

The Book of Friendship

Part 2: Family

Chapter 11

With the bright sun hanging overhead and the trees all covered in orange and gold leaves, two young stallions made their rounds through the town. One of them, a chipper unicorn, pranced up to a house and rang the doorbell. The door opened a short while after, revealing a bespectacled earth pony in a suit.

“Can I help you?” the stallion asked.

“Hello!” said the unicorn, “My name is Brother Young, and we’re with the Fraternity of the Joyous Friends of Princess Celestia. This is my partner, Brother Breeze.”

“Hello,” said Brother Breeze, a pegasus.

“Fraternity?” asked the stallion at the door, “My son joined that. He’s off on his mission, too.”

“Oh?” asked Brother Young eagerly, “Maybe we know him! What’s his name?”

“Scroll.”

“Oh,” said Brother Young, deflating. “I don’t know him.”

“Me neither,” said Brother Breeze.

“Well, in any case, we already have a book, but thank you,” said the stallion, closing the door. Truth be told, Mr. Page didn’t quite *get* the whole Fraternity thing. He just knew that one day in his senior year, his son came home from school very excited about this club he had just joined. His mother had been very relieved that Scroll seemed like he was finally making friends, and Scroll seemed extraordinarily enthusiastic, bringing home the Fraternity’s literature to read. Unfortunately, Mrs. Page’s mind changed that summer when he announced that he’d be going with some unicorn to a far-off place on a two-year mission.

At present, she was standing in Scroll’s room, which was more or less the way he’d left it, save for what he’d taken with him. There was still his bed, his quiz bowl trophy, his *Star Horse* poster, the picture of him with the science club (Scroll was, of course, barely visible in the back

of the group), his coin collection, and other knickknacks.

It had been two months since Scroll left on his mission, and his mother didn't like that. As far as she was concerned, he should have been in college then. It didn't help that they'd gotten almost no contact from him. She wasn't worried that he was dead or anything, but she didn't like how he seemed to just jump into this Fraternity business, going off with a random guy to commit to an undertaking like... well, she wasn't exactly sure *what* Scroll was supposed to be doing.

Mr. Page walked to the door. "Honey?" he asked, "We should be getting ready."

Mrs. Page sighed. "Oh, alright..."

The Green Grass was one of those moderately classy restaurants, the kind that a foal would be able to find something on the menu they liked, but that was still expensive.

"Party of two?" asked the receptionist.

"Oh, no, no," said a white unicorn, "party of four. It's under 'Gleam.'"

"Oh, of course," said the receptionist, "whenever you and your guests are ready."

"Right-O," said Gleam, grinning.

"Hopefully they managed to find their way," said the mare at his side.

"Ah, probably," said Gleam, "just got a little caught up with something, I suppose."

Gleam and his wife Bianca were both dressed for the occasion - meeting new ponies they always wanted to put their best hoof forward. As Bianca had always told her son White, "*First impressions matter.*" She had decided, after getting letters back from him, that they simply *had* to meet his partner's parents, so last week she looked them up and sent them a letter, saying they should meet for lunch here.

Two equally well-dressed earth ponies entered through the doors. Unlike the two unicorns, who wore beaming smiles the entire time, the earth ponies were more reserved. The contrast became even more apparent when Gleam noticed them.

"Why hello!" he said, merrily trotting up to them, "You must be Mr. and Mrs. Page!"

“Yes,” said Mr. Page, unflapped, “you’re Gleam?”

“Yes siree, and this is my wife Bianca,” he said. “I could tell it was you right away, I can really see the family resemblance! White’s told us *all* about your son. You must be so proud!”

Mrs. Page was a little too dumbstruck to say anything.

“Your table, sir?” asked the receptionist.

“Oh, of course!” said Gleam, “Thank you kindly.”

The Pages didn’t give a visible “weirded out” reaction, though they were somewhat taken aback by Gleam’s energy (the neutral connotation was the best choice). They followed the waiter to their table, where they sat down.

“So, can I start you off with anything to drink?” asked the waiter.

“Why, yes,” said Gleam, “I think I’ll start off with some jasmine tea.”

“I will, too,” said Bianca.

“We always agree, don’t we?” asked Gleam.

“Coffee, please,” said Mr. Page.

