

Redheart's Love

Chapter 2 (A Fool in Pain)

Finn's head throbbed with pain, causing him to groan as he slowly regained consciousness. There was a steady beeping sound coming from somewhere to his left that he could barely hear over the constant ringing in his head. He tried to sit up but quickly found that task to be impossible. His whole body ached and wouldn't respond to him no matter how hard he tried. It was like he was awake, but couldn't get up.

Even though Finn was unable to move and very confused, he could tell he was laying down on a soft bed that wasn't his own. This one was slightly stiffer and felt clean, as if the sheets had just come fresh out of the wash.

The pain in his head continued to grow the more conscious he became, so he tried to get up a second time. He managed to move one of his arms and slowly brought it up to the left side of his head where the throbbing was the most intense. His fingers came into contact with something soft and spongy, confusing him even more. He started to feel around, following the cloth-like substance with the tips of his fingers, discovering it wrapped all the way around his head multiple times.

Feeling a little freaked out, Finn tried to open his eyes to see where he was. The moment he started to lift his eyelids he was met with a blinding light, forcing him to squint and hold his hand in front of his face. After a little while, his eyes adjusted and he was able to look around more freely. He quickly discovered that he was in a somewhat small, off-white colored room that was illuminated by a few bright fluorescent lights on the ceiling. The room itself was mostly empty, with some cupboards on the wall and a few mysterious medical devices that he had no knowledge about.

That constant and steady beeping turned out to be a heart monitor he was hooked up to, the only thing in the room he could identify. Even though he couldn't remember how he got here, it became clear that he was in the Ponyville hospital.

Finn saw a window on the far left side of the room with the curtains closed, and on his right was a closed door. He instantly recognized his jacket and other clothing items hanging off of a hook on the door, which lead him to look down at himself. In doing so, he discovered that he had been completely stripped down and covered with a very large, plain-white hospital gown that barely fit him. It was meant for a bigger pony to wear, but the sleeves had been ripped out so it could fit him more comfortably.

Ignoring the fact that some poor innocent pony had to see his shame, Finn looked back to his jacket and frowned slightly. There was a strong feeling in the pit of his stomach telling him there was something important about it, but he couldn't remember what. He concentrated hard, rubbing the side of his aching head for a little while until it finally hit him.

"Redheart!" Finn shouted, jerking upright. As soon as he did, a sharp burning sensation ripped through his whole body, making him cry out and fall back onto the bed.

Finn scrunched up his face and gritted his teeth as he waited desperately for the burning to go away. It seemed that the slightest movement made the pain he was experiencing flare up even more and spread further into his body.

“G-gahh! What the fuck... How hard did Rainbow hit me?” Finn groaned, holding his head tightly. Never before had he experienced such an intense pain after having just being knocked out.

It was a little frightening, to say the least, but once the pain subsided to a more manageable level, he opened his eyes again.

After taking a short moment to collect himself, Finn looked back at his jacket and remembered the book that was still inside the pocket. It seemed that his plan worked and he now had a chance to ask Redheart out. But first, he really needed something for the pain in his head, and maybe a nurse could explain to him what the hell was going on with his body.

Finn started looking around for the ‘call nurse’ button, knowing there was always a way to contact somepony from inside the room. In his search, he noticed a lonely stool on the right-hand side of his bed that seemed out of place. It was right next to where he was laying as if somepony had come to visit him, but that couldn’t be right.

‘Did Rainbow come by to see me or something?’ Finn thought, wondering how long he’d been out for.

A simple knock to the head should have only incapacitated him for a few hours at most, not long enough to justify visits from friends. He didn’t question it for long since his head still felt like it was splitting apart, so he kept looking for a way to contact somepony.

Finn soon discovered what he was looking for on the nightstand to the right of his bed. The button was there, next to a simple metal lamp. It was a big round thing with a black silhouette of a nurse mare on it that connected to the wall with a small wire. The only problem was, it was placed way on the other side of the nightstand for some reason, just outside of his reach. He knew he could reach it if he extended his arm enough. He just hoped that the pain he experienced before wouldn't make that simple task impossible.

Taking a moment, Finn whispered a soft prayer to whatever god ruled this world that he wouldn’t get Redheart first. As much as he wanted to see her as soon as possible, he knew she would be pissed that he managed to end up in the hospital again. It wouldn’t surprise him if she started punching him, and he wasn’t ready to deal with that just yet. He wanted some painkillers inside him before that happened.

Holding his breath and gritting his teeth, Finn reached his right arm out towards the button, feeling the same burning sensation starting to flare up and spread through him again. He did his best to ignore it and extended his fingers all the way out, just enough to touch the button and—

“Yooooooooou...” a very soft, cold, and angry sounding voice said from the doorway of the room.

Finn froze as a chill ran down his spine. The heart monitor he was connected to started to beep slightly faster.

He knew that voice...

He knew it well...

