

Chapter 6

Celestia moaned fitfully, her hooves kicking feebly. Luna knelt at her side, her horn glowing as she tried to ascertain the damage. Celestia's formidable magic was being eaten away by the cruel spell Trixie had attacked her with. Luna's sister was dying from the inside out, her soul eaten away by malevolent magic.

Thor turned to Luna, her face grim. "Tend to your sister. I will fell this beast." He opened his wings to take off.

"Thor! You cannot defeat him alone!" Luna cried, turning to follow him. "Let me help! I am an Alicorn too, you needn't fear for me."

"You are not at the height of your power." Thor replied. His hooves left the ground with a powerful beat of his wings. "And your sister needs your help more than I do. Stay here!" Before Luna could protest, Thor had rocketed towards the towering dragon.

"Fin Fang Foom!" Thor bellowed. The dragon turned its attention from the crowd of ponies it was terrorizing. "Face me!"

There was the telepathic equivalent of a chuckle as Foom laughed. "**Ah, the False God challenges the First Son of Flame. What do you hope to accomplish, Pretender? Do you intend to smite me with the stolen power of a warrior long dead?**" He lazily swung a clawed hand at the charging Thor, knocking him into a wall. "**Do you think your borrowed might can stand against one who strode across the surface of Equestria long before the First Asgardian, Odin the Allfather, first came into existence?**"

Thor extracted himself from the rubble, growling at the dragon. "Your talk of age and strength frightens me not, monster! I am the Son of Odin, Lord of Thunder!"

"**YOU ARE NOTHING!**" bellowed the voice in Thor's head, loud enough to make him wince. "**I can see within your mind, False God. You are nothing but a peasant! A farmpony with delusions of heroism and godhood!**" The dragon's mouth opened wide and breathed a streak of flame at Thor. Thor raised Mjolnir, the enchanted hammer protecting him, drinking in the dragon's flame. "**Hear me, pretender of Asgard! You will not survive this day!**"

The stream of flame stopped and Thor glared up at the dragon, Mjolnir glowing red-hot in his hoof. "Than let us enter Valhalla together, monster!" Thor swept his hammer forward, the cords binding it to his hoof loosening in response to his mental command. With a roar, Thor flung the hammer, still glowing from the power it drank in from the flames, at the brow of Fin Fang Foom.

The hammer struck between the mighty lizard's eyes with a sound like the crash of

thunder. The power of Foom's own fire was loosed upon him, a massive explosion of flame staggering the beast backwards into the front wall of the hall. There was a great shattering of rock, and Thor had little time to pray that the partygoers had not been beneath as he caught the returning Mjolnir and chased Foom into the castle courtyard. The hammer retied itself to his hoof quickly, as if sensing his urgency.

Foom righted himself as Thor approached. "**You are strong. False God. But still you use the strength of others!**" He lunged at Thor, mighty jaws snapping at him. Thor rolled out of the way, only to be struck by the beast's claws again, driving him into the ground. A crater formed as Thor hit the earth, with Foom's mighty paw landing atop him. The claws bit into his armor, tearing it away. "**You are nothing. Pretender. You are weak!**" Foom seized the fallen god and flung him back towards the castle, where he impacted with a meaty thud.

Thor collapsed to the ground, panting heavily. The massive dragon flapped its wings, flying slowly towards him. Its voice grew louder in his head, pounding against his mind like a hammer. "**Surrender now, False God. Give Mjolnir to me, and you may live. The citizens of Canterlot may live. Surrender the identity of Thor and become Macintosh Apple once again.**" Foom's enormous red eyes burned into Thor's mind like cinders. "**It is not a burden you asked to bear. It is not a burden you wish to carry. It is not your fight. Surrender, and you can return peacefully to your farm.**"

Thor wanted to ignore the beast, but Big Mac paused. He couldn't help it. The offer was tempting. He didn't want to be Thor. Mjolnir and its power terrified him. He just wanted to be Big Mac, the friendly, simple pony from Sweet Apple Acres. He wanted to trade jibes with his sister Applejack and see his other sister Applebloom earn her Cutie Mark. He wanted to watch after Granny Smith, and go to Pinkie Pie's parties.

