

Orgott Island
by Nivrad00

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The cry of a bird jolted me into consciousness.

My eyes shot open, but I immediately squinted in the blinding light. Forms shifted slowly in the whiteness, taking a moment to come into focus. I saw tropical branches, swaying to and fro; clouds meandering above; a green bird, on top of my head, peering down at me with intelligent eyes. I sluggishly moved a hoof, setting the avian off in a flurry of feathers. Its caws faded into the distance, until all I could hear was the rhythm of ocean waves.

I slowly set my front hooves onto the sand. Blinking furiously, I willed my vision to finish adjusting. Rubbing my face with a foreleg didn't help, only managing to transfer irritating little particles of sand to my eyes. My mouth felt like it was full of cotton and my hooves felt shaky. I tried to remember, but my brain was like static. Instead, I looked around.

I was on a rugged beach, more stone than sand, with a turbulent ocean stretching far before me. Off in the distance, past endless iterations of foam-topped waves, a gray line separated the horizon from the blue sky. Perhaps fog? Behind me, a sparse forest, distant rock structures above the treeline.

My thoughts were whirling, incoherently, and the first thing I thought of was that vacation we had been planning. The beach, I knew, was her favorite place in the world. The favorite place of a special pony... whose name I couldn't quite remember at the moment. I mean, I knew she was important, but I couldn't procure a name within the fuzz that drowned out my thoughts.

I looked down, next. I was covered with sand, and I felt sweaty and disgusting. Was I hungover? We didn't usually drink, but sometimes we would get carried away when we hung out with... well, with some other friends.

The seconds ticked by, while the scratchy sand and the rough wind conspired to chafe my skin. My memories refused to return. Eventually, I worked up the will to rise on four unsteady hooves and take a couple steps. One step at a time, slowly, lest I topple over.

A movement caught my attention from behind the trees. I looked in its direction, inquisitively.

“Hey—” my voice, barely more than a croak, cracked as soon as it exited my mouth. I coughed and spit. My saliva tasted disgusting. “Anypony there?”

I ventured into the shade of the tall boughs, where the cry of insects and a subtle humidity hung in the air. For a long time I seemed alone, but with a sharp turn of my head, I spotted dark green foliage shake unnaturally. “Who’s there?” I repeated, a little crossly, regaining some of my energy.

“You shouldn’t be here...” I heard distantly, a whisper, almost drowned out by the distant waves.

I backed up slightly, my irritation disappearing in favor of trepidation. Maybe I should have stayed out in the open. “Shouldn’t be where? Why?” I demanded, backing towards the beach. My horn lit up, picking a heavy branch from the sandy ground and levitating in front of me.

“Get away... while you still can!”

Now the voice grew shrill, and I was convinced it came from the other direction. I looked back and forth wildly, eyes wide.

“Ooooooooo!”

Now it sounded like a foal imitating a ghost. *This is getting ridiculous*, I thought dismissively, but I couldn’t muster a convincing tone even in my own head.

I waved my makeshift weapon threateningly. “A—alright, who are you? What is this place? Answer me and I’ll leave!”

No response.

I swallowed my nervousness and stuck my head over a spiny bush, looking for the speaker. Nothing but more greenery.

“Look, I’m tired and irritated and sore,” I said, trying to inject my words with confidence despite my shaky voice, “and I don’t have time for—”

“BOO!”

I shrieked and swung my branch without thought, realizing a moment too late that my enemy was only a small white filly. Regret flashed in my mind. Then the wood passed through her like thin air, and I changed my mind again.

“AHHHHHHHH!” I shrieked, tossing the branch aside and sprinting away as fast as I could. Before I took more than five steps, my sluggish hooves caught an obstacle and I crashed to the dirt. I kicked out with my legs, but couldn’t find purchase on the sandy earth. Panicking,

convinced I was in mortal danger, I wrapped my forelegs around a jutting root like a child clutching a teddy bear and offered my prayers to the Royal Sisters.