Swallowing the lump in his throat, Finn slowly turned his head towards the now open doorway. A white mare with bright, sapphire-blue eyes now stood in the room, staring daggers at him. Her normally smooth and pink mane that was always pulled back into an adorable bun now looked haggard and in desperate need of a good brushing. She looked as if she had been up all night working frantically, but most importantly, she looked pissed...

“O-oh, hey gorgeous,” Finn teased weakly, trying to play the situation off as if everything was normal. “Fancy meeting you here!”

“Yooou...” Redheart repeated, her voice dripping with venom, chilling Finn to the bone.

Flames of pure hatred poured out of Redheart’s eyes as she glared at him from underneath the shadows of her pink bangs, or so it seemed. It could have just been Finn's imagination playing tricks on him, or he was still delirious from his concussion. Nevertheless, seeing her in front of him now with that look frightened him to his very core.

“L-listen, Red,” Finn attempted to explain sweetly. The sound of his heart monitor started to beep faster and faster. “I, eh, know you're mad at me, but just let me expla—”

“You idiot!” Red cried out, then lunged towards him at a blinding speed, slamming the door shut behind her.

Finn tried to brace himself, but it was too late. Redheart crashed into him, knocking the wind out his lungs. She quickly wrapped her forelegs around him in a tight death grip, then pressed her cheek into his chest and held on with all her earth pony strength.

The pain in Finn’s body started to flare up almost immediately. He gritted his teeth and did his best to hide his discomfort, but Redheart squeezed him even tighter, making him cry out once it became too much to bear.

“Oh, what? Does that hurt?” Redheart said, feigning sympathy, giving Finn another squeeze that caused him to cry even louder. “It’s a side effect from the treatment we had to use on your dumb head! Serves you right for making me worry like that! I was up all night thinking you might not make it! I swear to Celestia, one of these days you're going to hurt yourself so bad that we won't be able to piece you back together! Why don’t you ever listen to me?!”

“R-Red I, gahh!” Finn tried to explain, but Redheart gave him another squeeze. “It was just an accident! I’m sorry!”

“You should have been wearing a helmet!” Redheart argued passionately, not letting up on her grip, but nuzzled her cheek into his chest lovingly. “I keep telling you to be careful and you should have known to use a helmet when playing hoofball with your friend! Especially knowing how prone to injury you are! How many times have I seen you come in here this month alone!?”

“U-umm...” Finn struggled to say but stopped himself because he knew the answer was well over three.

“It doesn’t matter now,” Redheart said flatly, finally relaxing her grip on him before lifting herself up off his body. “You’re here now and you’re safe... For the time being.”

Finn winced, feeling like his head was splitting apart and his body had been dipped in acid thanks to Redheart’s assault, but he did his best to smile.

“Let me guess: you have a severe headache and your body feels like it’s on fire,” Redheart said knowingly, taking on a slightly more friendly and motherly tone, but still sounded upset.

Finn could only nod weakly.

Redheart sighed and shook her head.

“You know, this wouldn’t happen if you would just listen to your nurse and be more careful!” Redheart scolded as she stepped off the bed and landed on her hooves.

She made her way towards one of the cabinets in the room before continuing.

“The pain you’re experiencing is a normal side effect from the magical treatment. We had to use a lot of magic to fix your skull and stop all the bleeding. We weren’t even sure if your body would accept the treatment, but we were running out of options. Don’t worry though, I have some medication that will help with the pain. I brought it in here a while ago in case you woke up.”

“Fix my skull? Bleeding?” Finn repeated weakly, feeling confused. His injuries shouldn’t have been that severe unless Rainbow really let him have it. “Wait... So, what happened? How long was I out for?”

“You were unconscious for about...” Redheart stopped mid-sentence to look up at the clock on the wall before continuing. “A little over forty-eight hours.”

“Two days!?” Finn shouted in shock. He should have only been out for just a few hours, not two whole days!

“Afraid so. And according to your frantic friend who dragged you in here,” Redheart started to explain, pulling out a small white box from one of the locked cabinets, then made her way back towards Finn. “A rouge hoofball came crashing into your head. The force of the ball split your skull open and caused a lot of internal bleeding.”

Finn’s eyes widened immensely. “I-internal bleeding!?”

“Uh-huh,” Redheart said with a nod, taking a seat on the stool that was next to Finn's bed. She then opened the box and took out a small, thin and white strip that looked like a bandage with her teeth before setting the box down on the nightstand. She then took the bandage in her hooves and peeled off one side, then turned to Finn before holding out her hoof. “Here, give me your arm.”

Groaning, Finn did as she asked and placed his arm on top of her hoof.

Smiling, Redheart took the bandage in her other hoof and placed it over Finn's forearm, then pressed down on top of it.

Finn winced at the surprisingly cold and wet feeling of the cloth-like material, but soon a sharp pain started to spread out from the bandage and move up his arm. He reflexively tried to pull away, but Redheart held him tightly.

“I know it hurts, but this will make you feel better. I have to keep some pressure on it for several minutes though, so you’re just going to have to power through it,” Redheart said sweetly. “The medicine has to be absorbed through your skin. It shouldn’t take long since you hardly have any fur.”

