

"Rarity?" Applejack called as she ran over a snow covered mud field. "Twilight?" she said but couldn't see anypony in any direction. "Pinkie Pie, Fluttershy, Rainbow Dash?" as she said Rainbow's name, she heard the sound of something pass by quickly above her. She looked up and saw a blue pegasus flying at a high speed out in front of her toward the horizon,

"Rainbow Dash!" Applejack said excitedly. After she and her friends fell in the mysterious darkness, everypony else seemed to have vanished. She felt a wave of relief wash over her as she trotted as fast as she could after the blue pegasus. "Rainbow Dash it's me," she called but the pony kept on flying at the same pace. Applejack began to lose sight of the pegasus and in her frustration she yelled, "Dag burn-it Rainbow Dash! Can't ya hear me calling you? Get Back here!" The pegasus stopped almost immediately after Applejack had started yelling and turned around. Applejack stopped as well. She could now see that this wasn't Rainbow Dash, this pegasus was a colt who was larger and more muscular than Rainbow Dash. The blue colt wore a bronze colored helmet with an artificial mohawk mane and held a spear in one hoof and a whip in his mouth. He flew straight at Applejack so fast that she jumped back a little bit. He hovered just a few feet above her and the look on his face was one of the meanest scowls Applejack had ever seen on anypony.

"What do you think you are doing out here?" He demanded, his voice was deep and had a harsh rasp to it. It was as though he had spent many years of his life yelling. Applejack marveled at his size and that he was able to speak clearly with a whip in his mouth. Her head lowered a bit and her ears drooped, "Um...I was just looking for my friends," she said softly in contrast to the large pegasus, "We got separated you see and..."

"All *earth* ponies are supposed to be harvesting the south fields at this time," He interrupted and pointed his spear inches away from Applejack's nose. She tried to back away slowly from his spear but he simply followed and kept it right in front of her, "If your friends are smarter than you, that's where they are right now. I suggest you get back there yourself before I get angry," His menacing expression somehow became even more intimidating than before. Applejack had no idea what he was talking about, but she wasn't about to let herself get bullied by some oversized brute.

"Now just who do you think you are ordering me around like that?" Applejack said with a good hard stare of her own right back at him. The blue warrior reeled back and shoved his spear at Applejack's face. Her eyes went wide and she turned her head aside just enough for the spear to fly past her cheek. He retracted his arm and began to thrust the spear toward her again but she had anticipated it this time and had already spun herself around by the time he thrust forward and he missed her torso but took a few blond hairs off of her tail mane. She used the momentum of her spin to buck the spear right out of his hoof.

"Filthy earth pony!" He shouted enraged, his hoof rang with pain from the force of her buck.

"You wanna rumble partner? Let's rumble!" she said and steam billowed from her nostrils as she

grunted and dug her front hooves in the snowy mud. The warrior stallion flipped his head violently and sent his whip flying out toward Applejack who barely managed to jump out of the way. She waited for him to recover and try another shot. When he did she jumped aside again, turned her head and bit down on the outstretched whip. She pulled the pegasus to the ground, which he was unprepared for, and he hit the snow and mud belly first. He recovered to his feet and began to tug-of-war with Applejack over the whip.

“Let go you earth scum!” He demanded. “Make me,” Applejack retorted less articulately than him. They stared each other down as they swayed back and forth, both of them refusing to yield the whip. Unfortunately, the colt proved to be stronger than Applejack and finally managed to yank the whip out of her mouth which sent him flying onto his back. She started to charge at him before he could get up and fly to the advantage of the air but stopped when she heard the sound of multiple pegasi swooping down to where she was. She looked up and saw ten male pegasi who looked very similar to the one she had been fighting. Their scowls all matched each other’s. In unison, they pointed their spears at Applejack’s head. She began to visibly sweat from her cheeks and forehead.

“Um...” she stuttered while trying not to move a muscle, the slightest shift would cause her to cut herself on one or more of the ten spears surrounding her neck, “Maybe we can talk this out, sugar cubes?” She said and smiled nervously.

“Execute her!” The blue colt she had fought screamed. He rose from the snow and mud to join the ranks of his fellow soldiers.

