

Fallout Equestria: Murky Number Seven

Chapter 29: They Will Remember

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"You saw the sonic radboom with your own eyes? Incredible! How did that feel to finally see the sun at its fullest, shining down upon you all?"

Crying wasn't an entirely unusual thing for me. Usually though, it was to vent emotion when I couldn't let it out any other way or because of sheer relieved joy. This time however, it was from beauty and from being in utter awe. The endless blue and the searing orange and white of the sun itself was like colours I had never seen in my life. Totally unstained by the filth and dirt of the nightmare on the surface, it just made me regret never learning how to colour drawings. It reminded me what colour could be.

But it spoke to me deeper than that. I'm a pegasus. I'd never seen the proper daytime sky. Now that I could sort-of fly, I saw the great sky-ocean that I had been born to be in. It made me feel stronger inside, knowing that we were closer to the end. Like if we got out, then I could start training to someday soar around it on my own, no matter what Weathervane said about my chances to ever fly properly.

That one moment gave me more hope, it brought a smile and laughter to my face as I imagined all the possibilities. It looked like how I'd always imagined freedom from chains would be.

"Quite the signal that Xenith was referring to. I suppose it would make perfect sense, both the slavers and the Enclave would be distracted and dizzied. What better time to escape? Only...I guess it's not as simple as that, is it?"

No.

We had failed to get the foals. It was almost insultingly crushing, we had planned everything around getting them in time, but they'd predicted we'd do that and moved them ahead of time. Chainlink Shackles was brutal, but he was also one of the smartest slavers in the city. He was cunning and patient; you'd always find the simplest and most tiny things he did meant more than you perhaps realised. It was like he was always a few steps ahead of us and we were struggling just to keep up and find our way through everything he threw in our path. The ambush when we'd tried to get Aurora's orb back, the siege of the Mall, the Bloodletters and the raid on the metro had cost us in time and lives. We were being steadily worn down from the

strength we'd gained. We couldn't afford another big fight. We didn't have the time to go after everything any more.

This was the time when we'd have to make choices and compromises, the very thing Shackles wanted us to do. He wanted to force our hooves, control our actions. The same thing he always wanted. Control. I'd never imagined he could do it from so far away, and yet the whole time we thought we were evading him, we could have been running right into what he wanted while he was on the sidelines growing in power endlessly. He was now first in line to rule Fillydelphia. He had Aurora's orb. He had the foals. He'd released monsters and raiders that over time had killed Mister Peace and took Glimmer and Brimstone out of the fight.

I hadn't even met him face to face since the mountaintop, and yet he was crushing my efforts again. We were running out of momentum. Now the signal had come and we were behind schedule.

"You couldn't give up...not now. After everything you all did together in that Mall, there's no way you could..."

We wouldn't. We never would. I never would. I never *will*.

Only now we had to do what I said. Compromise. We had to go for the Wall or we'd miss our opening, but if we went right there, we'd be leaving the foals behind.

"And I am willing to bet that Coral Eve would never allow that."

Not her, and not any of the other parents with us. Not Protégé either.

He was in the worst position of all of us. The responsibility on his shoulders was crushing, but these were the days when I was finally seeing him be the pony he should be. The one who could rise up in such an incredible way. Yes, I feared for our chances. But I trusted *him* to lead us through it.

Somehow, we would claw our way, I knew. We always had before, we would again. It all began now. The final plunge.

"So...this was it, huh?"

Yeah. This was it.

This was when the slaves of Fillydelphia made their attempt to break through the wall.

This was the beginning of everything we had been fighting for. The escape.

“After all this time...all the building up. Wow...”

Once we left the Mall, there would be no turning back, but Fillydelphia wasn't ready to let go of us quite yet.

And like I said, it was as though Shackles was always thinking a few steps ahead of us...

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The sun and sky.

Bathed in its warm light, I stood upon the cracked ceramic of the Mall's outer balconies and stared into the sparkling blue above the city. As the clouds coiled and faded from the edges, driven back by whatever enormous force had punched this gap into the unspoiled beauty above, I stood and let the sun's light wash over me with its gentle radiance.

So gentle and comforting. So natural. For a moment, even with my hearing, I let everything drown out into the distance as my headache faded away.

If ever I had needed a reminder that brighter days could lie ahead, this was it.

Fillydelphia was at a pause. Both the slavers and the Enclave had faltered in their attacks on one another after the massive explosion had torn through the sky. An unusual sense of stillness came over the city.

It wouldn't last. Of course it wouldn't. Already I'd heard a few spats of combat emerging from some area of the city I couldn't see. Slowly, the war was rebuilding its momentum. All the same, it had given us a window.

I felt a hoof rest on my shoulder, and found Protégé trotting up beside me. He took his eyepiece off and stared up into the sky, just like I had. He took a long breath and slowly let it out.

“It really gives you context, doesn't it? What the world before could be under the light of that.”

He slowly drew out his photograph of a tree house in a quaint little village, a library symbol on a sign near the door. Vibrant greens and polished decoration lit up on the film-paper as true sunlight struck it.

It made everything come to life.

“It's what I always believed we could make the world be like again, Murky. That all it took was enough effort, enough ponies believing in it. Enough sacrifice...”

His voice faltered, and his hoof dropped back to the ground again.

"It could again." I began, and tried to smile.

To my surprise, he smiled back. "Go on."

Oh, great. He thought I had more to actually say. I'd just been saying that to sound optimistic but now, oh dear. Think!

"Well...well...I mean this in the city was all wrong and led by a bunch of disgusting and horrible ponies-"

"Thanks."

"I didn't mean it like that!" I faltered and, to my surprise, found myself laughing briefly. "I just meant that, well, Fillydelphia wasn't the right way. But that doesn't mean there isn't a way out there. Somewhere. I mean..."

I waved my hoof around the massive hole.

"If something, or somepony out there could do this? Who knows? Maybe it's possible."

Protégé smiled and nodded. "If we had but a whole world who thought like you and I, Murky. The things we could do, or could have done had we not met as we did. I so heavily regret the way I treated you, because of how I was-"

He stopped, before looking away and quickly speaking again.

"Unfortunately, as much as I wish we could enjoy this view for however long it lasts...we're just putting this off."

Behind us, I could hear the Mall beginning to pick up in noise as the events that had just occurred filtered through to everyone within it.

"Yeah, I know...and I know it wasn't your fault." I spoke quietly, I didn't want to let him away without hearing it.

Protégé let his smile slip as he nodded. I wasn't sure if I entirely convinced him. I didn't blame him, really! He'd been a slave as much as I. If only I had a good hour to sit down and talk to him about it.

As we both returned to the inside of the Mall, I caught him stopping to once more look back at the sun, then to his photograph and very carefully tuck it away.

"A new world is coming for us in here. No more slaves and masters to define us. Let's make this happen, Murky. As equals."

* * *

"What are we even going to do? That's the signal! That means now!"

"Calm down!" Protégé had to raise his voice to let the panicking stallion hear him over the growing ambience of the Mall. Ponies were shouting to one another and rushing back and forth.

The message that they'd be leaving any time now had struck hard. Up until now, ponies had crowded back to the windows, staring in wonder at the sky. The light in their eyes had twinkled, and just for a second they looked more like ponies should, less like withered slaves. It had almost been like a brief silence of respect, as loved ones held one another and those faltering from the hardship found new strength in the sight.

Now, however, there was a panic to pack everything up that hadn't been ready. To prepare weapons and stuff every bit of remaining food into pockets and bags. Ponies were working out who would carry what, which group would be responsible for which wounded or sick metro slaves and trying desperately to get some kind of organisation amongst themselves. They didn't just have a plan for the escape, they had to plan for the dozens of miles of hostile wasteland before reaching anywhere for help.

I saw ponies drawing the hoof-sewed tents we'd been making through the corridor beside us and heard calls for 'anyone still needing a group to join' go out again and again. Ammo was being given out equally and maps copied from one another on paper were flying off their piles. A great movement of ponykind was getting ready to make their last journey. The slaves from the metro were protected at the centre of it all, ringed by medical staff who would stay with them. No-one yet knew what would be done with them outside, but they would be coming one way or another. Many of them had no idea what was even happening. One I saw crying in terror as a nurse hugged her gently and rocked back and forth while stroking their mane, trying to tell her that 'the Master' wasn't going to come back for her this time.

Sunny Days, Blunderbuck and Weathervane had joined us, the latter looking thin and haggard. To my surprise, Glimmer; Brim and somehow even List Seeker had limped out to hear what was being planned. They had earned a sour glance from Weathervane, but after all he'd been through, he simply didn't have the energy to muster a scathing complaint at them leaving their beds. I felt a pang of disappointment that Unity wasn't here, but last I'd heard she'd been trying to find Coral.

Protégé glanced to the door, before starting, anyone who would be here was here.

“This is our window of opportunity. There is no debate about it, we must go for the wall and we must do it now. Crossing the city is going to be perilous enough with the slavers and Enclave being so jumpy and itching for a spark to reignite this entire thing. If we try to do it once the war starts again, then we'll stand no chance. We're not able to fight them like we could before anymore. Blunderbuck, is the bomb ready?”

The excitable young stallion nodded about a dozen times too many. He had bags under his eyes, completely at odds with his physical expressions of energy and bright speech. He'd been working on it for a long time now.

“She's ready to blow like Sparkle Cola and Party-Time Mintals! But uh...we got a problem! See, she might be very boomy, but she's not exactly pony-portable, if you catch my drift?”

Weathervane took a deep breath, before speaking. His voice was lower, more rasped and thin. “A similar problem exists for us with the struggling ones. It took us hours to cross the city last time with just the metro survivors. With the wounded as well, and the slow pace that some of these poor souls can only manage after what they've been through, well, we would be a limping target.”

Sunny Days took the opportunity to add on to this. “And do we even know where we're going for the wall anyway? We don't wanna run through them to get there. There's only a baker's dozen unwounded fighters left, and that's me being very generous with the definition of 'unwounded' right there, along with maybe a small group of healthy types that aren't fighters. There's four ponies sick, injured or broken in the head for every one of the ones we can count on.”

She flexed her own bandaged shoulder as emphasis. “Point is, we can't move quick, we've got too much to carry for the journey that we can't leave behind and we can't fight our way through.”

Protégé sat down at his office's table and drew a hoof through his mane, staring at the map in front of him.

“Based on what you all say, we need transport. That's just another thing to add on to our list of delays. This window won't stay open forever. Anyone got ideas? The couple of carts we have aren't going to cut it.”

There was a pregnant silence. I could hear Glimmerlight muttering beside me about various ideas, as she thought out loud. Catching me looking, she offered a tired wink and smile.

I tried to return it as best I could. To be perfectly honest, I hated these planning sessions. I always felt so useless during them, because I wasn't some great planner or thinker. I didn't know how to lead ponies or what things had to be considered, so I ended up as the perpetual fly on the wall. In some ways it reminded me of Shackles' slaver meeting in the Ministry of Wartime Technology. All those plans flying across a table, beyond my reach to really grab and join with. They-

Wait.

I hopped my front hooves up on the table and raised my voice to speak. Unfortunately, all that emerged was a strangled noise as my nerves caused my voice to break.

Well, at the very least it got their attention.

"I know!" I began, before figuring they maybe wanted a bit more detail than that, "Transport! I know where we can get some!"

Unable to reach across the table (curse my short legs forever!) I got onto a chair and leaned my forelegs on the table more properly before tapping the Wartime Ministry.

"That place! It has all these rows and rows of big armoured wagons outside it! Stuff the Equestrian Army was to use I...I think? If we got the bomb and the slaves into them, the healthier ones could all tow it across the city and they could protect us!"

Protégé's face lit up and he rapped his hoof on the table. I yelped at the sharp noise right beside me, slipping before Glimmer's magic caught me and helped me sit back, furiously blushing.

"Murky's right! The old Ministry has an arms depot outside it. Red Eye used to take some when we ever needed protected transport, but the remainder have been virtually forgotten about. Given how large they are, we could probably fit everyone on board, hmm, a dozen? They would only have to squeeze in for a brief time."

"In that case, we need them." Sunny stared at the map and traced the route with a hoof. "We could have a group there and back in an hour. Think you could have everyone organised and waiting for us by then? We'd have to arrive, load and go right away because somehow I don't think those bastards will let a big convoy of armoured wagons pass without issues."

"That would deal with our transport issues, but again, where we going? Where am I meant to blow up?" Blunderbuck was peering around my shoulder to see the map.

Any reply was cut off.

"I think there's a rather more important *issue* you're not talking about."

Coral Eve's voice cut into the meeting like a cold spear. From the entrance to the office, she stormed inside with furious eyes. A very nervous Unity meekly approached behind her.

I couldn't help but notice that everyone present parted ways for her, veteran or not. Protégé looked up to greet her.

"Coral Eve, we-"

"Enough with the crap. When and how do we get them?"

She stood at the edge of the table, her eyes locked on his.

"You've been planning on how to get all of us to the wall, but that sounds an awful lot like we're just accepting that we failed. So I'll ask again. How. Do. We. Get them?"

Everyone else was stunned to silence. I could see Blunderbuck hiding behind Glimmer, with my sister looking distinctly unsettled. It occurred to me that she knew very well what Coral was capable of in these moods.

And there was a truly dark look in her eyes.

"They're being held in that Ministry Station. We've all seen what happens down there. What it does to ponies! What do you think it'll do to foals? We saw *adults* fall into madness from whatever the hell it is down there!"

"We will get them somehow, Coral!" Protégé cut to the precise line he knew he needed to avoid a catastrophe. "The problem is, we don't know how to get in, and the convoy to the wall cannot wait. Listen, if we can't get that wall down in time, we won't have anywhere *to* go after this. It's all or nothing. Without an escape route out of the city prepared, we'll just get rounded up. If we're delayed, we'll get surrounded and bogged down. It all needs to happen at once. The key is..."

He took a deep breath.

"We need to split up."

There was a powerful rise in noise. Everyone present made their own thoughts very clear. It was suicide! We'd fail both parts! Two of the soldiers gave some very colourful terms on what would happen to us if we tried it.

"We don't have a choice!" Protégé shouted, "Coral Eve is right, we can't leave the foals! Listen, we brought back some of the slavers from the metro with us, remember? We find out from *them* if there's any other way inside. Once we know where the entrance is, we pick a point on the wall that we can get a wagon up to which is nearby to where-ever it is!"

Protégé glanced around each of them and clasped his hooves together.

"We park up the majority of the wagons at a middle point between them, go for the wall and at the same time, go for the foals. By the time the walls are down, hopefully we'll have enough time to help those rescuing the children get through after the rest."

A soldier spat. "Suicide."

Coral Eve glanced briefly at the mark on the carpet the soldier had left, before looking up at him. I couldn't help but feel slightly amused by the way he immediately took two full steps backwards.

"Like Protégé said..." Her voice was stern. "We have no choice."

Slowly, with a deathly glare to any of the doubters, she turned and left the room.

After a few seconds, Protégé wiped his brow and sat down again.

"Sunny?"

"Wagon duty. I'm on it. We'll be back in an hour. *Be ready.*"

"Weathervane?"

"We'll have the wounded ready at the doors."

"Blunderbuck?"

"Francesca's ready for her performance."

The roll-call was briefly broken as Protégé looked up at him, as did the rest of us. Glimmer snorted in laughter.

"You named the *bomb*?"

Blunderbuck held out his hooves to my sister, looking affronted. "Listen, me and that thing got *very* attached to one another while I was spending a good day or so building it while all

that nonsense happened in the Mall with soldiers and raiders and air strikes and giant green sky clearing explosions!”

An ice-breaker of a chuckle passed around the room.

“Let’s do it then!” Glimmer shouted out. “Come on!”