He just wanted to go home.

"DON'T LISTEN TO HIM!" Big Mac's head whipped to the side to see Pinkie Pie standing atop a piece of rubble, looking distraught. "Don't forget why you started fighting! You have to protect Mjolnir! You have to protect everypony from Loki, and meanies like him! You have to get up, Thor!"

Thor remembered the face of Rainbow Dash, excited to meet her hero.

He remembered Celestia greeting him warmly, as an equal, overjoyed to meet another of her kind.

He remembered how he'd protected Twilight from the deadly green spell.

And he remembered his conversation with Pinkie, a little over a week ago.

"What would happen... if'n Loki got Mjolnir?"

"I dunno. But it won't be good. His idea of a prank is ponies getting hurt and fighting and even dying. That kind of pony shouldn't have that kind of power."

Thor stood. "You shall not tempt me, monster." He turned to Pinkie. "Thank you, my friend, for reminding me why I am here. Now flee, quickly!" Pinkie smiled cheerfully at him, and vanished behind the rock she stood on. Thor returned his attention to Fin Fang Foom. "I reject your offer, First Son of Flame! I may have been born under another name, but here and now, I am Thor Odinson! I am the lord of the skies and king of storms! God of Thunder and Lightning!" He rose into the air, the skies above crowding with dark, thundering storm clouds. "You shall not cow the son of Odin!"

The winds twisted around Foom, whipping themselves into a mighty hurricane at the behest of their master. Foom roared from within the funnel of wind, his mighty wings beating powerfully as he broke through the wall of air. "**SO BE IT, PRETENDER!**" bellowed the monster. "**If you wish to be an Asgardian, you can follow them into Helhiem!**"

Thor charged the beast, swinging Mjolnir in a mighty arc. He caught the beast on the side of the head, but the monster's neck was fast as a snake, and it's teeth clenched around Thor's right hind leg. Fin Fang Foom whipped his head about like a cat playing with its' food, cracking Thor's leg before flinging him away.

Thor hit the ground with a heavy thud, and felt a massive weight upon his chest as Foom landed on him, pinning him down. "**You are a fool, Macintosh Apple. You should have accepted my offer.**" The mental growl resonated in Thor's head painfully as Foom's head lowered, it's mouth opened wide. Thor could see a flame building in the back of Foom's throat, and with his hooves pinned he could not raise Mjolnir in defense. "**Once you are dead, I will burn away all you cared about as punishment for your idiocy.**"

"I believe I will start with your home, Sweet Apple Acres. Your sisters will be the first to burn."

No.

The flame came surging up Foom's throat.

No. It cannot end like this.

He could see the fireball forming in Foom's mouth.

Not Applejack. Not Applebloom. Not my family, please.

The fireball was passing by Foom's teeth, on a collision course with Thor's unprotected body.

Please. Celestia. Odin. Anypony. Please save my family.

Please.... Thor.... save them...

Big Mac gave himself over to Thor, and felt a hot rage like nothing he'd ever experienced flood his body. It burned in his chest, filled his hooves with strength, and caused his vision to turn red. A mighty roar ripped itself from his lungs, the words forming on their own accord into a mighty battle cry. **"I SAY THEE NAY!"**

A mighty lightning bolt shaped like an Alicorn ripped itself from the ground, blasting Foom off his feet. The fireball went wild, shooting off into the night sky.

The thunderbolt resolved back into Thor, but it was not the same Thor. His armor had returned. His cape, ripped and stained from battle, was restored. His eyes burned with a golden radiance and his mane was a floating, writhing mass of living lightning. Foom righted himself and leapt at the glowing Alicorn, but Thor knocked the beast aside with a lazy swing of Mjolnir.

"You should have left my family alone, Foom." The Thunderer's voice echoed across all Canterlot. **"You should not have threatened them. Now you will witness the true strength of THOR, GOD OF STORMS!"**

"You do not frighten me, Pretender God!" Fin Fang Foom hissed. He leapt into the air for Thor again.

