

Beyond Judgment

Part X: Friendship

Twilight walked up to the next door and knocked on it. “Rarity? It's me, Twilight. How are you feeling?”

“I am lost in a maelstrom of depression!” Rarity lamented from within. “My career is over! My leg is disfigured! I can do nothing but hide in the blackness of my heart!”

Normally, Twilight would have excused Rarity's speech as needlessly melancholy, but that was just about the first time she was moping about something legitimate. Twilight pushed the door open with her telekinesis, only to have it slammed back in her face by Rarity's.

“Hey! Come on, Rarity, let me in!”

“No! I mustn't be seen in this condition!”

Twilight tried to dig her hooves into the linoleum flooring to get more traction for her spell, but it was too slippery to do any good. She was actually surprised by the fact Rarity was perfectly matching her spell power. She could have poured more power into the spell but she was afraid to rip the door right off of its hinges. The last thing she wanted to do was possibly harm her friend more.

After a moment of struggling, Twilight released the telekinesis spell. She had a much better idea.

“Ugh, I told you that I just want to be alone!” Rarity shouted as the lavender unicorn teleported past the door.

“I'm not abandoning you. I'm your friend.”

Rarity collapsed on the bed and wrapped the blankets around herself. It was then Twilight noticed that the room had been entirely redecorated. While all the other rooms were a sterile white, Rarity had apparently tried covering the room in stark black. It was strange, Twilight wasn't deeply familiar with Rarity's designs but she couldn't think of a time when the pearly unicorn used the color black for anything. Banners of black fabric arched their way across the walls. The bed linens were also darkened. The white curtains over the windows had been replaced with black ones, blocking out most of Celestia's light. Rarity had even concluded that she should hang black sheets over the lights, darkening the whole room. It was as though she had made a full conversion into a vampony, or something, and redecorated her room into her new lair. Twilight was at a little bit of a loss just taking the room in.

Empty bottles of dye and some of Rarity's sewing supplies were sitting on a desk at one side of the room. A couple boxes of sterile gloves had been brushed aside onto the floor to make room for them. Twilight was in awe of Rarity's ability to bring all of that in without anypony noticing.

“H-how did you do all of this?” The lavender unicorn stammered.

“Even in my darkest of times, I cannot fight the urge to create!” Rarity declared from under her

blackened sheet. "But I can only give form to what's inside of me! You have no idea how hard it was to get everything just right with this cursed leg!"

"I don't understand. You said your career was over, but this room still looks incredible. Dark, but incredible."

"It's not my designs, it's me!" Rarity shouted.

The white unicorn tried to roll herself out of bed, but with only three good legs she toppled out of it and landed on her side on the floor. Twilight jumped forward to help, but Rarity held out a hoof to stop her. Her hair was a mess, both mane and tail. Falling out of bed only made that worse. Her flowing curls were all out of shape and crinkled. Loose strands were everywhere. With a face of determination, Rarity struggled to stand on her own.

"The style and glamor of my heart and mind remains but I can barely move on my own." Rarity said sternly. "Do you remember what I told Trixie all that time ago about what it means to be a unicorn? Grace and beauty, Twilight, grace and beauty. How can I be graceful like this?!"

Rarity tried to take a step forward, but only stumbled again when her paralyzed leg didn't respond. Twilight tried to catch her again, but she was similarly stopped.

"It can get better." Twilight said. "There's got to be some kind of physical therapy to help, or something."

"No, there isn't!" Rarity shouted, shutting her eyes tight. "There's no healing this, Redheart said so herself. Not even a magic healing spell can repair severed nerves after this long. It's hopeless."

Rarity leaned against the side of her bed and sobbed. Twilight slowly stepped up, and tried embracing her like she did with Pinkie. She thought better of trying to place any weight on her back, so she settled with nudging her ruined mane.

"It will get better. Maybe not your leg, but everything else will be. I'm still here for you, and so is everypony else."

"Applejack isn't." Rarity replied bitterly, choking back tears.

As much as that stung, Twilight didn't let it get to her. Not just yet, anyway. "Macintosh would disagree. He said that she probably wouldn't even be mad at us. Even if she was awake, I'll bet she'd be right here with you too."

"Humph." Was all Rarity could reply.

Although she was still deeply upset, at least Rarity wasn't lashing out at Twilight anymore. Not sure what else to add, she just stood there with her, nudging her neck with her cheek. She looked down at the crippled leg, the hoof resting at an odd angle that must have been uncomfortable if the pearly unicorn could feel it. Twilight thought of moving it back into a more comfortable position.

“Wait, I have a great idea!” Twilight said, suddenly ecstatic. “Here, watch this.”

Rarity lifted her head to look at Twilight, who began channeling her horn. She followed the lavender unicorn's gaze to her own leg. Telekinesis engulfed it, and it started to tap against the floor like she was counting.

The next thing Twilight knew, she was propelled against the far wall by a burst of Rarity's magic. Hard. For a moment she thought she cracked a rib or two. She collapsed on the floor.

“What in Celestia's name do you think you're doing?! Are you mocking me?! Do you intend to wiggle my hoof around at will like some plaything while I lack the ability to move it myself!?”