“Belay that,” another pegasus said as he flew into view from above a low flying cloud. He was a red colored pegasus with a black mane. His helmet was gold instead of bronze and his cutie mark was two lightning bolts intersecting each other, “We can’t afford to lose any field workers right now.” He flew straight toward Applejack in a slow but purposeful manner. As he approached her, the other pegasi withdrew their spears to make room for him. He stared at Applejack with a face that was both stern and dignified at the same time.

“You will return to the south fields and continue to work on the harvest. And you will remember your place in this world, earth crawler. Is that understood?” He said to her. His words had little volume, but they were harsh and definitive.

“Um...” she began but was cut off by the red pegasus in charge shouting,

“Yah!” at his he screamed, one of the other soldiers flung his whip and hit Applejack square on her hindquarters. She neighed and bucked up on her hind legs from the shock of the sudden pain and ran off as fast as she could in a direction she could only pray was south.

“Follow her and see that she gets back to the field,” the commanding pony said and the squad of pegasus soldiers flew off after Applejack. All of them except one.

“Captain,” the original blue pegasus warrior spoke, “She attacked a pegasus officer and openly rebelled against orders, why did you not punish her properly?” he demanded.

“Attention!” the captain shouted and the soldier hovered as still as he could and saluted, “You were bested by an earth pony today, sergeant,” the Captain said condescendingly, “You should be thankful that I have decided to overlook this incident all together,” he added and looked at the sergeant with a half smile.

“Yes sir,” the sergeant replied with his cheeks red. He collected his whip and his spear and flew off to join his comrades.

She heard the howling of a wolf. Behind her, a group of bushes rustled and she spun around to see but nothing was there. She looked up, the sky was obscured by the massive volume of trees that flooded the forest. Barely any light was able to penetrate to the forest floor. She had been in the Everfree Forest before and it scared her greatly, but at least she was familiar with certain parts of that forest. There was also the comfort of knowing that, no matter how terrifying it seemed, home was always close by inside Everfree. Here she didn't know if *anypony's* home was *anywhere* nearby. For all she knew, the forest stretched on for hundreds of miles in all directions.

Something made a loud noise behind her, “eeee,” Fluttershy's faint scream barely made any noise. She dashed off, away from the disturbing sound she had heard. She was certain that she heard something chasing after her from behind, but found herself physically unable to look to see.

A deafening roar cried so loud she felt it as much as she heard it. Tears dripped from her eyes and she kept her head down, only looking at the ground directly in front of her. She wanted to stop and find a place to hide, but she was stuck in her run, too terrified to do anything else. A slowly increasing light source caused her to look up a little. Her mane was covering her face and obstructing her view so she tossed her hair aside to see better. She noticed that the source of light was a break in the forest. Her legs burned at the strain of her gallop, she could scarcely remember ever running this fast in her life. The clearing became larger and she was starting to make out the sight of smooth snowy hills and the backlit silhouettes of more creatures. She couldn't tell what they were yet but they had to be less scary than whatever was in the forest.

No more than ten meters away from the clearing, Fluttershy's hoof got caught on a root sticking out of the ground and she tumbled forward completing three ungraceful somersaults before she landed on her back. Her vision was blurred and the wind was knocked out of her leaving her

unable to see or breathe. Before panic could set in, her breath returned and the world began to reorganize itself in her field of vision.

As soon as her sight returned to normal she wished it hadn't.

Stuck in a prone and vulnerable position, her eyes went wide and her ears flopped. She tucked her wings tightly into her sides and let out a feminine squeak. She closed her eyes and turned her head away from what she saw and her entire body quivered violently.

Rainbow Dash was feeling exhausted. She had been flying for what must have been hours judging by how far the sun had moved in the sky. She was cold as well. The air was bitter and dry and the wind was relentless. Sometimes the wind blew so hard, she couldn't maneuver properly and had to simply spread her wings and glide as stably as possible. Below her the snow fell in droves onto the ground. It hadn't stopped even once since the moment she arrived at this strange place. She had yet to spot any of her friends or any evidence that her friends were around. For that matter, she had yet to find any evidence of any ponies at all. The only thing above was clouds and the only thing below was snow.