As ponies began to filter out, Protégé got up and walked around the map. Only he and my friends remained with me now.

“We need that information from the slavers we captured, everyone. Without it, this rescue’s going no-where, and I don’t want to imagine what Coral might do if it becomes...well...”

“Impossible.” Brimstone finished for him, the first word he’d said all meeting.

“I’m trying not to think of it. Now, I suppose I have some slavers to question...”

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The overseer laughed and rolled his eyes. Stretching against his bonds that held him tightly to the cage door of a slave pen, he wiped the sweaty mane from his eyes and spat on the ground before Protégé.

“And just what do you think I know, huh? I got nuthin’ to say to you! You’re just a little rebel waiting for Shackles to come and claim you!”

He settled back and looked away, fidgeting against the chains that held him in place to scratch at his thick grey coat.

Protégé stood in the cell with him, while I waited at the door. He was being patient, standing and watching the slaver, but I knew it was all an act. We needed that information as fast as possible. Sunny and a dozen ponies had already left to get the wagons, and when they came back we would have scant minutes to get aboard and get going. Already, slaves were being directed toward the front halls of the Mall, and the wounded loaded into makeshift stretchers. Behind me, ponies were pulling bags of tins and carrying boxes full of food to last the trip. There was an intensity in the air, as the Mall was stripped of anything valuable to take with us.

“You don’t owe Chainlink Shackles anything,” Protégé spoke quietly, “I’ve seen him turn on his own more than once already, you have to know how merciless he is.”

“Well, duh, but what else you gonna do? He paid us better and if you were valuable, you didn’t get tossed out. Survival of the fit, right? We got more per day than Red Eye gave us, he

got the better houses, we got our own slaves to start buildin' out own little dens and if you were with him, you got respect. Few years with him, you could make it up the chain with him backing you."

The red maned unicorn before him narrowed his eyes, "I've seen enough to know where his chain leads, always back to himself."

"And the fuck else you going to do when he rolls up to your lodgings and offers it? Turn him down? Oh sure, I'd have survived much longer by telling *him* to get lost, wouldn't I? You don't know the half of it, upstart!"

"So you did it out of fear." Protégé narrowed his eyes and leaned closer. "Obey him for your own 'benefit' or have him as an enemy. You know there's a chance to escape him now, a better start..."

The slaver hesitated, before shaking his head.

"No way, man! No way! I ain't turning my back on him! He finds you if you do, it's a contract! A deal! You don't go breaking it! He got eyes everywhere, he even got some amongst you, remember? With the orb? Haha...yeah, fuck betraying him!"

I could see in his eyes the same look that slaves often held. He was terrified, but not of us.

"Cos you lot aren't getting out, and when you're brought back it'll be him! It'll be him in control soon, you all know it's true! What happens then? You're going to fail and I'd be left to what he does to traitors! No, I'm gonna wait and prove that I didn't do anything against him!"

I knew Protégé was getting desperate, this had gone on for half an hour already. Briefly, he walked back to me and sighed, whispering.

"This isn't working. I *know* he knows things, he's too highly ranked not to, he's an overseer, one step down from Grindstone and his ilk."

"He's scared of him." I replied with my mouth covered. "When I did what Shackles said, it's because I w-was scared of him too, until I had something more important or scarier to have to do, I-like when he was going to-"

Protégé's hoof waved, cutting me off, "Don't go into it, for your own sake. But you're right. I've tried to appeal to hope, but maybe that isn't the approach...overseer?"

His voice rose on the last word, catching the slaver's attention.

"We're trying to ask you here, how else do we get into Ministry Station? The Outer Metro is not possible, the old prison is closed off now, how do we do it? Where is the way in? You're very right, we're on a short schedule and we have little chance."

He trotted closer and almost pressed his face to the slaver's.

"I've got the lives of foals and slaves on my shoulders, overseer. I've got their hopes and dreams riding behind me and you're the wall blocking me from getting them home. You're right...if you don't tell us then we'll fail."

The overseer cackled.

"I. Know. And it's brilliant."

Protégé didn't move.

"Then don't force me to take this in a direction that I'll regret having to do later in life."

That made the stallion pause. He leaned back in shock. "What are you...no, you ain't the type."

The cell door swung open and the deep gravelly voice rumbled into the dark cell.

"On the other hoof, I am."

A monolithic shadow fell across the floor, from the giant form of Brimstone Blitz entering the room. He had to duck to come under the door, his shoulders barely squeezing through. Every step held a weighty thump on the ground as his one eyed and scarred visage glared with murderous intent.

The slaver jerked back, sweating almost immediately.

"You...you..."

"Me." Brimstone snorted, blowing mist from his nostrils in the cold air of the cell.

Protégé and I slowly stepped aside to let him enter as the overseer trembled and looked up.

"You...no! He wouldn't let you! There isn't shit you can do! What? Y-you gonna try to just hurt me? Kill me? Then k-kill me! You ain't got shit if I die! You can't hurt me, he'd hurt me worse! There's nothing you can do that's worse than what Shackles would do to me! I've seen it! He's more brutal than you could have ever been! You haven't got the *time* to make it worse than

he would! You don't scare me! You wouldn't go that far now, ex-warlord! You're not gonna get anything from me!"

Brimstone stood and listened, before shrugging.

"I'm not the one coming to ask."

The slaver blinked, "H-huh?"

The huge earth pony slowly stepped aside, as a blue magical light flared into being in the doorway.

Behind him was Coral Eve, with a face that could end worlds.

The overseer's eyes shot so wide I thought they'd come off.

"THE MINISTRY!" The slaver shrieked, pulling back so hard he fell over from his chains catching and tugging his legs. He pulled again and again, pushing for the back of the room. "Arcane Science! The Ministry! There's a hidden elevator in Aurora's personal lab store cupboard! W-we found it only when we came up it! IT'S THERE!"

Coral took two steps forward, eyes boring into the overseer's.

"Where. Are. They?"

His hooves were weaving frantically, pleading visually. "In the same holding cells we put you lot in! Beside the old zebra portal! I SWEAR!"

She stared at him as he quivered and turned away, unable to match her withering gaze. I could see tears in his eyes, his entire body reacting in sheer terror.

Then she turned and stormed away, marching toward a set of saddlebags in the corridor, throwing them over her back. With one last glance of hatred, she strode off toward the front of the Mall. The slaver collapsed, his cheeks wet and his whole body a quivering mess.

Brimstone watched her go with a small grin.

He looked impressed.

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"Come on...come on...there we go!"

I stumbled back and forth under the weight of Glimmer's saddlebags on top of my own. My hooves skittered and searched for balance as I swung to the side, before her magic caught me and held me upright.

Together, we limped and struggled downstairs into the madness beginning to form around the giant entranceway of the Mall. I'd elected to help her given she couldn't carry her own bags on her injured back.

"Thanks, lil'bro. What are siblings for if not a pack mule, huh?" She nudged my side, making me grin, before her voice turned more serious. "Listen, Murky, when those wagons arrive, make sure you're in the same one as me, okay? I wanna try to get all of us into one cart."

"Sure..." I gulped, knowing the reason why. If any of the wagons got taken out, to have to watch an individual friend who was in it left behind would be horrific. In an effort to lighten the mood, I decided to say something I'd overheard from a convoy guard once, "I call shotgun though."

I tried to giggle with it, before her face lit up at even my attempt to lighten the mood as well.

"You're full of surprises, since when did you know caravan lingo? Yeah, well I'll call my rifle any day. Sure thing." She ruffled my mane, before settling onto a rug by the edge of the entranceway with a thankful sigh, rubbing the bandages still wrapped around her entire torso. "Now, c'mon, others need your help. I'll be fine here."

Seeing her settled, I made a move to get in amongst it all. I had lost track of the numbers, but we easily had over a hundred slaves in here now, possibly two hundred. They were so thick and moving that I couldn't even count. Those who had come first and fought to turn the Mall into a safe place mixed with the latecomers and the evacuees from the metro. The old and young rubbed shoulders, the former sharing wasteland survival tips and the latter using their more able bodies to lift and carry. The sick and wounded were lined up along the far edge of the entrance halls, many covered from tail to neck in thin sheets to protect against dust and pebbles and keep their wounds infection free.

I did my best to offer help. Some of the shell-shocked types scorned it, nervously packing their own bags. Others I helped drag and lift supplies for. I helped Weathervane to escort and support the limping ones down to the entrance. I shared a moment with List Seeker as he apologised profusely for the past, and then we hoofed out bread together to those readying their packs.

These ponies were ready, and it scared them. We waited in this one hall, as minutes passed like hours, awaiting the call from outside that the wagons were here, and it would all begin. There was nothing to do but plan and wait. The fear of what was to come surged through

me, but I could feel that thrill in me, much like I had upon gearing up for my first attempt to escape. I was in better shape than many of these ponies, I felt responsible, a feeling I'd never much been used to my entire life.

Soon, everything was going to explode when we left the Mall, and it would either be over forever, or it would be the failure that would break us all. It had cost so much to get this far.

As I weaved and ducked my way through the crush, I saw comforting hugs and last minute kisses for luck. I saw tears of worry mixed in with tightly knit groups trying to banter and cheer the tension away.

As I passed near to the wall, something on the flat surface facing the main doors caught my eye on it for a moment.

Strewn all over it were papers and pictures alongside scrawled messages in hasty and crowded groups. Written notes stuck to the wall mixed with sketches or even occasional photos. I struggled to read a few passages from various different notes.

"He got us this far."

"She wanted it more than anybody."

"You took that one for me, Peachy."

"We'll never forget you."

"Thank you."

Below it all was a pile of collars and chains, dumped at the base of the wall. In the middle of them all, around the trinkets and notes, were a few small words, with a much larger one beneath them.

We will be

FREE

There was no way I couldn't. I took out my charcoal stick and leaned closer to the wall. I didn't know what to write, words weren't my thing.

Instead, I let my charcoal touch and drag in smooth shapes and curves. I had to hop up on my hind legs to reach where I wanted, as I added my own touch to it all. Lots of little lines, all swift and light, gradually coming together into something bigger, becoming thicker and stronger as they joined and became one. Then I let my stick sweep, drawing all of it into one long journey

of the charcoal from the bottom to the top and around all of those who had left their messages. I drew them together, connecting them.

As I stepped back, I looked upon my work with pride, as others near me spotted it and clapped me on the back. To my amazement, slaves began to come over and view it.

“Woah...”

“Did he? That's amazing!”

I blushed, in shock as more and more slaves gathered to look at what had become of their memorial. The chattering grew as they called others.

In the centre, I felt my sore body shaken by excited ponies.

“Thank you! It's...it's just what they needed.”

“They deserve it for all they did.”

On the wall, every note and image was now connected. Lines flowed between and around them, around or inside the memorial, always moving to the next in one ongoing pattern. A pattern of broken chains from them all. Along their lines, I had added my own details. A cutie mark bearing the symbol of healing, a Talon's claw and an Equestrian Army Robotics badge, or at least how I imagined it would look if I had designed it.

Beside me, I saw some ponies crying as they touched the notes and traced the lines with their hooves.

They were remembering everyone who had made this possible, and those who hadn't made it this far.

As their emotions poured forth and I felt hooves wrap around me from strangers, I gazed at the three symbols myself, and joined them in their memories.

* * *

The fire of creativity had been lit in me.

I found a little hidden spot for myself, tucked away into one of the old employee store cupboards on the ground floor. I had friends, but with ears like mine, I always was the sort to want a little quiet time. I'd tried the radio, but everything was being jammed in the area. Sitting on top of old paper rolls, I settled my journal down and shifted to my ongoing piece.

My friends.

Those who had come all this way with me, it was only missing a couple more. I aimed to correct that.

This one would go behind us, alongside Brimstone. Their size didn't leave much choice. For this it would be strong and straight lines. Not curves, but rigid lines as tough as their belief in doing what they felt was their duty. My charcoal broke its tip twice as I leaned hard to stop my trembling from ruining them. Sharp corners and changes of direction, more digital and precise than the shapes and lines that created the feeling of life in my other friends. I felt myself drawn into the moment, becoming robotic and straightforward, before finally coming to the centre where I let it all flow into the living heart of the piece and my lines returned to how I knew them. To create the friend, to create the personality at the centre of cold metal. Lines into curves, winding around the harsh limits, becoming shapes that injected life to a cold framework.

Making Mister Peace more than he was ever conceived to have been.

Just as he had been.

No matter what happened, he would live forever with the rest of us on here.

Sounds outside began to perk up, making my ears twitch and lift. Looking up, I twisted to stare at the door I'd closed to draw by the light of my Pipbuck alone, charcoal drooping in my mouth.

Through it all, I heard Protégé's voice, the tone he used when declaring things.

They were deciding where to send the bomb, the time had to be close.

Closing my journal, I took the time to have one last flick through the pictures, before opening the door with a hind leg to leave my hiding spot.

Briefly, I stopped as the pages came to how I believed my mother looked. Beautiful and kind, the way I always wanted to believe and remember, no matter what the truth may be out there. I could still see the scrawl of charcoal on the page from where I'd been pulled away while drawing. I felt my wings droop by my side, before I forced them back up. I had to look confident for her.

"See you soon."

I threw the journal back in my saddlebag, before pushing the door open again to leave.

* * *

Amongst the crowds, Protégé had his map out, speaking to Blunderbuck and a number of the strongest ponies we had. They were the ones assigned to pull the wagons, with another group ready to take over if any of them went down. A grim, but necessary role.

“The Ministry is here.” He pointed with a hoof to the obsidian like building, marked in black on the map. “The nearest point of the wall is up here, about a ten minute gallop. We're quite lucky, it all matches up.”

Blunderbuck rubbed his chin. “Wall won't come down anywhere though, right? Isn't there an old generator near there attached to the wall to help power all the searchlights and stuff? It'll probably be down, but the wall's a bit thinner there. Whole thing's built from scrap and readymix concrete after all, s'not like they were making it with precision or anything. Francesca can take that, I'm sure!”

“And the generator gives us somewhere to hide it. The wall has a killing ground near it. If we go for that, then we might have a bit of cover to reach the base.”

I shivered, that was all too familiar, my first ill-fated attempt had gotten me shot down in such an empty ground before reaching it.

“More importantly,” Protégé continued, “it's near to the Ministry. We can stop here.”

He pointed to a market square just short of the killing ground's limits (Or 'deadzone' as many slaves called it), near some old refineries.

“Then split for the Ministry and the wall. Once the wall is down, we'll help the Ministry team and then get everyone back to the hole while slaves flood out. How are we doing for loading?”

One of the ex-soldiers shrugged, “So long as we're not bothered we should be able to do it. Sunny took all the damn shotguns with her, in case they had to clear the wagon fields, but we should still be getting ignored...”

“Then get everyone lined up to the doors now, they could come back any minute. If you're a wagon puller, then memorise the map, we'll try to take the main thoroughfare, but keep an eye on the side streets, with the war out there anything could be broken down or blocked. Anyone with a gun, stay ready to watch the skies. This won't go unnoticed.”

I moved along, not joining in the more detailed talks. Instead I headed deeper into the Mall, down the entrance halls to try and find my friends. If this all hit off, I wanted to be able to help them out. After not too long, I found Coral Eve sitting beside Glimmerlight, speaking quietly.

She was idly toying with a foal sized sweater in her hooves, bearing the same hallmarks of the knitting I knew she filled her spare time with.

“Those missing their foals have all agreed to come on the Ministry job.” She spoke to Glimmer as she laid down the sweater. “There's not a huge amount, but we got some help. Two soldiers said they'd come along, and one of Weathervane's doctors.”

“You don't know what you'll find down there, Coral...” Glimmerlight looked up from toying with her rifle, before smiling to me as I sat before them.