“O-oh... okay,” Finn said somewhat dumbly, feeling a warm soothing sensation start to spread out from Redheart’s hoof, putting his mind more at ease. He let himself relax, letting his body sink back into the bed, then watched as she worked.

Finn stayed like that for quite a while, just admiring how truly beautiful Redheart was. Even though she looked exhausted, he couldn’t help but smile like an idiot as butterflies started to flutter in his stomach. She truly was somepony special. Somepony to admire and cherish, and any stallion would be lucky to have such a rare and enchanting mare as his partner. It had only been a week and a few days since he was last in the hospital, but he missed seeing her in that short amount of time. He missed talking to her and getting to hear her sweet voice that could calm even the most treacherous of waves...

“I missed you,” Finn said softly, not even fully aware that he said that out loud.

A warm blush started to color Redheart’s cheeks, and even though she was looking down at his arm, Finn could tell she was smiling.

“You know...” Redheart started to say before looking up at Finn. “If I didn’t know any better, I would say you were intentionally hurting yourself just to see me!”

Finn's eyes widened and his pupils constricted to the size of pinpricks, but before he could panic too much, Redheart started to laugh loudly.

"But that would be crazy!" Redheart said before laughing.

"O-oh, yeah!" Finn said, doing his best to make his own laughter sound genuine. The heart monitor in the background started to beep slightly faster. "Y-yeah that would just be nuts. I-I mean you would have to be really crazy to do something like that."

"Crazy in love maybe!" Redheart teased with a wink, causing Finn to go back into another mini panic attack. The beeping sound in the room grew faster, but before it could go too crazy, she giggled again and shook her head. "But that would be even more ridiculous."

Finn laughed awkwardly and took a quick breath to help calm himself before his heart monitor could give away his secret. If Redheart ever found out why he kept showing up at the hospital, she might think of him as some kind of weird creeper and never want to date him. EVER!

"Seriously, though Finn," Redheart said with a hint of irritation in her voice, putting a little more pressure into Finn's forearm. "If this keeps up... I swear to Celestia, I'm going to have to send you home in bubble wrap!"

Finn smiled and chuckled awkwardly at that. "H-hey, don't worry. I'll be more careful, I promise."

Redheart gritted her teeth and grunted angrily, squeezing Finn's arm hard enough to stop his blood from reaching his fingers. She let herself fume for a moment before relaxing her grip and turning her head away from him. After a while she sighed deeply and dropped her head down, looking somewhat defeated.

"You always say that..." Redheart said tiredly before picking her head up again so she could focus on Finn's arm. "I really don't like seeing you constantly getting hurt like this, Finn."

Finn frowned sadly once Redheart went quiet. He was about to speak up, but she continued.

"But, to be completely with you honest..." Redheart started to say, but paused and bit her lip as the small blush on her cheeks spread a little farther. "I... I kind of missed getting to see you too... But only a little."

"See," Finn said somewhat smugly, the smile returning to his face. "It's not all bad! And I bet I have to stay here for a while so you can monitor me and stuff. Now we can hang out more and talk, and, uhh... stuff!"

Redheart shook her head as if she was upset by what he said, but Finn could tell she was fighting back a smile.

“No Finn, that’s bad. I mean I enjoy talking with you, but we can’t keep meeting like this. Not with you on the edge of death!” Redheart half-shouted before taking in a deep breath, then let it out slowly. “You’re just lucky I practically live here. I think anypony else would have gone mad trying to take care of you by now.”

Finn’s eyes widened at Redheart’s statement. He didn’t want to believe it, but Rainbow could have been right all along. She could just live here at the hospital and that’s why he’s never seen her in town before. He wanted to ask her if that was true, but she spoke up again before he could.

“Anyways, I really think we should talk about your, umm... *condition* now,” Redheart said, letting go of Finn’s arm, then threw away the now dried out cloth into the medical waste bin.

“Condition?” Finn questioned, pulling his arm back and giving it a light rub, noticing the pain was now completely gone. “What do you mean by condition?”

“Well,” Redheart started to say as she hopped off her seat and made her way to the end of his bed. She picked up a clipboard with Finn’s medical history on it that was hanging off the wooden footboard, then took a moment to flip through it. “I was talking to doctor a little while ago and he is in agreement with me. We both feel like you could be suffering from something more than just bad luck.”

Finn started to feel a little worried about where this conversation was going. “W-what do you mean?”

“I believe it’s more than just a coincidence that you keep getting hurt,” Redheart said as she made her way back to the stool next to Finn, then sat back down.

‘*Oh crap!*’ Finn thought to himself, feeling his heart start to sink in his chest. He did his best to stay calm, but he was starting to feel like Redheart might suspect what he had been doing this whole time. Maybe her little *joke* before was to try and see if he would slip and spill the beans somehow.

“M-more than a coincidence?” Finn repeated somewhat nervously, trying to keep himself collected so his heart monitor wouldn’t start freaking out again. “I-I’m just really unlucky and kind of a clutz... t-that’s all.”

