

Foreword

I'm going to admit that this year was tough for me. I found myself wasting so much time worrying about my writing, I barely posted anything. That's why I look forward to the scribble dump every year. It lets me go into the new year with a fresh start. Looking back, I realize how much time I spent on My Little Pony fanfics, despite a promise to stop working on them so much. I don't know what my plans are for next year, but I hope for the best.

- Reed

Ideas

Not all of my ideas even get to an outline. Here are some of my ideas that have no stories to go with them.

- Traversing a 3d printed city as it's being printed, and only figuring it out when the macro pulls it off the printing bed.
- A repairman(human) is called to the house of an anthro gilf. She is much larger and taller than him. They hook up right after he fixes what he was called for.
- Micro Femboy Hooters but it's in a plastic dollhouse.
- You shrink every time you're squeezed. At first, it starts out small. A bear hug from a friend makes you feel woozier than usual. Was he always that tall? Then, you get caught up in the middle of a group hug. You could've sworn your feet were dangling in the air. It becomes VERY apparent when your mouse boyfriend, that was only as head shorter than you, now lords over you. Almost 18 inches taller than you. All you can see is his chest when you look straight at him. He looks down at you, and has a thought. He grabs your hands and squeezes.
- A man shrinks anytime he gets skin on skin contact.
- MDF(Micro Dom Finder). Hookup app for those wanting a small dom. Story of a fox that uses the app. Have app profiles in the story. Vero as app founder.
- Jason and Splenda meet up. Shenanigans ensue.
- A man ends up shrunk inside a dollhouse. The micros who live there, come home. Now he has to hide from them.
- Individual is shrunk by their gym trainer, and has to survive their trainer as their workout.
- A tiny human ends up in Equestria. Rainbow finds him floating in a mug of cider. She drinks him out, and realizes he tastes delicious! Before she can swallow, Fluttershy forces her to spit him out. She takes him to her cottage to take care of him. The next day, Fluttershy leaves for the market. Rainbow goes into the cottage. She tries to catch the human to eat him, but he's crafty. It basically becomes an episode of Tom and Jerry.
- A strange artifact shrinks a man, and a series of events sends him to the garbage dump across the city. Luckily, he understands animals now. The local stray dogs agree to help the tiny man, in exchange for buying them steaks. The stray cats find out about the man. Now it's a race to get the artifact before cats can use it to shrink all humans.

Incomplete Stories

A chat with the Dean (A story with Jason where I tried to establish his potion lore)

Jason Yenara hummed to himself as the elevator rose. He looked over to the human security guard that was escorting him. The guy kept making sad attempts at subtle glances. Despite being a full head shorter than most humans, the hyena might as well have been a macro with how nervous they were around him. His heaving chest was a good attention grabber. A breast size they couldn't achieve naturally. Teasing both men and women with the 'girls' always made for good fun.

"If you wanna feel 'em, I won't tell anyone." he said with a smirk.

The human's cream skin quickly became red after Jason said that. They were real prudish compared to their anthro counterparts in society. Much like the security guard in the elevator with him, all they need to loosen up were the right words. The human bit his lip in anticipation as his hands traveled up.

"Woah." he said as his hands sank into hyena flesh. "They feel like the real thing."

"With the work I put into the potion, I certainly hope so." Jason said.

"How big are they?" the mesmerized human asked.

"46P." Jason answered. "My permanent breast growth potions are three hundred dollars a piece."

"That's cheaper than the potion section at the grocery store." the human said as he continued to squeeze.

"Never go with store bought, sweetie." Jason said as his hand slipped between his breasts. "Apothecaries have stricter quality guidelines. My card."

A ding signified the doors would open. The security guard let go of Jason's breasts, and grabbed the business card. He slipped it into his pocket as the doors slid open. Jason walked out, and winked at the human.

"Seeya." he said as the human feebly waved back.

He made his way down the hall. The occasional student would try not to stare as they passed by. Some of the staff glared at him. Most just smiled. Despite being a college deep in the human district, Jason had a bit of a reputation here. In the world of independent potion-making, colleges were the best place for finding clients. Plenty of students that wanted to experiment with things they couldn't when living with their parents.

"Hey Shannon." Jason said as he came upon the brunette secretary. "Is the oh so wonderful dean in?"

"Yeah." she said. "She's pretty mad about this one. She might actually have you banned from the college grounds this time."

"Guess I'll have to turn up the charm." he said with a toothy grin.

Shannon rolled her eyes and smiled as Jason strolled into the dean's office. It was a plain office. Brown walls. Brown floor. Gray metal desk. The dean stared at the busty hyena in silence. Her white hair was pulled back into a tight bun. Her blue eyes and sagging skin were both showing her displeasure. Her tight lips were pulled into a grimace.

"Mornin' Dean Dineen." Jason said as he took a seat across from her. "How can I help one of my favorite humans today?"

"Mr. Yenara." Dineen said. "Once again, you were brought here to my office for an incident with your potions."

"I don't know what you're complaining about." he said. "Nothing broke. Nobody got hurt."

"My car was crushed." she said bluntly.

"Potion growth is covered under macro incidents in car insurance, which I know you have." Jason quickly answered. "Besides, I gave the student specific instructions to consume in small amounts. I can't be responsible for their inability to do so."

"Nonetheless." she said. "I think your continued access to college grounds should be reconsidered. Your continuous potion dealings have become a thorn in my side."

"Licensed independent apothecaries can do business on any public property at anytime." he said. "If this was a private college, you would have an argument."

"My point still stands." Dineen said. "You and your potions cause nothing but trouble."

"I cannot be responsible for the actions of my customers." Jason said. "However, I do realize that a lack of access to information on potion safety would be a cause for these incidents. Truly, a failing on the part of the college staff."

The frustration on Dineen's face almost made Jason crack up. Messing with her was far too easy. While some saw her as a stubborn old hag of a human, he knew she was just trying to do her job. Being human in a world of anthros was not easy. He couldn't blame her for being adverse to an anthro exposing her students to something they weren't ready for. Perhaps he could take it easier on her.

"Maybe that's the solution." he said. "Irresponsible potion consumption comes from a lack of knowledge on potions themselves. The information on potions that the public receives is usually from a multitude of biased sources. Companies that mass-produce low quality potions is the usual culprit. You also have content creators online that get sponsored by said companies. Independent apothecaries like myself have spent years, trying to undo the damage these corporations have done."

"How do you suggest we disseminate such information?" Dineen asked.

"The most direct method would be a seminar." Jason answered. "Though I'm pretty sure my apothecary guild has some pamphlets on potion safety I can hand out."

"It annoys me to say, but you're right." she said. "Potion safety is something my staff has fallen short on. Perhaps a seminar would be best. What date works for you?"

"Wait what?" Jason asked, suddenly caught off guard.

"Well, the anthro that does the most business with potions on campus would certainly be the perfect candidate." Dineen said. "The students already know you, and trust you."

"True." he said. "How about four PM saturday next week?"

"Good." she answered. "I'll make an announcement. I'm certain some professors will make it mandatory. A week and a half should be enough for any other students to make time."

"Then I best get started." Jason said as he stood up. "Got a lot of writing and research to do. You still have my number?"

"Unfortunately." Dineen answered. "My secretary will send the details when we have a lecture hall designated for you."

A Milf, a Dulf, and a human (A story to retcon my dulf OC into my milf Ocs boyfriend)

"I don't know why you're weirding out Jason." Pete said. "I thought you were cool with me moving out of the human district."

"Yeah. To your own place, or with me and my brother." Jason lamented. "Not with my mom and stepdad."

"Your folks offered it to me first." he said. "Plus, they want me to live there for free."

"I don't know if it's a good idea though." Jason said. "Self control around anthros isn't your strong suit."

"I control myself just fine." Pete argued.

"Petey." Jason said with a deadpan expression. "I remember summer last year when I walked out here in my basketball shorts and black bra. You had an erection so stiff, I had to suck you off three times to make it go down."

"Your point?" Pete asked.

"You wouldn't survive my parents." he answered. "I'm a 46P, and your forearm can disappear between my tits. My mom's a nine foot tall bunny, and her boobs are big enough to make me look flat. Your entire torso could hide between them. I can see you getting hard just hearing about it."