“Yes I do. I'll find Chirpy and Lilac. Alive. Unharmmed.” Coral's tone was terse.

I bit my lip, before speaking up. “Once the wall's down, we'll be back to help you all. Then we can all leave together. Just...just find them, and we'll help with the rescue. We'll get them this time.”

The two mares both looked up at me, making me recoil slightly with a blush. To my surprise, Coral actually smiled for the first time in a long while.

“Glimmer isn't the only one who grew up a bit, is she?”

Oh come on, Coral. Now I just felt embarrassed. Looking away, trying to laugh it off, I lightly waved a wing dismissively. It was getting easier, less painful the more I did it. To hell with what Weathervane said, I was going to keep working at them no matter what.

“Come on, Murky.” Coral got up. “Let's go help get up to the doors.”

Coral supported Glimmer, bringing my sister to her hooves as I took her bags. As we pushed into the crowd, trying to get Glimmer near the front as one of the injured, I could see my other friends doing much the same. Unity was once again with Weathervane's team, helping them with what she could, despite not having any real training to do any medical work. I was beginning to suspect if she was just more at ease with the quieter patients than the louder, more boisterous slaves sometimes. She saw me looking and waved. I blushed and nodded back. If there was one real happy ending to look forward to, it was what it would be like to help get her back to her parents who clearly thought her gone forever.

“Hey, careful there!”

“Oh! S-sorry!” I stumbled and veered away from a slave pulling a little cart of ammo and shells, having to brace my hooves against the floor. He was heading deeper into the Mall, a shotgun lying ready in his sling.

I turned to move on, but something struck me as odd.

Why were they taking ammunition away from the front of the Mall? The supplies had to go first with the wounded. Ponies hopped on last.

Shrugging, I turned away to catch up with Coral and Glimmer. Yet something kept nagging at me. A feeling like I'd missed something, before I stopped sharply and turned again to stare at the stallion disappearing into the crowd, weaving his shotgun away from the others.

Sunny took all the shotguns.

I downed Glimmer's bags where they were, ignoring the cries of those it then blocked. I began to push around ponies to move after this slave. He was right at the edge of my vision, as my small stature kept me from seeing over all the standing figures. I moved faster, at the canter, ducking between someone's legs and shoving someone clean out the way.

Ahead of me, the slave began to move faster. I could see him moving toward a group of others emerging from a side room.

"Protégé! PROTÉGÉ!" I shouted, seeing the black unicorn perk up from nearby. He saw where I was now galloping.

So many were in my way, I screamed at them, to get down or to move out the way. I rushed, sprinting and leaping over a wounded pony as others began to notice me. Brimstone Blitz turned his head. I could see the slave ahead of me hear the commotion.

And then I saw the shotgun rise, it was aimed toward the waiting and nervous slaves. A line of armed ponies were forming at the back of the entranceway.

Cold blood running in my veins, I whipped out my saddle's trigger and bit *hard*.

The grapple hook propelled out, knocking me on my backside from the odd angle I was running at. It whirled out, before striking the barrel of the shotgun just as it fired.

In the cramped and echo inducing entrance hall of such a large shopping mall, the weapon's retort was like the cough of a dragon as it blasted a hole in the plaster and concrete roof.

All hell broke loose.

Hundreds of frightened slaves in a small and cramped area panicked. No-one knew where it had come from, other than 'behind' and before I knew it, a stampede of unarmed and vulnerable ponies was forming within the area.

What I now knew as a team of slavers lined themselves up behind the entire waiting convoy and advanced, weapons high. Slaves surged away from them, falling over one another. At the far end of the corridor, the Mall's doors burst open as the crowds fled the Mall, with the main entrance being the only escape route away from these ponies. I saw them aim and fire, again and again. I heard wails as ponies went down. I could see blood trails as wounded slaves pulled their friends or limped in tears. Bodies fell and didn't move.

I was almost swept away, stopped only as I slammed into the solid side of Brimstone. Injured, he still managed to grab a nearby crate of firewood and bodily hurl it at the slavers. Their line split as the heavy box crashed down amongst them, throwing off their fire and forcing them to take cover at either side of the hall. I could see Protégé behind a pillar at the far side, trying to get a shot. Coral Eve was directing ponies, unable to use her magic with so many around us. Between the slavers and us, fearful slaves rushed to get away from the coming gunfight.

Then their fire resumed. Targeting Protégé and ourselves, I had to skid and dive behind a bag full of tents left lying. As the horrible whipcrack of rounds stung off the floor around me, I was sent screaming away as the bags failed to do anything to stop the bullets tearing through them. The noises echoed and gathered into one ongoing crackle of fire and anger inside the hall. After four heart stopping seconds, I dove into the same cupboard I'd been drawing in, landing atop a crying pony.

"Infiltrators, keep everyone away from them!" Protégé shouted from outside, as he snapped off one careful shot. I heard a cry of pain from further down, before Protégé had to stop and curl up on the spot as fire smashed into the pillar, tearing chunks off and forcing him to lie down, his hooves around his head as fire flew above him.

Daring to peek out, I saw the slavers moving up after the running mass of ponies. I had a brief moment of horror as I saw Unity go to run out into the line of fire. She was holding a large metal door in her magic, using it like a shield as she scurried across the floor. She looked terrified, but crawled and pushed on as the door bent and buckled. Finally, I saw what she was going for.

In the middle of the entrance hall, a stallion was clutching his smashed hind leg, wailing for help, his voice lost amongst the echoing roar of weaponry inside. Unity leapt and skidded beside him, her magic trying to hold the door upright to shelter them, before trying to drag him.

Blinking out of my astonishment, I took aim and fired my grapplehook toward them, landing it a foot away from her. Unity looked up and saw me, before hooking it into the larger stallion's belt and signalling to me. Holding onto the door frame, I started to winch him in as Unity rushed over with the door to protect him.

A heavy round slammed into it and knocked the door clean over her head. My heart leapt into my mouth. Slavers spotted her. They fired from one side, making Unity yell and drop to the floor, as slavers moved up the other side. One of them took aim, before he was sent head over hooves as a heavy crack shot railed into his skull.

Turning, I saw Glimmer lying immobile at the edge of the hall, magic bracing Diamond's rifle against her saddlebags.

The four remaining slavers paused, and Protégé took the opportunity. Joined by the rest of the slaves that had finally broken through the escaping stampede, a volley of fire showered upon the slavers. Grabbing their wounded friend from earlier, they fell back behind the marble pillars short of the plaza junction. Nearing me, Unity dropped her makeshift shield and pulled him into the cupboard where the crying pony, one of Weathervane's team, sucked up her tears and went to work. Unity lay back against the wall and mopped her brow, pulling her stringy mane from her face, a hoof on her no doubt thudding heart.

"Thanks for the...the line..." She panted, tapping the hook, as her magic fed it back into the launcher.

"You're crazy." I muttered, "Leaping onto sky wagons, yanking us down a hole, now this?"

"You're one to talk." She weakly chuckled, before leaning over to help the nurse with the bandaging.

None of this attack made any sense. The slavers were outnumbered, even by our depleted group. Why did they do this?

Before my eyes, as Protégé got back into the fight with his exceptionally good eye for accuracy, they retreated out of sight. I heard one of them shouting "It's done, go!"

We stood on the spot, aimed after them, but I could only hear them galloping further and further away. I shouted that they were gone to the rest, as doctors began to run to the wounded.

"What were they doing?" I asked to Protégé as he surveyed the scene.

He didn't reply, deep in thought as he looked from where they'd come to the direction the slaves had went. It was almost like that was all they'd wanted, to get the slaves moving. To get them-

Outside.

I had a horrible thought.

After that, I heard the gunfire start.

* * *

Outside, well over a hundred slaves now fled and crawled for the smallest scraps of cover they could find, not counting all the others who ran back to the Mall again. The cratered and shattered pavement and garden of the Mall short of the road was filled with individuals curled up in the small holes or behind fences. From across the road, muzzle flares sparked amongst the far buildings. Screaming filled the air, a panic was forming but no-one knew what to do. Some still closer to the doors or windows tried to run and get back into harder cover. Not all of them made it.

As we crouched at the doorway of the Mall, I began to realise what had happened. Unable to assault the Mall head on, they instead had taken advantage of us about to leave to force the defenceless ones outside by starting a panic. I could feel Shackles at work behind it. The eerie timing; the understanding of what we'd be doing. He probably even had seen that we sent some away to fetch something else for when to make his move.

Ponies who may not even be coming back now. If we'd been ambushed, they could be too.

This was a horrible, horrible spot. We were open and vulnerable. Many of the slaves couldn't move quick enough to get back inside and we didn't have nearly enough fighters left to take this head on, we-

I shrieked. A shot whipped off the edge of the stone near my head, making me back down as a half dozen more followed it, chasing me as I hid behind it and spraying me with rock dust. Across the doorway, Protégé leaned out and snapped off four fierce blasts with his revolver; but at this range there wasn't much hope, even with his enviable aim.

"Murky, are you all right?!" He shouted across.

"Y-Yeah! The slaves!"

"I know!" Protégé kept trying to peek out, but it was harder and harder as the shots started to come at us more, chasing after the source of the fire. "Murky, listen! They're gonna shoot at who shoots back, okay?"

"I understand!"

I really did, it only made sense. Protégé wanted to try to distract their fire, get them to shoot at us instead of the cowering wounded and sick out in that awful lack of real cover. Delay

them, distract them until, well, until we thought of *something*. To that end, I turned and ran back into the Mall, before twisting into one of the side corridors, aiming to come out at a far window from Protégé's location. On the way, I grabbed a rifle from the dead slaver in the corridor, I needed something with more punch than *Rarity's Grace* to even get noticed.

Oh, great, I was *wanting* to get noticed and shot at now. Great! Just peachy!

Struggling to carry the rifle in my mouth, I eventually shoved it under my saddle's straps and held on with a wing until coming to the blasted out windows of the Mall. Outside, I could see Weathervane behind a wall of rusted shopping carts hurling every curse and oath in the known world at our attackers, while trying to staunch the bleeding on one of his nurses. The poor mare looked white in the face.

Setting up the rifle, I angled my head into the trigger and braced it against my shoulder. It was far too big for me, but all I needed was to make an impression. Already I could hear the distinctive sound of Protégé's revolver again. Glimmer's rifle sharply barked. A few rifles opened up from somewhere. Gradually, the puffs of dirt and sparks of impacts shifted away from the slaves in between the two lines of fire as the slavers sensed they were being shot at.

Time to join them. Leaning into the rifle, I bit hard on the trigger. Then wailed out loud as my head split from a sudden and harsh noise that dropped into a ringing tone.

The recoil jarred my shoulder hard enough that I fell backwards as the old hunting rifle's big round shot from the barrel. I felt like my entire skull had been broken in two. I couldn't hear anything. Tears in my eyes, I dropped back and held my ears against my head as gunfire rattled above me and into the far wall of the room. Damn stupid big rifles and their stupid noises with their stupid huge rounds to my stupid stupid hearing! I beat my hoof on the inside of the wall in anger and pain, trying to pull out some rags to push into and around my ears.

"Here! Let me help!"

Unity dropped down beside me, lifting the rifle and using both her hooves to yank back the bolt and load the next round.

"It's loud, careful!" I shouted, tying the rags around my ears tightly.

"Rifles generally are!"

I blinked in shock for a moment. Unity in a dead serious mood was always a surprise.

Gradually, screwing up my face anticipation of the sound, I lifted the rifle with her and we fired it again together. And again. Squealing every time they shot down at us, I tried to crawl away along the windows as glass and wood splintered and shattered above me, dropping down

on my head. Unity dove and scrambled in the other direction, before we tried to crawl around to a new spot.

“Give me some help with this!” She shouted, as the bolt seemed to be getting stiffer to move. I grasped it, my hooves beside her magic, feeling the entire metal top heated up. Eventually, we got it back up and fired again in the vague direction of the slaves.

So long as it kept them safe outside. So long as they weren't shooting at them! They weren't going to win, not now! Not when we were so close to leaving!

But we were going no-where. We couldn't keep firing forever and there were more of them. Every so often, someone would get hit in the middle. The doctors couldn't reach them. The ammo was running low. The cover was being broken down slowly. More slavers seemed to be turning up.

We were trapped.

“Give up!” A megaphone voice started to echo around the buildings. “Throw down your guns and return to your masters and you will not be harmed!”

Screams began to pick up from outside. Ponies were losing hope. Terror was starting to filter in, the desire to surrender and live starting to approach on the determination to fight and be free.

I could hear a rumbling in the distance. No doubt an army of slavers and soldiers. I fired again, and was surprised when no giant bang happened. I pulled the trigger again and again, but nothing happened. Looking into the top, I saw one bullet at a weird angle. The metal around it was scorching hot.

Completely jammed, and with no hope of fixing it that I knew of.

“What now?” Unity tossed the wrecked rifle down.

“Uh...uh...main hall! They'll need us to help get others to the wagons the moment they're here!”

Instead, I ran back to the entrance hall and found Blunderbuck wheeling his bomb toward the doors with the help of his assistants. Hearing voices approaching from behind, I screamed at them to get moving and helped push it myself. The slavers from the hallways before were returning to try and flank us!

Where even to? We couldn't go out the front! I felt confused, lost but unwilling to stop moving. As Blunderbuck and I pressed our shoulders together and turned to shove with our backs, I saw figures approaching down the hall, looking to close the trap again.

Bullets whipped past my head and drove them back. Protégé slapped the trolley the bomb was on and shouted at us to keep moving.

"Where to?!"

He didn't have an answer. Instead, we ended up stopping at the entrance, hiding behind a huge bomb made of what looked like soil and liquid with gunfire coming at us. Both Unity and myself squealed at the same time as we saw the bomb take two bullets into the packed containers surrounding it.

"Don't worry, you two!" Blunderbuck shouted, "Bullets won't set it off! It doesn't work like that, we're safe!"

"*You call this safe?!*" Unity cried out, as she scurried around it to hide from the gunfire. "We don't have anywhere to go!"

Blunderbuck gulped and made a half hearted and fearful shrug, "Comparatively?"

Unfortunately, she was right. Slaves were starting to run out of ammo in a big way to waste here. Us with the bomb were pinned down. Those outside couldn't dare move. Everything had ground to a halt.

Then as our places to go ran out, that rumbling suddenly became clear. I heard wheels and the thunder of hooves. A great well of shouting began from the slavers outside as the blast of shotguns and rifles filled the air. Peering out, I saw our salvation.

Twelve armoured wagons came skidding around the corner of the road and began to drive for the Mall. Atop each of them were ponies armed and firing everything they had. Sunny rode on the front one, her rifle snapping off accurate shots at any slaver who dared give his position away by shooting. They were angular vehicles, with giant V-shaped bottoms and thick wheels that crushed small rocks and wood below as they went. Each was pulled by a pony with an intricate metal shield around them that looked about as unwieldy and cumbersome as they likely were.

"Get moving! Get moving! Meet the wagons!" Protégé rushed up to Blunderbuck and I, throwing his strength into the pushing as we left the front doors. His magic kept shooting his weapon behind us, keeping the slavers inside the Mall back, before pausing to make the complicated reload in mid air with individual floating bullets. How he managed that while pushing I would never understand, he had always been a true multitasker.

“MOVE!” Brimstone Blitz slammed the Mall's security door shut behind us as we passed outside. Around us, slaves were starting to encourage one another to get up under the cover of Sunny's team. Stretchers were being pushed and wounded were limping. Brimstone stopped to lift Glimmer onto his back, the wounded unicorn firing with her rifle the entire time. Coral dragged four large bags of supplies. Unity took one from her and the pair of them pushed ahead to the end of the road.