“N-no. Tele – ” Twilight coughed. “Telekinesis is the answer.”

“What!?”

“You have an incredible talent for moving things with magic.” Twilight continued, smiling up at her with tired eyes. “You can use it to move your leg, and you can learn to walk just fine.”

Rarity looked down at her ruined limb and considered what her friend said. She called on her own magic to support her leg, and for the first time in two days was able to balance herself like normal. Her eyes widened in amazement as hope filled into her heart again.

“Oh, Twilight, I'm so sorry!” Rarity pleaded as she leaped down to comfort her friend.

The lavender unicorn chuckled for a second until she felt a sharp pain in her side. “That's okay, I probably should have warned you I was going to do that.”

Rarity used her own magic to lift the two of them up, making a point to be extra careful with Twilight. “I feel absolutely dreadful. I've been a terror all morning, and you were all just trying to help me! Is there anything I can do to make it up to you?”

“I'm inviting everypony together for a party tonight at nine. A small one, though. Just the si- uh, five of us.”

The pearly unicorn raised a hoof – the disabled one, even. “Say no more, I'll be there. Oh! If only there were more time, I could-” Rarity started, and then abruptly stopped herself by placing the hoof to her mouth.

“Could what?”

“Nothing, nothing, dear. I just have so much to do now. I must apologize to Nurse Redheart for my ghastly behavior as of late. And I simply must redecorate this room all over again from the floor up. So much black, what was I thinking? Even if it's just a small party, I'll need some time to doll myself up. I can only imagine how my mane looks.” She said, feeling her hair.

Twilight smiled brightly. “I'm just glad you're feeling better. Don't worry about your mane. At least it

looks better than mine did when we first met.”

The two unicorns laughed at that shared memory, and embraced each other for a moment.

“I’m feeling so much better, thank you so very much. Now I have to take care of this room.” Rarity turned around and faced the center of the room. She started pulling down the banners with her magic. Each dropping sheet caused the room to brighten more and more.

“I’ll just leave you to that then. I have some things to take care of myself before tonight.”

Twilight left and closed the door behind her, and Rarity abruptly stopped what she was doing. She walked over to the counter where her sewing machine was and rummaged through the drawers. She pulled out a pad of prescription sheets and a quill and inkwell. The sheets on the pad were small, so she tore several off at once and arranged them on the counter. She started making sketches.

“I know just the way to make it up to you. I’ll make you a brand new dress. You and Nurse Redheart. But this... this shall be my grandest creation to date! I must merge my own flamboyant style with your simplistic preferences. A paradox, to be sure, but I am to the challenge!”

Rarity paused her monologue for a moment to consider a line she had just drawn, then scratched it out.

“Even if it takes the rest of your life, Twilight, I shall finish this dress for you.”

“That one sounded rough. Are you alright?” Nurse Redheart asked as Twilight emerged from Rarity’s room.

“I’m fine, thank you. Just a bruise, I think. She’s feeling much better now, and that’s all that’s important.” Twilight replied, closing the door behind her.

“That’s great to hear. You’ve been an amazing friend.”

“Thank you. I feel really tired, though, so I’m just going to go home.”

“You go ahead and do that, I’m going to finish my rounds. Take care now.”

Twilight nodded and the two parted ways. As she headed towards the exit, she just happened to glance into an open doorway. What she saw quickly brought her to a stop and sapped the good feelings she had been building up all afternoon.

It was Applejack’s room, where she still lied motionless save for her slow breathing. Macintosh was there too, standing by his sister’s bedside, having arrived while she was talking to the others. A basket of apples rested on the floor as well. One of the apples had been placed between her resting hooves. Twilight watched as Macintosh brushed Applejack’s mane away from her face, and then rested his chin on the mattress.

Twilight shut her eyes tight as frustration gripped her. There was no magic spell she could cast or words she could use that would restore her friend safely. Magic could be used to awaken a comatose pony, but that could cause severe neurological damage. Applejack would be fine waking up naturally, but there would be no telling when that would occur. It could be a few days from then, or maybe years, perhaps decades. Applejack's condition was the one thing she couldn't fix, and yet it felt like the most important.

Resigning herself to a deep sigh, Twilight slowly walked out of the hospital. She wanted to take a long walk home but found that to be impossible. An army of Earth pony soldiers from Canterlot had arrived and were deploying all around Ponyville. Twilight knew just enough about military procedure from being around Celestia and the guards to understand some of what they were doing. A lot were simply making patrols around the town, while others were going from shop to shop seeking supplies and lodging, or looking for storage or places to set up the equipment and tools they brought along with them. The shopkeepers supplied what they could, but most of the ponies around were worried and frightened by all the warriors swarming the town. The square around the hall was quickly being filled up with tents for the standing army.

Twilight passed by Sugarcube Corner on her way back home. She noticed a one pair of golden armored unicorns examining Pinkie's second-story bedroom from the outside. She didn't make out exactly what they were talking about, but one of them mentioned something about a "vantage point" and being "like a tower," while the other agreed with him.