“Oh! I’m sorry, are you okay?” said the filly, her voice getting closer. “Are you hurt?”

A couple moments trickled by, but no mortal danger was forthcoming. “Uhh,” I whimpered, cracking my eyes open. The white filly stared at me with concerned pink eyes, and I felt confusion replacing blind panic. In retrospect, maybe I’d been a bit too presumptuous.

I soon realized her hooves weren’t touching the ground. She didn’t have wings. She was just... floating. I slowly scooted away.

“I didn’t mean to scare you! Well, I kinda did, but I didn’t mean for—well, nevermind. Are you hurt?”

I took a moment to process my thoughts. My brain was honestly too numb to feel the pain from the fall. “No, I’m okay.”

“I’m sorry. My name is Nadir. We’re not supposed to let strangers near the ruins.”

I slowly rose to my feet again. “Okay.”

“Sorry. Stay away from this area please! Bye!” Nadir scampered away from me, though her little legs never touched the ground.

I shook my head groggily. “Wait. Wait. Where am I?”

“Orgott Island!” said a fading voice.

“...Island? I’m on an island? How do I get off?”

“Try flying!”

“Hey-hey-hey! Not everyone has magic floaty powers!” I started chasing after Nadir. “Hold on!”

My hooves pounded the dirt as I tore through the greenery. Ferns whipped me face as I passed, and I stumbled numerous times on rocks and roots. Before long, breathing hard, I had to admit I had lost her. The wilderness had crept in closer, making the path intolerably dense. The ghostly filly had probably flown right through it.

Maybe there was a town or something on Orgott Island, some place with a port. I pushed through the vines as I speculated. Or a bridge, maybe. Eventually I’d get home. Oh, a long

soak in my bathtub sounded great about now. Maybe I'd stop by my friend's house, the important one whose name I couldn't remember, and we could get lunch at that restaurant with the wonderful lily soup. Or, maybe it was daisy soup. What was it again?

The static in my head refused to go away, and now I felt the beginnings of a headache. Okay, this was bothering me now. I closed my eyes, trying to visualize the scene. A bowl of soup, rich with the taste of lilies—or daisies—and across from me a pony. A mare. I willed myself to see her mane, her face, but they wouldn't come into focus. I only recalled the taste of something sweet. I stomped on the floor, frustrated. I knew that this pony, whoever she was, was extremely important to me, but I couldn't recall her voice or her body or her personality or her *name*.

I opened my eyes, shook my head, and stomped forward once more. What was wrong with me?

I saw the empty air a moment before my hoof slipped off the edge. My weight lurched forward, terror coursed through my body, and I toppled over a cliff edge.

I screamed wordlessly, flailing my legs. The world streaked by me and the wind buffeted my body. Oh Celestia, I was going to die here on this godforsaken island and I couldn't even remember my best friend's name and—

Something solid arrested my fall, and I found myself soaring in the opposite direction. I choked on my scream. Wide-eyed, shaking, I glanced at the severe-looking pegasus that had just caught me. He returned the gaze coolly with a pair of amber eyes.

He deposited me back on top of the cliff, where I immediately collapsed, shaking, to the ground.

"You shouldn't be here," he said in a gravelly voice.

"I'm sorry, I... just... give me a moment..." I gasped, my cheek pressed against the dirt. "Just.. almost died, here." It took several minutes for my convulsions to settle, and I was left slowly breathing in and out on the forest floor. I would have stayed there longer if the pegasus hadn't started prodding me.

"Come on. Get up. What's your business here?"

Pushy. I struggled to my hooves, then looked my savior in the face. The cyan pegasus cut a striking figure, with a gray mane, a disinterested stance, and a disapproving look in his eyes. He wore a faded jacket, lined on the inside with fur, and a white scarf.

"Look, we ain't got all day. I left my post for this."

He might have saved my life, but I felt the urge to give him a good buck in the teeth.

“I’m just trying to find my way home,” I muttered.

“And where’s that?”

