

VAGABOND
PART 2

For nearly an hour no one spoke. Dr. Mend served the three girls some tea, but they didn't seem to notice. Rainbow Dash was the first one to recover, "What could have done that to him?" she asked no one in particular.

"I would chalk it up to an animal attack, a cougar, perhaps, or maybe a bear." Dr. Mend speculated.

"When will he wake up?" Dash asked.

"He may not. He is, by far, the toughest pony I've ever seen, but he suffered massive physical trauma, and by that, psychological trauma as well. Honestly, it might be a mercy if he just slipped away and never woke up. Loosing something like that can absolutely destroy you. But, as I said, he's tough, so maybe he will recover." Dr. Mend said standing up.

Fluttershy came back to the world as well, "The poor, poor guy." She muttered.

Dr. Mend nodded, packing his bag, "Well, one way or another, you three have been up all night. Get some sleep. I'll leave some pain medicine and care instructions here, on the table by your door Fluttershy. I'll come by tonight if I can. Good day girls." Dr. Mend said closing the door behind him.

The girls fell asleep right where they sat, on the floor.

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All three girls were awakened by Wynona barking loudly at the front door. Applejack raised her head sleepily, "Quiet Wynona." She commanded, then it hit her, "Wynona! You're alright." She yelled, standing up.

The energetic collie kept barking at the door. Fluttershy and Rainbow Dash were beginning to stir, as Applejack headed to the door to see what had Wynona in such an uproar. She opened the door and there was Pinkie Pie, Rarity, and Twilight standing in front of the door expectantly. Applejack stepped back, holding the door for her friends, "Mornin' every pony." She said.

"Don't you mean, good afternoon, Applejack?" Twilight asked dryly.

Every one's attention was diverted when Rarity shrieked, "Fluttershy darling! You have a dead body on your sofa!"

The statement stopped everyone, except Pinkie Pie. Pinkie hopped over to the wingless Pegasus and began playfully poking any spot that remained un-bandaged,

“He’s not dead, silly, he’s still warm. Look he’s even waking up.”

The pony stallion coughed roughly. His eyes slowly cracked partway open, “Where am I?” he asked. His voice was rough but quiet.

Twilight stepped up to him, “You’re in Equestria, in a cottage outside Ponnyville to be exact.” She said.

“So, I’m alive?” he chuckled darkly, “The pain hinted at that.” he paused then looked around. His expression changed from sleepy to sober, “I apologize for being a burden. I’ll leave as soon as I am able.” he said.

Fluttershy, being the perfect hostess, flew over to him, “Oh, that’s quite alright, you can stay as long as you want.” she said.

The pony stallion shook his head, “No, actually I can’t.” he said.

Applejack shared a concerned look with Twilight, then turned to the wingless Pegasus, “You won’t be goin’ anywhere for quite a while; a couple o days at least.” she said.

Rainbow Dash threw in her two cents, “Yeah, you can, like, barely move. You were nearly dead when I found you last night.” she said, then a thought struck her, “Hey, what’s your name?” she asked.

The pony stallion settled his face and spoke in a neutral tone, “For the last five years, I’ve been called Vagabond.” he said softly, then added, “I wish you hadn’t found me last night.”

Twilight adopted a look of dire concern, but she quickly smoothed it over, fortunately none of her friends seemed to notice. Fluttershy cocked her head to the side inquisitively, “What do you mean, Vagabond?” she asked meekly.

Vagabond turned his amethyst-colored eyes to Fluttershy. The yellow Pegasus gasped, the sorrow she saw in those eyes was nigh on unfathomable.

“I should be dead.” he said softly, “I deserve to die.”

Applejack ground her teeth slightly, “Well, what in tarnation did ya do? Furthermore, what’s with the pity party thing?” she asked.

Vagabond’s eyes flashed in the afternoon light. He began to laugh mirthlessly. It was the most lifeless and cold thing any of the six friends had ever heard. It wasn’t full of energetic malignancy like Nightmare Moon’s laugh was; this laugh was utterly hollow, devoid of life, feeling, or any emotion, “Ask me again, once you’ve killed someone.”

He continued quickly once he saw the looks on the other pony’s faces,

“Now, don’t misunderstand me,” he laughed even harder. The laughter was becoming more full-bodied, “I’m not a murderer, but the blame is solely on my head.” He continued to laugh, except now the lifeless thing seemed to become bitter as well, “I don’t pity myself, and I don’t want it from any of you.”

As suddenly as it began, the laughter stopped dead. Silence filled the air for a moment before Vagabond continued, “It is my punishment.” he whispered, “I’m sorry for being a burden.” He said laying down his head, seemingly exhausted from the laugh. He closed his eyes, feigning sleep.

The girls were silent for a long while. Minutes ticked by as the words began to sink in.

