Cloudwalking
Natural magic- Transfiguration

The creation of spell is attributed to Loci the Gilded. This versatile, intermediate level spell mimics the natural cloudwalking ability of pegasi, allowing earth ponies and unicorns to tread upon clouds. It requires no preparation and is easy to master, making it a favorite of magical instructors.

It serves a practical need in allowing earth ponies and unicorns to visit pegasi cities. The Canterlot Council has advised all adult unicorns have a working knowledge of this spell.

Wispy clouds floated across the sky, carried by a light breeze. The sun was a fiery starburst in the sky, ensconcing Ponyville in its gentle warmth. Laughter and chatter filled the town park as ponies threw open their shutters and welcomed the first embrace of spring.

But huddled beneath the shade of a drooping willow, four ponies were engaged in hushed discussion, faces betraying grief and confusion. A checkered picnic blanket lay beneath them, spread with a variety of food that laid untouched.

“I don’t understand. You said she’s been gone for a week?”

Fluttershy nodded, eyes wide with concern. “Scootaloo was the last to see her. We checked her house this morning and her mailbox was almost full.”

There was a brief pause, punctuated only by furious scribbling as Twilight recorded every detail. The quill danced across the page, filling the notebook with thin black ink. Dates, times, and clues were all noted and organized.

Satisfied, Twilight peered upward. Rarity was pacing, flipping her purple mane over her shoulder every few seconds. Leaned up against the tree was Applejack, her lips pursed in thought. Fluttershy inched in closer.

“So...do you think you have an idea?”

Twilight flipped through the bulging notebook, her horn glowing as the pages turned themselves. “Let’s start at the beginning. We all last saw her at Pinkie’s going away party.”

There were several nods of assent, which she took as a cue to continue. Shielding the paper

from the sun with a hoof, Twilight added, “Did not leave a message. Nothing was taken from her house. The weather was clear and sunny.”

A thick binder lay on the ground in front of them, filled with more details. “Pinkie’s letter confirms she did not see Dash. So far it has been almost eight days.”

“What about her friend? The fiery one?” Applejack lifted her hat up, playing idly with a loose strand of thread. “Ah think Dash mentioned something ‘bout her.”

More page flipping. “Met with her yesterday. Spitfire mentioned Dash had approached her two weeks ago talking about Wonderbolt tryouts, but had not followed up.”

“Maybe she went to go train?” offered Rarity.

Twilight shook her head, her frazzled mane bunching up and sticking out at odd angles. She stifled a yawn, taking a greedy slurp from a thermos. “She would have told either us or Spitfire. No training equipment was taken from her house.”

Applejack bucked the tree in frustration, a loud hollow bang that drew a wince from Fluttershy. Verdant leaves drifted from the branches, swirling and fluttering in the spring wind.

There is evidence to support that cloudwalking stems from the same magical source that allows Pegasi to control the weather- a natural affinity with the skies. However, this has been disputed by several professors at the Canterlot University of Magical Studies, who argue cloudwalking stems from physiological differences in bone structure and weight distribution.

The exact method of action the cloudwalking spell uses is unknown, as Loci the Gilded perished several days after publishing her research on the spell. Sources say the unicorn was murdered by a rival who had invented a similar concept, although no evidence was found to support the claim.

“I-I can’t. Sorry.” Fluttershy looked away, her pink mane shielding her face. Her turquoise eyes were shimmering, threatening to cry at any moment. “This is the most busy time of the year. All the animals are beginning to start families and they’ll need my help...” Her voice trailed off as she drew back, face burning with shame. “I’m so sorry,” she whispered.

“Don’t worry ‘bout it, ‘Shy.” Applejack flashed her an encouraging smile, but her happy expression ended at her lips. Her face was solemn as she bid her friend goodbye, trotting back to the main street of Ponyville.

She chewed on her bottom lip as the homes and stores of Ponyville drew closer. So it would just be to the two of them, then. Applejack’s mind played at the thought- what’s a short adventure between friends, anyways? Walk on some clouds, find Dash, yell at her a bit, and bring that silly filly home. Maybe she’d be back before planting season started in two days.

A grand ol’ adventure.

“I cannot, Twilight. I’m...terrified of heights.” With a rather melodramatic sigh, the unicorn collapsed upon the ground.

Twilight flashed her friend a sympathetic smile. “It’s okay, Rarity. I understand. That Wonderbolts show must have been rather scary.” She returned to her checklist, scribbling a small note in her margins.

“Well now,” Twilight finally added. “A traveling bag?”

“Oh! Wait right here, I have just the thing!” There was a gust of wind as Rarity dashed into the boutique’s back room, emerging with a knapsack clutched between her teeth. She set it on the ground carefully, loosening the ties and unstrapping the buckles.