“I want to believe that, but I fear there is something more here that we might be overlooking. It just seems like there is a clear pattern here,” Redheart said, looking through his long record of past visits. “Not only that, but we’ve seen you in here way more than any other patient this whole year. It just doesn’t add up.”

‘*Oh-no,*’ Finn thought, his eyes widening as the beeping from his heart monitor started to pick up its pace.

“Your first month of visits were for simple things like back pains and stomach aches,” Redheart continued, still reading over his file. “But then things started to get more, umm... *serious.*”

'Oh crap, oh crap, oh crap,' Finn thought frantically. His forehead started to bead with sweat as his heart continued to pump faster and faster.

“We started seeing you coming in for poisonous insect stings, horrible cuts that needed stitches, lots of broken bones, and now you’re here with a concussion that nearly cost you your life!”

'She knows!' Finn thought, scared out of his mind. *'Rainbow was right! I should have listened! The bat to the face was too far!'*

“That’s why, in my expert opinion, and the opinion of the good doctor,” Redheart started to say, closing Finn’s file before turning towards him with a serious scowl. “We believe you are suffering from chaos magic!”

“Ch... chaos magic?” Finn said dumbly, feeling a wave of relief wash over him. He started to laugh weakly, then took a deep breath through his nose to help calm himself.

Redheart raise a curious eyebrow at Finn once she noticed that his heart rate die down. “I don’t know why you’re so calm, this could be very serious!”

Finn chuckled a bit and shook his head. “Come on, Red. You really think it's just some kind of crazy magic affecting me?”

“No, not just magic, chaos magic!” Redheart repeated harshly before rolling her eyes. “Look, I know you’re still kinda new to this world, and cases like this can be rare these days, but this could be a very real reality. You might be in serious danger! You have all the symptoms that point to somepony putting a spell on you. That or you could have stepped into some poison joke, but the cause is unclear at the moment.”

Finn knew that Redheart’s diagnosis was way off, but he figured it was best to play along and keep her distracted from the truth.

“Well, if that's true,” Finn said, trying to look serious and not crack a smile. “Say somepony used chaos magic on me, or I stepped in that thing you said. How can you really tell and how can we treat it?”

“Well, that's the tricky part. Chaos magic can be hard to detect if the caster hid the spell, but that’s what we’re going to try and find out,” Redheart said, opening Finn's file once more. She leaned down and took out a small pencil that was pinned to the top of his records with her teeth, then sat back up again.

“Now then,” Redheart said, sounding slightly muffled with the pencil in her mouth. “Have you run into any draconequi lately?”

“Dracona-what?” Finn asked, but then remembered that the ponies called that weird snake-like dude with the weird wings and horns a dra-coon-a... whatever. “Oh, you mean that one guy that hangs around

Fluttershy a lot? No, I haven't really been around anypony like him, and that dude doesn't really talk to me."

Redheart brought Finn's file up to her muzzle and started to scribble away, using her teeth and lips to manipulate the pencil.

Finn did his best not to laugh at how adorable Redheart looked trying to take notes with her mouth.

"Alright," Redheart continued, making a few more check marks on his record. "Have you spent any time in the Everfree Forest? If so, did you run into any strange blue flowers there?"

"No, I don't really go into that forest," Finn answered, trying his best to keep a straight face.

"Do you ever feel constipated or bloated throughout the day?" Redheart asked.

"Does... does Chaos magic cause constipation?" Finn asked curiously, raising a questioning eyebrow.

"No, but ponies suffering from chaos magic can often feel that way," Redheart explained calmly, jotting down a few more notes. "It can also make you feel like you have to pee, even if you really don't. Although that is a less common symptom."

"Weird..." Finn said under his breath before giving his answer. "No I haven't felt bloated or constipated, and all the plumbing works perfectly! If you want, I can pee into a cup for you to prove it. You can stay and watch if you want."

Redheart scrunched up her muzzle ever so slightly to try and suppress her laughter before melting back into her more professional poker face.

"That's a very tempting offer, but I think I'll pass," Redheart teased, making a few more little checks in Finn's record before continuing her questions. "Have you even gone a whole day without sneezing more than once?"

Finn thought about that for a moment, not sure how any of this could determine if he was affected by chaos magic. "I can't even remember the last time I sneezed."

"Do you experience any long moments of confusion or feel like you are lost randomly throughout the day?"

"Umm, no not really..." Finn answered, then thought twice about that question. "Well, not any more than what's normal for me."

Redheart rolled her eyes at Finn's little joke, then placed the pencil back into his file. She looked down at her notes and stared at them before speaking again. "Well, I can't come to any solid conclusions from this,

but I'll inform the doctor that you're up now. He might come in to check on you and ask some more questions. It's kind of a busy day so I'm not sure when he'll be in to see you."

"I can wait," Finn said with a grin. "Plus, it's not like I really have a choice. I'm pretty sure you're not going to let me out of here unless I'm wearing a helmet and a bubble-wrap bodysuit."

Redheart giggled briefly and shook her head at Finn, but her happy expression soon turned into a more somber and tired one. She sighed deeply before glancing over her notes again, staring at them intently as the room grew silent.