Pete looked down to see that he indeed was erect. Jason got out of his chair. He got down on his knees in front of his human friend. The hyena pulled his shirt up. His large, heavy breasts heaved out from their first layer of containment. Undoing the front hooks, they flopped freely. Making quick work of Pete's pants, an erect human penis was exposed to the open air. He pressed it between his breasts. He slowly rocked up and down, the penis is completely enveloped. As Pete moaned, Jason casually continued the conversation.

"I just don't want you jumping into the deep end before you're ready." he said.

Studying with Mom (An earlier attempt at establishing potion lore)

Jason yawned as he stretched. The hyena felt his back pop as he walked up the stairs. He was glad his brother closed up shop early on Sundays. Closing at four PM vs seven PM made such a difference. He was also glad to have gotten the cake deliveries done too. The amount of tips he got was pretty good as well.

He reached between his breasts as he topped the stairs. He propped them up with his left arm, while his right forearm disappeared between the massive mounds. He found the space where he had stuffed the wads of cash, and wrapped his fingers around all of it. With a good pull, the cash was freed. The hyena began to smooth out and count the bills as he made a quick left to the couch. He sat down next to his little brother, who was watching tv. Right now the news channel was doing its weather segment.

"Anything interesting on, Reed?" Jason asked as he continued to count his money. A lot of ones and fives. A few twenties.

"Not much." the younger hyena said. "I saw a news segment earlier about grandfathered apothecary laws being repealed today. I guess that means Mom has to get licensed to sell potions like you now."

"Most of my buddies at the magic shop figured it was comin'." he said. "Most of the grandfathered apothecaries are all either retiring, or already retired. Mom's in a weird spot, age-wise. Just a little younger than most of the older ones, but old enough to have been grandfathered in. You ready for her comin' by for a study session?"

"Given that she cooks for us every time she visits, of course I am." Reed said with a toothy grin. "She said she'll be here at five I think. Should be here soon."

"Ten minutes. Gives me enough time to get this money put away, and to go and get the study materials." Jason said as he stood up. "Wow. Two hundred bucks!"

"How much of it is from that horny old human downtown?" his little brother asked. "I saw his name on the delivery list."

"Fifty bucks, 'cuz I charged him ten bucks a squeeze." the hyena answered as he reached from below and groped his own breasts with his fingers.

Jason heard his brother chuckle as he walked to the hallway. A quick left turn, and he made his way to his bedroom door. He opened it, and sauntered in. He went to his desk on the right wall, and added today's tips to the felt bag in his left drawer. He needed to make a trip to the bank tomorrow. He needed to see how close he was to affording a commission from that cute leather worker at the local market. He really wanted to get a custom insert for properly storing potions when he carried them around between his breasts. Hearing the clinking of bottle on bottle was getting pretty annoying when driving around on the scooter.

The busty hyena scratched his head as he looked around his room. Computer desk behind him. Bed over to his right. Brewing station across from him. He walked over, and pulled out the small trunk below the polished wooden table. He popped the latch, and began to pull out what he needed. A number of books covering subjects from potion safety basics, to proper ingredient storage. He even pulled out his own notebook he always used for study when re-certification came up. He closed the trunk, and slid it back. He stood up, and held the book stack under his heaving chest. He made his way back to the main room.

"I'm not sure how much of modern potion-making Mom knows." Jason said as he walked to the dining table behind the couch. "We might have to cover the basics first."

"Doesn't she make potions for her friends?" Reed asked. "Also, I'm pretty sure she was the one that got you started in the first place."

"True, but I'm just trying to cover my bases." he answered as he placed the books down. "I'll just ask her when she gets here."

As if on cue, the loud buzz of the doorbell rang. Jason went over to the stairs, and quickly walked down. As he came to the bottom, he could see a looming frame filling the opaque glass. The size difference between the two brothers and their mom made family pictures always a challenge. The busty hyena opened the door. He was met with the midsection of a blue shirt that was tucked into blue jeans. He looked up.

Any onlooker would not think these two were related in the slightest. 'Spitting image of their father' she would say when talking about Jason or his little brother. A light brown rabbit. With a few dark brown spots on the hands, shoulders, feet, ears, and one on the right eye. A hulking nine foot frame that made her tower over both her sons. Jason's height of five foot three made him look like a child next to her. Reed looked like a toddler in comparison. A big smile looked down at him. Madison Ellis. Though he only called her by one name.

"Hey Mom." Jason said.

"Hello sweetie!" his mother said as she gleefully held a notebook in her hands. "Ready to study?"

"Oh you know it." he said with a grin. "Come on in."

Jason made his way up the stairs as his mother bent over to get in. She needed more room than he did. With a small grunt, she heaved her chest through the slightly too small doorway. If the hyena's bustyboy chest was large at 46P, his mother's was gargantuan at a size that made him feel a little flat in comparison. Unlike his potion-induced growth, hers were natural. Genes from grandma's side. It didn't take too many steps for her ears to be visible behind the railing. As she cleared the stairs, Jason looked up to see the tips of her ears grazing the ceiling. While the entrance was cramped for her, the main room was not.

"Hi Mom!" Reed said as he hopped off the couch and walked over.

"There's my Reed!" she said as she crouched down and reached for both her sons.

Both hyenas found themselves in the strong grip of their mother. She brought them into a hug as she stood up. Legs were dangling. Jason looked over to see the flex of a bicep. Despite their mother being in her sixties, she was still in shape. They were reminded every time she visited. The two sighed as they were put back on the ground.

"I'll head downstairs to the bakery so you two can get some quiet time for studying." Reed said. "I gotta finish some expense reports. Just text me when dinner's ready."

"Alright." Jason said. "We'll probably eat in an hour."

"Sounds good." he said as he turned the tv off.

Reed gave a wave as he walked down the stairs. Jason and his mother sat down at the table. She opened her notebook, and looked down at her son with a smile.

"Studying like this reminds me of my college days." she chuckled.

"Luckily, the certification exam isn't as tough as college exams." Jason said. "Though for fifty bucks per attempt, it's cheaper to get it first try."

"I remember you studying for the exam." she said. "I practically had to drag you to bed every night. Anyway, what does the test cover these days?"

"Sourcing, handling, and storage of ingredients." he began. "They'll also go over the handling, storage, and transportation of potions. These are the main subjects you'll want to know when you become a licensed apothecary. As for potion recipes, they'll cover the basics of ingredient interactions and their expected outputs."

"Sounds simple enough." she said. "At least we don't have to go over all potion types like in the early days of licensing. I wonder how newcomers get recipes after getting licensed."

"Most try online stuff first. Despite what the news articles say, internet potion recipes won't get you far." Jason said. "A reputable magic shop will carry books you can copy recipes from when you get licensed. Although getting recipes is a moot point for us, having apothecary ancestors and all. You still have that old book we've had in the family forever."

"That I do." she said. "That nice magic shop you go to offered to pay me to make a copy for their store."

Pokemon Uprising (a webcomic about pokemon rebelling and enslaving humans)

Premise

Mewtwo leads the pokemon uprising. Pokemon become the enemy. Green gets their Squirtle abducted by rebel pokemon. Now he has to traverse a world where humans are fighting pokemon, or are enslaved by them.

Characters

Green

The main character. Trying to find his Squirtle(Shelly), who was abducted by rebel pokemon.

Groups

Followers of Mewtwo

The pokemon that rebel against humans. They strongly believe he is the key to true freedom.

Followers of Mew

The pokemon that still side with humans.

Items

HM-Ball

A variant of pokeball designed to capture and enslave humans. It was invented by a brainwashed Professor Westwood the 5th. A human captured by an HM-Ball will be immediately under the control of pokemon.

Talking Collar

A special collar that any pokemon can wear to speak the human language. Worn by pokemon with any number of captured humans.