“Wow, this is perfect.” It was a plain chocolate brown, criss-crossed with dark buckles and strands. She slung it over her shoulder. “Really light too. This is just what we need.” Another item off the list.

“So, when do you plan on leaving?” The seamstress busied herself with a pair of scissors and a needle, quickly altering a dark cloak with practiced ease. It was a prototype- straight from the Canterlot outlet. When worn, the hood sealed in heat and eased breathing in high altitudes.

“Anddd check.” With a flourish, Twilight rolled the scroll up and placed it carefully in her bag. She stole a glance outside- the sun was just beginning it’s downward descent. The clear skies promised another few days of good weather ahead. “I’m planning on tomorrow night. I just need a few more hours of research.”

Local Pegasus Still Missing

It's been a week since the sudden disappearance of Junior Speedster and star flier Rainbow Dash, who dazzled crowds in Cloudsdale last month by performing the first back-to-back consecutive Sonic Rainboom.

Despite the unexplained nature of her disappearance, her friends have remained optimistic for her safe and timely return.

"I bet she's just working on her rad flying!" said Scootaloo, a young Pegasus who said she was Dash's "super number one fan."

Sheriff Iron Cuff has confirmed several search-and-rescue teams have turned up empty, as Dash left them with few leads.

"That was awesome Granny. Couldn't eat 'nother bite." Applejack patted her round stomach with a satisfied grin. The table was littered with empty plates and dirty utensils, the remains of another Apple family dinner. A few lanterns sputtered, staving off the nighttime darkness.

The elder pony gave herself a small smile as she cleared the plates, pushing away Applejack's hoof as she motioned to help. "Don't you worry about that. Ah know how busy you mus' be right now, with Dash missing and everything."

At this, Applejack's content expression faded, but she hastily donned a mask of casual nonchalance. From the corner of her eye she saw Big Mac look at her, and she turned away. "Don't worry about her. That crazy filly must be up to something. I'm sure she'll turn up again later."

When Granny Smith finally left the kitchen, Big Mac spoke. His words were quiet and sure, as if he deliberated every sentence in his mind. "Some'hm weighing on you, Applejack? You sure don't look fine."

"Ah couldn't tell Granny earlier. Didn't want her to worry too much, y'know?"

“Ah see. Leavin’ soon?”

She nodded, blowing some strands of her mane out of her face. In the corner of the room lay a travel bag, packed with the basic necessities of a short trip. For whatever reason, Twilight had asked her to bring several bandannas. She obliged, folding the colorful cloth squares and packing them with the rest of her gear.

Big Mac’s brow creased, his expression darkening. He leaned in to whisper, “Ah don’t have a good feelin’ about this. I’m worried for you.”

Instinctively, Applejack flashed another confident smile, but the gesture fell flat on Big Mac. It was no use trying to hide anything from him. “I said, don’t worry. Twilight has everything planned out. If there’s one pony that’s good at these things, it’s her.”

When Celestia’s sun finally crept past the edge of the horizon, the two siblings embraced. “Be safe, Applejack. Remember to take care of yourself and Twilight Sparkle too. The skies are no friendly place for earth ponies.”

“We don’t have a choice.”

At this, Big Mac looked away. His gaze was sharp, betraying an intellect hidden by his quiet demeanor. “Ah know you don’t. Just be safe.”

Cloudsdale is a small cloud city a days travel outside of Canterlot. It is sister cities with Ponyville, of which it shares a common location. Cloudsdale is generally regarded as the birthplace of competitive pegasus racing, and is home to the Junior Young Speedster’s, Flight Academy, and Wonderbolts summer training camp.

The weather is sunny and mild for most of the year, with the exception of several major thunderstorms that occur as a result of spring air currents. The town is famous for it’s beautiful architecture and peaceful, serene atmosphere.

“Compass?”

“Check.”

“Telescope?”

“Check.”

“Map?”

“Hm.” Twilight rummaged through her knapsack before coming across the compact folded poster. “Yep. Full Equestria map.”

Spike rolled the scroll back up. “Then, I guess your last thing on your to-do list is to send a letter to Celestia.”

Twilight’s heart sank. She had been putting off writing for as long as possible. It had been weeks since her last friendship report, and now Dash’s absence promised another few days of isolation.

“Yeah, I’ll finish it right now. Can you organize the supply bag? I think we’re low on bread.”

The library door swung shut as the dragon hurried off to the bakery. Twilight released a deep sigh, sinking into an armchair. Scattered thoughts and emotions ran wild through her mind. A headache send pain radiating through her skull.

Slowly, she levitated a quill in the air and dipped it in a pot of black ink. Now or never, she thought.