Finn watched Redheart for a moment, noticing the small bags under her eyes as she scanned his record over and over again. It was as if she was searching for some clue, something that she might have missed about his *condition* and she wouldn't stop until she found it.

It was easy to tell that Redheart had gotten little to no sleep. Everything from her mane to her coat was in shambles and in dire need of a good brushing. Finn wished in the back of his mind that he could help her relax and groom her himself, but that was an activity only couples could do. Still, it was clear that she was extremely exhausted from working so hard.

"I would like to get to the bottom of whatever it is that's affecting you," Redheart continued, sounding sad but determined, interrupting Finn's thoughts. "I don't want to see you getting hurt anymore. It's just such an unusual case... I really hope we can find some way to cure you."

Finn frowned a bit, feeling like a real heel for making such a beautiful and caring mare worry about him so much. He knew exactly what was wrong with him, but he couldn't tell her, no matter how much he wanted to. Even though he couldn't just come out and say that he was the one hurting himself and could stop whenever he wanted, he had another idea that might cheer her up.

"Hey," Finn said, placing his hand on Redheart's hind leg, causing her to jump a little.

"W-what?" Redheart asked cautiously, giving Finn an odd look.

"Have you made any progress finding that book?"

"You remembered that?" Redheart almost shouted in disbelief, her eyes widening in surprise. "Wow... I'm shocked you actually listened to me that night. That was so long ago and I was just rambling on and on. I thought for sure I was boring you to death."

"Maybe a little," Finn teased lightly with a smile before letting go of her. "But were you able to find another copy?"

Redheart shook her head. "Unfortunately, no. I just haven't had the time. Not like if I had the time I could even find it. It's a nice dream to have, but I fear I'll never see that particular book ever again."

“Is that so?” Finn said, struggling to hold back his smug smile. “Why don’t you check the inner pocket of my jacket. There might be something in there that could cheer you up.”

“In your jacket?” Redheart asked, giving Finn a strange look before turning her attention to his clothes hanging off the door.

“Yeah, go check it out,” Finn said, poking Redheart’s thigh, giving her an encouraging nudge. “It’s on the inside, in the left side pocket. I kept it with me just in case we saw each other again.”

Redheart furrowed her brow, trying to maintain a serious and professional demeanor, but she couldn't hold back her smile as Finn kept trying to poke her off the stool. She rolled her eyes at him before hopping off, then slowly made her way towards the door. “Alright, alright, I’ll check it out.”

Finn watched as Redheart stood up on her hind legs and braced herself on the wall before working her little muzzle under his jacket. He could see her fishing all around, poking her head in every direction to try and find the inner pocket. She worked her way even further inside, then squeaked softly in surprise when her nose bumped into his little gift.

“Hey, I think I found it!” Redheart said excitedly from under his jacket before gently biting the book, then slowly pulled it out. Once it was free, she tried to cross her eyes and look down to see what she had, but then laughed at herself when she couldn’t see it. She quickly stepped down off the wall and trotted back to Finn, then sat on the stool next to him again. With a soft and somewhat shy giggle, she took the book out of her mouth and held it up with her hooves.

“Alright, let's see wha—” Redheart’s words died in her throat as soon as her eyes read the title, ‘All Quiet on the Celestial Front.’

“Ta-da!” Finn shouted, throwing his arms out like he had just hopped out from behind a curtain. “Well, what do you think? It’s the right book isn't it?”

Redheart didn’t answer him. She continued to stare at her gift with wide eyes, her hooves starting to tremble ever so slightly.

“Umm, Red?” Finn called softly, feeling increasingly more worried the longer Redheart stared at the book. He was beginning to think that he had gotten the wrong title or something. He was about to try and grab her attention again, but stopped once he noticed a few tears forming around her eyes. “H-hey, are you okay!?”

“F-Finn...” Redheart said weakly, whimpering softly as she set the book down in her lap, her eyes never leaving the front cover. “You... you actually found it?”

“Well, yeah,” Finn said, rubbing the back of his head awkwardly, not sure how to read Redheart’s reaction. He was expecting her to jump for joy or start squealing with happiness, not start crying. “Hey, I’m sorry if I hurt you. I didn’t mean—”

“You dumbass!” Redheart cried loudly as she threw the book onto the bed and lunged herself straight into Finn’s chest. She quickly wrapped her forelegs around him in a tight hug and nuzzled her now tear stained cheeks against his flimsy hospital gown. “You big, stupid, clumsy, thoughtful, dumbass!”

Finn winced, fully expecting to feel pain shoot through his body again, but it never came. It seemed the medicine Redheart gave him worked, but now she was crushing his body and making it hard to breathe. Her earth pony strength making itself known.

“H-hey,” Finn grunted weakly, wrapping his own arms around Redheart as he fought to keep air in his lungs. He started to gently pat the back of her head, not sure what else to do. “I-it’s okay... It’s... j-just a book.”