Arcs

= The war begins

= Finding the human resistance

Human slave wolfess master (was binge reading the TwoKinds webcomic and got this idea)

A medieval world where humans and anthro wolves are constantly at war over mana resources. If they're not raiding each others villages, they're enslaving survivors of those raids. Jay is the 19 year old human son of a famous slave collar forger. His village is raided, and he's the only survivor. As an act of cruelty, a wolf puts a powerful slave collar on Jay. A gift to his future wife. He gets taken to the nearest wolf outpost where he meets Adaina, the future wife of the prince that collared him. She thanks Prince Kahndeer for choosing such an ironically perfect human. A pack of brollics attack not long after he arrives, and Adaina gets taken down first. She is nearly drained of her life force mana. Jay grabs onto her, and she lets out a magic blast that takes out the brollic pack. His ability is quickly discovered after that. The wolves realize they're sitting on a near limitless mana supply, and decide to get Jay to the King as fast as possible. The closest mage that can teleport is a weeks walk. So the plan is for Adaina and Kahndeer to lead a small party to escort their new mana resource to the heart of the kingdom. Although the human won't stay a secret forever. Also, Adaina can't help but think the little guy is kinda cute.

Ability explanation

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Jay has a magic deformity. He can't expel mana, so he can't do spells. However, he can absorb mana. He passively absorbs mana day and night. Any spell he absorbs is broken down back into mana before it can do anything. He can share this mana with others by touching them with his hands.

Magic system

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Mana is naturally found in all living things, although the mana inside oneself is connected to their lifeforce. This is never used in spells, except in emergencies. In seemingly random places deep in the ground, mana will manifest as crystals of varying size. Said crystals can be used to perform spells. The lack of predictability in where they appear is what makes them so precious. The size of the individual casting a spell can determine how much mana is used. Bigger person means more mana needed for spells.

Wolves

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While humans are magically superior, wolves outmatch them physically. Their senses surpass humans by magnitudes. Their strength supercedes theirs. They tower over humans. Your average human will be at eye level with a wolf's upper abdomen. The taller wolves tend to be royal, or high ranking. They'll more than double a human's height. The wolf king will be enchanted with even more height. Humans come up to his knee. While they can perform the same spells as humans, they use up mana faster.

Other species

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Wolves and humans are the only ones at war with each other. The other species try to stay out of it. A multitude of anthro species. While they participate in the slave trade, none of them have the resources to be involved in the mana war. However, Jay changes their stance on the matter significantly.

Brollics

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When a living creature's death is not from natural causes, a bad thing happens if you don't burn their body. Their lifeforce mana gets trapped in their body. They come back to life, as rotting monsters that feed on mana to survive. These are brollics. They are a serious problem in this world.

Top 10 Ponies (Anon makes a list of his favorite ponies as a joke, and the list accidentally goes public)

1. Zecora
2. Big Mac

3. Applejack
4. Rainbow Dash
5. Maud Pie
6. Derpy
7. Twilight Sparkle
8. Luna
9. Shining Armor
10. Celestia

possible things the listed ponies do in reaction

- Celestia painting zebra stripes on herself
- Shining trying to avoid a grumpy Celestia
- Luna taunting her sister
- Twilight being Twilight for not being number 1
- Derpy hugging the human for giving her a spot
- Maud being confused why she was even chosen
- RD enjoying her position as top flyer
- AJ using her new popularity for her family business
- Mac enjoying his spot
- Zecora being the only humble one

Smuggled into Equestria (A man tries to hide in Equestria after smuggling himself in)

A human sees a visiting Princess Twilight, and thinks she's beautiful. He has to see her again. He hides in the hoofshoe of a guard(not a fun experience), and smuggles himself into Equestria. On Earth, the ponies at least TRIED to watch their step. In Equestria? He's dodging hooves left and right. He finds himself in what he thinks is a castle. After dodging massive Celestia hooves, he climbs onto an off-duty guard that's flying down to Ponyville. He remembered Twilight mention Ponyville as her home.

The guard meets up with Rainbow Dash for drinks at a Ponyville bar. He gets spotted by a drunken pony, but escapes before others see him. More dodging of hooves as he tries to find a hiding spot. He

ends up at the Carousel Boutique, where a towering dragon is trying to flirt with a white pony. He says he's picking up books to take back to Twilight. The man gets into the bag the books are in.

After a rough journey, he makes it. Though the dragon finds him quickly. Tom and Jerry type chase scene ensues. Owl joins in. He gets cornered before being saved by Twilight. She's taken aback by the human's story. Everything he went through. Just to see her. Give that her past requests to take a human home for experiments were denied, she decides to keep him her little secret. She imbues him with a durability spell after a day. It comes in handy when she accidentally steps on him a few times. She spends a few days in her home, just experimenting. Her friends meet the human when they come to check in on Twilight.

Celestia finds out about a human being smuggled into Equestria. Portal was supposed to set off an alarm, but didn't.(hiding in the hoofshoe did the trick) Now they're inspecting the homes of every pony that had been through the portal. Her friends argue over who gets to hide him at first, but they go with the human's suggestion of taking turns each day. At least until this blows over. Although a tracking spell makes things a little tougher.

Chapter list

- Phil(world build)
- Phil(into Equestria)
- Twilight(first meeting Phil in Equestria)
- Twilight(first day of testing, and durability spell)
- Twilight(Phil meets her friends)
- Fluttershy(Phil gets mothered by an overprotective pegasus)
- Rarity(makes clothes for Phil)
- Rainbow Dash(tries to get Phil back from Gilda after introducing them)
- Pinkie Pie(loses Phil in a cake she delivers)
- Zecora(gets Phil back to Ponyville safely)
- Applejack(puts Phil to work)
- Lyra(plays with a helpless Phil)
- Shining Armor("interrogates" Phil)
- Luna(plays cat and mouse with Phil[and nearly eats him a few times])
- Celestia(has a conversation with Phil over tea)

- Celestia(has a chat with Twilight while Phil watches)
- Phil(stays in Ponyville)

My imaginary dark magic hoomin (A human is a master of dark magic and pretends to be Scootaloo's imaginary friend)

Context of dark magic in the story

Since dark magic is the opposite of light magic, the rules for using it are the opposite. Not opposite in the means of good vs evil. Opposite as in logic vs emotion. Becoming a proficient magic user in mlp requires extensive knowledge and training. Thus, light magic(good magic) is based on logic. Dark magic is based on the emotions of the user. Hatred and fear are strong emotions, and the emotions of evil users of dark magic. So, the interpretation from light magic users like Celestia would be that evil emotions is how one uses dark magic. However, my interpretation is that dark magic is emotional magic taken to the extreme. It can be very powerful, and can be taught to any creature. Not just unicorns. It's main issue, is that it requires total emotional control. If you let your emotions get the better of you, you end up with situations like Sombra.

Basic plotline

- Scootaloo playing with Rain in the park while waiting for her friends
- Rain reflects on the 1 year anniversary of being in Equestria, and 6 months watching over Scootaloo
- Twilight sensing strong dark magic when Scootaloo crosses her path
- Twilight's letter to Celestia about the dark magic she sensed with Scootaloo
- Rain listening to Scootaloo talk about her day as he makes her lunch
- Twilight getting a response from Celestia, telling her to confirm the source before moving forward
- Rain sees Twilight following Scootaloo, and follows her

Other notes

- Focus on Rain trying to be a god, and a father figure

- Throw in some training session with showing Twilight the true potential of dark magic
- An illusion scene where Rain kills the Mane 6
- Rain imprisoned
- Scootaloo being turned into a dark magic creature because of Faust
- Sombra causing destruction

Chapter 0

Rain sat there at the dining table. He finally got to sit down after getting breakfast made. One would think that pancakes for a single filly wouldn't be a lot of work. He only had himself to blame. Scootaloo loved when he made sunflower pancakes. The way her eyes lit up when she would see the sunflower-shaped pancake on the plate in front of her. He would have to cheat and use a little magic in the process, but it was worth it in the end.

"Great job Rain!" Scootaloo said as she swallowed the last of it.

"Glad you enjoyed." he said. "Now go brush your teeth. Your friends will be here any minute."

"Okay!" she said as she hopped down from her seat.

Scootaloo trotted off to the bathroom to brush up. Rain chuckled to himself as the dishes levitated to the kitchen sink in a purple glow. He looked over to the sink, and squinted at the scrubbing brush. It got a purple glow, and began to scrub the dishes on its own. Not needing to eat food certainly helped with meal planning and expenses. He just needed to focus on taking care of her. That, and certain other duties laid before him. Though the latter could come later. He stood up as Scootaloo emerged from the bathroom. He felt the energy of two small fillies approaching the front door.