Dear Princess Celestia,

I apologize for the long delay since I’ve last written. I’ve been really busy with Winter Wrap-up and all sorts of adventures, and haven’t found the time to write another friendship report.

Unfortunately, I wish I could write to you with good news. As you know, Rainbow Dash has gone missing. Disappeared suddenly. Search-and-rescue haven’t been able to find anything, but I think I have a crucial lead.

Tonight we set off to Slipstream City. Apparently she has an aunt we didn’t know about, and I have a feeling she may know of Dash’s whereabouts. It’s a long flight, so Applejack and I are taking the hot air balloon.

I feel like there will be a lot to write about when I get back! I should take my friend’s to visit

Canterlot sometime. It's been too long.

Your faithful student,

Twilight Sparkle

After hastily scribbling her signature, Twilight sank back, exhausted. Her mind played scenarios over and over again. She checked and double checked all of her mental checklists, making sure she had enough packed for two ponies.

She wasn't surprised by Fluttershy and Rarity. Fluttershy rarely flew and seemed distant from her pegasi brothers and sisters- she felt comfortable with four hooves on the ground. Although it pained Twilight to admit it, Rarity could end up being a liability if she panicked while flying. It wasn't for the faint of heart.

She gazed around the library, noting with a twinge of sadness the state of disrepair it had fallen in. Stacks of books lay on the ground. Scrolls and bottles of ink covered every available table. A few may prove to be useful on the journey, and she had made sure to pack them.

With a musical whistle, the grandfather clock indicated 9 o'clock. She rolled up the scroll, scribbling a quick note for Spike to send it immediately.

It was time.

Hot air balloons were invented by Wind Burst the Magnificent during the First Discord War. They were originally devised as fixed aerial scouts, but soon proved to be crucial in evacuating civilians in remote locations.

Piloting hot air balloons is notoriously difficult, even with the assistance of magic. Because of the frequency of high winds, flying is not advised over most of Equestria. Strong gusts can overcome the most skilled of pilots, making navigation difficult.

Nowadays, hot air balloons are used mainly for recreation. Under a skilled hoof, they can prove to be efficient means of travel for non-pegasi, but the art of hot air balloon piloting has been steadily dying.

The night air was cool and breezy, gently ruffling the manes of ponies huddled outside. Applejack stamped her hooves into the dirt, looking around.

“Where did Twi go?”

Rarity shrugged, twisting her knit scarf a bit tighter around her neck. Several lanterns hung from the balloon’s gondola, casting a warm glow into the darkness. Ahead of them lay the open fields of the Apple family orchards- the perfect spot for a safe takeoff and, if necessary, an emergency landing.

Spike was busy loading, flinging the baggage haphazardly where they landed with dull thumps. Finished, he sidled up to Rarity. “Sooo...” he began, placing an arm around her waist. “Come around here a lot?”

The effect of the gesture was lost, however, by a pony’s arrival. Twilight had a thick rope coiled around her body, and she behind her several burlap sacks. Wordlessly, she levitated them onto the overflowing gondola, before collapsing onto the ground in a panting heap.

“Oh dear!” In a flash of white Rarity was beside her, gently dabbing her burning forehead with a handkerchief. “Applejack, get some water!”

Twilight suddenly found an coldness pressed against her body and she sighed, slumping into the ground.

“You okay? You aren’t really lookin’ strong enough for his journey.” The wet rag made its way down Twilight’s face, wiping sweat off the nape of her neck. She struggled a bit, blushing, but Applejack continued to meticulously wipe her with broad strokes of her hoof.

“I-I’m fine.” She managed to struggle to her hooves, a flash of color exploding in her vision. “Really, don’t worry. Just overexerted myself a little bit.”

Rarity gave her a worried look, but didn’t press the subject. Sighing, Applejack extended a hoof toward her. “We don’t have to go today. Get some rest. We got all tomorrow.”

“Time is of the essence right now. We’ll be in Slipstream by tomorrow evening, and hopefully Dash will be found.” She glanced at Spike. “Is everything set?”

“Yeah. Although I think Rarity has a point...”
Twilight steadied herself with a hoof as she hopped into the balloon’s gondola. Applejack gave

her friends one last uncertain look, but joined the purple unicorn.

“B-b-bye guys. Be safe!”

“Farewell, dears! You better drag Dash back by her tail when you find her.”

Twilight gave the guide rope an experimental tug. The balloon’s canvas expanded. With a flick of her horn a bright orange flame appeared. It began to ascend immediately. Applejack stumbled back a bit, holding onto the side for support.

“Bye girls! Will do, Rarity.”

As the balloon rose higher, Applejack stole a last look at the ground. Her friends were nothing more than specks on the earth. She squinted her eyes, barely able to make out the dim lights of the farmhouse and barn.