"Then thou art a fool." Thor rumbled, raising his hammer. **"Now fall, beast!"** Mjolnir laid a might blow across Foom's skull, but Foom recovered and continued to fly, attempting to bite Thor in half. **"In the name of Asgard, fall!"** Mjolnir struck again with a ringing sound like steel striking steel. **"In the name of Princess Celestia, fall!"** Again, Mjolnir struck, and a crack appeared in the armor-like hide of Fin Fang Foom. **"In the name of Odin the Allfather, I command thee FALL!"** A final blow, and the First Dragon's armored scales finally gave way, cracking apart as the hammer crushed the skull of the mighty beast.

The corpse of Fin Fang Foom crashed to the ground, and immediately shattered like pottery.

Silence reigned.

Thor breathed. His mane returned to normal. He floated gently to the ground.

All was still.

Then Luna's voice rang out. "Thor! Something is happening with my sister!"

Thor spun about, quickly flying back into the castle. As he cleared the mountain of rubble, he caught sight of a brilliant white glow from the stairs. Celestia floated within a nimbus of power, light streaming forth from her. At first, Thor thought she had recovered, but a second glance told him otherwise.

Her mane had returned to its rainbow coloration, but rather than flow gently it thrashed wildly, like a nest of angry snakes. Her eyes glowed with unfathomable power, and light spilled forth from her horn like a waterfall of magic. The aura of power was so bright it hurt Thor's eyes, but he could just barely make out the dark shape of Princess Luna standing beside her sister, frantically trying to shield herself from the out-of-control magic.

The Princess let out a scream as the light intensified even further, making Thor feel as though he was staring into the heart of the sun itself. He raised his hoof to shield his eyes, putting Mjolnir between himself and the Princess. That was what protected him.

Another scream tore from the Princess's throat, and the light exploded outward from her, a wave of magic expanding outward through the ruined castle, through the streets of Canterlot, encompassing the city and all the land for miles around.

Everywhere the light touched, things changed. Even from where Thor stood, he could see the changes as the light faded. Some of the trees in the courtyard - those that hadn't been ruined - had changed into strange shapes. Some were moving of their own accord. But it wasn't just the plants - the ponies had been changed, too. Not all of them - just a few. Over there, an earth pony found his coat transformed to an orange hide of rock. Over there, a unicorn was rapidly freezing the ground around him, and looking frantic as he tried to figure out how to make it stop. And there, a pegasus with light spilling from her wings as she glanced at them nervously.

Just what had Celestia done?

"Sister!" Luna's cry refocused his attention on the princesses. The strange mutations of the other ponies could wait until he was certain their monarch had survived. He flew as swiftly

as his aching wings could carry him, landing beside Luna.

“Is she harmed?” Thor asked as he came closer.

Luna gestured to the floor before her. “See for thyself.” She said quietly.

Thor looked. On the landing of the stairs was a pure white filly with a pink mane and a sun for a cutie mark. She was slightly larger than a normal filly, and she sported both a horn and a pair of wings.

Her eyes opened slowly, and she gave Thor a weak smile. “Hey there, handsome.” She croaked. “How do I look?”

“Apprentice.” Loki greeted as Trixie teleported into the clearing. He smiled at the comely filly as she approached. “Your mission, you met with success?”

“The Great and Powerful Trixie could do no less, my master.” Trixie said confidently. “Foom fell, I fear, but otherwise all went as you planned.”

Loki took the news of Foom’s death very casually. “Ah well. He was a useful pawn, but this late in the game one less piece on the chessboard hardly matters.” He did not miss Trixie’s brief grimace at that statement, before she mastered her face and concealed it again. *Good, let her worry. Let her continue to be useful to me.* “What is important is the Singularity. It went off as planned?”

“Yes, Lord Loki.” Trixie grinned maliciously. “The stupid mare practically gift-wrapped herself for me. She’s grown complacent, I think; she didn’t acknowledge a mere unicorn as a threat.” She sniffed contemptuously. “As if anypony, even a goddess, could stand against Trixie. The Soul Seal hit her point blank; the Singularity initiated shortly after Foom’s defeat.”