The wagons circled around and formed a giant half circle of armoured cover, their thick ramps dropping at the back and their side doors sliding back to drop a small set of steps. Sunny ran down one of them toward us.

“Get on! Get on! We are getting the hell out of here, they're chasing us from behind too!”

She spun on the spot and let off a wickedly accurate shot that punched a window back into the room it hung beside. The fire from that room stopped.

Ponies began to throw themselves into the wagons. Weathervane and his team led, carried, pulled or encouraged the broken slaves of the metro to move. They stumbled and cried, not understanding what was going on. Some stared blankly as they were being bodily lifted in. Others panicked and lashed out, having to be held down. With the most unbelievable demonstration of professional care I had ever seen, Weathervane's ponies of the Hearts and Hooves hospital got every one of those poor souls on board, not one of them getting on until they were done even while under fire and taking their own wounds.

Coral Eve quite literally catapulted the supplies into the wagon to save time, sending it rocking back on its axles. Blunderbuck and I helped his assistants and Protégé to pull the bomb up into the lead wagon, locking it down with chains on the wooden pallet and trolley he'd brought it on. Behind us, List Seeker shouted and waved to direct ponies to each wagon that still had room. He winced and fell to one side, his bandages leaking red as a wound reopened. Ex-soldiers climbed onto the roofs and opened fire alongside Sunny's team, as slavers began to emerge from the streets and corners to move in on us. The sound of gunfire hitting the wagons was like an army of possessed blacksmiths hammering with fanatical intent.

Yet slowly, achingly, ponies were loading up. Blunderbuck hopped on with the bomb as Protégé and I got off to help the others.

“Hey boys, we gotta move!” Sunny shouted over at us as she hopped onto one of the wagons near the front, before curling around the side of a wagon and raking off two shots at the slaver who'd just shot at her.

I came across the one that my friends were getting on. Brimstone was lifting ponies aboard while Glimmer helped defend it as best she could, but I could see her stamina running low in her injured state.

Then with a fierce *boom*, an anti-machine rifle barked from somewhere nearby.

The pony inside the armoured shield of the wagon screamed for only a second before passing out. He fell from the straps and out of the protected shield. A hole had been punched clean through it. His shoulders were a mess.

“Shoot! Help him!” Glimmer gasped as she saw it happen.

Brimstone didn't wait. He grabbed the wounded pony and lifted him carefully aboard. Then he tore the shield off the wagon entirely.

“Brim, what in the hell are you doing?” Glimmer leaned around the door. “You're too hurt to pull this thing!”

“Watch me.” Brimstone grunted and slung the straps over himself. I saw him grimace as he bent his still ruined body around it. If there was any pony who you could count on to go that extra mile, it was him.

“Good luck.” I gulped, before Unity yanked my saddle from behind to get me on as well.

The last few ponies fled to the wagons as the shout went out to get moving. Even as they began to shuffle and pick up speed, slaves were fleeing from the craters and leaping aboard. Unity and I caught a mare and pulled her on, her speed and desperation so much that she briefly fell atop me. Brimstone's grunting of pain was clear as he towed the vehicle, and with aching slowness, all of the wagons got going and picked up speed. Glimmer, Coral, Protégé and myself held on to the handles on the wall, all in the same one together along with a panicked group of ponies, including one of the metro slaves who sat almost unknowing in the corner.

“We did it! We actually did it! We got away!” Unity lay back against the wall of the wagon, reaching limply for the hinge to close the armoured door and bumped hooves with me. She looked breathless, as we both stared back behind us.

Slavers swarmed out of the buildings. They were all Shackles' kind. They turned to chase us, but were quickly left in our wake. I saw a few on the radio, and others waving away to someone else.

But behind them I saw the Mall.

That giant, old building of heavy concrete and rounded metal, slowly drifting away into the distance. A building I would never forget. Full of memories, pain and joy. I could see it in my head. The plaza with its hanging flags of the Ministry Mares. The balconies looking upon it. The ventilation ducts I could squeeze into. Protégé's oaken office full of books. Shackles' grim quarters. The armoury and its manic creators. A supply room where we had fought and laughed at different times, from fearful raiders or Glimmer messing around with socks to try and make us smile.

I could remember our cell shop. Remember its strange comfort and thick couch. I could remember that it was where I fought Barb and where Caduceus died. That it was the place of horrors as Shackles' pet, and a place of triumphant bravery against all odds. That building had been a defining place in my life.

It was the place I had met some of my true friends for the first time.

Now we were leaving it forever. I would never again set hoof inside its walls.

As the wagons pulled away, I watched the Mall fade into the smoke, a ruined shell of what I had first known it as, left in my mind as a memorial, bearing our thoughts on its walls. Without really knowing why, I brought up my hoof and waved a little, before blushing as I saw Unity staring at me in confusion.

Yet now my mind had other things to look to.

The wagons powered forward as they turned in a row for the route to the Wall and the Ministry. They set forth, thundering forward into a city at war. Below the bright sky to fill us with hope, we set forth to face whatever was awaiting us.

There was no turning back now. The escape had begun.

* * *

"C'mon, help me stop this bleeding!"

Glimmerlight shouted over to the rest of us as she held what rags we had over the poor stallion's shoulders. A terrible tear had opened from where the huge rifle had hit him. Or more likely just been hit by the bent metal from round's passing through the wagon. I'd seen much worse happen to ponies who'd even been glanced by those enormous guns the griffins used. Unity and Coral helped her.

The wagon was running at full tilt. Climbing up onto the step that let ponies poke their heads out of the hatch (Protégé had called it a cupola), I could see Brimstone charging ahead after the other wagons. A soldier sat on top of it with us, holding Diamond's old rifle from

Glimmer. He'd lost his own in the rush. The entire convoy was rumbling between two sets of brickwork houses at the edges of the Mall district, having turned the sharp corner to head for the main roads. Above, the open sky beamed down upon us, like an ever-present omen that times were changing in this city. Enclave ships were starting to soar again, exchanging fire with ground forces across the city. A nearby building rumbled as a cannon atop it opened up on one of them. Ahead, I saw slaves and slavers scattering out of the way of the thundering convoy. Shouts at our passing went up, but quickly faded into nothing.

We were moving fast enough that I felt like I would fall backward if I let go of the hatch's ring. Wind in my mane, I watched every familiar street go by. I knew the way to the Ministry, we were following the same route.

Up ahead, I saw a scrap-built walkway above the road swaying in the growing wind. On it, four slavers stood around a heavy gun, their gas mask eyes glowing red.

They were on radios.

The easy part was already past. The soldier beside me dove down into more cover of the wagon as we saw the gun light up, before its hammering sound drove along the street. Rounds stitched the road either side of the lead wagons, which began to weave and sway, trying to throw off the slaver's aim. Their big armoured tops rocked and threatened to overturn at speed as they bounced through cracked roads and over planks of fallen wood. I could hear screams of ponies as bullets thudded into the armoured roofs and walls, denting and sparking off them.

"Everybody hold on!" Brimstone roared. Our wagon veered to the side, hopping onto two wheels as we hit a pothole. Thrown against the soldier, I gripped the hatch, my eyes beginning to sting from the rushing air around me. The wagon ahead of us slowed down sharply as the pony pulling it tripped and stumbled. With a lurch, we turned and overtook them, the heavy compartment we were in skidding and crashing its side through the wooden supports of the walkway as we zoomed underneath it. The jarring impact knocked me around again, my ribs impacting on the hatch. The wagon we'd passed barely got by as we heard the crack and snap of wood, before the entire thing collapsed behind us in a snapping heap of timber and sheet metal, slavers falling around their gun. Brimstone stumbled and struggled, yanking us back on track to the middle of the road.

I saw utter chaos. Slavers were flooding out onto the rooftops as the warning was sent ahead. A flak cannon on a roof was being traversed down to us. Its quad barrels aimed menacingly, before it finally unleashed. The road near us was torn apart, chunks flying into the air and pattering off the wagons. Each vehicle split and took its own route to get past the street. One of them ramped a wheel off a piece of Enclave wreckage and almost tipped. Another two hit side on as they both tried to evade the cannon's red lit rounds. Slaves fired back from the roofs of the armoured wagons, but it was impossible to aim properly from these things. Under a

tirade of fire, we pushed on and endured. I saw one wagon's wheel go spiralling off, as its brave puller somehow kept it moving. The metal bent near me as I ducked down to avoid incoming shots. Diamond's rifle beside me barked again and again as the soldier tried to do his best, before tossing it down for Glimmer to reload. I twisted to face the other side, firing what I could from *Rarity's Grace* at a wooden post hanging off a building that had three slavers with pistols taking pot-shots. I never saw if they even noticed.

Brim yanked us side to side. The flak cannon's rounds tore past us again, spraying over a wagon ahead of us and tearing the roof off. The ponies atop it somehow managed to get down before it happened. I saw the signpost for the main thoroughfare of Filly ahead of us.

Then the cannon stopped firing. Turning, now that it was behind us, I saw it being cranked to face the sky with a great amount of panic.

Attracted by all the commotion, three Enclave skyships were descending, the same type that had torn the roof off the Mall.

Angular, burning with storm clouds at their fringes, they dove with a keening wail of engines and rocketed toward what to them must have looked like an important convoy of Fillydelphia's forces. Plasma and laser batteries seared, and I had only a brief chance to scream at the others to duck before they hit. The road around us exploded, and I felt heat singing my coat as the magical energy surged and sparkled around the wagons when we drove through the smoke. I felt the wagon turning sharply to the left. Looking out, I saw it was the entrance ramp to the main road. A sharp ninety degree turn was ahead of us, and each wagon tilted as it flowed around it, knocking apart a flimsy wooden barrier that crumbled beneath the wheels.

A rush of wind almost caught my wings to send me flying out the hatch, as the skyships rocketed overhead and began to bank again. On the rear of them, I saw a small turret flare with light. Another-oh crap no!

Laser beams stitched the ground near Brimstone just as he was turning the wagon. We had been climbing up to a level above the nearby houses onto the high road. As he tried desperately to control us, I felt the entire wagon lift up onto two wheels and begin to tilt. Screaming, I saw the edge of the road give way to a massive fall into a scrapyard below, me on top being hung over the lip of it. Brimstone was bellowing with pain and effort to pull us back as the top heavy vehicle kept shifting.

"We're going over!" The soldier beside me wailed. "Shit!"

Forcing down the fear, I clambered out onto the curved roof and fired my grapple at the nearest wagon. The sudden jolt of it hitting and the nearny wagon's movement almost snapped the saddle straps around me, but I gripped the wagon and held tight, straining every muscle I

had that wasn't already injured. I felt like my legs would be pulled from their sockets as I used the other vehicle's motion to pull us back.

It was just enough.

With a groaning of metal, the wagon rocked back onto its wheels and Brimstone pounded his hooves to get us moving again. Everyone inside was tossed to the other side of the compartment as I struggled to get my grapple reeled back without catching anything else. The crunch of the wheels bouncing with the forward momentum tossed everyone around again as we tried to get back into the convoy properly.

The road was a mess of holes, wreckage and fire. Twice I felt my eyebrows singed as laser fire rattled near us. The skyships strafed us again and again. At speed, we were harder to hit but they only had to get near us to burn and scar the vehicle. My stomach turned as the bumpy ride threw what little I'd had to eat up and down, my eyes stinging from the wind blowing into them. I hardly even knew why I was up here, but the thought of not seeing anything at all was worse.

"How close we coming, Murky?" Unity shouted up to me, and I peered through the air strikes and laser fire to see that giant obsidian building up ahead. It was down from the road, about ten blocks away. Its tough walls were crumbled and damaged, the tall high rise flats beside it now collapsed in colossal heaps of concrete.

"I can see the Ministry!"

Below me, Coral's face hardened, as she climbed up, pulling the breathless soldier down.

"Then that's where I'll go." She spoke strongly, before casting her eyes up and widening them as a skyship came roaring along the rooftops, so close that its wake tore water reservoirs and fences clean off. I could see the cockpit and the weapons gleaming. Incandescent colours speared forth and turned a whole section of the road ahead of the wagons to slag. They all began to turn to avoid it, passing through a gap in the barrier between either side of the road as a wave of sparkling dust washed over the group and blinded everyone for a few seconds. Coughing, waving it away, we tried to open our eyes again into the cold wind. We were nearly there! Every moment they didn't bother us, we could get another hundred metres closer at this rate! The city was slowly scrolling by as we fled for the Wall in the sun.

"We're not fighting you, ya dumb idiots!" Glimmer yelled up the hatch into the sky as she finished reloading.

"I hardly think they care, Glimmer! They just see targets down here after they got half their fleet thrown out the air!" Coral scowled as she followed the flight path with her head. "If we can get off this road again, we'll be safe!"

Protégé popped his head out of the other hatch at the back and gazed ahead. "There should be a turning off just up here! We should...great Equestria, is that a..."

His voice trailed off as we all gazed to the side at once. Across the war torn city, now lighting up again with fire in all directions, there came a shape. It had been hidden behind the wall of clouds that the eruption in the sky had forced away, but now it slowly emerged. An enormous shape, so large that it barely even registered as possible. A flying *building*. A cloud fortress. Like what I'd once seen in pictures of Cloudsdale before the end of the world, only filled with metal and bristling with weaponry. It hung outside the city, an impossible shape in the air.

"...a Thunderhead." Protégé sounded disbelieving. "All this time, they still had them. I didn't think it possible!"

"Well it's not near us, far as I care that's all that matters." Coral shouted, trying to stop her braids from slapping into her face from the wind atop the wagon. "Those ones *are!*"

Up ahead, I heard the other wagons scream a warning, before the skyships came twisting around to rush at us again. Flak from atop the Ministry opened up to force one off with a glancing hit on its hull, but the second one kept coming. Fire leapt from its underside, before I saw missiles arcing through the air, coming veering down toward the convoy in a spiral of smoke and flame.

"Brimstone! Speed up!" Coral shouted, as she pulled herself up onto the roof of the wagon and lit her horn.

No, she wasn't going to-

The wagon leapt forward as the big raider threw everything he had into it. We passed by another vehicle, moving closer to the centre of the struggling convoy.

The missiles hurtled right down toward us, and Coral grit her teeth in response. Crying out, the air pressure around us growing, she let out a sharp yell and unleashed her magic. A wall of force rocketed upwards and met the incoming missiles. I felt Unity grab my belt and pull me back down, just as Glimmer did the same for Coral as her spell impacted on them.

The bright sky began filled with fire and metal as they exploded thirty feet above us. The wagon leapt and slammed into the side of the road barrier. Screeching metal filled my ears as it dragged along it and shrapnel pinged off the roof and walls, until a heavy roadblock hit the side of our wagon. Unity was thrown across the floor as the side door was ripped clean off. I heard

her cry as she fell toward the gap, until Protégé caught her hooves. Pulling back, he dragged her back inside, the small mare holding onto him tightly and hyperventilating with wide eyes.

Out that side door, I now had a view of the crater and the other side of the city. Duelling Enclave and griffins were taking the fight back up at the edge of the road, too busy to deal with us, other than missed shots pinging near us. The same skyship came into view, veering off to find its departed wing mate.

“Protégé! Hey, boy!” Brimstone's voice picked up.

Settling Unity down, his hooves on her shoulders, Protégé shifted across to the step and peered over to the earth pony pulling us.

“Road ahead's blocked!” Brim's voice was stoic, but exhausted and pained.

Poking my head around the side door, I saw what he meant. The wagons ahead of us were all slowing down. They were battered, damaged and lacking armoured panels anymore. The three wheeled one was barely neck and neck with us, struggling to keep up. Yet ahead of them, the entire road had fallen away just short of the Ministry's turn off.

Protégé glanced from side to side, before grabbing his radio.