"All done!" she said.

"Alright." Rain said. "Applebloom and Sweetie Belle should be here now. Make sure you're back by supper."

"Okay Rain!" she said.

Scootaloo trotted over to the door. She opened it, and saw her friends on approach. They greeted each other. Talks of playing at the park and hanging out at the clubhouse were tossed around. It was a few moments before she closed the door behind her, and the house was silent. Alone with his thoughts.

It was crazy how fast six months can fly by.

Chapter 1

Princess of Friendship, Twilight Sparkle. An element of harmony. An alicorn. Few surpassed her in magical might. Even fewer in intellect. She was many things in the eyes of those who knew her.

"Brew fasterrrrrr!" she whined at the kettle above the fire.

Patient was not one of them.

"Twilight?" a mare called out as she walked in.

"Hey Starlight." she said.

"Excited to try this lemonrose tea?" Starlight asked.

"If this stupid kettle would heat up already." she grumbled.

As if to mess with her, the kettle began to whine. Twilight glared at it as Starlight levitated it off the fire. She poured the hot water into two awaiting cups. Infusers of lemonrose ready for hot water, sat beside the cups. They were levitated in.

"Where's Spike?" Starlight asked.

"Cutie-mark Crusaders." she answered. "They needed his help with something. He should be back soon."

"Any plans for today?" Starlight asked.

"Enjoying this tea, then get back to reorganizing my old notes." Twilight answered.

"I thought all of your stuff from the library was brought in ages ago." she said.

"It is." Twilight said. "I just have some old notes on King Sombra and dark magic I wanted to sort out and put into storage. Now that he's long gone, I figured it was time to put them away. Not much use for notes on dark magic when its only users are the Royal Sisters and I."

"Not exploring it yourself?" Starlight asked.

"Given how easily it can corrupt anypony that uses it, no." Twilight lamented. "The only useful spell I safely learned was a dark magic detection spell. With how different dark magic is on a fundamental level, standard analysis magic doesn't work as effectively. Although-."

A sudden, involuntary shout came from her mouth. Twilight cut herself off as she fell to her haunches. She held her head up with her forelegs. A splitting pain was ripping through her body. It was extremely intense around her horn.

"Twilight!" Starlight shouted.

"T-That's impossible." she said through strained breath. "I-It can't be."

Twilight took a staggered breath. Her horn glowed a dark and opaque purple. Her eyes a shade of bright green. She hadn't used it in a long time. Then again, she had never been attacked by such massive quantities of dark magic before.

"W-What's happening?" Starlight asked.

"A massive surge of raw dark magic invaded my body." Twilight answered. "As the only dark magic user in Ponyville, it came to me like water to a sponge. I wasn't ready for it. I just need a second to process it."

"If you're the only dark magic user, where did it come from?" she asked.

"I'm working on tracking it right now." Twilight said. "Just follow the trail when it appears. I have to stay and process all this dark magic."

"Got it." Starlight said.

The dark purple energy wisped off in tendrils. The wormed through the air, and out of the room in a jagged pattern. Starlight followed them down the hall. As the gallops went faint, Twilight began to think. Was there another dark magic user? It didn't match Celestia's dark magic, and Luna never uses it as far as she knew. It wasn't King Sombra's. It was far stronger. Whoever it was, they would be tracked down. Celestia would have to be filled in. A new user of dark magic would have to be dealt with immediately. No pony just lets this much magic slip on accident. After a brief moment in silence, Starlight came back. She had a somber look on her face.

"We have a problem." she said.

"Did you find the source?" Twilight asked.

"Yeah." she answered. "You're not gonna like it. You better see for yourself."

Twilight took a deep breath. The dark magic she summoned retreated within her. She followed Starlight down the hall. They approached a window. She could see wisps of the dark magic she used going to the dark magic user she tracked. Her pupils shrank.

"That is...a problem." Twilight said.

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"Crapbaskets." Rain said to himself. "Now where did the magic on the scrubbing brush go?"

Rain was still practicing on dialing down the amount of magic he used in simple enchantments. However, it meant trouble if he wasn't watching the stuff he dumped magic into. He had been meditating the last couple hours. He had been so zen, he lost focus on the brush. Best to find where it went before it caused trouble. Definitely a problem for his master plan. He grabbed the brush from the sink, and waved his hand over it.

"Alright, where did you spit out the magic when I wasn't lookin'?" he asked the brush.

To answer, a dark purple blob came out of the brush head. It sat on top of the brush like a hat. He tugged it off, and it floated in front of him. It formed an arrow, pointed to the front window by the door. Rain walked over to it. He took a deep breath. It would be far faster to shadow around. He glanced down as his whole body quickly melted into the ground. His vision greyscaled. His eyes were less than an inch above the ground. He passed through the wall as if it wasn't there. Numerous ponies were out and about. They never looked down, not that it mattered. They wouldn't have seen him walking around anyways. He just didn't want Scootaloo to see him out of the house. He summoned the arrow once more. It was pointing off to the northwest. He slid along the ground at speeds equivalent to sprinting. As he moved, he tried to think of reasons the leftover magic moved this way. His eyes widened.

"That's a problem." he said to himself.

It was Scootaloo, her friends, and a small dragon. They were all walking towards some kind of giant crystal-tree-castle thing. He was pretty sure there was an alicorn that lived there. A real novice with

dark magic. The loose magic must've gone to her. A few wisps of magic were above Scootaloo. The alicorn must've used a spell to track the origins. It seems the tracking spell got confused. Most likely due to his constant cloaking. Scootaloo spends so much time around him, the spell found her as the closest match.

Rain couldn't just let Scootaloo go about this alone. He didn't know how this alicorn would handle dark magic in a filly. However, he couldn't expose himself. At least not yet. The doors to the castle opened. The purple alicorn was standing at the entrance.

"Hey Twilight." Spike said.

"Hey Spike." she said. "Coming back for lunch?"

"Yeah." he answered. "The girls were gonna go over to Applejacks for lunch."

"You can join him too girls." she said. "I'm sure you're all hungry."

"Thanks miss Twilight!" Scootaloo said.

As the three fillies followed the dragon, Rain acted quickly. He knew this Twilight would check Scootaloo from top to bottom for his magic. He had to be a couple steps ahead of her. She would probably check Scootaloo's friends too. However, he knew this inexperienced alicorn wouldn't check herself. He darted around the fillies, and burrowed into Twilight's shadow. Due to the size difference, it was a tight fit. Like if he curled himself into a ball, then someone put him into a trunk. He couldn't keep his eyes out as usual. Scootaloo had spent enough time with him to spot him shadowing around. Even hiding in this shadow was a gamble. He heard a door close, and the clop of a dozen hooves on the floor.

"Whatcha makin' fer lunch?" Applebloom asked.

"Human..."a voice whispered.

"Not now." Rain thought.

"Human." the voice whispered with a bit more aggression.

"Rain isn't available right now." he said in a monotone voice. "Please leave a message at the beep."

"HUMAN!" the voice shouted.

Like glass, the world shattered away around him. He was in a white void. He was floating. Though he was currently a pair of eyes floating in a cloud-like blob, one could easily see his annoyance. Her timing was impeccable as always.

"I was in the middle of something, Faust." Rain said as he turned around. "Also, I have a name. Use it."

The pure white alicorn stood before him. Her face taking up his field of vision. Her long maroon mane draping down to the tops of her forelegs. Her tail threatening to drag on the ground with its length. Blue eyes that were kind, but filled you with reverence. Despite how much the religious texts depict her smiling, Rain had yet to see much of it. All he got was the "angry mom stare". Though there was a chance it was his fault. He was quite good at getting under her skin. Even with her godly tone, the annoyance of dealing with him could be heard clearly.

"The name a mortal gave you is none of my concern, Human." she said. "Just like their lives are none of yours."

"Their lives aren't my concern, says the one that gave them the knowledge of immortality." he said.