I paused, awkwardly. “Well. Uh. The more important question is... where am I?”

I took a good look over the cliff for the first time, and my jaw dropped. It was a humongous valley, crumbling walls cut vertically out of chalky stone and engraved with fading symbols. Stone doorways led into the walls, while winding staircases, bridges, and broad platforms wound into the deep, combining in intricate geometries like an abstract sculpture.

“What is this place?” I whispered.

The blue pegasus harrumphed and trotted in front of me, spreading his wings to block the view. “Your kind aren’t welcome here. Look, missy. Here’s what you’re gonna do. You’re gonna turn your little self around. You’re gonna start walking. And you’re gonna forget all about this place. Kapish?”

My headache was returning in full force. I decided to ignore his condescending voice and ducked under his wing to get a better view. “Who built this? It must have taken years.”

“Hey! Ya hear me?” demanded the pegasus, moving his head to meet my gaze.

I took a step back and crossed my front legs. “Look, I don’t want to be here any more than you want me to. I’m stranded. I don’t know what’s going on. But if there’s ponies down there, it sure as heck beats wandering around the forest—”

“I said leave,” the pegasus growled.

“Well where in Tartarus am I supposed to go?” I retorted.

“Why should I care? Back to whichever heathen tribe you wandered out of.”

“Hey!”

“Now get outta here!” He stepped forward and shoved me away from the crumbling architecture with both hooves.

“Whoa!” I stumbled, but caught my footing. “Okay, that’s it.” I stomped forward, pushing by the ornery stallion and heading straight to a flight of stone stairs.

“Wouldn’t do that if I were you,” he warned. I had taken a few steps when the pegasus suddenly blocked the path in front of me. I hadn’t even seen him move. “You unicorns always think you know best. Why don’t you try listening to somepony else for a change?”

His smug voice made my anger flare. I narrowed my eyes. “Outta my way, punk.” Lowering my head, I charged forward, intending to shove him out of the way. However, right before impact, the blue pegasus disappeared. Momentum carried me forward, and I tumbled forward onto the landing below. My horn bashed into the stone, sending stars into my vision.

“Ow!” I held my pounding head. “How did you do that?” A pair of blue forelegs grasped me under my shoulders and lifted me off the ground. “Hey! Leggo!”

I squirmed until the pegasus deposited me ungracefully in the dirt, back where I had started. “Done yet?” he asked, crossing his forelegs as he flapped above the ground.

I struggled to my feet and stared at him defiantly, but I was in no condition for more scuffling. A few angry seconds passed. Then, I turned around and swiftly stalked away from the ruins, ignoring the loud protesting of the indignant little pony in my head. Jerk.

Soon I sat in a sandy clearing, trying to massage my headache away. The leaves cast dappled shadows over my body. Insects chattered constantly, uncaring of my plight. Nature as always.

What was wrong with my head? Why couldn’t I remember anything? My memories had become like a foggy mire, any distinct shape obscured behind the shifting layers. I recalled the taste of something sweet, tantalizing me, swirling around memories just beyond my reach. I shut my eyes tightly and focused... willing a vision to pop up in my mind’s eye. The seconds ticked by, but I refused to give up.

Finally, something. Something sweet....

A smooth voice....

A vague silhouette....

A loud bird call made me jump. A green bird was perched by my side, looking up inquisitively.

“Argh! Clucking birds!” I waved my hooves wildly, setting it off into the air. With a frustrated cry, I kicked a nearby tree. Leaves lazily fluttered down beside me. Then I stood there, breathing hard, as the insects chattered heedlessly.

Finally, I heaved a long sigh and dropped down on the ground, resting my head on a patch of grass. I’d lost it.

What about... my name?

I shot upright. I knew my name. It was obvious. I opened my mouth to say it, but nothing came out.

“My name is...” I prompted, hoping to trick my mind into giving me the answer. “My name is... Lily,” I spit out. No, that felt wrong. “My name is Daisy. Blossom. Sunflower.” I looked at the color of my mint-green hoof, hoping for inspiration. “Minty. Meadow? Leafy? Grassy?” Panic rose in my chest. Those weren’t even names.