“Sunny, take that turning on the left! It goes down into Appleview Avenue, but there's an old side road that'll take us to the market quarter! It's still close enough for the Ministry team!”

The radio crackled, and a pained voice came through, sounding breathless, “Sure...sure thing...we're just holding together up here. Bomb is...bomb is okay...”

Protégé looked shocked, “Sunny? Sunny what's happened? Are you all right?”

“Nothing...nothing big. I think I popped a rib when we collided with Weathervane's wagon back there.”

“Take care up there. Make that turning!” Protégé repeated the request, before nodding down to Brimstone as the big pony looked over his shoulder.

Short of the break in the road, we pulled off to get down to ground level again. Passing through an old toll booth, I briefly noted the outrageous price (If bits equalled caps anyway) before I felt us picking up speed downhill. The clattering of the damaged wheels filled my ears as the roaring air passing by us flooded in through the open door. Red buildings flanked us on either side, tenements by design with apple logos on their corners.

I looked up to their tall roofs, worrying about any more cannons.

Instead I saw the one up ahead explode.

I had no idea what caused it, whether it was a falling bomb, an air strike, a misfire of a cannon, but the brickwork shattered and sprayed down into the street ahead of us like a waterfall. Ponies screamed as the wagons passed into the dust cloud and rattled over the individual bricks in the street. What I now knew as Weathervane's wagon slid on locked wheels as a brick got caught in its wheels to clip the edge of a house's fence. The metal tore out the ground before a postbox was demolished ahead of it. Rising on the curb, the entire wagon leapt off the ground.

From the roof, I saw a nurse come dropping to the road. She screamed, before hitting with a thud and rolling over and over.

Brimstone swore loudly and swerved to avoid her. Beside me, I felt Unity look out and gasp.

"Night! Night Dream! Brim! Murky, grab me!"

"Don't miss her, I ain't turning!" Brimstone roared back as he yanked and twisted the wagon to come close to the stricken mare.

I saw Unity lie close to the side door on her belly.

"Murky, grab me, quick!"

"O-Ok! Hold on!"

Having needed to be told twice, I didn't hesitate any longer. Wrapping my front legs around her hips, I lay my weight down on her back legs and rested my head on her lower back as Unity crawled forward and lay the front of her body out of the wagon. I felt Glimmer and Coral grab me to stop us falling out.

The mare was struggling on the ground, screaming for help. Unity stretched out with a hoof.

And grabbed her.

We all shrieked as the weight pulled all of us out by a few more inches and tugged us down the door to the very back of it. The mare yelled as her body skidded on the ground, but Unity lit her horn and grabbed with both hoof and magic at once, trying to pull the nurse in. The wagon bounced and weaved to avoid the falling rooftops as explosion after explosion began to

ring out above us. Wagons came close and wheels nearly caught Night Dream. Yet with one last pull, Unity and ourselves managed to yank her inside.

Falling in a heap, we all simply tried to catch our breath. Unity hugged the mare tightly, presumably a nurse she'd gotten to know while helping at the aid station.

Behind us, the entire avenue began to collapse as wreckage continued to fall onto it. Before I knew it, the hovering skyship that had been above us began to falter and fail, before dropping like a stone to crumble amongst the old street. Magic energy exploded and rock flew away to bounce off the back of our wagon, before we finally turned the corner.

“Hey, boy!”

Protégé took a deep breath, wiped his brow and got back on the hatch. “I'd appreciate if you wouldn't call me that, Warlord.”

Brimstone grunted. “Sure thing...kid. Look up. We're there.”

Ahead of us, the convoy was slowing down. Around us I could see shop fronts and abandoned stalls filled with dust that must have once been fruit. Cobblestones and old wooden carts filled the area, along with raggedy banners with words I couldn't read on them, too many letters. But it was clearly the market district. Brimstone unharnessed himself and fell to the side, half collapsing on his side, his eye closed. One big hoof rested over his heavily injured torso. Protégé got out after me.

“Okay, everybody out! We don't have the time, help the wounded! Blunderbuck, we've got a bomb to deliver!”

Gradually we dropped onto the cobblestones on shaky legs. I'd never been so glad to not be moving. Yet, I found the breath stolen from me as I looked around myself, realising how close I was to two things, here at the end of all things in this city.

On one side of us was the monolithic obsidian tower of the Ministry.

And on the other was the unbreachable barrier to freedom.

The Wall.

* * *

Those who could still gallop and shout unlatched the wagons to let the frightened and trembling slaves with us out. As those lines of ponies emerged from the battered metal vehicles, they were directed across the street, through the winding rows of old stalls and fruit carts to a

line of shops and three floor homes that littered the last row of buildings before the wall. Locked doors were bucked until they broke, to find as much cover and security for the slaves as we could. Their dirty faces betrayed a sense of feeling lost and vulnerable. The war had ground them down, sapped all the last wells of courage they'd had to defend the Mall with.

I could relate. I couldn't stand on all four hooves; instead I just kept leaning and pacing from one to another with nerves. We'd travelled across a quarter of the city, evaded fire and strafing runs to reach here, and now we were isolated and surrounded by war on all sides. We had no enormous and fortified building this time.

Protégé was pointing to windows and open rooftops, encouraging those with weapons that still had ammo left to get on them and prepare to try and defend against whatever came by here. Ponies were trying to sort out what rounds they had left, but it looked dire. We'd had to leave a lot of supplies behind. As I trotted forward, I heard many of them talking about their last magazine or scant few rounds.

We couldn't hold this position, not in a million years.

Blunderbuck's wagon with the bomb was moving toward the buildings, trying to squeeze through an alleyway to reach the other side with the help of a half a dozen ponies. Through a gap in the homes, I could see the dull and scrappy face of the wall, out there past a deadzone of nothing but earth and rubble.

That wall had been the limits of my world for far too long.

Moving away from the wagons, I found Glimmerlight lying down on her belly with Weathervane beside her. The ghoul was retying her bandages, ones I saw stained in red. She grimaced as I rushed over.

"A-Are you okay?" I grabbed her hoof and held it tightly.

Glimmer winced and looked up at me, "Looks like I'll be skipping this one out again, Murky. It reopened on the-argh...on the way over here. That last toss coming off the high road. Listen, Murky...don't worry about me here, you do what you can to help. Okay?"

"I...I..."

"Murky." She reached out and grabbed my chin. "You can't stop now. Let that little dynamo of a heart you've got keep you going now. Big sis' needs a rest to let this magic doohickey start working so I can actually make the journey afterwards."

“There's so few of us left to fight, Glimmer...” I looked around at those remaining and saw a number of them running back from the wagons, shouting for Protégé in a panic. Something was going on.

“I believe in you, lil'bro. We're gonna bring that wall down, right?”

“Yes!” The answer was automatic.

She just smiled. “Then go make it happen.”

Weathervane waved sharply to a nurse, his hooves then moving down to work with his magic in securing the new bandages before helping lift her up. They pulled her away from me, amongst the procession of the wounded.

Suddenly, Protégé and Coral were rushing toward me.

“Murky! Murky!”

Protégé came to an exhausted halt after shouting to me.

“We're being followed.”

* * *

My grapple shot upwards through the rubble of an old grain tower to dig into the wooden beams above. Tugging it to make sure it would hold, I nodded to Protégé and lifted my hooves to clutch around his upper body, while he held onto my saddle. With a bite of the trigger, we both were pulled sharply upwards. Dangling and swaying around the broken framework of the tower, my winch slowly brought us to the last remaining balcony at the top.

From there we had a bird's eye view of the surrounding area, in all its shattered glory. The market district of Fillydelphia must have once been a bustling place of old architecture, cobbled streets and endless seas of stalls. Its many squares and wide streets were arranged in warped patterns, not ordered and squared like, say, Manehattan. It all came to a solid end about a hundred metres short of the wall, as each building had been demolished to leave the deadzone, or 'killzone' as some called it. A normally flat and barren area with little features to keep ponies from sneaking up to it. However, the area we'd chosen made sense, the deadzone wasn't entirely empty, this section had fences and pylons running out into it that gave a little bit of cover, leading all the way to the wall. It would shelter us below the cables and corrugated roofs above the generators themselves all the way to the wall.

At its bottom, I could see the old generator station, hunched slightly into the wall. The alleyways on the market district leading to it were alive with the sounds of Blunderbuck's team trying to get the wagon through to it.

The top of that huge wall seemed empty, with a giant scar where a cannon might once had been. I supposed there was little point using a wall as a defensive point against a flying enemy.

Yet our interest was to the other side. Looking out in the cauldron of flame and destruction that was the rest of the city, even under the radiant sunlight that clashed in tone with the vista before us, we could see things approaching.

Individuals, or small groups, were rushing forward. Ponies were galloping in the streets toward us in the distance. They weaved and rushed as though in a panic, with shouts carrying across the thick air of the city to my ears. I couldn't tell what they were saying, but it didn't sound calm.

Digging into my saddlebag, I got Old Grizzly's binoculars out to take a closer look. Focusing in on the closest group, I saw three ponies in rags sprinting past the empty remains of an old swimming pool, heading directly for us.

I gasped. "They're slaves."

"What?" Protégé offered a hoof, and I gave the binoculars to him. Holding them up, he panned between every group out there. "It seems as though word got out on what we were doing and where we were going. Look!"

He pointed toward the high road we'd come off. Below it, a much larger group broke out. Hysterical cries began to echo across the rooftops as they fled through alleyways and tried to leap fences. Then a second group, and then a third.

The survivors of the war outside were coming right toward us.

"We can free more, Murky." Protégé smiled, his chest swelling with the thought.

I wasn't convinced.

Taking the binoculars and looking down, I could see the expressions on their faces through the smoke and fiery haze. They didn't look hopeful or eager.

They looked desperate and scared, not of something in general, of something very direct. I saw their heads turning a lot. Many were crying.

Then I saw the shots ring out from the darkness behind them.

From within smoke and down the streets, the orange flare of heavy rounds leapt and stabbed at the fleeing slaves. Screams drifted on the winds, as they ran faster toward the market square we were in.

“Protégé...”

Surrounding us, on all sides but the wall, I saw slavers emerge in rows and upon their own carts and wagons. Cages atop those carts bore slaves within them, as the ones ahead rounded up all they could to throw them back in. Slaves who stopped and held up their hooves were beaten and tossed within. Those who ran too much were gunned down. They were moving inwards in a semi circle toward us, the majority following us from the high road.

Shackles' slavers were coming to take us back.

“We're trapped.”

* * *

“We're not going to be able to get you to the Ministry.” Protégé rubbed his head before slamming his hoof against the tower's wooden door.

Coral looked out across the lines of slaves now beginning to flood into our area. If her anger blamed anyone, it wasn't Protégé for saying it. She just grit her teeth and snorted.

“Then we make this happen here, and when that blasted wall comes down, we use the confusion to get back in for them.”

I gulped, “I th-think it would work. I could probably find a way past them if there was that big a diversion of all the slaves running out...”

Protégé nodded, but he seemed very unhappy, to say the least.

“This isn't going how we wanted it...there's always another obstacle. For Equestria's sake, Fillydelphia...just let go already...” He muttered to himself. “Come on, we have to get that wall down, *now!*”

“I'll come with you!” I piped up.

The three of us galloped from the tower, heading back to the others. Behind us, the march of hooves and the squeal of rusted wagon wheels were approaching. Slaves threw themselves upon us or the others. They begged for help, to be let free. The rooms in the

buildings we'd chosen were filling up. The small space we had between the slavers and the deadzone of the wall was starting to become very cramped. As we tried to direct slaves into it and push through the crowds toward the bomb, I saw slaves using old stalls as cover. Others were pulling the armoured wagons in to block sight and hide behind or inside them. There was snarling and crying and begging and anger and spite all around us. The smell of unwashed ponies growing from so many in such a small place began to hit my nostrils amongst the acrid tang of war time air. Some yelled to the sun, others cowered.

They were trapped, all of them together in one small area, with only a small wish of hope that the wall might disappear.

We had to make it happen. It would be a massacre if we didn't.

Throwing ourselves into the alleyway, I carefully ran over the broken ground with my small hooves to try to catch up. Protégé and Coral threw themselves against the back of the wagon and shoved with all their might.

"Blunderbuck! Get this thing moving! We've got slavers coming up behind us!" Protégé cried out to the gunsmith turned bombmaker.

"I'm pulling, I'm pulling!"

It sounded like Blunderbuck himself was in the front of the wagon with the harness, his two assistants on either side. I rammed my body into the back, between Coral and Protégé. I looked to try and see Brimstone, but from when I'd last seen him he was down and out.

It was up to us.

I honestly didn't know how much I was really helping with my meagre strength, but I shoved for all I was worth. Every few seconds, the entire wagon would lift upon on rubble, then clank down on the other side before finding the next chunk it had to go over.

The deadzone ahead looked flatter, if only we could get it there in time!

Slow and aching minutes passed as we moved one wagon for just twenty metres over every fallen wall or collapsed pillar. Coral Eve blasted some of them out of the way, but she couldn't keep using her magic forever. She was losing strength with it after all the events lately.

"They're coming!"

"Where's the hole in the wall? They said there'd be a hole in the wall!"

Shouts of panic were beginning to emerge behind us. I could hear the shouts of slavers coming near as the slaves who had escaped them fled into our midst. Every slave who had survived the bombardment, who had heard the rumour and been able to get free seemed to be coming this way. They looked in a horrible state, making me wonder just how bad it had been for those outside the Mall.

“C'mon! Push! Everyone! PUSH!”

Finally, the wagon bumped free and rolled into the deadzone.

“Go! Go, go go!”

Blunderbuck strained with all his might and started to pull the wagon. Coral, Protégé and I pushed from behind, before the pair of them leapt up and yanked me by my front hooves onto the floor of the back end beside the bomb.

We hit the flat rock and earth of the deadzone and began to pick up speed. Blunderbuck's assistants stayed to help with the mass of direction-less slaves coming in. Leaving behind the cover of the buildings, we raced toward the wall. To my eyes, it only grew bigger as we approached, looming over me. I clutched a hoof over my breast as I remembered being here last. A round from Ragini had shot me down about now. We-

A bullet rung off the wagon, and I screamed.

“Watch out, off to the side!” Protégé pointed along the wall to where more slavers were approaching us from along the deadzone. They fired ahead of them, moving in and out of the buildings that formed the border of the city against this area. Their rounds hit the pylons or heavy boxes that sheltered conduits for the wires. I could see tents from where they were coming from, a slaver and soldier camp, like the one I'd passed through long ago.

It was all happening again.

Oh no, it was all going to happen again!

Holding my cheeks, I felt my muscles lock up and gunfire began to slam into the wagon or strike the dirt around us. Protégé fired twice back, before lightly cursing and stopping to reload his revolver. He only had a few rounds left.

The wagon bounced and slid to the side on the loose earth as some rocket whooshed overhead and struck the wall. The slavers were closing their net around the slaves from either side now. Those stuck in the buildings fired with what they could, but had to mostly just lie down and take cover. I saw black armoured soldiers with the slavers, who marched and ran from crater to crater in the deadzone. They stopped far enough out, but they kept shooting at us the

whole way. I screamed and closed my eyes, shivering and worrying. All this way and we were going to just-

"Murky, open your eyes, my dear. We can't freeze up now!"

Coral's hooves came down on my shoulders and I felt her hug me closely. My hooves leapt out and squeezed her. My heart felt frozen. I would feel confident, and then it would all just melt away so quickly, like a harsh emotional whiplash.

"I...I can't help it! It's what happened before!" I wailed, feeling rotten, I should be stronger! But my every fear was emerging, my very first attempt was so similar. "Just...just one bullet and...and..."

"This time you aren't alone."