“No!” Redheart cried, rubbing her face into his chest, staining his gown with her tears. “It’s more than just a book! I just can’t believe you found it! They stopped printing it years ago!”

“Y-yeah well, umm... You know,” Finn struggled to say, petting the back of Redheart’s head, feeling how her bun was starting to unravel slightly. He couldn’t truly let her know what a struggle it was for him to find that book. He had to play it off as if it was just a coincidence that he came across it. “It’s really no big deal... I just, ehh, happened to be in the right place at the right time.”

“Where?” Redheart asked, looking up at him, keeping her chin pressed to his chest. She tightened her grip on him, causing him to wince and making it even harder for him to breathe. “Wh-where did you find it?”

“W-well... you see...” Finn grunted, trying to think of a good lie. He never thought she would actually ask him where he got the book. There was no way he could actually tell her that he had to look through every store and book hobbyist’s collection for weeks. It got to a point where he had to send letters all around the world to various vendors before one wrote him back saying they had the book. After that, it took days of negotiating a fair price that he could actually afford, and even then Twilight had to intervene to help him. “I was just with... T-Twilight at the time, and... and somepony just dropped it off at the library... They... they had a bunch of other books that... they were... donating!”

“I can’t believe it...” Redheart mumbled through a soft sob, relaxing her grip on Finn as she looked back at the book that was now resting between his legs. “After all these years.”

Finn took in a much needed breath but kept his arms around Redheart. “Y-yeah, I thought you might like seeing it again. I remembered you saying it was a classic from your past.”

Redheart sniffled a few times before rubbing her tired and teary eyes into Finn’s chest. “I thought for sure I would never get a chance to read it again...”

Finn smiled ever so slightly as he held onto the pony he had fallen so deeply for, enjoying the little moment they were sharing. His heart beat even faster as he held her close to him, feeling pretty good about his gift for her. Even though she was crying, it seemed like they were tears of joy, and that's all he ever wanted for her. For her to be happy. He would have just lain there and let their embrace last forever like that, but her reaction had him curious.

“This book really means a lot to you,” Finn pointed out, tightening his grip around her. “I’m guessing it more than just a nostalgic favorite from your past?”

Redheart simply nodded. “It was a story my Papa read to me almost every night when I was just a filly.”

“Papa?” Finn asked with a soft chuckle.

Redheart giggled and sniffed a few times before rubbing her hoof over her eyes. “Sorry, I forgot most ponies don’t call their grandparents that. That’s what I used to call my grandfather. Grandpa Purpleheart. He took care of me when I was younger since... well since my real parents couldn’t.”

“He would read a book like that to you?” Finn questioned, having not read the book himself, but he was familiar with its content. It was an old story about an earth pony who enlisted in the royal guard and was thrown into a battle that changed his life forever. “Isn’t that a little heavy for a filly to be reading?”

Redheart let her tired eyelids fall slightly as she nuzzled herself deeper into Finn's chest. “Maybe, but I was old enough to understand it and loved the way Papa read it to me. It was a sad story, but an eye opening one. I learned so much from it and... and it... it reminds me of him.”

“I’m guessing he’s no longer with us,” Finn said, rubbing Redheart’s back gently.

Redheart nodded. “I looked up to him so much when I was younger... If it wasn’t for him, I might not have joined the Royal Guard and discovered what my true destiny was.”

“Whoa, wait! You joined the Royal Guard?!” Finn almost shouted, looking down at Redheart in surprise.

“Didn’t I tell you that?” Redheart questioned, frowning her brow slightly as if she was trying to remember. “I thought we talked about that?”

“No!” Finn said excitedly. “I would have remembered something like that! I’d love to hear that story!”

“Oh, well it’s really not all that exciting,” Redheart admitted, smiling at Finn's reaction. “I don’t even know if I have time to tell it.” She snuggled into him a little deeper before yawning loudly. “Plus... I really should be getting back to...” She yawned again before continuing, “...work.”

“Please?” Finn asked sweetly, rubbing her back a little more to help encourage her.

“Well... I guess I could make it quick,” Redheart said, smiling softly as her eyelids become a little heavier. “This was long ago in my teen years, right after I had just gotten out of school. I was kind of a late bloomer when it came to my cutie mark, so I still hadn’t found my calling in life yet.”

“Wait,” Finn said, sounding confused. “I thought all ponies got their cutie marks when they’re just fillies and colts.”

“Most do, yes,” Redheart said with a weak nod. “But there are cases where some ponies won’t find their marks until they’re adults. I was one of those ponies, or close to it anyways.”

“Really?” Finn said, becoming deeply enthralled in her story already.

“Yeah,” Redheart said, followed by another tiny yawn. “I had no clue what I wanted to do with myself, and at the time my Papa was still around. He suggested I try to apply for the Royal Guard, saying that it could help me find my mark like it did for him. At the time I didn’t really care so much about my mark. I was more excited about getting a chance to do something great just like he did all those years ago, so I signed up right away.”

“So, did you have to fight while you were in the Guard?” Finn asked curiously.