“A shame, I had hoped it would happen in time for new heroes to aid Thor. Ah well, that is why we plan - to catch us when our hopes fail.” He smiled down at his apprentice. “Now that the Princesses know me - know *us* - to be a threat, a team will be organized to stand against us. And no doubt Thor will lead them.”

Loki threw his head back and roared to the skies. “Hear me, Thor! Lead your armies to me! I shall crush them all! For I am Loki, the TRUE heir of Asgard! I shall dash you all upon the rocks and pry Mjolnir from your cold, dying hooves! This I swear, Thor! THIS I SWEAR!”

Thor waited quietly outside the infirmary for Princess Luna. Luckily, most of the damage of the castle had been restricted to the front hall and courtyard; this section of the castle was largely intact.

Luna finally emerged from the infirmary, looking tired. Thor looked up. "How is she?"

Luna sighed deeply. "She's fine, more or less. The spell Trixie hit her with was designed to kill normal ponies, not Alicorns. Her body responded to the attack by producing more magic, overwhelming it with a burst of power. Problem is, it overcompensated, resulting in the explosion we saw."

"And her... condition?" Thor asked, not sure what you were supposed to call it when your monarch suddenly became a filly.

"She burned out most of her magic with that burst. She'll recover in time - essentially, it's the same thing that happened to me after I was... saved by the Elements of Harmony. But it will take a long time. Months, at least." Luna looked away. "Celestia said that until she's recovered, that I... I will rule Equestria."

Thor started. "Why? Surely even weakened, Celestia is still herself. Can she not still make the decisions of rulership?"

"Well... how would you feel about taking orders from a filly? One without the power to enforce her rule?" Luna pointed out. "No pony would follow her in this state. I'm not terribly popular in Equestria, but at least ponies would take me seriously."

Thor thought about this for a minute. "I understand." He said finally. "Whatever support I can lend, you will have it. I give you my word."

Luna smiled at the larger Alicorn. "I am glad to hear you say that, because I have something I need you to do. Follow me." She led the way down the hall, Thor following her silently.

"Look at these files." Luna said, spreading out a sheet of papers on the desk between her and Thor. They were in her sister's office, though the golden sun plaque on the desk had already been replaced with a silver one depicted the moon. Some pony clearly was working quickly to try and make the Princess comfortable in her new role.

Thor looked down at the reports Luna was trying to show him and felt a slight tingle of anxiety. Thor only knew how to read Asgardian runes, and while Big Mac needed to know how to read for the running of his farm, he was a slow and deliberate reader. Looking at the tiny,

cramped writing on the reports, Thor knew it would take him hours to glean any information from them.

Luna picked up on his anxiety, or maybe she simply grew tired of waiting, because she continued. "My sister's explosion had more effects than simply robbing her of her strength. You likely noticed - many of the ponies who were exposed have begun to develop abilities that are frankly extraordinary. Each of these reports details a different pony who has undergone a magical mutation due to exposure. It would appear exposure has about a thirty percent chance of causing mutation - possibly higher, some mutations are quite subtle. It's possible that many mutated ponies are slipping our notice because their... gifts are extremely subtle." She gestured at the stacks of reports. "We have reports of over three hundred mutated ponies here, and that's only in Canterlot. Tia's - sorry, Celestia's explosion also reached several nearby towns, including Ponyville and Manehattan. Reports are still coming in from those cities."

Thor looked down at the papers in surprise. "So many... what do you intend to do?"

Luna sighed. "What I can do? I cannot remove their gifts. I cannot forbid their use. The only thing I can do is make use of it." She looked up at Thor. "That is where you come in."

Thor gave Luna a puzzled look. "What would you have me do?"