A large gust of wind swelled again and she spread her wings to her full span to ride it out. However, this time the gust was so powerful that she lost her balance and was tossed through the air like a loose shopping bag. The clouds around her became darker and more numerous, but in her frantic and uncontrolled flopping about, she couldn't see any pegasi making the weather change. This made even less sense when the previously random wind somehow became organized and swooped Dash around in circles like a tornado vortex. She grunted and strained and tried to muscle her way out of the vortex but the wind was too strong. The spinning started to make her dizzy and she was sure that she would blackout soon. Once she blacked out, there was no telling when the vortex would stop and she would plummet to the earth below. If she fell unconscious, there was no guarantee she would wake up before it was too late.

That terrifying thought alone was enough for her to stay conscious a little while longer. She felt as if she was going to throw up when the vortex came to a sudden stop. Rainbow Dash took a few moments to re-develop her sense of direction. Her head seemed to still believe that she was spinning. Finally she shook it off and noticed that she was being magically pulled upward into the dark blizzard clouds. Unable to escape the force of the magic, she decided to save her remaining strength and let it pull her. She swallowed hard as she entered the clouds and, for a few seconds, saw only white and grey.

When she broke through the cloud barrier, she saw that she was surrounded by glowing blue horses. She recognized them immediately from children's storybooks and, most famously, from

the "Hearths Warming Eve" play.

They were windigoes.

They fed on negative emotions and caused a devastating winter wherever they went. The windigoes stared sharply at Rainbow with bright red eyes. She could feel their malice and hatred. Dash never liked to admit to any pony that she could get scared, but she felt that even if her friends were with her now she wouldn't be able to hide her terror from them.

My friends, she thought, *I wish my friends were here*. She missed them terribly. It had never occurred to her before that they were in fact, the greatest source of her strength and courage.

The windigoes started to roar and toss about frantically. They backed away from Rainbow Dash a little bit. "What in the hay is wrong with them?" she said out loud. Her question was answered by a gust of wind whisking her up and away from the windigoes. "Woah!" she screamed as she was flung backward through the sky. She had gone much faster herself before, but never this fast backwards. After a while she managed to regain control of her flight and brought herself to a comfortable hover. For once, she was quite content with flying very slowly.

Then she realized. "Oh yeah," she said and grinned. "Windigoes hate love and friendship. I was thinking about how much I missed my friends so they let me go. I knew that, totally did it on purpose." Satisfied with herself, she turned and saw another pegasus pony hovering no more than a few feet away from her.

"Ahh!" Rainbow Dash cried and reared back a little. She had not expected some pony to sneak up on her. This pegasus was long and lean, he wore a soldier's helmet that looked like it came right out of a pegasi history book. He also held a long spear that he wielded with two hooves.

"What are you doing out here?" He demanded, he cocked his left eyebrow.

"I, er, uh..." Rainbow Dash stuttered.

"You are out of bounds soldier, explain yourself!" the pegasus demanded.

"Soldier?" Dash echoed with a bewildered look. The pegasi soldier suspiciously examined Rainbow Dash from head to hoof. When his eyes got to her cutie mark he gasped in terror and withdrew his spear,

"Oh forgive me sir I didn't realize!" he said and bowed his head. Then he straightened up into a smart salute.

"Uh, it's cool man, honest mistake I guess," she said and forced fake smile. She couldn't figure out what this pony's deal was and why his attitude changed so suddenly. "What seems to be the

trouble there, uh, soldier?" she said hoping she got the lingo right.

"Sir," he responded quickly, "I was thrown off when I noticed you were out by yourself and out of uniform. I foolishly mistook you for a deserter but now I realize that you clearly must be returning from a covert spy mission in enemy territory. I am at fault for not recognizing it sooner, sir. Please accept my apology and allow me the honor of escorting you back to the general to make your report, sir."

Dash was still confused and had many more questions she wanted to ask the strange soldier. But now she had the opportunity to go talk to other ponies and possibly figure out where she was and where her friends might be.

"Yeah," Rainbow Dash reluctantly said, "let's go see the general."