“No, I never saw any action on the front lines, but that was mostly because of my position,” Redheart explained as her eyelids struggled to win a fight against gravity. “When you first join the Guard, they give you a test to see where you would perform the best. I was given the job of a medic, but at the time I thought they got my test wrong.”

“Did you not want to be a medic?” Finn asked in disbelief.

“Well, yes and no,” Redheart admitted weakly. “It’s kind of hard to explain. I wanted to be on the front lines like my Papa, but part of me was actually excited about getting to help ponies feel better.”

“So is that when you found your mark?” Finn asked, letting himself relax as he mindlessly petted Redheart’s back.

“Oh no, that didn’t happen until...” Redheart started to say but then paused as her eyes widened.

“Until what?” Finn asked.

Redheart didn’t say anything as she stared blankly at the wall but soon started to laugh loudly. “Oh my goodness,” she said before slowly calming herself. “I... I can’t believe I never noticed it before, but now that I’m thinking about it... you actually remind me of a friend I used to have in the Royal Guard!”

“Wh-what, me?” Finn asked with a smile, trying not to laugh as well. He always found Redheart’s laughter to be surprisingly infectious.

“Yeah!” Redheart half-shouted before giggling some more. “He was just like you! A really good friend but such a clutz! He was always getting himself hurt and we saw him in the barracks almost every week with some new injury!”

“O-oh, really?” Finn said awkwardly. He was starting to think this stallion had fallen in love with Redheart and had the same idea he had to try and spend more time with her. It could have been a similar situation.

“Yeah, his name was Butter Hooves!” Redheart continued happily. “He was always tripping over something or getting hurt when he was horsing around with the other stallions in his unit. I think you get hurt a lot more than he did, but you’re both still very similar. He was a real character but in a lovable kind of way.”

Finn felt his heart sink in his chest, fearing that Redheart might actually already be taken by this mysterious stallion. He never asked her if she was single. “I-is this stallion your... c-coltfriend?”

“Oh sweet Luna, no. I’m a single mare,” Redheart said almost too proudly with a soft giggle. “Although, he was adorable and very sweet, but I don’t think we would have worked like that... And I’m pretty sure he was gay...”

A wave of relief wash over Finn and he sighed quietly to himself.

“We were just really close friends,” Redheart continued, snuggling a little deeper into Finn as her eyes closed completely. She did a little stretch over him and yawned before sighing contently. “Anyways, he ended up being the one that helped me find my cutie mark.”

“Butter Hooves did?” Finn asked in disbelief. “How did he do that?”

“Well, it wasn't what he *did*, but what *happened* to him that helped me,” Redheart pointing out softly, taking on a more somber demeanor, then went quiet for a moment.

“So, what happened to him?” Finn asked after a while of waiting. He started to think that Redheart might have fallen asleep, but after a few more seconds of silence, she spoke up again

“H-his...” Redheart struggled to say, her voice wavering slightly. “His unit was ambushed in a dense forest... It was supposed to be empty, but...” She paused and tightened her grip around Finn a little more before continuing. “They were caught completely off guard and... suffered heavy losses... Most of them were sent to us to try and save, b-but... We did all we could. We really did.”

Finn frowned worriedly, not liking her sudden change in tone and the direction this story was taking.

“Hey, you don’t have to tell me this story if it’s too much,” Finn said as he rubbed Redheart’s back for added encouragement. He could tell this was a difficult thing for her to relive, plus this might be a story better told to somepony that she actual trusts and feels closer too. “I know it must have been difficult for you. I understand.”

Not opening her eyes or moving an inch from her comfortable position, Redheart lifted her foreleg up with tired strength and lightly bopped Finn’s nose. “Don’t be silly. I want to tell you.”

Finn chuckled softly as her hoof slid off his face and fell back to its original position.

“Anyways,” Redheart continued, her grip around Finn tightening once again. “Butter had a deep gash on his right side that just kept bleeding and bleeding... I had never seen anything like it. I-I thought... I thought I was going to lose one of the only friends, but I couldn’t give up on him... I couldn’t see another soldier die that night.”

Finn did his best to comfort Redheart as she relived the nightmare. He held her close to his body and kept petting her back gently, hoping his small gesture would help soothe her in some way.

“A couple other nurses and I tried to save him,” Redheart continued. “My hooves were covered in blood, but I kept putting more pressure on Butter’s gash until it eventually stopped bleeding. We were able to stitch him up and get him hooked up to a blood transfusion, but he was still unconscious and barely breathing. It looked like he wasn’t going to make it...”

“Red...” Finn said sadly, fearing the end of her story.

“Even after we had him stabilized, I stayed in that room all night just in case something went wrong. I tried to stay awake, but I, umm... fell asleep,” Redheart admitted sounding disappointed in her past self. “But then the next morning... I woke up to a sight that I would never forget.”

“W-what?” Finn asked. “What did you see?”

A small smile started to spread across Redheart’s lips. “Butter’s smiling face...”

“You mean he lived!?”