Coral kissed the top of my mane, as those words rung in my ears.

No, I wasn't.

Taking a deep breath, I opened my eyes to see her face.

"Just hold what you want close, Murky. Keep letting it spur you on." She grimaced and looked away after her small pep talk, as the wagon began to pull away from the incoming fire and approached the generators against the wall.

Protégé briefly looked back at me being held by Coral and stuck out a hoof with a smile.

"Come on, Murky. You're one of us."

Trying to force myself to smile, I reached out and struck his hoof with mine, before pushing myself to my hooves.

"We're here!" Blunderbuck screamed as we pulled onto the hard concrete surrounding the boxy generators. "Francesca, your chauffeur has delivered you safe and sound. Time to do your work!"

He unhooked himself and ran around the back as we were leaping off. The bomb was dropped onto its trolley we'd lifted into the wagon while I took a quick look around this place.

The wall was everything. It stretched up above me, to someone as small as me it felt like it stretched into that blue sky above. Around us, inactive power plants lay motionless amongst a series of wires that had long since been cut off from Fillydelphia's power source by the Enclave.

The entire thing was on two levels, with further walkways that went higher on the wall for cable maintenance. An upper level held the tunnel into the wall, where we wanted the bomb to go, alongside a hastily built office made from a shipping container and lines of wooden walkways that ran up further on the wall to maintain the various wires that ran up to the top. There were a lot of small areas I could have hid in here, behind the massive generators or the thick pylons that directed all the power to the wall, not to mention the massive crater right beside it. Nearby, a pylon had pulled a chunk of the inside wall down with it into the deadzone behind us from an Enclave air strike.

We rolled the bomb between all of us onto an elevator at the back, before grabbing the chains with our hooves. Under sheer muscle power alone, we worked to slowly drag it up to the next level where the tunnel in the wall was.

“Come on! Pull!”

We pulled. It moved one foot upwards.

“Pull!”

We *pulled*. It shifted further.

And further.

And up.

And up.

The deadzone was slowly dropping below us. I could see the soldiers forming a cordon around us as the slavers began to move in to attack. Masses of slaves had gathered now in a thick group. More were coming up behind the slavers and trying to sneak or break through. It was like all of Filly was hearing about this rumour, and every slaver wanted to squash it dead.

Briefly, I began to wonder.

“*Pull!*”

Why did they attack us back then at the Mall?

“*Pull!*”

How did they know we'd be at this spot to gather so many?

“*Pull!*”

My tired front legs pulled again and again. Gritting my teeth, the sweat running down my body, I felt the elevator lock into place twenty feet up the wall. Ahead of us lay the indent to the wall itself, a small tunnel in which what I thought was a transformer for the power grid now lay. Welded girders held up the hidey hole for it, and we shoved the bomb directly inside it.

"How long, Blunderbuck?" Protégé crouched against the edge of the tunnel, keeping watch as Coral and I moved to the other side.

"It's already set! Got the trigger on a wire, we just run back and detonate!"

"Then let's go!"

We ran out onto the walkways. I was beginning to feel dizzy on my hooves now, as my stamina started to drop. Protégé came up beside me and matched my pace, wordlessly offering support to keep going. We followed Coral, with Blunderbuck running a wire behind us down each ramp and level of the station toward the bottom. After a while, he simply tossed it to the ground, then ran down to pick it up, giving it a more direct route.

As we came to the edge of the power station, we looked out and saw rounds flying every which way in the deadzone, keeping slaves pinned inside those buildings.

"No choice but to just run for it." Protégé grimaced. "Use the wagon!"

Turning it around, we hopped inside again, as Coral this time hooked herself into the protected reigns and began to pull us. We entered the deadzone, returning to the buildings. The moment we exited the power station, however, shots began to ring off the sides. I saw indents appearing and dropped to the floor beside the others, hooves over my head.

All I could hear were screams, dull thumps and the crack of distant gunfire. Then an all mighty roar of weapons fire broke out in the distance.

The slavers had begun their attack on the one lone bastion of slaves left.

"Blunderbuck, can we blow it?" Protégé screamed across the floor of the wagon.

"Not yet! We're far too close! We have to be in the buildings or the whole thing might collapse on us! I'm not exactly sure which way it's gonna go!" The young stallion was running the wire out a crack in the wagon's side door behind us. "It should go as soon as we hit the button and-"

There was a ferocious explosion right beside us that sent my ears into a ringing tone and thumped my ribcage. The wagon halted on the spot strong enough that it sent all three of us

whipping forward into the far wall of the inside. My scream was cut short as I felt the metal rattle off my head and a splitting pain shot down my back. Clutching the back of my neck, I rolled over and almost slid out the door.

Opening my eyes, I could see we were at an angle.

Then Coral Eve was at the door, one side of her face bloody as she held an ear that seemed to be bleeding with a long cut on her foreleg. She was staggering, looking concussed and unsteady.

"Bomb...missile...hit..." She muttered, before slumping against the side of the wagon.

Blunderbuck groaned, trying to get out. Following him, as I dropped to the ground on my belly, the entire world seemed to be slowing down. Shots whined over the building tops in at a crawl. Skyships above drifted lazily. The gap between breaths felt like minutes.

Then my hearing gradually returned. My ears ached dully, yet I turned to look at the wagon and saw it almost on its side into a crater. Coral lay against it, and I began to dig my head under her shoulder to try to lift her. Protégé rolled out and helped me, as Blunderbuck checked the wire.

Together, Protégé and I carried her back, Blunderbuck trailing behind us.

"Just keep moving, Murky!" Protégé hissed, as gunfire whipped near us, forcing us to duck and crawl with her.

"I'm...I'm trying!" I whined, finding my body start to shiver again, the age old fear crept back in, of a time when our wagon had been blasted apart on another failed escape. I'd been here before too. "Protégé I...I think I'm..."

"No! No you are not!" He snarled over Coral's shoulders as we pushed and pushed back to the buildings. "You've not got an ounce of giving up in your body, Murky! Seeing you doing this is what's kept me from giving up! I'm not going to watch you do that now! Come on! Dig down, find something!"

"M-Me?" I gasped, and then gritted my teeth to throw myself those last few feet toward the buildings. "But I didn't-"

His eyes found mine. There were no lies in them.

"You made me see what was possible, Murky. Now be the pony I've believed in this whole time, since we very first met...and don't give up now."

I felt a swell of something. I wanted to cry, and I wasn't sure why.

But I knew I had to live up to that. For him. For all my friends.

And so I lifted Coral again, and forced my tired limbs to push on. As unseen as we could be, ducking and crawling away from any gunshots and staying to the lower crater, we finally, finally, found our way back.

Sunny was lying against one of the windowsills near us as we got into hard cover.

"You holiday-makers are back, huh? I've been running dry trying to keep them off your backs out there! Hurry up!"

Below her, we pushed into the building, and I saw the horror of the situation.

Ahead of us, the slavers were breaking through. Those with guns on our side were doing their best, but there were just too few. The slavers and soldiers were firing and gunning down those who resisted, and trying to push forward to capture the others. Their wagons acted as shields to approach us. Wounded were being carried back in dozens. Slaves still kept seeming to find their way through to us. There was no cover. The slavers were unrelenting and less than fifty metres away.

Sunny screamed from upstairs, "We can't hold them here! It's now or never!"

Weathervane was shouting somewhere, that he needed *anyone* who had so much as put a bandage on before to get up and help them. Glimmer lay against a pillar, someone else using her rifle as she held her side, half unconscious as she kept drinking another healing potion to stop the bleeding from before. Brimstone held a massive slab of metal against a window, trying to cover more slaves, but he couldn't get out to fight.

We had only time left, and not much of it. We got Coral to the doctors just as she was coming to, and a bandage was tied around the cut in her leg, while Weathervane frantically lit his magic around her skull. Even as we did, someone cried out about the slavers getting too close.

Blunderbuck wound the wire around an old alarm clock's innards, below a button.

"It's ready!"

His hoof rested over it. Then Protégé's rested above his. He glanced at me briefly, before I shifted forward and put mine atop both of theirs. Seeing us both, Blunderbuck grinned and took his away.

“You two do it. The two born slaves, huh? It's too 'right' not to do...”

Amongst this hell, with slavers about to over-run us, after the war and fighting to get here, this mattered. Even if we still had the foals to get, this one long sought moment mattered.

Protégé and I looked at one another and allowed a smile to creep onto both our faces. He nodded briefly, and I returned the gesture. Both our hooves did it at once.

Together, we pressed the button to end this nightmare.

And nothing happened.

* * *

“Wh-What's happening?!” I hit the button again and again. I was feeling that old panic start to rise again inside. Behind me, there was a scream as someone was hit and fell away from the window. Megaphones of slavers were demanding surrender.

Blunderbuck took the device from me and checked the wiring. He pressed it. Nothing. He changed the wires and rebound it. He pressed it again. Nothing.

Nothing. Nothing. *Nothing*.

Protégé wiped his hooves over his face, shaking as he tried to contain the heartbreak and stress.

“Blunderbuck...”

“I don't know!” The young stallion wailed, twisting more wires together. “Everything's good out here! It must be on the bomb's end! I...I know I did it right! I think? Oh sweet Equestria I...I just...I...”

I heard Sunny cry out from upstairs.

“Get everyone back from the wagons! Get them all inside!”

Another voice came after, “There's no-where to go inside!”

“We only have to hold for a few more minutes, just keep your head down! *Survive!*”

List Seeker followed her shouts.

"If anyone has a gun left get over to the right, they're trying to round up some trapped workers! We're already over time! They're catching slaves stuck outside!"

An explosion rung out from the left hand side. Soldiers began to flood into the next building, I could see them through an old hole.

Every side was crying out for help. I could see one of Red Eye's ex-soldiers lying wounded, another firing from in front of him, guarding his comrade. Outside, through the front of the row of shops, slavers were moving forward piece by piece. We were being overrun. We were already out of time.

"I'm so sorry, I thought I did it right!" Blunderbuck covered his face. He was crying.

Protégé held the button in his magic, then turned to look at me. He looked desperate, but there was a resolve in his eyes. He slowly turned to look back to the power station against the wall, where the bomb lay.

"Murky, we can do this, can't we?"

Gulping, I nodded.

"We have to."

Side by side, we ran back out into the deadzone.

* * *

Sprinting around the wreck of the wagon, we galloped for the wall once again. I kept an eye to the ground, looking for any break in the wire, but it all seemed fine. I was exhausted, running on nothing but adrenaline, desperation and rapidly diminishing levels of sheer hope. My head thudded with every step of my hoof on the packed earth below us. The spotlights of the wall that had begun to shine down upon the slave's last position glared into my eyes and the sounds of hell from behind me stung my ears with guilt and worry. My friends were fighting for their lives, almost all wounded or faltering. This great mass of slaves that had gathered together was being crushed and attacked on all sides, trapped against this damned wall.

Protégé ran ahead of me, his longer legs carrying him faster. The earth whipped up around him before the rushing air and crack of shots whined out and I saw him dive to the side. Scrambling, trying to move in anything but a straight line, he got back up. The shots were coming from behind us. I yelled as some started coming nearer to me, with one coming so close I could have sworn it almost brushed me. My saddle's grapple dug into my side on every single stride, and I kept thinking it was the thud of a bullet. The pylons gave some cover, but we were horribly exposed out here in the deadzone.

Up ahead, I could see the ramps and walkways of the station itself. They got closer with every gallop, but always felt far off. I weaved and ran to the sides, stopped and skidded back in the other direction. The ground shattered with a burst right ahead of me, and I screamed as I swerved to run the other way. Another burst came up beside me and I felt one go beneath my legs on the ricochet.

Protégé reached the station first, and swung around behind its torso height wall to fire a few accurate shots behind us. He would never hit at this range, but the fire made someone rethink sticking their head out. With that brief gap, under cover of the snapping 'blams' of his revolver, I ran in beside him.

“Quickly, up to the bomb!” He slapped my shoulder and ran past again. “It has to have snapped loose, I know he wouldn't have made a mistake like this!”

“You sure? I don't know how to fix a bomb!” I squeaked, rather embarrassingly, as I felt the stress make my throat tighten up.

“Neither I...but we just have to hope.”

The wooden boards clattered below our hooves as we raced up them, veering around the elevator to find the tunnel. Fiery embers blew past us as the wind of the open sky blew down into the city and threw fire against the walls. As we climbed each level, I felt it begin to blow at my mane and ears. I'd never been so close to the wall like this until today. I felt as though I were climbing the side of my own cage, looking back into the pit I'd come out of. The sun had dulled as smoke began to rise in front of it, casting a blood red haze across this entire section of the wall that coiled and flowed like water on the inside surface.

Ahead, we saw the bomb. Sitting beside two small pylons, just where we'd left it.

Protégé and I skidded to a halt, as we saw what was wrong.

The wire had been pulled out.

“What in Equestria...?” Protégé breathed as he picked it up.

That wire had been coiled around a metal rod. I'd seen it myself. It wouldn't have just come loose and it hadn't been cut. Someone had untied it.

Why had they forced us out early?

Why had they known where we were going?

I ran back outside and looked down below us, but the place was still empty. I looked above, and saw nothing below the top of the wall.

Then I heard Protégé cry out.

Spinning, I saw a dark shadow launch itself from a hidden little pocket of the tunnel and crash into him. A mouth-held club swung and swung, hitting the floor around him and chipping the wood.

Pushing my hooves into motion, I screamed out and rammed the side of the slaver with all I could muster, sending her back with a grunt. Protégé didn't waste time, as he stood, pointed and shot her.

My ears twitched as the shipping container office burst open. Two more slavers came barrelling out. One had a shotgun, and fell as Protégé quickly re-aimed and fired a second time. The third hesitated, before Protégé's revolver clicked empty.

"Oh I know that sound! C'mon!"

From the other side, coming down from above, another two burly slavers came barrelling down the walkways holding a shock stick and a whip. They had chains and nets on their sides.

I felt Protégé's hoof on my neck, shoving me behind him. He was frantically trying to reload.

"Murky, get the bomb wired again!"

Resisting every urge to freeze up, my lips quivering, I rushed for the wire and grabbed it in my mouth. My hooves were deft from sewing enough to do it, but I kept dropping the wire from nerves. Sweating, my eyes wet, I tried to wind it the way I remembered seeing it before.

Behind me, Protégé never finished reloading in time. By the time he closed the drum on his revolver, a club smacked into it and knocked the weapon into the tunnel wall. At the entrance, he dropped low and bucked behind him into the chest of the slaver with the shock stick. The two others barged into him, dropping the unicorn to the ground. Twisting, snarling, fighting as dirty as any slave ever could, he twisted his head and jabbed his horn for their necks, he bit, he spat for their eyes and used his magic to shove the shock stick into their sides.

"You! Stop that!"

A slaver ran for me. I screamed and kept twisting the wire, before Protégé grabbed his hind legs and dropped him down.

"Keep working, Murky!"

The wire twisted around again, I hoped I was doing this right!

A club thudded against the back of Protégé's armour, just missing his head after he swung out the way. I heard him cry in pain, before his back hoof caught a knee joint and he knocked that slaver into another. A hoof cracked into his head. The shock stick missed by inches.

Finally, I thought I had the last twist needed.

"It's done!"

Behind me, Protégé struck one slaver with a loose plank of wood. He was bleeding from the nose and lip. Taking the brief chance, his magic grabbed his revolver and swung it up as the other two barrelled atop him. Shoving the barrel against them, the single heavy round tore through both slavers from point blank range. Their screams as they fell off filled the tunnel.

Battered and bloody, Protégé pulled himself from the ground, holding the last slaver at gunpoint.