“Decaf,” said Mrs. Page. She turned back to the unicorns. “So, your son has told you about Scroll?” she asked nervously.

“Oh, yes!” said Bianca, levitating a photograph in front of the earth ponies. Mr. Page adjusted his spectacles, looking at it. There was Scroll, all right, the dark blue earth pony with the black mane and glasses. He was smiling at the camera, next to a white unicorn with a brown mane and a smile for a cutie mark. The unicorn was beaming at the camera - obviously had to be Gleam and Bianca’s son. There were some other ponies in the picture, though. On the unicorn’s back was a small pink colt, and next to Scroll there was a pair of earth ponies. The first one was a cream-colored mare with some kind of frothy mug as a cutie mark, and the other a slightly shorter, slightly fatter tawny colt.

“Who are these other ponies?” asked Mrs. Page.

“Well, they’ve had a ton of success!” said Gleam. “That pink colt is Clip. They’ve taken him in like a family member. Cute, isn’t he? And those two there are Tap and her brother, Barrel.”

“Barrel’s actually joining the Fraternity,” said Bianca, smiling.

Mrs. Page raised an eyebrow. There was something she didn’t like about Tap. She looked, well... not the sort of filly she wanted her son to be around. She didn’t say anything, though.

“So, Scroll hasn’t written back to you?” asked Bianca.

“Well, not really,” said Mr. Page.

“He never was a big writer,” admitted Mrs. Page.

“Aww, that’s a shame,” said Gleam. “Well, anyway, they’re on this island of earth ponies. Our little White’s the only unicorn there.”

“Ah,” said Mr. Page.

“So White tells us that Scroll’s quite the scholar,” said Gleam.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Page, smiling a bit, “he was one of the star players of his quiz bowl team.”

“Really?” asked Bianca, “White was going to do that, but he decided to do theatre instead.”

Gleam’s horn glowed, and a large folder floated up.

“Umm...” said Mr. Page as the folder opened, showing several photos of the white unicorn colt.

“This was White’s first show as a little colt,” said Gleam proudly, “and he’s been in over thirty musicals!”

The album flipped through the pages, showing White in various costumes with the members of whatever cast he was in at the moment. In a somewhat surreal twist, the cast photos seemed to be the same group of ponies, with the same poses, but in different costumes. Mrs. Page could see the distinct family resemblance - in every picture, White had that blinding smile.

“He certainly smiles a lot...” she said.

“Oh, yes!” said Bianca, turning the page, “And he has wonderful oral hygiene!”

The next few pages consisted almost entirely of dental records.

“We would’ve been happy if he decided to pursue a career in the arts,” said Gleam, “but he’s studying to become a dentist!”

“He always says he wants to see other ponies smile,” Bianca sighed fondly.

Mr. Page was not as concerned as his wife. “So what exactly is it they do on this mission?” he asked.

“Well, basically they’re supposed to spread the teachings of Twilight Sparkle,” said Gleam simply, “Princess Celestia’s student.”

“Scroll told us about that,” Mr. Page answered, somewhat relieved he could actually contribute to the conversation, “the letters, right?”

“Yes,” said Bianca.

“But there’s more than just the letters in the Book of Friendship,” said Gleam, “there’s also other things - party games, pranks, simple recipes, even relationship advice in some of the newer editions...”

“But what do they *do*?” asked Mrs. Page. “Walking up to doors and hoofing out books?”

“Well, yes, there’s that,” said Gleam, “but they also do other things they think can help out. Like Tap and Barrel, here.” He picked up the photograph again. “Their house burned down, so White and Scroll helped them rebuild.”

“*Burned down*?” asked Mrs. Page, for the first time actually frightened about this whole mess, “What happened?”

“I’m not sure...” said Gleam, “White never really explained...”

“Calm down, honey,” said Mr. Page.

“But also Clip - he’s an orphan, I think,” continued Gleam, “they’ve taken the little guy in.”

“They also put on a play,” said Bianca.

Mr. Page’s eyes narrowed. That was probably the last thing he ever expected his son to take part in. “Well,” he said, picking up his menu, “it sounds like they’re having fun.”

Actually, they weren’t.

Earthquake Island was not a very nice place. It was an island far beyond the borders of Equestria, with a town that consisted entirely of earth ponies. Brother White was usually the sole unicorn there. This day, however, there were other unicorns.