A fearful thought froze my heart. My cutie mark. The symbol that defined my life, that gave me purpose when I had nothing else.

I didn’t remember what it was.

I slowly turned my head, terrified of what I would see, and my breath caught in my throat. Oh, no no no. This was wrong. This was so, so very wrong. I checked my other flank, stood up, hyperventilated. Everything was gone. I didn’t know who I was. I was nopony. Unbidden, a quiet scream escaped my throat, and I pranced in place.

“Who am I?” I whimpered, but the forest did not respond. “Who am I?!” I demanded. My voice disappeared into the dense, uncaring foliage. I’d never felt so alone before. I had to get out of here. I had to—I had to—

“Hey, miss?” came a voice. I froze as I noticed a pair of pink eyes staring out from the trees. “Are you okay?”

There was a long silence as I heaved in and out. “Uh, yeah. I’m okay,” I lied. Nadir slowly floated out in front of me with a wary look on her face. I didn’t blame her. I looked like a crazy pony.

I took a good look at the filly for the first time. Though she floated supernaturally, she was fully opaque. She had pink wavy hair and a concerned look in her eyes.

“I saw you talking with Windseeker,” she said. “I’m sorry about that....”

“He’s a jerk,” I huffed.

“...But you should really stay away from the ruins.”

“Okay.” I looked her straight in the eyes, challenging her. “Why?”

The filly shrugged. "Iunno. Father says all unicorns are mean and selfish."

"What?!"

"And... short-tempered."

I saw Nadir back away, and I realized I probably wasn't helping my case. I sat back down with a sigh. "Okay, but... I mean, not *all* unicorns are like that. You can't say that about an entire race of ponies."

Nadir shrugged again. "I dunno. You seem alright. I've never actually met a unicorn before!"

I pondered for a moment. "It would be okay if I was just... visiting, right?"

"Hmmm...." Nadir tilted her head, as if in thought.

"I, uh. My sister lives here! I just want to visit her."

"Oh!" Nadir perked up. "What's her name?"

"Oooh, ummm..." I said, too quickly. I was an only child. I really needed to stop my mouth from getting ahead of my thoughts. "Raspberry... Cake."

"Raspy has a sister?" she squeaked.

My mind blanked for a moment at my luck. Celestia must have been watching over me.

"Yeah! That's me, haha."

Nadir hopped up and down, which was odd, since she didn't touch the floor. "That's so neat! And you're a unicorn, too! Cool."

"So you'll let me in?" I grinned widely.

"Oh, I'm not allowed to do that."

My face fell.

"But... uh..." Nadir spoke slowly, quietly. "There's a... secret passage. We can use that." Her face gradually lit up. "It's perfect! You can get in and see your sister, and Father will never find out!"

My grin returned.

“Come on, it’s this way.” Nadir quickly soared through the trees.

“Whoa, wait up! No floaty powers, remember?” I trotted to the edge of the clearing, but took an uneasy glance at my flank before I entered the thicket of plants.

Just as before... it was completely blank.

I was determined to get some answers, and Celestia help anypony who got in my way.

“What is this place?”

My voice echoed in the dark, cavernous chamber, coming back to me in a mocking reply.

“What is this place? What is this place? What is this place?”

“It’s called the catacombs,” said Nadir quietly, floating at my side. “I don’t go down here a lot. It’s creepy.”

Each of my hoofsteps resounded through the air as the sound waves bounced and multiplied. Somewhere, water was dripping. The only light in the chamber was my horn, which glowed gently with green light.

I approached one of the rock walls, examined the blocky runes inscribed in long rows by the light of my horn. Much of it had been chipped off, others obscured by mold. I craned my head upward, but I couldn’t catch sight of the ceiling.

“What is it for?”

“Iunno.”

“Are there any ponies down here?”