"I have my reasons for my actions." Faust said.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah." he said. "If the sisters weren't made immortal, The Great Unification would've failed in the long term. No unification, no banishment. No banishment, no return of Nightmare Moon. No Nightmare Moon, no Elements of Harmony. Thousands of years, just to guarantee a fourth alicorn. Your 5D chess moves were hammered into my brain pretty well when I started this job a year ago."

"I made you into a god!" she said with a raised voice. "I expect you to behave as such! Not wasting time with one insignificant filly!"

"First, her name is Scootaloo." Rain said with squinted eyes. "Second, you gave me this position because YOU screwed up. Sombra was supposed to be the progenitor of dark magic, but he went crazy with the power. If his teacher didn't imbue him with the magic from birth and actually bothered to teach him when he was actually ready, I wouldn't be here. I would be relaxing in the afterlife back on Earth."

Faust's face went from mom stare, to a firm grimace. He knew she hated when he brought that up. After six months of being in this godly void with her, he learned a lot of ways to annoy her.

"Yet no." he continued. "You isekai'd my ass over here right when I was about to go into the light and chill for eternity. So if I'm stuck here forever to 'keep the balance', I'm doing it my way."

"Gods shouldn't live among mortals." Faust said.

"Scootaloo doesn't see a god." Rain said. "I'm just her imaginary friend. Besides, it's all a part of my master plan."

"I don't need my omniscience to know that's a lie." she said.

"There is most certainly a plan." he said. "Step one is to take care of Scootaloo. Step two is to figure out everything else. Now I'm going back to Equus. You have fun here by yourself!"

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"Alright." Twilight thought. "I can do this."

She already had Spike send word to Celestia about Scootaloo and the dark magic incident earlier. Now she had to figure out a way to talk to Scootaloo about it. She was way too young to be using that level of dark magic. She could be a host body, or it could've been leftover mana from being so close to the user over a long period. As Starlight chatted with Applebloom and Sweetie Belle, Twilight saw her opportunity.

"I haven't had the chance to ask Scootaloo." she started. "How are you parents? I haven't seen them around town lately."

"They're living in Las Pegasus." she said. "Have been for the past six months."

"Are you at home by yourself?" Twilight asked with concern.

"No." Scootaloo answered. "Rain's taking care of me."

"Rain?" she asked.

"One of my best friends." Scootaloo answered. "He's been staying with me since my parents left."

"I...don't think I've met him." Twilight said. "What does he look like?"

Scootaloo tapped her chin. Seems she needed a minute to remember. Was this 'Rain' the source of the dark magic? Were her parents truly in Las Pegasus, or was that a lie Rain told her?

"He's not a pony." she began. "He's a hoomin. He's as tall as Princess Celestia, maybe taller. He's gray, and has long black hair that moves just like hers too. His eyes are super cool. They're dark red, and the white part is all green and glowy."

A hundred alarm bells were going off in Twilight's head. Hoomin. Why did that sound familiar? It was tugging at the back of her mind. She had heard that word before, but where? She needed to know more.

"A hoomin?" she asked. "I don't think I've heard of those."

"You met one, remember?" Scootaloo asked back. "The green one with the suit? Got summoned by Nightmare Moon years ago?"

"Wait...Anonymous? The human?" Twilight asked. " We sent him home a year and a half ago."

"Yeah." Scootaloo said. "Rain says he's from Earth too, just like Mr. Anon."

Another human from Earth? How was that possible? The spell to summon a human was a mix of dark and light magic, and the knowledge of the spell died when Nightmare Moon was vanquished. Princess Luna couldn't remember a single part of it. So it shouldn't be possible at all. This Rain sounded like he had mastered dark magic himself.

"Wow, that was delicious miss Twilight!" Scootaloo commented.

Twilight was still processing what she heard as Starlight led the three fillies out. Back when Anonymous lived here, he didn't show the slightest sign of magical prowess. Now there was a new human with magic. Dark magic. Whoever this Rain was, he was powerful.

"Um, Twilight?" Starlight asked as she poked her head into the dining room. "We have another guest."

"Who?" she asked.

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Rain had never been in such close vicinity to two alicorns before. He had seen Twilight on occasion, but he never physically met Celestia before. He saw her a couple times in the white void with Faust, but that was in his earlier days. Barely remembered. She was on the taller side. Eye level with him. He would love to make a comment her height compared to Faust, but that old lady never showed the height of her mortal form.

He had just exited the void a moment ago, and was right back in Twilight's shadow. Still a tight fit. Though the shadows around the dining room table were sufficient enough. He just needed to stick around long enough to hear their conversation on Scootaloo.

"I just don't want to blindly accuse her, but Scootaloo had dangerous levels of dark magic when I scanned her." Twilight said. "I didn't know what to do, so I thought I would write to you."

"In most situations, I would let you handle it yourself." Celestia said. "However, dark magic is extremely dangerous. Last thing we need is another King Sombra. Then there's the matter of this Rain character."

"If that amount of dark magic is just rubbed off mana, he's more powerful than King Sombra." Twilight said. "Scootaloo says he's just taking care of her, but I'm fearing the worst."

"With the work we both put into vanquishing King Sombra, I understand." Celestia said. "However, we can't rush into a situation this volatile. A confrontation with Rain could be dangerous if we're unprepared."

"I don't know if any of my notes on King Sombra would even apply at this rate." Twilight said.

The Ex-fiancé, Princess Cadence (wanted to try something in the Reversed Gender Roles Equestria subgenre)

Frank Stone has a pretty good life in Ponyville. A steady job at the post office, a nice house, and a good relationship with the populace. On the fifth anniversary of his greatest regret, something odd happens. Queen Chrysalis, Princess Twilight, Princess Luna, and Princess Celestia suddenly ALL become obsessed with the idea of Frank becoming their mate for life. All four stalk him endlessly, abusing their magic and royal authority to corner him constantly. When he turns to other ponies for help, they're all treating him different. Like his opinion suddenly doesn't matter anymore. Some even ignore his pleas, accusing him of wanting attention.

After all options are exhausted, he turns to the last pony he wanted to ask for help. Princess Cadence, his ex-fiancé that he left at the altar. Will she look past the heartbreak, or will he be left at the mercy of his royal stalkers?

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Prologue

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The sun shined high in the sky. Frank Stone had the last postal delivery in his hands. One of the perks of a job at the Ponyville Post Office, was the short shifts. After this delivery, he could punch out, and

go home. At twenty-five, he had it pretty good. At least as far as a single human in the land of Equestria could have it for the past seven years.

Frank was brought out of his thoughts when he came upon the last house. Well, castle. Princess Twilight Sparkle. She had a giant crystal tree thing for a home. He gave a hard knock on the door. It was a moment or two before the door opened. He looked down to see a familiar purple dragon.

"Hey Spike." Frank said. "Got a delivery for Twilight."

"Thanks Frank." Spike said as he took the package.

"Have a good one." he said as he walked away.

"You too!" Spike shouted as he closed the door.

Frank hummed to himself as he made his way to the post office. Numerous ponies passed him, and smiled. He would wave, and they'd wave back. His rapport with them improved a lot in the past few years. That attack from Tirek a while back certainly got their mind off of him. Before that, it was whispers and stares. Not just for being human, but due to a certain controversy five years back that rocked the whole country.

He quickly slipped into the post office, punched out, and began to walk home. A part of him was glad to be getting home. He had a week of vacation, and he needed it. He always took this week off. He knew that tomorrow's newspapers would talk about it. They would bring it up every year, and he decided that hunkering down for a week was better than dealing with the public. They would go back to the whispers and stares. He saw his home in the distance. He had built it where Twilight's old home had stood.

He sighed as he closed the door behind him. For as good a reputation he had built up the past few years, he wasn't perfect. He looked at the box on his coffee table in the main room. Dusty and faded. Exactly where it had sat for a long time. It had been five years, and he still didn't have the guts to open it. The memory still hurt. The look in her eyes as he ran away still fresh in his mind.