Luna licked her lips nervously. "We were attacked today, not by Loki but by his subordinates. And they almost destroyed us. If nothing else, tonight's attack has shown us that we are not prepared to fight with Loki." She tapped the reports with a hoof. "I intend to use these gifted ponies to fix that. I intend to search these... mutants, I suppose, for the most gifted, the most courageous, the most loyal. I will organize them into a team, to fight against Loki and protect Equestria from all extra-normal threats."

Thor was beginning to understand. "And you wish me to join this team?"

"No." Luna replied, surprising Thor. "I don't just want you to join - I want you to *lead* the team."

Big Mac blinked. "Me, lead?" He asked, momentarily stunned. Thor had no problems with such responsibilities - had he not commanded the armies of Asgard against its' many foes? But Big Mac was hesitant. "Why me? Surely, there is somepony else..."

"No, there is not." Luna said heavily. "Thor... there has not been a serious conflict in all Equestria since my... altercation with my sister, one thousand years ago. No pony alive today has any knowledge of battle save for my sister and myself - and you." She looked Big Mac in the eye. "My sister cannot fight in her current state. I must keep Equestria together, keep the country running. You are the only other pony in all Equestria who can fight, and train others to do so. They will listen to you; being an Alicorn will grant you all the respect you need."

“Please, Thor. This team will need you. Lead them. Protect Equestria.”

Big Mac was silent for a time. “I will... need to consider.”

He left before Luna could respond.

“Ah can’t lead the team, Pinkie.” As Thor, Big Mac had managed to secure a private chamber for himself. Almost immediately, Pinkie had appeared from under his bed, claiming her Pinkie Sense had alerted her that “somepony needed to talk to me real bad”.

“Why not, Mac-pack?” Pinkie said from her comfy spot on the bed. She munched on candy from a bowl that she pulled from... her mane? Big Mac didn’t bother questioning it. “It sounds like it’d be super-duper fun! It’d be like something out of one of Spike’s comic books! Ooh, you could come up with cool code-names and matching outfits and communicators and a private super-fast jet and-”

“Pinkie.” Big Mac laid a gentle hoof on his friend’s shoulder, and she stopped. “If Ah led the team, Ah’d have to stay here. In Canterlot. What’m Ah gonna tell mah family? Ya’ll know Ah can’t lie ta Applejack, and Ah doubt even you could come up with a convincin’ excuse for me tah stay in Canterlot for... weeks? Months? Forever? Ah don’t even know.” He began pacing the small room anxiously. “Sides, Ah can’t just abandon them like that. They need me on the farm. Granny’s too old and Applebloom’s too young, and Applejack can’t do it alone.”

“Can’t she just hire some help?” Pinkie asked curiously. “I mean, that’s what the Cakes do whenever I throw a super-duper extra-huge party and need a LOT of pastries and cakes and stuff all at once. Ditzzy Doo’s a really good baker, actually! She makes the *best* muffins EVER!”

“Ah guess... Ah know Carrot Top and her family are always willin’ ta’ help out.” Big Mac mused. “But what’m Ah gonna tell Applejack? She’s not just gonna let me walk out on her... and Ah owe it ta her to tell her *something*.” He scuffed a hoof on the carpet. “Ah’m not even sure Ah should at all... Ah can’t just walk out on my responsibility like that.” He glared at where Mjolnir lay on a nearby table. That stick had caused him so much trouble...

Pinkie looked to be deep in thought. “I dunno... I’m not too good at all this heavy thinking, you know? Normally, when there’s a problem I just sort it out with a party! But I don’t think even a party would stop a meanie like Loki.” She looked frustrated for a minute. “But I think... I think you have another, bigger responsibility. To... to protect everypony. I mean... there has to be a reason Mjolnir chose you, right? I think it’s because it knew you’d never give up on it.”

Big Mac mused on Pinkie's words for several minutes, not looking at her. "Maybe... maybe yer right, Pinkie. Yer pretty smart for such a crazy pony, ya'll know that?" Pinkie giggled. "And Applejack?"

"Tell her the truth!" Pinkie suggested. "I mean, she kinda deserves it, don'tcha think? I mean, I know you wanted to keep it a secret, but... well, you don't have to tell anypony else, and Applejack trusts you. If you keep hiding Thor from her, than eventually she'll find out on her own, and than you'll lose her trust. And losing a friend's trust..."