Finally Twilight turned to Rainbow Dash, “Dash, I need you to come with me to the library. Tell me everything you experienced last night, and don’t leave anything out.” Twilight and Rainbow Dash headed for the library.

Rarity looked utterly disgusted, “Imagine! A killer among the good ponies of Ponyville! He should be banished immediately.” She said haughtily. A tiny motion caught her eye. She whipped her head around and saw Vagabond’s ear twitch, “I must return to my shop.” she finished heading out the door, *‘He heard me and said nothing.’* she thought to herself.

Applejack watched her go. She could only roll her eyes and shake her head, “Wynona and Ah have chores back on the farm, thanks again Fluttershy. If e happens to wake up again, stay out o ‘is reach, take to the air.” Applejack stopped at the door, a deadly serious look on her honest face, “Know what, Ahm going to send over Big Macintosh. He’ll keep Vagabond in line.” She said.

“Oh, that’s alright Applejack, I’m sure I’ll be fine.” Fluttershy said softly.

Applejack was decidedly NOT convinced, “Ah ain’t playin’ Fluttershy. This here’s a big deal. Even if ya don’t need Big Mac, to protect ya, Vagabond’ll need help relieving himself. That ain’t a proper thing for any girl to be doin’. Would ya agree?” Applejack asked.

Fluttershy blushed at the mental picture, “I hadn’t thought of that. Alright, thank you Applejack.” Fluttershy said.

Applejack and Wynona left, leaving Fluttershy and Pinkie Pie alone with Vagabond. Pinkie Pie trotted up to Vagabond and cocked her head to the side, studying him, “I know you’re awake, you know.” She said.

Fluttershy gasped and turned quickly as Vagabond raised his head. His eyes snapped open and watched Pinkie Pie like a predator, “You’re a very observant girl.” he said quietly, “What’s your name?” he asked.

Pinkie smiled hugely and closed her eyes, bouncing lightly on her hooves,

“I’m Pinkie Pie, What’s your name?” she asked.

Fluttershy spoke up,
“He already told us, his name is Vagabond.” She said. Angel bunny hopped up on top of Fluttershy’s head crossed his paws and starred down at Vagabond menacingly, almost as if saying ‘*Don’t even think about it, bub.*’

Pinkie shook her head,
“Nu-uh. He only told us what he’s been called for the past five years, he never said it was his real name.” she said. Fluttershy blinked, Pinkie Pie was right.

“Unfortunately, I must disappoint you Miss Pie. I cannot tell any pony my name, or answer to it, until my punishment is at an end. I’m sorry.” Vagabond said.

Pinkie Pie, never daunted asked,
“When will that be?”

Vagabond shifted slightly, possibly in an attempt to shrug,
“Until the pony, whose death I’m responsible for, tells me from beyond the grave, that I am forgiven. Until that time, I am supposed to stay away from any pony I might hurt. That is why I have to leave as soon as I am able.” He explained.

Pinkie just bounced in place vacantly,
“How did you lose your wings?” she asked bluntly.

Fluttershy looked absolutely stricken. She put a hoof to her muzzle,
“Oh, Pinkie Pie, you shouldn’t ask such things.” Fluttershy said. She then turned to Vagabond and added,
“I’m oh so very sorry Vagabond. You don’t have to answer that. It’s probably horribly painful to remember.” She said apologetically.

Vagabond actually seemed to brighten slightly. His eyes were still narrow and unfriendly but not quite so dark,
“That is one of the few truly appropriate events I’ve experienced in the last several years.” he said.

Pinkie Pie plopped down in front of him to listen, so Vagabond began,
“It happened two days ago. It was early morning and I was walking through that forest where your rainbow-manned friend found me. I came upon a bear that had its back legs trapped beneath a rock-slide. It must have been there for some time, several days at least, and it was hungry and thirsty. I don’t much like bears, they’re dangerous, but I had to do something. I know what it’s like to be responsible for a death; it tears a part of you away, knowing what you’ve done. If I didn’t help the bear I would be responsible for its death. I took out my canteen and poured the water into a bowl that I had, and pushed it toward the bear. The bear lapped up the water, but I had to get its legs free. I maneuvered a fallen branch beneath one of the larger rocks and levered it away. I had to repeat the process to probably a dozen more rocks, but apparently the bear was just too weak to pull its legs free. I had to help it pull its legs free, but I also knew it would attack me if I got close, so I tried to use the branch, but couldn’t wedge it between the rocks and the bear’s legs. I had to do it myself. I know herbs well, so I found some Tartolette mushrooms and mixed those with Merchia flowers I had...”