There was a massive fortress in the sky, floating over the island. Bolts of fire and magic rained down from the castle, striking the town and its surrounding forest. In retaliation, the soldiers of the town were firing cannons back up at the fortress. In the street there was a roaring firefight between the earth ponies and the unicorns. These ponies weren’t throwing pies. They had guns that shot actual bullets that were intended to kill.

While the battle was raging outside, however, there was one building that was left untouched. The castle’s attacks didn’t land anywhere near it, soldiers weren’t breaking down the door, nothing. It was a quiet, clean building not too far in the middle of the town with a plaque on it. This plaque read:

*Mission House of the Fraternity of the Joyous Friends of Princess Celestia.
Brothers White and Scroll welcome you!*

“Alright!” said a young unicorn stallion, looking around the mission house. He was a white unicorn, with bright blue eyes and a big beaming smile. His brown mane, however, was not as neatly combed as it had been in the photograph his parents had seen. There were some loose locks that kept falling in front of his face, causing him to jolt his head to clear them away.

There were dozens of earth ponies in the mission house, all of them “refugees” of sorts, in here to keep safe from the war outside.

Brother White looked at the group of ponies, all of whom seemed tired, scared, and a little bored. They were used to the attacks, though this was the first time that it involved-

“Pies!” called a voice from the kitchen. A dark blue earth pony stuck his head out of the

doorway. There was Brother Scroll, with that nervous smile and a pair of round spectacles over his brown eyes. His face was covered in flour and batter, and he had a big poofy chef's hat on his head. "First batch of pies are done!"

He went back into the kitchen, and then trotted out with a platter of freshly-baked apple pies on his back. He looked around hopefully. The earth ponies there, however, did not seem particularly interested.

"They're really good..." Scroll said, a little pathetically. He simply placed the platter of pies on the counter, hoping somepony would want one, before retreating back into the kitchen.

White shiftily looked around at the other ponies before walking up to the pies. "Thank you, Scroll!" he said loudly. "These pies look absolutely delicious!" He leaned down to smell. "Mmm!"

Tap, the cream-colored mare, was lying down on a nearby bench, bored like a lot of the other ponies were. She wondered whether her tavern had been destroyed again. It probably had. She looked over at Brother White, who was trying so very hard to convince the others to try one of those apple pies. She tilted her head, curious - she'd never actually had an apple pie. Fancy pastries weren't exactly the sort of luxury anypony on Earthquake Island really cared about. White and Scroll just seemed so dead-set on these pies that she decided she'd just get up and go try one of them.

"A bit fancier than the usual grass or fruit," she said, looking over the pies.

"They're a staple back in Equestria," explained White. "You know..." he smiled again, "These apple pies are actually what ended the conflict between the settler ponies and the buffalo at Appleoosa."

"Really," said Tap, her tone so flat it wasn't even inflected as a question. "Well," she said, looking at them, "I think I'll try one." White let out a very relieved sigh as Tap took one of the pies back to her bench. White, feeling a little better, decided he'd pop into the kitchen, where Brother Scroll was busy at work stirring something in a bowl. Barrel, Tap's brother, was walking from the fridge with a carton of eggs, while Clip, the pink colt, was sitting on the counter watching the whole thing.

The photograph did not have a clear view of Clip's back or his flanks. On his back were two red scars, and his flanks had black burns where his cutie mark should have been. He was not an earth pony, but a pegasus pony.

“Baking is easy...” Scroll said to himself, “it’s just chemistry. Simple, applied chemistry...”

“Chemistry?” asked Barrel.

“Yeah, Chemistry!” said Scroll. “Everything’s down to reactions. All very simple - just gotta get everything in the right quantities and measurements and under the right conditions, and you’ve got pies!”

“Sounds complicated,” said Barrel flatly.

Scroll shrugged. He smiled a little. Despite the terror going outside, he felt that occupying himself with a mental task was a good way to help him relax. He could put his mind to work, and hopefully these pies would help to relieve the war-torn earth ponies in the next room. And in any case, he found there was something refreshing about making delicious baked goods.

“Great work, Scroll,” said White, poking his head into the kitchen, “how you holding up?”