Nadir took a moment to respond. “Maybe.” She floated off through a gigantic doorway. “This way.”

I made a face as I stepped into a stale puddle. Much of the floor here was submerged under water. “Ugh. Floating would be really helpful about now.”

“Why don’t you float, then?”

I rolled my eyes. “Not everyone can *float*, Nadir.”

“All spirits can float,” scoffed the filly.

“I’m not a spirit. I’m a pony.” I stepped gingerly through the water. “Is that what you are? A spirit?”

Nadir gave me a funny look. “You hit your head pretty hard earlier. Are you feeling okay?”

A loud crash from behind nearly made me jump out of my fur. “Luna’s mane!” I spun and surveyed the empty chamber. I turned my head, trying to see behind the massive pillars. “What was that?” I asked Nadir. When no answer came, I looked over my shoulder. “Nadir? Hey?”

The white filly was nowhere to be seen.

I heard the scurrying of hooves. With a gulp, I slowly backed away from the commotion, putting my back to the wall. “I—I’m a unicorn! I know attack spells!” I sputtered. I didn’t, actually, but they didn’t need to know that.

“Hello?” I heard Nadir’s welcome voice and turned quickly. She sounded a bit anxious as well. “I’m over here, silly.” She motioned with her hoof, and disappeared into a corridor. Forcing my breathing to calm, I hurried after, splashing up water as I went.

I worriedly checked behind us as I caught up to the floating filly. “Nadir... did you hear that?”

“Yeah,” she whispered. “Don’t worry, we’re almost there.”

For several long, tense moments, the only sound was the humming of my magic and the splashing of my hooves. Even the usually talkative filly was silent. Finally, we emerged into a chamber lit dimly by cracks in the ceiling, and I extinguished the light on my horn. My eyes widened.

The wall opposite us, beyond several pillars, held a humongous double door decorated with carvings of intricate form. Though the cave walls around it were cracked and irregular, the door was cut precisely and each detail was pristine. Deliberate. Stark. Something about it inspired awe. Almost reverently, I trotted closer to the rock structure and examined the flowing artwork. I touched with one hoof the seam where the two doors met. Curious, I pushed as hard as I could, but it was as solid as a boulder.

“Where does it go?” I wondered aloud.

I heard Nadir squeak behind me, and I spun around. The room was empty.

Uh oh.

“Uh, Nadir?” I stepped towards the middle of the room. “Nadir! Okay, I’m all done looking at the door. Where are you?”

The deep voice that responded definitely did not belong to the white filly. “You are not welcome here, unicorn.”

In Celestia’s name, was everypony here a racist? I strained my eyes, but I could see no one in the shadows. I spotted a stone staircase nearby and started creeping towards it. “S—show yourself,” I demanded, my voice much higher than intended. I coughed, then tried again. “Show yourself. *Or else.*”

My half-hearted threat didn’t seem very effective. Hoofsteps raced to my left, and I sharply turned my head. I tried to breath steadily, but it did nothing to calm my racing heart.

Something lunged at me. Screaming like a lunatic, I ducked instinctively, and my assailant soared over my head. I dashed towards the staircase and didn’t dare look behind me as I leaped up several steps at a time, reached the top, turned onto a corridor, randomly chose doorways to gallop through. Thank the Royal Sisters, the light was growing brighter!

After what seemed like miles of staircases and hallways, I emerged into a long corridor lit by torches, unlike the others. Skidding on the stone, I caught my bearings and galloped at full speed towards the normal-sized stone door on the other end. A quick glance behind me saw a gray figure in pursuit; it would be foolish to stop now. With a deep breath, I slammed both front hooves into the door and shoved it open.

I stumbled out and was immediately blinded by the bright sun. I paid no heed and continued anyways. Soon my eyes could make out shapes: blue sky above, some houses with thatched roof... off in the distance where I expected to see the horizon, there was a chalky stone wall inscribed with runes. I was in the valley from earlier!

It was then I noticed the dozens of ponies, all who turned their heads at the desperate looking unicorn with that had blindly walked out into the middle of their town.