“But that would make you numb!” Fluttershy interrupted, “Oh I’m sorry Vagabond. I didn’t mean to interrupt you, but why would you do that? It’s dangerous. Any herbalist knows not to use that combination unless you’re in dire need. It will erase all feeling and make your mind addled.”

“You are correct, but that was the effect I wanted. I mixed the mushrooms and flowers with what little water I had left in my canteen, which made about a quart of the potion. I drank it all. It worked well, I couldn’t feel a thing, which I would need when the bear attacked me. I had to be close to pull its legs out, and I couldn’t blame an animal for behaving like an animal. I moved as quickly as I could. I ran in and felt the thumps as the bear attacked me. I just ignored it and concentrated on my work and pulled its leg free, then I ran to its other side and pulled that leg free as well. I tried to take to the sky as soon as I was done, but when I tried to fly, I didn’t move. I panicked and ran from the, now free, bear. I looked back over my shoulder to see if the bear was giving chase. My eyes fell upon the bear feasting on my wings. It must have torn them off when I exposed each side of my body to the bear when I pulled its legs free. I stopped and wrapped my blanket around myself before I regained any feeling. I couldn’t find a stream or river and my canteen was empty, but I kept walking.” Vagabond paused and looked back over his flank, “I am curious. Why did you not remove my saddle bags?” he asked.

Fluttershy looked chagrined,
“Oh, I’m sorry Vagabond, but Dr. Mend felt around under them and said there were no injuries. Besides we know the normal way of carrying saddlebags. The way you are wearing them is concealing your cutie mark. We didn’t want to be rude, if you didn’t want anyone to see it, travelers do that sometimes.” She said.

Vagabond looked slightly more at ease,
“Thank you.” he said. Turning back to Pinkie Pie, Vagabond continued,
“Any way, I would have made a poultice for myself, but I couldn’t find water or the materials. I was still numb and my head still didn’t work right. I just kept walking like a zombie, until your friend found me. Does that make any sense Miss Pie?” Vagabond asked.

Pinkie looked thoughtful for a moment then perked up,
“I think so.” she said, then commented, “At least the bear got to eat.”

Fluttershy squeaked in horror,
“Oh, Pinkie Pie, what a terrible thing to say.” Fluttershy scolded.

Vagabond’s face was completely impassive for several tense moments.

Slowly a grin split his face and he began to chuckle,
“That is the funniest thing I’ve heard in a long time.” he said. The chuckles turned into a full-bodied laugh. This laugh though, was rich and full, a thing which had a flicker of actual life to it. Vagabond winced in pain, but didn’t stop,
“Miss Pie, . . . you have . . . an amazing . . . gift.” he said through fits of laughter, when he could get a breath.

Pinkie only smiled and said,
“Yeah, I get that. You can call me Pinkie by the way. All that ‘Miss Pie’ stuff was making me feel old.” she giggled.

A heavy knock reverberated throughout Fluttershy's house, originating from the front door. Pinkie Pie literally bounced up from a sitting position up to her hooves and from there to the door in two simple motions. Fluttershy rose and trotted into the kitchen, disappearing through the doorway. Pinkie opened the door,
"Hi Big Macintosh!" she said, stepping aside to let him in.

Vagabond had never seen such a large pony. Big Mac looked more like one of the legendary Clydesdales. Big Mac clopped over to the couch and looked Vagabond up and down appraisingly. Vagabond couldn't help himself,
"You're huge." he said looking up.

The enormous earth pony chewed a piece of wheat and simply replied,
"Ayup, and you're injured. Mah sister sent me over here to help ya out, and keep an eye on ya." Big Mac said.

Vagabond nodded,
"She probably thinks I'll try to hurt Fluttershy."

"Ayup. Any idea why she'd think that?" Big Mac asked.

Pinkie Pie bounced up beside Big Mac waving a hoof,
"Oh, oh, I know!" she said.

Big Mac raised an eyebrow so Pinkie continued,
"Vagabond-here-though-that-isn't-his-real-name-and-he-can't-use-his-real-name-until-he's-forgiven-he-hates-himself-for-something-he-did-and-he's-afraid-he'll-accidentally-hurt-someone-again-so-he-laughed-real-evil-and-gave-this-big-scary-speech-about-it-he-acts-like-he's-all-like-tough-and-stuff-but-I-think-he's-actually-nice-does-that-make-sense-to-you-Big-Mac?" Pinkie machine-gunned off without a breath.

Big Mac looked thoughtfully at Vagabond, for a moment, then seemed to come to a decision,
"Ayup." He said. Pinkie Pie burst into a fit of the giggles.

Vagabond's eyes had gone cross while Pinkie had been chattering, he shook his head and uncrossed his eyes,
"I hate to impose, but I need to use the bathroom. Would you help me get there?" Vagabond asked, obviously embarrassed.

Big Mac simply said,
"Ayup."