"They're preparing for a battle." Twilight thought with horror. *"All the ponies around here freaked out when we were attacked by stampeding bunnies. A pitched battle is the worst thing that can happen here. Oh, I hope Celestia knows what she's doing."*

Continuing her way around Ponyville, Twilight watched the bustling activity of Ponyville. It was surreal. There were just as many ponies around as there were on the busiest of days, but none of which were ponies she recognized, and all of them wore the same gilded barding. She tried to stay out of the way, lest somepony recognize her as Celestia's protegee and ask her for orders or something. Every now and again she would catch sight of somepony peeking out from behind her curtains in fear of what was going on around town. She took the long way home, walking around the entire village. It had been a very trying couple of days and she just wanted some fresh air and just not think for a little while.

The park was similarly converted into a campgrounds. Twilight did her best to find some comfortable patch of grass on the far end of the field to relax and clear her head. She lied down and held her nose up towards the gentle breeze. The faint scent of fresh apples from Sweet Apple Acres mixed with the aroma of some wildflowers washed over her. The cool wind lifted her mane and the ends of her hair brushed gently against her forehead. Twilight meditated in peace like that for a while. A few minutes, and hour, maybe longer, she didn't know.

"Excuse me, Miss, are you alright?"

Twilight opened her eyes. An earth pony soldier was looking down at her, carrying a bundle on his back that was to be his own tent. Looking around, she realized that the camp had expanded a lot while she was resting.

“Yes, I was just... relaxing. I'm sorry, I guess I'm just in everypony's way now, aren't I?”

The guard smiled, politely not saying the affirmative.

“I'll just be going then. Excuse me.” Twilight continued, and she left.

Eventually, Twilight found her way home. It was just after sunset, so it was just as well that she finally returned. She opened the door and stepped inside. Before she even had the opportunity to close the door behind her, a loud pop and then a squeal sounded from the center of the room. Immediately afterward, something splattered against the wall to her right and bits of it landed in her coat.

“Oopsy, whoopsy, doopsy!” rang out a voice from the darkness.

“Pinkie!” Shouted a few others in irritation.

Twilight flipped on the lights with her magic. Pinkie Pie was crouching behind a baby-blue cannon she had never seen before that was aimed at the door. Spike, Rarity, and Rainbow Dash were glaring at the pink pony while Fluttershy looked like she was about to hyperventilate. The lavender unicorn inspected the gooey material stuck to her wall and fur. It was cake.

“You, you scared me!” Fluttershy wheezed. “And I was trying so hard to brace myself for that...”

“Sorry, everypony!” Pinkie said, scratching the back of her mane. “Party cannon's got kind of a hair trigger sometimes.”

“Great, now it's all over the wall!” Spike shouted. “Do you know how long it'll take to clean all that up?!”

“Pinkie,” Twilight asked flatly, flicking her tail in irritation, “Why is there a cake plastered to my wall? And why did you shoot it out of a cannon at me? What's going on?”

“We were gonna turn your party around on you and make it a surprise party.” Dash answered.

“We just really wanted to thank you for all you've done for us today.” Rarity said. “We were at some of our lowest points today, and you still didn't abandon us.”

“I wasn't feeling low. This is radical!” Dash interrupted, showing off her scars again.

“Well, most of us were.” Rarity continued, waving her paralyzed hoof dismissively at the azure pegasus. “It's like you told me, we're all together.”

“Yeppers!” Pinkie declared, leaping into the air to tackle-hug Twilight. The unicorn magically caught her in mid-air before impact in self defense. That didn't actually stop her from talking, however. “And you reminded me to not stop fighting, even if I do feel sad. You also reminded me of the importance of hugging. Or was it the importance of rope? No, hugs! Now let me down so I can hug you!”

“Um, I know you didn't actually talk to me today,” Fluttershy interjected as Pinkie started flailing her legs around. “But I'm sure you would have if you just weren't so busy...” she said, pawing absentmindedly at the floor. “It's okay, though, Rainbow came and cheered me up.”

Twilight smiled and walked up to Fluttershy. Pinkie floated along above her, still trapped by magic. “You know I'd be there for you if I could,” the unicorn said. “We're still friends right?”

“Best friends.” Fluttershy said, and Twilight embraced her.

Rarity walked up as well, stumbling only a little, and hugged them both. Pinkie resumed protesting. “Hey, what about me! I wanna group hug!”

Twilight released her spell, and the pink pony fell on top of them. They all collapsed into a heap and laughed.

“Dog pile!” Dash shouted, flying in from nowhere. The impact from this addition to the group hug pushed them all back a few feet, but this only caused them all to laugh harder.

“Thank you, everypony.” Twilight said, tearing up just a little. “You're all my best friends.”

Just then, there was a knock at the door of the library. Twilight excused herself and tried to pull herself out of the pile of pony. When that proved too difficult she simply teleported away. The other friends worked their ways free as she opened the door.

The goddess of the sun, Celestia, was there. Luna standing slightly behind and beside her. Twilight was taken aback. “Twilight Sparkle, my faithful student, I have an important question to ask you.”

“W-what is it princess?”

“Since when have you learned to revive the dead?”