"Murky, get the detonat-"

The heavy shot rung out across the wall, as it slammed through Protégé's armour and tore across the side of his body before slamming into the wall beside him. His body was knocked clean from his hooves, the revolver dropping. I saw his eyes widen and his mouth open in shock as his mane flew out from falling. With a thud, he hit the floor and curled up.

I stood in horror.

Then I screamed.

The heavy stomping of hooves began to flex the walkways and clump into my ears. The rattle of chains began to fill the air as he approached. Trotting down the walkways from above, Chainlink Shackles joined the remaining slaver, another two of the foul 'old school' slavers flanking him.

In his grip, he held a stubby but heavy looking rifle that he let swing onto a saddle. The malice and glee in that smile made me feel ill as I ran to Protégé's side, the unicorn hissing and shaking on the ground from the long tear on his side. I looked back up and felt my blood turn cold as their weapons pointed at me as well. Shackles turned his beady and bloodshot eyes to me, his smile only increasing as he recognised me being here as well. His armour looked

battered, clad around his bulky frame from the war, yet he filled the walkway with bloated menace as he steadily came closer.

“Well, Number Seven, it's good to see you again.”

* * *

I tried to move backwards, dragging the wounded Protégé with me. I'd forgotten everything. The bomb, the slaves below, the wall, freedom, the war. Everything except Protégé and myself being so close to that monster. Protégé grunted and tried to move his hooves, managing to unsteadily push himself back with me as we moved away from the tunnel.

Shackles glanced into it, before smirking.

“This would be the third time you've failed, Number Seven, and your first, upstart. How fitting to share it together, eh? Two little colts thinking they can pull off something like this around me.”

He looked back at us, before moving forward. His every step flexed the boards of the walkways, as he tapped the side of his clothing. I gasped to see what was hanging there, the reason they'd ambushed us.

The E.F.S Blocker I'd once stolen to use myself.

“This is my city, runts!” He snarled, waving a hoof over the burning Fillydelphia to our left. “Even if flying rats are besieging it, no-pony escapes from their chains under my watch. You thought you could send them all away, did you, eh?”

“You...” Protégé coughed. “You can't hold back these ponies forever, they won't stop fighting every chance they get for it.”

“Soon enough, that won't even matter, as I'm sure you're aware. After all, you did fail to get my 'first generation' back, didn't you?”

His rotten teeth were on full display as he grinned at the look of hatred that Protégé gave him.

“And now you've delivered all the rest right to me...”

I gulped, my heart thudding faster than any war had ever done to me.

“W-What do you mean?”

Chainlink Shackles waved to his slavers, as they moved forward and grabbed both of us. I struggled, but the strong hooves clamped around me, holding me upright as Shackles closed in. I felt nauseous, as his massive hoof stroked along my jawline almost tenderly, his face on a level with mine, before gripping the back of my head and holding me forehead to forehead. I was whimpering, I knew I was, but I couldn't take my eyes off his.

"You are all too predictable and simple. Save this, rescue that. You would never give up the foals, would you?" He turned to look at Protégé, who struggled before gasping in pain from his wound, being held still. We were both held where we could see the city, and more particularly the Ministry and the market square as the sounds of horror began to reach my ears. Screams of pain and panic. Of hopeless desperation and failure. A tragedy before our eyes. I saw slavers piling in through windows. I saw fighting in the streets as slaves were being pulled out. Slaves coming up behind the slavers trying to reach the wall were pinned down.

"It's not as though I don't know the only other way to Ministry Station, Number Seven. And it's not as though I don't know you all would never attempt this foolish rush without a plan to get the foals. It isn't exactly difficult to know where you'd have to go once you figured it out."

He licked his lips sloppily, stroking my mane like a pet's. I felt sick to my stomach, an old feeling of terror returning as he stroked along that old scar on my forehead, much like his own. Yet it was his eyes that scared me, he was a foul and monstrous slaver, but he was sharp and penetrating whenever he looked at me.

"All it took was forcing your hooves to get you moving, and we knew where you'd go...now you've led them all to a hopeless position, ready to be reclaimed all at once, pulling all the other potential rebels with you as rumours got spread...by ourselves, of course. The wall is down...the wall is going to explode...hurry hurry! All those who went into hiding during the war drawn out at once by a false promise. Your promise. A large task for us to reclaim them all made simple."

I felt hollow, holding myself up by my hooves so the grip from the slaver wouldn't choke me. Shackles lifted Protégé's head by the chin.

"Or did you really think you were the ones pulling the strings in this city now? That you were the masters of your own fates at last? There's only one master of these ponies, upstart. You've led them to their capture."

Protégé seethed with anger, struggling, crying out in pain but struggling all the same. Shackles merely chuckled and slapped him viciously across the face, the unicorn fell limp for a second, passing out.

Down below, I could only watch as the slaves and my friends were being assailed. A horrid sight of gradual failure and crushed dreams. My ears picked up more than that though, they heard the hushed voice.

Shackles moved back across to me, as I saw a collar drop on a chain beside him. I recognised it, and stiffened up. He must have seen the fear in my eyes, for he started it swaying, as he lifted it up.

"Welcome home, Number Seven. We've got a lot of work ahead, you and I. A lot of things to regress to and get back to the way they were, a time when we were both comfortable, both knowing our place. When things are just right as they should be."

"No..." I squeaked, trying to pull away.

"When you can finally live out your true meaning."

"No...it's not..."

"When you and the *mare* can both do what you were supposed to."

My heart felt like it had stopped, images of Unity flashed through my mind at the same time as everything I'd seen him do. The memory machines, the cruel 'leftovers', the breaking of minds and ponies as resources all in aid of abusing the most beautiful of magics into a horrid disease for his insanity. And when I saw Unity stuck in that with me, after everything we'd been through together to get away from what this city had done to us.

I just snapped.

And so did Protégé.

He hadn't been unconscious. I'd heard his slight whispers, the warnings to be ready. With a sudden glow of his horn, the revolver sitting on the ground back down the walkway lifted up and fired. I felt myself flung to the ground by the slaver as bullets started flying by us. One slammed into Shackles' armour and knocked the big slaver away from me with an angered roar. The moment I was free, I turned and fired my grapple gun and *Rarity's Grace* at point blank into the slaver. All the anger, at them all threatening both Unity and I with the sick madness that he was clearly stuck in just emerged as I dumped every shot I could. The slaver screamed and fell back, clutching his stomach.

"**Runt!**" The savage voice roared in my ear, before I felt myself yanked up by a massive and long coated hoof. I squirmed and fought, clasping onto that heavy rifle of his as Shackles fought and clutched on to me. I could see Protégé wrestling with the other slaver over their club.

Not knowing what else to do, I let my hooves wander over his weapon to grip it tightly, and then reached forward and bit into his neck.

The roar of pain was enough, as I was thrown from his grasp before I could rip at the flesh. My world turned upside down, as my wings splayed and tried to right myself in the air, but I hit the surface of the wall at the back of the walkway before I could manage it. My bones rattled, as I slumped down.

Shackles twisted and raised his rifle toward Protégé. The unicorn slammed the club into the slaver, before turning and stopping dead, his eyes wide.

The weapon clicked dry, and Shackles turned with murder in his eyes toward me, as I sat there with the magazine in my hooves.

"Murky, move!" Protégé screamed at me as he sucked up the pain and galloped down to swing the club in his magic. It met Shackles' foreleg, as the thick and bony hoof blocked it. I rushed to try and get Protégé's revolver from where it had fallen in the struggle, slipping the empty weapon into my saddle. Behind me, Protégé was being forced back. Shackles' monstrous attacks were more than a magic wielded club, as every swing of a hoof made Protégé need to dart back and slowly move to the next level up.

Running, I fired my grapple onto the wall above them both, pulled myself up, swung and then dropped on top of Shackles, holding the heavy magazine in my mouth from his weapon, as I beat it again and again over his head, holding around his neck with my forelegs. Protégé swung at his knees or his chest, as I was thrown left and right by the massive slaver's bucking and tossing.

"You've only led them to their end, upstart!" Shackles roared, smashing the club with one hoof strike. He lunged to the side, as I yelled and clutched on tightly, hanging over the edge of his body and the walkway as his head shook madly.

"This wall is the chain that binds this city, it will never break!"

He was insane. For the first time in my life, past the fear, I knew he was truly insane. Intelligent, resourceful, a master of psychology, but at his core he was as broken as I had been.

That gave me the courage to cling on, he wasn't a master of my life! He was just a foul and mad old stallion!

I instead threw the magazine away and took my grapple in my mouth, swinging the sharpened edge down to draw a huge cut along his skull.

The cry of pain was only briefly encouraging, before Shackles rose up on his back hooves and flung me cleanly over his head. Circling in the air, I came crashing down on the next level of the walkway, grabbing onto a wooden pole to not slide off. Coughing out sawdust and smoke, I tried to get my hooves under me, before a massive pressure squashed me from above. I felt a hoof pressing on me, crushing my body and pressing my ribs in. I squealed in pain.

Ahead of me, out over the gap that my upper half hung over, I could see the trapped slaves being forced back into the deadzone to not be killed. They were taking cover behind the pylons and conduit boxes. If they got any closer, the wall might be too close for them to survive it going off! Slavers were pulling individuals back with them one after the other. Hope was fading, ponies were starting to surrender for fear of their lives.

“You can see it, can't you, Number Seven? You know how they feel, that crushing of something you thought might happen. The realisation that you belong here. With me. With **family.**”

Coughing, trying to shout back, I ended up just gagging and retching over the edge as my stomach was compressed down.

“Look at them! This is what all this foolish dreaming gets you! An eternal chain, Number Seven! For those destined to be in it, the cycle never breaks!”

“But this wall *will!*”

Protégé launched from behind with the shock stick, before I felt Shackles cry out in pain and sweep away from me. I sucked air into my lungs as the pressure was lifted and rolled onto my back.

He swung the shock stick again and again. Shackles, faster than anyone his weight or size had any right to be, beat out with his hooves and batted it away or forced Protégé to back off, as they climbed another level in their struggle. Gritting my teeth, I grabbed my grapple like a weapon and rushed in again.

Together, Protégé and I fought our master up the walkways to the next level. We swung and thrust, we dodged and weaved. I saw Shackles trying to get range to reload his weapon, and pushed my fear down to rush inwards again. Protégé joined me and struck a ringing blow against the slaver's foreleg, the shock stick's tip breaking and sparking out from the impact, but making Shackles roar in pain. That same hoof immediately lashed out and sent Protégé crashing back into a pile of used cables.

Below from the ground, screams were becoming distinct from all sorts of slaves.

"Help us!"

"They're coming, please!"

"I don't want to go back!"

I briefly caught a glance of Glimmer's bright pink hair as Unity helped her out the back of the shops. Slavers were right behind them.

Chainlink Shackles grinned through his bloody face at us and sneered.

"Far, far too late."

Magically thrown cables flew through the air at him. They went for his neck, his hooves and his weapons. They spun, a multi-tasking only one unicorn I knew could manage, winding and tying. Thrashing, Shackles found himself bound and unsteady.

Hoarsely yelling, I charged, flapped my wings, and rushed into his side.

It was like ramming into a brick wall. His armour and weight made me bounce and fall away. I shrilly yelled as a hoof raised and stamped for my head, as I rolled away from every individual stomp aimed at me. I was underneath him, yelling and diving between his legs over and over to avoid being crushed. Reaching up, fired my grapple into his thick armour, where it dug deep and drew a grunt of pain from Shackles.

"I'm promising you now, Number Seven! This won't end here for you!"

Diving away from a hoof, I got up and just kept running, as Protégé slung a crate at Shackles' head with his magic. Shackles chased me, smashing the box away, his hooves becoming clumsy and tied up as I led him on a chase around the power station. I snuck through thin gaps and slid under small holes. To my horror, he could still move faster than me, as I ducked and ran under trolleys and pylon lines that Shackles battered through. I ran around and around, as every moment, Protégé threw things and dropped debris with his magic, confusing, attacking Shackles as he blindly chased me. Within a few seconds, I snuck away behind a corner and, scrambling up a series of crates, I took the chance and got atop a generator. I gripped the trigger of my hook gun to tighten the line and leapt off to the wooden floor below. The line caught, and I stuck in mid-air, as Protégé jumped up and grabbed hold of me to drop both our weights. The wire of the grapple hook *yanked*.

My pace, our weight and the line's own pulling power was enough. Just beside us, I heard the crash of Shackles coming down amidst the cables with a furious scream of anger and rage as the cables pulled tight and cut his hooves up from under him. I saw him thrashing on the ground, eyes glaring at me.

“This won't save *you* Number Seven. You think Wildcard didn't tell me what he wanted to say to you as well?”

He began to fight out of the cables. I felt Protégé pulling at me, as he started to limp away.

“Murky, come on! We have to get out of here and detonate it! The wall comes first! This is our chance!”

We both turned and ran. His revolver was still on the floor levels down, *Rarity's Grace* was empty and getting too close to the thrashing Shackles would have been suicide. We were two levels up from the bomb now, two levels up from where the detonator was lying. A skyship soared by, pulled in by the commotion going on below, but it just kept on flying, as flak from the top of the wall chased it off. Its passing rattled the side of the wall and the walkways, forcing us to grab hold of one another. I supported him down to the next level, only one above the bomb!

“We're almost there! Come on!” I pulled at him, feeling the unicorn slowing down from his wounds. Shackles had battered both of us, but that gunshot wasn't-

That same rifle rung out again.

We both fell to the side of the walkway, Protégé's weight bowling me over. Gasping, I stood up and turned in horror.

Behind us, Chainlink Shackles had caught up, still trailing cables around him, but with his weapon bearing a fresh magazine and pointing along the walkway at us.

And in front of me, Protégé lay on the wooden ground, from where the heavy round had punched clean through his armour and through the centre of his body. His face was open in shock, his breathing starting to increase in pace as I saw the blood begin to stain his clothing.

A revulsion, a sheer unfairness welled up inside me. As I screamed in horror, falling beside him.

Shackles began to walk toward us, the rifle pointed directly at me. I didn't dare run.

“Shot down at the last moment, isn't that how it's always gone, Number Seven? By the griffin, by the upstart before you now...it's always the way, isn't it?”

He stopped, pointing the gun my way still. I could sickly tell, it was pointed low, a non-lethal shot if he could away from my skull.

"You will not escape *my* city!" He roared. **"This is a city of servitude! It was before the balefire, it will remain so after it! This is the city I was promised, the one I was bred for! The one I was destined for! The eternal chain, the endless link surrounding the city. Just like this wall."**

"Why are you doing this?!" I cried.

"Because there's always a master, and there's always a slave." His voice dropped from its booming tone. "Where there is servitude, there is power. Where there is order, there is simplicity. Where there is control, the wasteland cannot control us."

"That's not true! That's not true at all!"

He shook his head, that grin never once leaving him.

"Equestria's gone, little runt. Every one of you that tries to rise up sees the same thing. You get a look at the sun, the moon, the sky...maybe an orb or a photo. Music, a diary. Maybe artwork...and you all believe the same naïve things. They've all failed. For two hundred years they have failed again and again, little victories leading ultimately to nothing in their own silly little stories. Only the strong keep going. The strong control. I **am** control. I was **born** to control. Now I will control the ponies of this city in a way even the wasteland cannot stop."

Below us, there was a great cry as the last house was finally overrun. The slavers were closing in on the great mass of unarmed ponies.

In front of me, Protégé stirred, and lit his horn to try and lift one of the slaver's dropped weapons. Shackles' hoof dropped on it, holding it down even as Protégé strained. Yet the unicorn gritted his teeth, gasping in pain to merely speak, as he lifted his head and stared back at Shackles.

"Some day, ponies like you will only be a bad memory, Shack-" He coughed, before hissing and trembling, his horn faltering, before staying strong in trying to pull the weapon out.