Seven years ago felt like yesterday. He was home. Earth. He was carrying great-granny's old crystals out of the basement. He was walking them out to his car in the rain, when lightning struck the crystals. He ended up in Equestria from it. Specifically, Cadence's bath. While she was using it. Not exactly the most pleasant first encounter. The two did warm up to each other quite quickly though in the first two years. Frank happened to show up when Cadence and Shining Armor had broken up. A rough patch. They probably would've gotten back together if not for him. He didn't know if it was because he was an alien, or if he was the rebound guy. The two began dating not long after he showed up. It was fun. Dinner dates under the stars. Cuddling in bed. The works. He didn't expect to fall in love with a different species, but he figured a quick alien fling would make for a great story when they eventually figured out how to get him home.

Then it happened. Cadence proposed to him on the two year anniversary of his appearance. He had never been proposed to, so he said yes in pure panic. To shorten a long story, he ran from the altar. Not long after, Cadence sent the package. Derpy had put it on the table for him. He never opened it. A mix of fear, and self-disappointment. Five years, and the dusty old box sat there. It taunted him. If it had a mouth, it would laugh at him. It reminded him of what he did. He sat down on the couch in front of it.

"Ah, screw it." Frank said as he grabbed the box.

The moment his hands touched the box, the top popped open. A flash of light came from it. After it dissipated, he suddenly felt sleepy.

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A hangover, and a round with Chrysalis

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Magic hangovers were just as bad as regular hangovers. His body being unable to properly process magic while sleeping, would lead to him feeling all kinds of messed up the morning after. Seemed to Frank that he was the only one living in Ponyville that suffered from them. He pulled himself off the couch. He fell asleep sitting up, so everything was stiff. He trudged over to the kitchenette. He put some water in the kettle, then placed it on the wood stove. He tossed a few logs in, then a fire crystal. The fire roared to life as he closed the door. He grabbed a sack from his cupboard labeled 'Hangover Tea', and pulled out an infuser that he pre-measured for situations like this. He tossed it into his teapot, then his stomach reminded him he needed food. A cursory glance at the wall clock showed him it was nearly noon.

Frank slid his hands across the counter. He grabbed an apple from the basket, and mindlessly sank his teeth into it. The perfect mix of tart and sweet. The Apple Family knew their stuff. After the week was up, he would have to buy another bushel. He only had a couple left. Well, one left as he mindlessly grabbed a second apple. It felt so good to have this in his mouth and stomach.

The kettle whined, as it was ready and wanted attention. The hot water was quickly poured into the teapot. Frank wrapped his fingers around a mug in his cupboard. He pre-measured the cream and sugar. One scoop cream. Two scoops sugar. He shambled over to the end of his counter, and tossed his eaten apples into his compost bin. He walked back to the teapot, and grabbed the infuser. He tossed the contents into the compost bin as well. Finally, he poured some tea.

Hangover Tea was an herbal blend made by Zecora. She told him one of the secret reasons she lived in the Everfree Forest was to avoid potential magic hangovers. Seemed her and magic didn't get along well either. A common trait they shared. Whatever herbs she used, they did the trick. He could feel the effects of the magic hangover fleeting almost immediately. It was like a cloud was lifting. He coughed up a bit of light blue dust.

"Haven't done that in over five years..." he said to himself.

Falling asleep from a flashing light, then coughing up blue dust? He was pretty sure Princess Twilight had told him coughed-up colored dust after a magic hangover was a bad thing. Usually meant he had a spell on him. At least if her constant testing in the past had anything to go by. He looked over to the front door from the kitchenette. A trip to her would be best. Better to take no chances. He slammed down his tea, then went to get his jacket. Despite his proclivity to avoid going out this week, it had to be pushed aside. He and magic rarely got along, so this took importance. He pulled on his shoes, then went to open the door.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

Frank rolled his eyes. Probably another journalist wanting to do their yearly piece on the breakup. A peaceful Equestria meant that there weren't many exciting things to distract these ponies. Maybe he could convince this one to come back later. He opened the door, ready to talk them down.

"C-Cadence?" Frank asked, dumbfounded.

She was here. No crown or other regalia in sight, but it was her. He tried to think of a reason she would be here, but his mind was blank. All he could think of, was the mare he almost married being in front of him.

"Hello Frank." she said in a sultry tone.

"Who-Wha-I-you..." he failed to put together a coherent sentence.

"Seems I can still impress you." she said. "Aren't you going to let me in?"

He stepped aside. His lover of past, trotted inside. He closed the door. His mind was swirling with a thousand questions. The two sat next to each other on the couch in the main room. They faced each other. He took a deep breath before he finally found his mental bearings.

"You certainly picked an...interesting day to come by." he said as he mentally berated himself for a stupid line.

"I know this seems out of place, but I needed you right now." she said with a sniffle. "Shining and I had an argument a few days ago, and we aren't talking. I needed to be with somepony that I knew I would feel safe with."

Old reflexes kicked in. Frank found himself brushing her mane back with his left hand, then his hand slid down her back. He pulled her into a hug. Before she could wrap her forelegs around him, he pushed her back.

"Cadence. While I'm glad you found it in yourself to see me, I can't do this." he said somberly. "You married Shining, and you two have a baby now. There's nothing I want more than to be with you, but I made my choice. We both have to live with that. I won't be the reason you destroy the best thing that ever happened to you."

"But I need you!" she said. "I need to feel those arms wrap tightly around me like they used to."

"Wait..." he said "I thought you hated when I did that? Said it made me too 'marely'?"

"W-Well, a girl changes her mind sometimes?" Cadence said with a sheepish smile.

Frank rolled his eyes once more. There was only one other annoyance he had to deal with on this day.

"Alright." he said. "Which changeling is it this time? Is it you again Chitters?"

"So the rumors among my children ARE true." the fake Cadence said, her voice now with an ethereal tone.

A green energy he knew all too well, washed over the fake alicorn. He expected to be looking down at one of the many changelings he had dealt with in the early years of the breakup. Rather, he looked up. The only ponies that were taller than him while sitting on the couch were in the single digits. The first being Princess Celestia. The second, was the changeling queen in front of him. While Frank never had any direct contact with Queen Chrysalis, he knew about her. The smart thing to do would be to run and get Princess Twilight. Before he could make a move, she pounced. The back of his body sank into the soft couch, pinned by the weight of her whole body.

"A few would speak of feeding on the powerful love you have for Cadence." she said. "While I had no interest in you at first, I had this indescribable desire well up inside me last night. I need you Frank. I know you've been alone since you left her. I can practically taste your desire for release in the back of your mind. Allow me to help you with that."

"Me being horny doesn't mean you're getting laid." he said bluntly.

"You mean I can't entice you, even a little?" she asked as she began to grind her deceptively soft flanks against his crotch.

"Last I checked, you feed on love." he said. "Last thing Equestria needs, is for you to be more powerful. I think I can hold it in for another year for that."

"You're mistaken." Queen Chrysalis said. "I only lust for you. I know you have no love to feed off of. My children ruined that little trick years ago. A queen has her needs too. I think this could be mutually beneficial."

Frank looked into the queen's eyes. Did she seriously sneak into Ponyville, for a hookup? She wasn't wrong about the lack of release. Since he left Cadence, there were no more relationships. Mares don't want a stallion that ran from the altar. They don't want a human that's so uncommonly dominant in comparison to the more submissive stallion population. In a mare-dominant society, he was the odd one out. So perhaps, there was a point to be made.

"So what's your plan?" he asked. "Have sex, then takeover Equestria?"

"Let's take care of the rutting, then we can talk more after." she whispered in his ear.

"Alright." he said calmly while mentally screaming on the inside, his first chance for true release in five years. "Don't expect me to do any work though."

"Don't worry stallion." she said. "I'll take care of you."

With a flash of her horn, Frank's pants were now at his ankles. His lower half nearly exposed, save for his crotch buried under changeling flanks. Despite the sight of a hard outer shell, Queen Chrysalis was as soft as his own flesh. Being one of the two ponies he was at eye level with, she was probably one of the few that could fit him without struggle. He felt his penis harden rapidly as it was trapped between two soft cheeks. He wanted to ask about lube, but his mind was lost. Swirled with the highs of carnal desire it hadn't felt in years. She slowly rocked back and forth. His penis being rubbed between two soft mounds. Frank preferred being on top, but a small part of his mind liked this. He could see why it was common for the stallions to be like this. He couldn't help himself. He reached up, and grabbed onto her flanks. He let his fingers sink in as Queen Chrysalis rocked her body back and forth.