“Fine, fine...” said Scroll, nodding.

“Wonderful!” said White, pulling his head out of the kitchen. He spotted another pony taking one of the pies. White smiled - it seemed like a little stroke of good luck. Then the ground shook, the pony lurched, and the pie went flying, hitting White in the face with a *splat!*

Even though guns and cannons were blazing outside, the world seemed very quiet for White. The pie tin slowly slid off of his face, hitting the floor with a dull *clang*.

“It’s okay...” said White, taking a deep breath, “You can have another one.”

White stood there for a few seconds before walking back into the kitchen, where Scroll seemed to be trying to catch his breath. Barrel, meanwhile, was standing with egg yolks over his eyes. White walked up to the sink and turned the faucet on... and water didn’t come out.

“Oh, come on...” said White. The water was off again. “Great.”

Barrel, meanwhile, was wiping the egg off of his face. Clip started giggling. Those two had a much better composure in the situation than the missionaries - they’d known the war their entire lives.

The day after an attack was deathly quiet. White sat up in his bed, his ears pricked, like eyes gone wide in the dark. Not a sound, save for Scroll's breathing. He looked down at the young stallion sleeping next to him. Scroll let out a contented little hum - White decided he wouldn't wake him. He got out of bed and looked up at the bunk above and saw Clip, snuggled up in his bed, like he didn't have a care in the world. White smiled a little.

White stretched himself out and walked into the main room. Empty - all the earth ponies had cleared out by now, and they'd left the place a mess. Most of the pies were still there, too, completely untouched.

White proceeded into the bathroom. He saw his scraggly mane in the mirror. "I am such a mess..." he said to himself. His first thought was to take a shower, but the water was still off. He lifted the comb with his magic, trying to straighten out his mane, but that didn't work too well when it was dry.

He shook his head. *Snap out of it, White*, he thought, *you're Brother White, and by gosh, you're with the Fraternity! Show that smile!* He grinned. There it was, bright and beaming as ever in the mirror, and he instantly felt better.

He walked back into the main room and looked at the door that led to the town outside the mission house. Taking a deep breath, he gathered his courage, marched up to the door, opened it, and was met with something wet and stingy on his face. "Ahh!" he yelled, stumbling back and covering his eyes with a hoof. He shut the door, and removing the hoof from his face, he saw that it was covered in black paint. He blinked, puzzling over that.

"G'morning, White..." said a groggy voice. White turned around to see Brother Scroll, yawning.

"Hey," said White, wiping off his hoof. Scroll tilted his head, looking at his mission companion.

"We doing another play?" he asked.

"What?" White asked, "Oh, no, no no..." he nervously laughed. "This is just something that happened..." he straightened up, "anyway, think we should go take a look? Maybe see if Tap and Barrel are okay? Maybe if they're okay we can stop by for breakfast - bring the pies."

Scroll looked sadly at the untouched pies. "No pony wanted them..."

"Aw, don't be hard on yourself, buddy," said White, shrugging, "they were fine. Tap had one."

Scroll's head snapped in White's direction. "She did?" he asked.

"Yeah," said White, "now, let's go on out!" he said, marching out the door.

White took a few steps outside of the mission house and stopped. The town was a mess - many of the buildings were destroyed, and there was rubble and dead bodies littering the street. White took a deep breath - this would not be pleasant to walk through.

Scroll followed outside, pulling the red wheelbarrow, now stacked with the tragically neglected apple pies. He, too, surveyed the wreck - depressing, but it was starting to become typical as they witnessed more and more attacks. He looked around, and then he saw the door, which now sported a crudely-painted penis.

"Well, let's-" said White, before spotting the graffiti. "Oh..." he said, "Well, we'll have to, uh..."

He shook his head. "C'mon, let's see what we can do," he finished, starting on down the road, with Brother Scroll following.

"We got pies!" White called out, sporting his usual smile. "Home-made apple pies!"

Scroll had to smile along with him. "I made them myself!" he called, trying to show a little confidence.

Of course, nopony was interested in a pie. They were all busy trying to get back to their lives, rebuilding their homes, carting away their dead. There was a nearby cart that was owned by the *Shovel Bros.*, a pair of grave-digger ponies who seemed to be only ones as cheerful as the missionaries.