That was the last thing I saw before something hard hit my head.

I dreamed of something sweet. The lingering taste was still on my tongue when I awoke.

I immediately sat up, wary of my surroundings. I was on a small cot in a small room, furnished by a sink on a wooden countertop and crude boxes with red crosses painted on them. A yellow-orange colored earth pony gently snoozed on a couch, wearing a white uniform with a red cross. Next to her, a stocky gray stallion sat on the floor. His severe gaze was trained on me. I looked back at him silently.

There was a throbbing pain in the back of my head. Tentatively, I reached up with my hooves and felt cloth strips wrapped lengthwise around it. My skull had *really* not fared well since I arrived here.

“Well. Hello,” I finally said to the gray earth pony. He didn’t respond, but my voice roused the nurse pony from her nap. She yawned, looked up, and brightened.

“Oh, you’re awake!” She hurried over to my side. “Sit down, sit down. You should rest.”

I complied, slowly, still groggy. “Alright,” I replied.

“I’ll let you know, I haven’t treated many unicorns before,” she said. “Let’s check the injury. Turn your head?” I gave her access to my bandages, and she carefully peeled it off. “I wasn’t sure how to treat the bruising around your horn, so I hope it’s not serious.”

“What happened to me?” I asked, wincing as she prodded a tender area.

“Generally, you were dehydrated and exhausted,” she said, very business-like. “You also had *significant* cranial trauma.” She glared at the gray pony.

“She was sneaking into the ruins,” he grumbled.

I recognize his voice from the catacombs. My eyes narrowed instinctively. “Or I could have been *lost*.”

“You know attack magic,” he said. “You could have been a terrorist.”

“I don’t—” oh, wait. “Well. You could have *asked* me first.”

“Nevermind that,” said the nurse, moving to block the stallion from my view. “My name is Amber Light. I’m the physician here in the ruins, and I am prescribing *tons* of rest and quiet. Starting now.”

“I need to take her to Azimuth,” rumbled the guard pony.

The nurse glared at him. “She’s not going anywhere, Boulder.”

“I feel fine, actually,” I lied, sliding to the ground. I was eager to get some answers.

“No no no—” Amber Light patted the bed. “I’ll tell you when you’re fine. Get back into bed.”

The guard pony cleared his throat. “She’s a prisoner. I’m supposed to take her to see Azimuth as soon as she wakes.”

“Does Azimuth not care about the health of this poor mare?” Amber said, sharply.

“How should I know? All I know is that my orders are to take her to go see Azimuth—”

Amber started talking over the stallion. “Nonsense, she needs rest, and she isn’t leaving my sight until—”

“I don’t think that will be necessary,” spoke a calm voice. The banter immediately ceased, and we all turned our heads. A large, white earth pony stallion, adorned by a simple purple robe, pushed through the door. His face was creased with the lines of experience, and his body was built widely and solidly, like he could pick me up and toss me out the window without breaking a sweat. He walked with an unhurried gait.

“Oh! Your highness!” exclaimed Amber, kneeling before him.

“Your highness,” echoed the gray pony.

The stallion nodded gently to the two ponies. “Thank you, Amber, Boulder, for watching over our guest.”

He then turned towards me, and a little jitter ran through my heart. I didn’t understand it at first. Though his face was neutral, his unwavering gaze bothered me. It was like he was trying to read my mind.

“And you must be the unicorn that’s stirred up so much trouble around here.”

I felt small next to him, like a twig beside a mountain, which at any moment could crush me under an avalanche of stone. “Uh huh,” I said, slowly, meekly.

“My name is Azimuth.” His voice was slow, deliberate. He held out a hoof, which I reached out and shook after a moment’s delay. “What may I call you?”

For a moment I considered telling him the truth, but I felt averse to admitting any sort of weakness.

“...Mint Leaf,” I said.

It was then I noticed Nadir’s small figure, peering past the doorframe. She caught my gaze, but withdrew until I could barely see her eyes.