"Is the fastest way to lose a friend FOREVER!" Big Mac chanted with her, turning to smile at her.

"And that goes double for family!" Pinkie added firmly. "The girls and I aren't leaving until tomorrow morning 'cause Twilight wanted to make sure the Princess was okay. You can go talk to Applejack right now!"

"Yeah... yer probably right, Pinkie. Thanks." Big Mac took a deep breath. "You... you don't think she'd be mad, do ya? For not tellin' her sooner? Or for leavin' her to tend to the farm alone?"

Pinkie leapt off the bed and gave her large friend a big, comforting hug. "I know she'll understand."

"Applejack? Can Ah talk to ya?" Applejack turned from the conversation she was having with Fluttershy to see her older brother in the doorway of the room she was sharing with her friends.

"Big Macintosh? What in tarnation are ya'll doin' here? Who's watchin' the farm?" Applejack was shocked her brother would abandon his responsibilities like that. What ever it was, it must be really important.

"Ah asked Carrot Top to keep an eye on it. We really need ta' talk, AJ." Big Mac didn't look particularly upset, just... determined. And very serious. It was a sharp contrast to the laid-back attitude Applejack was used to.

"...All right, Mac. Ah'll be right back, Fluttershy, alright?" Fluttershy smiled and assured her she didn't mind, and Applejack got up to follow her brother from the room.

Big Macintosh led her down a long hallway, into what appeared to be another bedroom. Much to Applejack's surprise, Pinkie was laying on the bed munching on candy. "Hiya, AJ!" She waved a sticky hoof at her cowpony friend.

“Pinkie? What in tarnation...” Her eyes narrowed as she looked first at Mac, than at Pinkie, conclusions forming in her mind. She’d suspected for some time, but...

Mac looked nervous as he spoke. “Now, afore you say anythin’, Sis, Ah just want ta say I’m sorry Ah didn’t tell you about any ‘a this before. But Ah... Ah think you need ta know.” He took a deep breath. “Ya see, Ah’m-”

“Hold it right there!” Applejack interrupted, unable to stop herself. “Now, Ah know Ah shouldn’t be tellin’ ya’ll who you can and can’t date - Hay, you’re five years older’n me - but Ah don’t think you and Pinkie are right for each other. Ya’ll are just gonna end up hurt.”

Big Mac blinked at her, flabbergasted. Pinkie’s eyes grew to the size of dinner plates, and she stuffed both hooves in her mouth to keep from laughing. “What?” Applejack demanded finally, after several moments of awkward silence.

“Ya’ll thought... Pinkie and Ah... were DATING?” Big Mac finally said, astonished. Pinkie finally lost it and burst out in hysterical giggles, flopping onto her back and laughing uncontrollably.

It was Applejack’s turn to be surprised. “You mean yer not?” she asked. “The way the two’ve you have been thick as thieves this past week, always hangin’ out together all the time...”

“AJ, Pinkie’s mah first real friend since Ah went to school.” Big Mac said, smiling slightly. Pinkie was getting her giggles back under control, and righted herself. “It only makes sense that Ah’d spend time with her. ‘Sides, Pinkie’s been helpin’ me with some... issues, recently. The stuff I asked you here to talk about, in fact. But we ain’t datin’.”

Pinkie was still giggling a bit, but she was able to speak now. “If we were dating, I wouldn’t keep it secret, silly! I’d throw a big party to celebrate! But Mac-alack-apack isn’t really my type, though he is REALLY big and strong and awesome and has a really fun name to say. I prefer fillies, anyway.”

Applejack stared at her pink friend. “You do?”

“Sure, didn’tcha know?” Big Mac said casually, causing Applejack to boggle further. “Anyway, as amusin’ as this is, Ah still need to talk to ya. It’s important.”