Scroll's eyes shifted. He saw the other earth ponies, and the looks they gave him and White. "Fuck off, you annoying little fairies," they seemed to say.

White wouldn't be deterred. He just kept walking with his head held high. Scroll didn't know how he could do that. He kept finding himself jittering around, just *noticing* things around the place - a foal pawing at a fallen door, a soldier giving them a dirty look. A cream-colored mare standing in front of the ashen ruins of a tavern.

"I think I should feel worse about losing my home," said Tap, "but now it's just something that happens and it doesn't mean anything anymore."

“We can help you rebuild it,” said White, trying to be helpful.

“Again?” Tap asked, laughing a little.

“Yeah,” said White, “again and again.”

“We brought some pie,” said Scroll, nudging the wheelbarrow. He knew how pathetic it seemed - all this bleak despair, countless ponies dead and countless more out of homes, and all they had was a wheelbarrow full of apple pies.

Tap looked at it and laughed a bit.

“Hey, I had one of those yesterday, during the attack,” she said. “They’re really good,” she added, seeing Scroll’s despondent expression.

Scroll smiled. “Thanks,” he said, pawing the ground nervously. “Say, uh...” he looked around, “where’s Barrel?”

“Oh, he went down to the docks,” said Tap. “Not like he has anything else to do. There isn’t anything here but this bottle of whiskey,” she said, tapping a bottle on the ground next to her.

“I’ll go check up on him,” said White, trotting off. “Scroll, you stay and see if you can help Tap clear away the junk.”

“What?” Scroll asked, watching as White merrily went away, “I, uh, well, um...” he stammered, sitting on the ground and fidgeting with his glasses.

“Well, there’s not a whole lot to be done,” said Tap. “There’ll be a crew coming in to clear away all the busted wood and stuff. Then we can start putting up new stuff. I think we’ll just keep it one story this time, though...”

“You could stay at the mission house...” suggested Scroll, “well, if we can get some new beds, I mean...”

“Oh, Scroll,” Tap laughed, “that’s awful nice of you, but I don’t think that’d work out.”

“Well...” said Scroll.

“Oh, come on, you don’t want my business around your place,” said Tap. “You don’t want a bunch of drunken brutes crashing around your nice little house, do you?”

“Well, I dunno...” said Scroll, “I mean, really, I want to help.”

Tap smiled. “Your Fraternity must be glad to have ponies like you in it.”

“Well, eheheh...” Scroll said, rubbing the back of his neck with his hoof.

“There’s a ship!” cried a voice. It was Barrel, running down the street, followed closely by White. “There’s a ship that’s coming in!”

“I think it’s got supplies!” White said excitedly. “I think the Fraternity is actually answering my request for supplies!”

“Suh-suh...” Scroll stammered, “Really?”

“C’mon!” shouted White, turning back around and running down the street. “This is great! We’ll have so much more apples and milk and sugar and maybe some more beds and blankets...”

The four ponies ran down the street, towards the docks, with White shouting happily all the way.

“...And frosting and cookies and eggs and alfalfa and salt and...”

He stopped. There at the dock, in front of them and looking sternly at the docked ship, was a hulking stallion, the color of dried earth, with a crack for a cutie mark. With him were two earth pony soldiers, one of whom noticed the party of ponies that had just waltzed in.

“Uhh, general?” said the soldier. The general turned his head. Seeing the unicorn, he snorted, narrowing his eyes.

“Well, uhh,” said White, “hiya, Quake!”

“What the fuck did I tell you about checking my ass, horner?” the general growled angrily. White and Scroll backed up, exchanging a nervous glance. What did Quake want here?

“Here we are, sir!” shouted a soldier from the boat, as he and two other earth ponies carried down a large crate. They set it down with a loud *thud*. The general walked over to it and looked over it.

“Well?” he said, “Don’t just stand there like a bunch of mouth-breathing dipshits - open it!”

One of the soldiers bucked it, knocking the lid off. By this point a small crowd was starting to gather around the docks. The missionaries just kept their eyes glued to the general as he stuck his hoof into the crate and started sorting through it. White cringed as he heard the sounds of the supplies being sorted around - he didn’t want them to get broken, and General Quake wasn’t being too considerate.