“He did. And he had that same dumb smile that you get sometimes,” Redheart teased. “But it was at that moment... that moment when I saw his stupid, grinning mug... That big brainless smile—like nothing even happen! As if everything was normal and he wasn’t just inches away from death! As if my hooves were not still covered with his dried out blood! As if...” She stopped herself as her body tensed up and her grip around Finn tightened even more. She gritted her teeth and grumbled something inaudible, letting her anger fume before relaxing again, then sighed. “It was at that moment that I knew what I wanted to do

with my life... I wanted to continue to help stupid, reckless ponies like him get better so they could live to see another day.”

“So you did it then! You saved his life and got your mark!” Finn pointed out excitedly.

“I did,” Redheart said somewhat smugly with a nod. “Then I proceeded to choke the shit out of him!”

Finn threw his head back and laughed. “Well, I’m glad you saved him and you got your mark too. So then I guess you two must be really good friends after something like that.”

“We are, but it's hard to stay in touch these days,” Redheart admitted. “We went our separate ways after the Guard and tried to keep writing to each other, but it gets hard... to...” She paused to let out a yawn. “Anyways, it would be nice to see him again... It’s been... years...”

“Why don’t you write him again?” Finn asked but got no response. He could hear the sound of a tuckered-out pony snoring in his lap, causing him to laugh quietly.

Finn smiled and laid back in his bed to get himself ready for sleep as well. He couldn’t have asked for a better moment than this to enjoy with his secret love, and she really did need the rest. He let his eyes close befo—

“NURSE REDHEART!” a loud, crackling voice popped in from the hospital’s PA system, causing Redheart to yelp and jump up with wide eyes. “Please report to the doctor's office right away! We have an emergency in the west wing!”

“Oh my gosh!” Redheart said, putting her hooves over her muzzle in horror. “I almost fell asleep on the job!” She looked over to a very confused Finn causing her eyes to grow even larger. “Oh no! And I was sleeping on top of you!”

“H-hey, it's alright, no big deal,” Finn said with a smile.

“No, it's a very big deal!” Redheart said in a panic. A bright red blush colored her cheeks as she quickly started to pat her messed-up mane back into place. “Oh my gosh, I’m such a mess! I’m so, so sorry I did that!”

“Really it’s not a—”

“That was such an unprofessional thing for me to do!” Redheart continued, not letting Finn finish his sentence. “I-I was just so tired from staying up all night watching you and you’re always so sweet and you gave me that nice—Oh my gosh the book!”

“The book?” Finn questioned as Redheart picked up her gift from between his legs then jumped off the stool. His eyes widened and his heart started to beat out of his chest as he saw his love start to leave the room. “H-hey Red, hold on a second!”

“I’m so sorry Finn. I didn’t mean to hug you for that long!” Redheart said in a rush, not hearing him call her as she put her hoof on the door and turned back to him. “I really do love the gift you gave me, but I have to get back to work. I’m really sorry for what I did, I didn’t mean to put you in such an awkward position!”

Finn started to panic as his chance to tell Redheart how he truly felt was slipping away. He had to tell her now, or risk never getting a chance again. The next time they met might be with another nurse or doctor in the room, or they might give him a new nurse entirely!

“Redheart, please wait!” Finn shouted as he sat up and reached out to her.

Redheart stopped as she opened the door and looked towards Finn with a confused look. “W-what is it?”

“I...” Finn started to say, then locked up.

‘No oh! Not again!’ Finn thought as his heart monitor beeped quickly and his hands started to tremble. He hadn’t thought this far ahead and he had no idea how to even go about admitting his feelings. His fears were starting to eat away at him and his mouth went dry like it always did in these moments, but he tried his best to stammer out a few words. “I-I... I... need to say...”

“You... what?” Redheart asked curiously. She started to step into the room again and shut the door when suddenly the same voice cracked back on over the PA system.

“Nurse Redheart! Please come to the doctor’s office as soon as possible!”

“Oh, no!” Redheart said worriedly as she looked up towards the ceiling, then looked back at Finn. “I’m so sorry, but I have to go. I promise I will try to come back!”

“Red, wait!” Finn shouted again, almost falling out of his bed as he tried to reach her, but it was too late. Redheart ran out of the room and shut the door behind her.

“Dammit!” Finn shouted as he fell back onto his bed and covered his face with his hands. “I should have said something! Why can’t I ever just tell her!”

Finn lay there, angry at himself for having let his crush slip away yet again. Groaning, he let his hands fall back onto the bed and stared up at the ceiling blankly. “You fucking idiot! You let her leave without even asking where she lived or asking if she wanted to get coffee later... You fucking moron.”

Once Finn was able to vent his frustrations, he started to think a little more clearly. Yes, he messed up, but all was not lost. Redheart did say that she would be back to see him again, and thanks to the seriousness of his injury, he was sure to be stuck in the hospital for at least a few more days. There was still a chance that he would see her, and then... then he would finally tell her how he felt and ask her out on a date.

“Yeah,” Finn said as he stared up at the ceiling. “That’s when I will tell her for sure.”

With little else to do, Finn closed his eyes and did his best to get some rest.