Then his eyes turned harsh.

"I was wrong. Is that what you want to hear? I was wrong to dream the way I did. Wrong to dream of wonders while committing atrocity. I didn't help it...I took Equestria further from what it ever was. Just a silly slave who thought he was free..."

Shackles' grin only spread.

"See? It isn't so hard to know your place."

Protégé spat blood upon the wooden floor, a hoof clutching his wound, he was sweating to not let the pain control him.

“But Red Eye always spoke of generous souls, of giving up that which belonged to you for a greater good, and I believed him! Maybe he was wrong...maybe I was wrong to interpret it. But I've seen there's more than that. I've seen ponies who had never met until today lay down their lives for one another. I might have led them, but I didn't control them. I see them down there right now, fighting for the slightest hope of a better time! I see Equestria's spirit still lives in them, Shackles, you haven't taken it away!”

His magic kept pulling, before I saw what he was *really* pulling.

He'd pulled the detonator up from the level below. Shackles' eyes suddenly widened.

“So let me, at the end of all this with all I've done, show you, Red Eye, this cursed city and this whole fucking wasteland the true meaning of the word *sacrifice*.”

There was one, brief, impossible to belief moment of horror in Shackles' eyes, as Protégé hit the button.

Shackles turned and ran, disappearing into a tunnel. The bomb didn't go off entirely immediately, as several small explosions rattled out, as I grabbed Protégé and leapt into the air, before the bomb finally went off properly.

From below us, the world erupted into fire. We were hurled by the concussive force and the walkway slamming up into us as it was blasted away, catching my back legs and bruising the bone as I was sent spiralling away. I clutched onto him, opening my wings even as I was blinded and shattered inside by the eruption of Blunderbuck's explosive. I felt fragments dig into my skin, slamming through my sweater.

Behind me, I heard the dull and eerie creak of bending metal. The explosion from inside the wall carried up through it, before the shadow over us began to grow. As I felt my wings catch the air, I angled us downwards, trying to build speed. The wall slowly began to tip, as tearing metal ripped from the sides of this chunk. It fell inwards, crashing down at the base, before the top half came barrelling down toward us. Keeping my sore wings spread, I glided down ahead of it, trying to veer to the side, to get out of the way.

Then it hit the ground and the remainder of the unstable bomb went off.

Protégé and I were blasted, as I lost all sense of direction. My ears stopped hearing. I couldn't see. I couldn't breathe.

I felt nothing until we both hit the ground, surrounded by the crashing of a hundred tons of metal and stone.

* * *

As I dreamed, I saw her.

As we fled together, before I could ever remember, we fled in an ill-fated attempt to escape our bonds.

As we ran for that wall the very first time.

As we were finally stopped, as we failed.

I saw her turn back to me, as we hugged one another and promised that someday we would do this again.

That if it took us another whole life to find one another and try...we would someday do it.

And we would win.

* * *

The world was bathed in orange.

Dust thrown up by the wall had filled the air in all directions. It hung lazily, forming a blanket that stopped all my vision beyond a few feet.

As I lay there, staring from my side, feeling like I had died, I watched that dust drift and settle. Vaguely, I could hear screams and shouts from the distance. I was in pain, a far away, total pain as every joint in my body had been shaken by the explosion, and my head felt swollen. Cuts from wooden splinters covered me.

Yet as much as my body felt broken, I was not dead.

We had done it. We had actually done it. And as my vision began to clear, I could see the shadows of ponies flowing by us in all directions. Slaves pulling one another with them. They all headed for the gigantic ramp of scrap that led to the top, a ramp that shone with the bright blue sky into the haze of orange dust and smoke. Blacked out figures all around climbing higher and higher, some throwing their forelegs up high as they reached it.

I lay still and watched them. They kept coming from all directions.

Slowly, I moved to try and get up.

As ever, the limbs were the easiest, but the big core muscles were, like any winter morning in slavery, the difficult ones. Dumbstruck, feeling like I was watching a painting unfolding as those smudged black figures flowed by me, with voices sounding like they were a world away. Gradually, I put one hoof in front of the other. Unsteady, staggering, I moved toward the one other black figure ahead of me.

The one I saw not moving.

He lay on his side, legs flat down, his mane splayed out behind him. My heart was in my mouth as I approached. I didn't want to believe.

Yet as I laid a hoof upon him, I felt him breathing.

"P-Protégé!" My voice came out like I was underwater to my ears, as I rubbed them to try and get my hearing back. "Protégé! It's me!"

Slowly, his eyes blinked open, and he stared at me from below. I could see his horrid wound was still bleeding, and before I could think, I tore off the loose sleeve of his clothing to wrap into it.

"Protégé, come on! We did it!"

"Mur...ky?" He gasped, his mouth as dry as mine from the dust, as he clearly started to recognise me. The ground thudded as hooves rushed around us on all sides.

"Murky...you're alive...please...please tell me..."

I tried to get him up, wrapping my hooves around his neck, but he was dead weight.

"I'm alive! I'm...I'm here! Just...just hold on! Oh no...Protégé it'll be okay, right? I'll be okay!"

I turned behind me, I had no idea where we were other than in front of the wall. I couldn't recognise anyone running through the dust toward the blue sky.

"Help!" I shouted, as helpless sounding as it was. "Somepony! Help! *Help us!*"

Yet no-one heard. They were all further away, or screaming themselves as they sprinted for freedom.

"Did we...do it?" Protégé had slumped back down, his eyes closed.

I had to fight to hold back tears, as I grasped his shoulders and lifted him up to sit with me, trying to get him to see the wall.

"We did...we did." I sniffled. "Look, you did it, we all did it. They're..."

I gazed as they ran past the top, singles or groups. Some helped them over, one glowing green who seemed to fly around helping others.

"They're free, Protégé...*we did it.*"

His eyes squinted open, as his limbs finally held on to me a little more.

"Murky, I can't move. Please...take me there."

"I will! Please...just be okay! HELP!" I screamed again, before I got him under my shoulders and lifted, getting him to his hooves. I could barely hold his weight in my exhausted and battered state. I only realised now as I saw the drips that my own nose was bleeding terribly from the pressure of the bomb. Protégé's was too, but I just held us together, as we limped and stumbled up the remains of the wall. Every little step taking an individual effort and a moment to rest. My chest hurt, and I could feel Protégé grimacing and gradually coming to as his own head sorted out where he was. Every few steps, he would stumble and fall.

"Murky, I don't know if I can-"

"NO!" I screamed at him, pulling him again and again. "You kept me going back there! Keep going now! We're going to make it!"

Slower than everyone else, we ascended. Every step made the great blue through the gap grow larger. Every step brought clearer air. As we crawled out of the pit, toward the sky. Pushing ourselves for those last extra steps.

Then, suddenly, we were at the top. And ahead of us lay the wastes of Equestria.

The most beautiful sight in so long.

Rolling hills peaked with snow rose from the great plains, dotted with old farms and fences build around ditches and still standing stone bridges over the dry riverbeds. Clouds coiled in the sky around the edges of the hole in them, rolling slowly, gently across the air. Every layer of hills gained a new subtle colour as the distance coloured them in steadily more saturated shades before great mountains rose up with their sheer peaks in the far, far distance. It was at peace out there, open and free.

I pulled Protégé over the lip of the wall, and pulled us both down the wreckage to get out of the way of the swarming ponies. We hobbled until eventually he fell, lying back to stare outside. I dropped beside him and put a hoof around his shoulders to hold him upright.

"I'm...free." He whispered, staring to the plains, a hoof held over his horrid wound.

"You are." I tried to hold back my tears again. "At last. You did it, Protégé, you led us here...you got them all to do this, past *all* of that..."

Then slowly, I felt him collapse. In a panic, I grasped him with both hooves.

"No, no no! Protégé! *Protégé* stay awake! Please stay awake..." I begged on those last three words, my lips quivering.

"Ngh..." He grunted, before coughing weakly. "Murky...Murky are you there?"

"I'm here..." I sniffed again, my cheeks shaking as I fought to control my eyes and mouth at once. I saw his hoof reaching out, and I took it, hugging his back to my chest, resting my head on his to hold him steady with my forelegs and watch the new world out there. "Don't worry, they'll catch up soon! And...and they'll help you! Weathervane will come and-"

"Murky...I'm so sorry..." He whispered, holding tightly to my hooves. "I'm sorry for everything...I did."

"You don't have to be...please, just...just hold on!"

He shook his head.

"I just...I just keep wishing...life hadn't given us what we got. Slavery...master and slave...being forced to...to hurt one another because of it. I hated it..."

I didn't reply, I just leaned my head into the side of his, feeling my heart sink terribly.

"I just always wished it hadn't been like that, Murky...I really did. That it wasn't this wasteland. We were better than that, and...and sometimes it showed. Just sometimes..."

"I know."

He smiled, but it was a sad one, full of melancholy.

"I just always kept feeling...if we'd both been born in a better world...in a better time...perhaps we might have been better friends as well."

I choked, tears on my cheeks as I could no longer control them, and I held him tightly.

"We *are* friends, Protégé. We always will be now."

In my heart, I knew I was denying the truth now about the future, but I couldn't bring myself to say it.

I felt him grab my hooves and hold tightly.

"Promise me, Murky...save those foals...and then live a free life. The one you wanted...the one you deserve..."

I shook my head, "No...no *we'll* do it, *we'll live*-"

He coughed, and I saw the blood seep from his lips again. "Murky...please..."

Sobbing, I nodded my head, before hugging him tightly, pressing the side of my head against his. "I'm sorry...I'm sorry...I...I will..."

His lips moved, but no words came out, only a gentle sigh, as he clung on to me, trembling with nerves. Briefly, he opened his eyes to look once more upon the vista of Equestria, the land he loved, before they slowly closed.

His voice was quiet, tinged with gentle relief, as I felt him slowly go limp across his body.

"I got to taste freedom..."

And with that, he fell silent, and did not stir again.

I froze, as a final realisation sunk slowly in, and then everything I'd been holding back finally flowed over. On the steps to freedom outside this hellish city and holding him closely, I cried until I could cry no more.

* * *

Minutes later, Glimmerlight and Unity found me.

I was sitting beside him, my eyes stinging and red, barely moving.

I didn't move until I felt Unity and my sister's forelegs wrap around me tightly, where I reached out to hug and hug and hug...

* * *

Night had fallen.

The slaves of Fillydelphia, or a great number of them, were free.

They had flowed out the city in a great number, overrunning the slavers once they saw what was up for the taking.

Now they lay in the city outside, hiding and away from the slavers who were by now too busy with the renewed Enclave attack to come after them.

Fires were lit against the cold nights, and many celebrated together, looking back across the city at the tall walls with delight to be on the other side of them. Some had already left on their journeys. Others were preparing to go.

Yet every single pony who had come from the Mall stayed. They stood in a circle surrounding the pyre. Every one of them that he had saved stood and watched the flames as they grew. Every one of them bowed their heads in respect. Earlier, they had all approached one by one to say 'thank you'. Now they watched over his memory amongst the flames.

I sat with my back to Glimmer's chest, as she hugged me from behind. In my hooves, I toyed with his revolver bearing Equestria's sigil.

Soon, I sat it aside in my saddlebag, and drew out my journal.

Lines...lines became curves.

Curves became shapes.

Shapes became...

I wished they would.

Trying to stop any tears from smudging it, I let my charcoal rise and fall in complex and talented strokes, all of my confidence and belief that he had instilled in me flowing through onto the paper. Soft lines, caring leading to the strong core shape that formed his belief in others. I added some things, then removed them. In place of that clasped mane, I drew him as he was when not in uniform. I drew him as the pony he was inside.

Slowly, I finished the final friend on my journal page.

Amongst all the others, Glimmerlight, Coral Eve, Brimstone Blitz, Unity, Caduceus, Chirpy Sum and Mister Peace, now stood Protégé. Added into the final space left, just beside

me, with a smile on his face and a bright look in his eyes. The smart and wonderful pony I knew he could have been, but ringing with the hero I knew he had inside.

Not one of the ponies here would forget him or forget his sacrifices.

They would remember.

* * *

We all stood together as the embers fell at last.

"This is your decision, yeah?" Glimmer nodded to Sunny, as the earth pony slung up her things and grimaced at the motion on her ribs from the wagon crash. She looked battered, a mare who'd been at every front, strong till the end.

"I know these lands out here, Glimmer. I know the trails and the wildlife. Most of these ponies don't. They need a leader."

Glimmerlight smirked, "And they picked you?"

"Ha. Ha."

The two mares moved closer and hugged briefly.

"See you later, Ironshit."

"Take care out there, ya backwater primitive."

Sunny moved along to myself, and leaned down for another hug.

"I still owe you a stuffed toy, Murky. Make sure you come by to claim it, okay?"

"I will." I sniffed, and she patted my head.

Beside her, Blunderbuck and Weathervane approached. The former got another hug from Glimmerlight. He had decided to go with them too, and try to make it to Manehattan. He'd spoken that maybe Tenpony would appreciate his artistic talent more above practicality.

Weathervane just stared down at me with stern eyes.

"Don't look so slumped, kid. Don't you remember what I told you? Walk like a damn pegasus should."

I bolted upright from the sudden command, my wings shooting outright and my head up and straight. He smirked.

“Better. You should always walk like that. Better for the wing muscles.”

I squinted and tilted my head, “It's not really, is it? You just wanted me to feel more confident, right? What's it called? A placeebol?”

Weathervane, remarkably, laughed. “Finally.”

Then he leaned down and lifted my hoof with his son's pipbuck on it.

“Take care of this, okay? Far as I'm concerned...he'd probably have been proud that you own it now. You're worthy of it in my eyes with all you've done.”

I had to fight not to cry again, as I took his hoof as confidently as I could and shook it.

“Thank you...thank you for everything. All of you.”

I let my eyes wash over the rest. Sunny, Blunderbuck, Weathervane, List Seeker. They'd all played some part at some time.

Now, as we said our goodbyes, I saw many of them, our friends and allies, walk off into the darkness. Free to begin their long journeys home at the head of all the ponies who now depended on those four.

And with that, I turned to my friends.

Glimmerlight stood ready, if hunched. Weathervane had closed up her wound and with a few extra strength potions, she insisted she was ready for one last run. She held out something to me, and played with her magic as she slotted what looked like a red gem into my pipbuck, then she winked.

“I figure he'd have wanted you to have this.”

Before I knew what was happening, my vision suddenly saw small lines at the bottom, filled with little green bars on a red interface design. It flicked on and off as Glimmer showed me the button.

It was an E.F.S. The one from Protégé's eyepiece.

Glimmer clapped my back and stood up again.

Behind her, Unity slung the small pile of potions Weathervane had spared around her shoulders in a sack. She smiled gently at me as I moved up alongside her.

Beyond her, Coral Eve was staring back at the city with a furious intensity. If she felt any lingering effects from her concussion, Weathervane's magic was holding it at bay.

To her left, Brimstone Blitz pulled his battered body up, he'd never say die. Ever.

"There's foals in there counting on us before we can call this done, everyone." Glimmerlight spoke clearly. "We promised, and we owe a good stallion this too. They can't have them, they won't make more slaves from them. So...this is it, huh?"

"Aye." Brimstone snorted.

Unity glanced at me for a second, and I caught her eye.

"What?"

"You always wanted to be free...and no-one would ever think twice if you walked now. Yet you're going back. It's just...heh..." She couldn't finish.

I just blushed a little. "It matters. Together, right?"

Briefly, Unity and I reached out and held our hooves together, as she nodded.

"Well then!" Glimmer spoke loudly, and began trotting forward, Diamond's rifle slung on her back. We followed her, on our last journey.

"Let's finish this for good."

* * *