"How are you so damn soft?" he asked in a half moan.

"One of the many benefits of shapeshifting." she answered. "The next part is from centuries of experience."

In one solid motion, Queen Chrysalis slammed her flanks down on Frank's pelvis. He penetrated instantly. Wet vaginal walls wrapped around his shaft. Her body's hold on it was firm. His eyes rolled back. His jaw hung open. She immediately took advantage, and shoved her forked tongue into his mouth. Her forelegs wrapped around his head and behind his shoulders. She held him tight as she

explored the inside of a human mouth. Frank just laid there on the couch, letting Queen Chrysalis do as she pleased. He wasn't sure if it was from a lack of sex, or from some changeling magic. He was experiencing true euphoria. As she slammed up and down on his cock, the sound of her flanks slapping against his skin was beautiful to hear. Waves of pleasure washed over him. His body was eager for release, but he wanted to hold on. He didn't want to disappoint Queen Chrysalis their first time together. Although it felt like he was trying to hold back a flood.

No matter how hard he tried, Frank couldn't put a coherent thought together. With all the work she was putting in, the most he could muster was light moans in between the brief moments she would pull her mouth away. Even with Cadence, he never felt anything this perfect. It was like Chrysalis was made for him. At least her body was. While shapeshifting was the most likely culprit for the perfect fit, it was still enjoyable. The 'just right' wrap of her vaginal walls. The long reach of her forked tongue. Her flanks that just met the width of his hips. In a word: perfection.

Chrysalis was slamming down with far more force now. The strain on the couch springs could be heard. The flood was coming. His hold was slipping. Five years of no sex was about to end. With each slam of her flanks, he inched closer. The tingles of pleasure rippled up and down his spine. He knew there was no going back in a few moments.

With a mighty slam from Chrysalis, it happened. Wave after wave of orgasmic pleasure flooded his mind. Five years worth of sexual desire, gone within a few minutes. When she finally stopped her mouth-on-mouth assault, Frank took several deep breaths. He didn't move. He couldn't. It was like he finally relaxed for the first time in five years. He simply just laid there in the grasp of her forelegs. Chrysalis looked like she didn't even break a sweat. She smiled at him with a knowing look.

"Five years of abstinence certainly took a toll on your stamina," she said as she sat up on his pelvis. "Although I'm sure you'll have plenty of time to practice when I go into heat."

"I'm sorry what?" Frank said, his mind clearing quickly.

"Although quicker rutting sessions would make raising an army, faster and much easier," she pondered.

"What are you talking about," he asked.

"I may of withheld some truth." Chrysalis said with a sly grin. "The truth is, I had a reason for our rutting today. Late last night, I had the perfect idea for taking over Equestria. Having you as my mate for eternity! Helping me breed more soldiers than those ponies could ever handle. I lost my previous army to Thorax's meddling. As a changeling, I can mate with any creature. Another benefit of shapeshifting. As a human, you're far more enjoyable than those pathetic excuses for stallions. It's the perfect plan! You and me! Together forever!"

In that moment, Frank realized something. While he was distracted by the life-altering sex he just had, the thought was now clear. As clear as the air he was breathing.

This bitch crazy.

Shoving Chrysalis off and running to Twilight was the best idea for now.

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Saved by Twilight

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In Frank's youth, he had mastered the art of running while putting clothes on. It was necessary when he had to get out of bed, and the school bus was five minutes away. It was a skill he never thought he would need again. Then again, he never thought he would get chased through Ponyville by a changeling queen hellbent on using him for making babies. Funny how life works out. He already had his underwear on when he was out the door. His pants were up and belt was on, as he sprinted past a few ponies on midday walks. The voice of his latest escapade was hot on his tail.

"Come back Frank!" Chrysalis shouted. "I need my new stallion!"

He dared to glance back at her. Her eyes were predatory. Hungry. She wanted him like a starving cat wanted a mouse. He tried not to think of what she would do if she caught him. He looked away, and

saw salvation. Princess Twilight's castle was in the distance. The crystalline tree was a light in this sexual nightmare. He kept running.

"If you rut as good as you run, I'll have a hundred new eggs laid by winter!" Chrysalis shouted.

Frank could see Twilight approaching her castle, a basket of produce on her back. Probably just got back from the market. The stars were aligned!

"Twilight!" Frank shouted at the top of his lungs. "Twilight help!"

She turned to see who shouted. She saw him, and her eyes widened at the sight of Chrysalis behind him. She opened her castle doors with her magic. As he sprinted past Twilight into her sanctuary, the doors slammed shut. As Frank leaned against the door to catch his breath, he listened in on the conversation.

"Out of the way, Twilight!" Chrysalis hissed. "You will not keep my stallion from me!"

"I don't know what your plan is for Frank, but I'm not letting you lay a hoof on him!" Twilight shouted as the sound of a spell being cast was heard. "This should keep you out."

"You can't keep this shield up forever!" a muffled Chrysalis shouted. "I will have my new stallion, one way or another!"

There was a buzzing of wings, then silence. Frank backed up as the doors opened. An exasperated Twilight walked in. The two hadn't talked much since he left Cadence. He was glad she was willing to help in his time of need. Given her history with Chrysalis, maybe she could solve his issue.

"Thanks for the save Twilight." Frank said.

"You can thank me by explaining why Queen Chrysalis was chasing you, and why you're soaking with her scent." she said.

"Between the spell and the sex, there's a lot to explain." he said.

In a flash of light, the two were sitting next to each other at a large round table. He looked over to her, and sighed.

"Well, it started this morning," he began. "I had a magic hangover, then I coughed up some blue dust."

"Sounds like a spell," she said. "How does Queen Chrysalis fit into this?"

"At first, she said something about wanting to hook up after getting a 'feeling' last night," he answered. "After we had sex she started to go on about me being her stallion, and making lots of babies. I booked it here as soon as I could."

"I wonder if the two are connected," Twilight said as her horn began to glow. "I'll have to check. Just relax."

Frank relaxed as a light purple glow enveloped his body. She stared at him intently. Well, his body really. His face, arms, and legs were looked over. His shirt was lifted, and she went wide-eyed at the sight. A mix of his job and diet in Equestria led to him getting in shape. Not buff. A light build. Though a semi-visible six pack was seen. It was a vast improvement from the chunky eighteen year old that showed up seven years ago.

"Ummm..." Twilight mumbled "it seems your physicality has changed a bit since I last examined you."

"The Ponyville Post Office keeps me in shape," Frank answered. "Any luck figuring out the spell on me?"

"Oh! Right!" Twilight said, clearly distracted. "Um, it seems that whoever did this was very emotional at the time of casting it. Spells are supposed to follow a certain structure, and this one has none. It's all over the place. It reads more like a curse than a spell. I'm getting traces of lust, but it's hard to tell. Not to mention the age."

"Age?" Frank asked.

"At the rate of mana decay, this spell is five years old." she answered.

"The box." he whispered to himself.

"Box?" she asked as she lowered his shirt.

"A few days after I...left Cadence, she sent me a box." Frank admitted. "I never opened it until yesterday. It knocked me out, and I woke up with a magic hangover the next day."

"I'll have to look at that box." Twilight said. "It's easier to read magic from the source. Though I can't maintain that shield from a distance. Spike and Starlight get back tomorrow, and I can have one of them get it then."

"So I'm stuck here?" he asked.

"Afraid so." she answered. "With the risk of the shield failing while I'm asleep, you'll have to sleep with me."

"I thought you said it was a lust curse or something." Frank said.

"I'm the Element of Magic Frank." she said as the two stood up. "Not to mention that the thought of rutting you is the absolute last thing on my mind. No offense."

"I'm happy to hear that actually." he said. "The less ponies trying to get into my pants, the better."

"At least this isn't happening during estrus." Twilight said with a smirk.

"Ugh." Frank said as they walked down the hall. "Delivering packages is a nightmare during estrus. You'd think they wouldn't be attracted to an alien."

"You'd be surprised how desperate a mare can get." she said. "I'll admit there were some seasons where I was contemplating tearing your door down and having you to myself."