“And why have you come to our little village?”

I tilted my head. “I’m just... looking for a way off this island.”

“Oh?” Azimuth left the world hanging in the air, tense.

“Yeah, like... a boat. Plane, maybe, I dunno.”

Azimuth shook his head and chuckled. “You must be new here.”

Indignation rose in my chest. “Excuse me?”

“We don’t get many newcomers around these parts. Come, let me show you around the village.” He turned, ignoring me altogether.

I decided then and there I didn’t like this stallion. Whatever. I’d get my answers eventually.

I trotted after him, much to the dismay of Amber. I saw her hold up a hoof with wide eyes, as if wanting to protest, but thinking better of it. Come to think of it, the nurse was the first pony I’d met here that was looking out for my well-being. I gave her a sheepish smile, mouthed *thank you*, and hurried after the white stallion.

I emerged outside, and for the first time got a good look at the town. “Welcome to Stone Village,” said Azimuth, pacing down a brick road. “The haven of the earth ponies and the centerpiece of the ruins.”

The cottages and buildings, many of which were also made of rock, were more numerous than I first anticipated. Stone Village was situated on a large plateau of gray stone and thin earth, deep down in the valley-like ruins and open to the light of the sun. Where the ground met the valley wall, large archways and diverging stairways led to an underground section of the town. Earth ponies of all shapes and sizes trotted across the pathways, many stopping to bow reverentially to Azimuth. For the most part, the white stallion ignored them. Others stopped to stare at me—a bit rude, actually—which I pointedly ignored as well.

“The ancient passageways of the ruins go deep into the earth, many of them abandoned for centuries. Small establishments exist underground, but most of my little ponies like to live out in the sun.”

“How do you get food down here?” I asked, trailing behind him.

“Our farmlands are to the south of the ruins,” he answered without looking at me, “but a large part of our diet grows in the dampness of the caves.”

“Like... mushrooms?” I said.

“Indeed.”

I stuck out my tongue when the stallion wasn't looking. Mushrooms were disgusting.

Ahead I spied a large plaza. Stalls and shops were set up around the perimeter, occupied by ponies who hawked various wares. “Sweet, sweet maple candy for sale!” called a nearby voice, and my head turned without volition. I spotted a beige mare, selling small packets of wrapped goods. “Made with real tree sap! Get them before they're gone!” Soon, she passed out of view.

Nearby rose a cracked clock tower of gray stone. Though the clock face looked to be in good condition, the hands did not move. I looked at Azimuth inquisitively.

“The clock requires unicorn magic to function,” he said, simply. Honestly, it sounded like I was the only unicorn in all of Stone Village.

“Well,” I said, carefully. “Your town is neat, and all.” I donned a hopefully convincing grin. “Really! Seems like a great place to live!”

“Thank you,” he said, casting me an unreadable glance.

“But, uh, I'm kinda anxious to see some of my friends and family again. So. You know.” I shrugged, casually. “How would a pony, hypothetically, get back to the mainland from here?”

“You cannot,” Azimuth said, calmly, as if commenting on the weather.

I stopped walking. “Excuse me?”

“Your place is here, now.” He turned his attention on me once more. “Not in Stone Village, of course. You do not belong with the ponies of the earth and stone. But the cities of the mountains will gladly receive you.”

“What are you talking about?” I gave him a look, crossed between incredulous and indignant.

Our discussion was interrupted by a high-pitched yelp and a crash from behind. Turning around, I saw vegetables rolling across the street, a pile of crates in disarray, and a vender pony angrily yelling at a meek white filly.

“Nadir?” I asked.

She noticed my gaze, eeped, and hid behind the pony’s stall. It was like the ghostly filly couldn’t decide whether to be corporeal or not.

“Nadir,” echoed Azimuth in a deep rumble, his voice laced with command. After a moment, Nadir poked her head out from behind the stall.

“Yes, father?”

show Nadir going against Azimuth’s wishes