“Eggs... sugar...” the general muttered, “The fuck is this?” he asked, lifting a jug of milk from the crate.

“Well, sir,” said Scroll, “I realize that here on the island you don’t have cows or, well...” One glance from the general indicated he didn’t want a long-winded explanation. “It’s milk.”

“For the foals?” asked the general.

“Well, not completely...” said Scroll. The general looked at him like he was crazy.

“Well, *shit*,” Quake grunted. He rummaged through the crate some more, scattering some straw and bits of packaging out of the box. One small item hit the dock and nearly fell through a gap in the boards, but the general didn’t notice it.

All the while, the crowd was watching with interest. Clip, the little colt, managed to gingerly pick his way through the mass of ponies and get up to where the missionaries were.

“Waddya need all this shit for?” General Quake asked, looking at them.

“Well, sir...” said White, looking from the general to the crowd, “It’s for them. The Fraternity sent these to us so we could share them.”

“Sharing is an important part of being a friend!” Scroll piped.

“Sharing, huh?” the general asked disdainfully. “Well, I guess you wouldn’t mind ‘sharing’ with us, now, would you?”

“No, not at all!” said White, nodding eagerly. “It’s for everypony.”

Quake snorted. “We’ll take this over to my bunker,” he said, as the soldiers replaced the lid.

“Uhh...” said White, unsure of what to say as the general and his stallions passed by.

“But... but...” said Scroll, rushing in front of the general, “but you can’t-”

The general shoved Scroll aside. His glasses fell onto the dock, while Scroll stumbled right over the edge and into the water with a *splash*.

“Augh!” Scroll cried, desperately clinging to the wet wood. The water kept rising and falling, however, making a steady grip difficult. The general looked down over the side of the dock.

“Scroll!” White shouted.

“I can do whatever the fuck I like, you fucking little pussy.” Quake snorted, before leaving with his soldiers and the crate.

Scroll was frightened. He’d never been a strong swimmer, and there seemed to be very few provisions on this dock for ponies that fell overboard.

“Hold on!” White said frantically, “A rope, somepony get a rope!” He spotted a bit of rope, grabbing it in his mouth and running over to the side of the dock. “Grab on!” he shouted, throwing it down. Scroll bit down on the rope as White tried to pull him up. Clip ran up behind him, grabbing a length of rope and pulling along with him. Very shortly, Tap and Barrel followed suit, and soon enough Scroll was raised out of the water.

“Pull!” White shouted, pulling on the rope as hard as he could. Scroll managed to get high enough that he could throw his forelegs over the top, allowing White, Tap, and Barrel to get a grip on him and pull him up.

Scroll sat there on the dock, panting.

“Scroll, are you okay?” asked White, kneeling in front of him.

“Yeah...” Scroll said, still breathing deeply. “I think so...” He looked at White. “Thanks.”

“Don’t thank me,” said White, laughing a little. “I’m your best friend. I’m *supposed* to do that.”

Scroll smiled and looked down. “Well, still... thanks.”

White smiled too, spotting the glasses. “Dropped these,” he said, lifting them into the air and onto Scroll’s face.

“Thanks for that, too,” said Scroll.

“Uhh...” said an earth pony, tapping on White’s shoulder. White looked up at him - one of the sailors on the ship. “Y’know, we got like five more of these crates... you do want ‘em, right?”

White got up, overjoyed. “Oh, absolutely!” he said, “You just unload them and we’ll get them right over to the-”

“What’s this?” asked Clip, prodding the little box that the general had knocked out of the crate.

“Huh?” asked White, looking over at him.

Clip picked the tiny little box in his mouth, lifting it up for White to see. White squinted and looked at it - very small, no bigger than a music box. White’s horn glowed and he lifted the box a little higher so he could see it in the light. He recognized it. He looked over at Scroll, smiling, and Scroll’s expression showed that he knew what it was, too.

White looked back at the crowd, which was beginning to disperse. White smiled. “Ponies?” he said to the friends around him, “I think our day is about to get a little brighter!”

There was a *click* as the lid of the box opened, and a burst of light streamed from the opening. A banner of multi-colored light flowed out of the box, up into the sky, before arcing down over the town. Tap, Barrel, and Clip stared at it in awe, as the missionaries’ faces filled with elation.

It was a rainbow.