“Ah’m not sure how many more revelations Ah can take.” Applejack sat on the bed next to Pinkie, her face burning red with embarrassment. Pinkie gave her a hug and offered her some candy, which Applejack waved away. “But Ah guess if it’s that important ya’ll had best get on with it. Ah’ve had a real crazy day, and Ah’d like ta get it over with.”

“Believe me, Ah know the feelin’.” Big Mac replied with a nervous chuckle. That got Applejack’s attention - her brother was NEVER nervous. “Alright... how should Ah say this... ya’ll know ‘bout Thor, right?”

Applejack blinked, surprised at where the conversation was going. “Well, sure. Everypony does. Ah’m not a big supporter like you or Dash, but he’s a good stallion. Saved our flanks big-time today, that’s fer sure.”

“Yeah, Ah know.” Big Mac took a deep breath and walked over to a table, where what looked like a really old, poorly carved walking stick lay. “Ya’see... there’s somethin’ you oughta know about Thor.” He looked over at Pinkie who smiled and nodded her head encouragingly. He picked up the stick and turned to Applejack, holding it in his hooves. “But first, ya’ll gotta promise to try and stay calm, and never tell ANYPONY about this. Alright?”

Applejack’s curiosity was eating at her now. She trusted her brother completely, and she knew he wouldn’t ask her to make such a promise if it wasn’t REALLY important. “Ah promise.” She caught a look from Pinkie Pie, and sighed. “Cross mah heart an’ hope ta fly, stick a cupcake in mah eye.” She went through the appropriate hoof motions that went with the chant, and Pinkie gave a satisfied smile.

Big Mac took a deep breath, and nodded. “Alright. Here goes. Try not ta freak out.” He rapped the stick against the floor.

There was a bright light.

Applejack’s eyes nearly bulged from their sockets. “Holy Celestia...”

“Not quite.” said Thor.

“So, all this time, Thor was just you in disguise?” Applejack asked. Big Mac had changed back into his own body, Mjolnir lain carefully aside. All things considered, Applejack had taken the news pretty well, passing through the “No bucking way” and the “Ah can’t believe you lied to me” phases rather quickly, and was now thoroughly enjoying the “My brother’s a superhero/god” phase.

“Not exactly a disguise. Ah really am Thor when Ah transform, or near enough. But it’s still me, mostly.” Big Mac explained. “Cept sometimes I sorta... lose it, and Thor takes over. It’s scary, but it works well.”

Applejack nodded and turned to Pinkie. “And you’re... what, part goddess?”

“Only a teeny tiny itty bitty bit.” Pinkie assured her. “That’s why I’m an earth pony! I do have a bit more magic than everypony else, and it lets me do weird stuff sometimes, but that’s it. I’m still my Pinkie-licious self!”

Applejack shook her head in disbelief. “Ah’m having trouble takin’ this all in... and you want ta’ leave, Mac?” Applejack turned to her brother. “What’m Ah gonna do without ya? How’ll Ah take care’a the farm? What’ll Ah tell Applebloom and Granny Smith?”

“You can tell Bloom and Granny the truth, if they’ll believe yah.” Big Mac said with a shrug. “Family deserves to know. No more secrets. As for runnin’ the farm, ya’ll can hire more workers. We have the money, more or less. And Carrot Top’ll be happy ta help out.” He sighed. “Ah don’t want ta leave, AJ. But I gotta. Ponies are countin’ on me.

Applejack wiped her eyes with a hoof, trying to hide the tears that threatened to form. “Ah know. Ya’ll never could stand to let a pony down. It’s yer best quality.” She hugged her brother tight. “You go and be a hero, Macintosh Apple.” She said quietly. “But you be careful. Ah want mah brother back in one piece, ya hear?”

“Eeeyup.” Big Mac said, hugging her back. “I hear ya.”

Luna looked up from the mutation reports as somepony walked into her office - Celestia’s office. She’d been spending the last few hours trying to pick potential members for the team, but it was a long and grueling task, considering that many of the reports were incomplete, first-observation glances, and the sheer number of them. She smiled when a large blue Alicorn entered the office and strode up to the desk.

“I accept.” Said Thor Odinson.