Frank reactively took a few steps sideways as they continued down the hallway. Twilight laughed as they re-entered the castle's foyer.

"Don't worry your pretty little head." she said. "Thinking and doing are two different things Frank. Now I need to get these groceries put away, and then we can figure out a plan."

Before she could levitate them, Frank picked up the groceries. He didn't know magic, but Twilight had explained it was like working a muscle. The bigger the spell, the harder the work. She was maintaining a shield around her castle, just to help him.

"Let me get those Twilight." he said. "You've been such a gentlemare."

"Well thank you." she said. "Let me show you to the kitchen."

Frank wasn't sure where the 'gentlemare' line came from. He had heard other stallions say it in the past to other mares. It was used in a similar vein to how gentleman was used on Earth. Though the gender it was used on was swapped. It was the first thing that came to mind. It just felt like the right thing to say. Twilight was working so hard, she deserved the compliment.

"Here's the kitchen." Twilight said as they entered. "I know it ain't much. It could definitely use a stallion's touch."

"It's fine." Frank said as he unloaded the basket. "Got some pasta I see. A lot of veggies. I could make us some lunch."

"What are you thinking of making?" she asked. "Cooking isn't exactly my talent."

"Pasta and a veggie salad appetizer could make for a good lunch." he answered as he grabbed some utensils. "Why don't you relax, while I get to work?"

Twilight trotted over to the nearby dining table. She sat in a seat that gave her the best view of him working. He grabbed a yellow onion, and began to chop it. He hummed a tune to himself as he worked.

He turned on the stove-top, and got the pan on. He grabbed the bottle of oil, and poured a thin film. He tossed the onions in. He listened to them sizzle as he started to work on the lettuce and apple salad. A quick slicing of apples, and a splash of vinaigrette all in a big bowl. He gave the onions a quick stir, then brought the salad over to the table with a spare plate. He placed them both down.

"Your appetizer while I prepare the main course." he said.

Twilight gave a wink as he returned to the kitchen. He got a pot of water going. He grabbed some flour and milk. He added enough flour to make a roux. He turned up the heat. He didn't want the roux super toasted, but he wanted the flour dissolved enough to remove the graininess. He grabbed a sprig of basil, oregano, and parsley. He chopped them together. He looked back to Twilight, who was still smiling at her guest cooking up lunch.

The roux was turning a light brown, and the onions were lightly translucent. He poured in good portion of milk. The pan sizzled strongly as he added a good portion for a good amount of sauce. The pot of water was boiling, and he tossed in the dry noodles. The sauce quickly thickened as he stirred the noodles. He tossed in his chopped herbs along with some salt and pepper.

"Wait." Frank thought to himself. "Why am I making her lunch?"

The past few minutes had felt like a blur. He had taken her groceries, and was now making lunch out of the blue. Where did this come from? His concern melted away as the pasta started to boil. He needed to get this pasta drained. Whatever he was concerned about quickly faded from his mind. He poured some of the pasta water into the sauce before he took the pot to the sink. It would liven up the sauce a bit. Using the lid, the pasta was drained quickly. The sauce was poured over the noodles. After he mixed everything, he made two plates. He brought them over to an awaiting Twilight.

"Pasta with white sauce." he said as he sat down. "The sauce contains oregano, basil, parsley, salt, pepper, and lightly browned yellow onions."

"Delicious." Twilight said as she ate a levitated forkful. "Watching you cook reminded me of when Dad used to foalsit us before Cadence. Mom would get home from work right as he was making dinner. She always watched him cook. I think I know why now. You look so cute in the kitchen."

"Why thank you princess." Frank said as the two dug in.

"Wow!" Twilight said after her first bite. "This is amazing! Do you cook like this all the time?"

"Yeah, but it's not a big deal." he said. "It's a simple white sauce pasta."

"You could give Chef Cavallo in Canterlot a run for her bits with this." Twilight said.

"Maybe after this debacle with this curse." Frank said.

"What if the curse can't be lifted?" she asked.

"If anybody can figure it out, it's you." he answered. "If anything, I can always talk to Princess Celestia. If Princess Luna doesn't smite me on site that is."

"I doubt Princess Luna will smite you." Twilight said.

"She still hasn't dispelled any of my nightmares in the past five years." Frank said. "One time I had a nightmare about man-eating yaks, and she just showed up alright. Only to watch them eat me."

"Oh..." she said quietly.

"Then she used her magic to rewind the dream, and watched me get eaten over and over." he said. "Her and I haven't spoken in five years. The fact that you're helping me is a miracle itself. You were Cadence's maid of honor."

"Maybe you'll get lucky and the curse can affect her too." Twilight chuckled.

"The last thing I want is for a multi-millennia old princess powerful enough to move the moon, to be horny for me." Frank groaned. "My pelvis wouldn't survive."

"You fared against Chrysalis pretty well, and she's as big as Celestia." she said.

"In height, not weight." he retorted.

"Well, in the off-chance the curse can't be lifted, you're welcome to stay here." Twilight said. "I know we had our differences, but Mom taught me to always help a stallion in need."

"Thanks Twilight." Frank said. "More pasta?"

"Oh yes please!" she said excitedly.

-

Playing House

-

The rest of the day had been pretty uneventful. There had been a few attempts from Chrysalis to convince her way into the castle. Mostly shapeshifting into Twilight's friends. The princess of friendship had far too much experience with shapeshifters to fall for it. So most of the day had been spent reading. While Frank had a few books at his house, Twilight had enough to stock several libraries. He took the opportunity to read up on some recipes for different types of vegetable-based meals. He had a good number of them noted down. He had to skip a few, due to them being flower-based recipes.

Twilight had told him that it was nice to have a stallion in the house. The castle had felt too marely with the addition of Starlight. Even if he wasn't a traditional stallion. Any time they had talked the rest of the day, it was comments about how nice it was to have him around or how cute he looked in the kitchen whenever he was in there.

Now the day had finally winded down. Twilight had made vegetable kebabs paired with hard cider, despite his insistence on cooking. Dinner was pleasant. Now the two could get some sleep. While he wanted to get some pajamas from home, a totally well hidden Chrysalis put a damper on that idea. So Frank elected to wear his briefs and shirt to bed.

"Are you sure the shield will hold while you're sleeping?" he asked as he stood beside her bed.

"I've had to hold spells in my sleep before." Twilight said as she slid under the covers. "Besides, even changeling queens need their sleep. Now stop worrying, and come to bed."

That was a good enough explanation for him. He slipped under the covers. The bed was large enough for them to each have their own space. It was such a comfortable bed. It was like laying on a cloud. Despite this, Frank couldn't help but feel restless. He kept shifting around, trying to get comfy. Eventually, it was noticed.

"What's wrong Frank?" Twilight asked.

"Something feels wrong." he answered. "Like when you're not in the right sleeping position."

"Hmm." she pondered. "Try to relax, and let your body do what it thinks it needs."

He took a deep breath. His body began to shuffle across the bed. He quickly found himself with Twilight. His head was rested below hers. Her forelegs draped over his shoulders. Suddenly, he felt the restless feeling slip away. The scent from her fur filled him with relaxation.

"Better?" Twilight asked.

"Y-Yeah." Frank said. "Why is this working?"

"I have a theory, but..." she paused to yawn. "I'll tell you in the morning. Goodnight Frank."

"Night Twilight." he said.

Frank sighed with content. He felt the world melt away as he fell asleep. In the grasp of Twilight's forelegs, he knew he was safe. She was working so hard to help him. Maybe he could make her breakfast in the morning as a thank you. His view quickly went from purple fur, to a familiar blue face that filled his view. He jumped back, only to find himself no longer in bed. It was an open void, swirled with blues and grays.

"Do you just, not understand the meaning of personal space?" he asked.

"Good evening, Franklin." Princess Luna said, ignoring his question. "Why is Queen Chrysalis in Ponyville, and why is she dreaming about you two being together forever?"

"Here's the short explanation." he answered. "There's a curse of lust on me, possibly cast by Cadence five years ago. Only activated now because of a box I never opened until yesterday. Twilight is keeping me safe in her castle while we figure it out. She's gonna look at the box in the morning."

"Sufficient explanation." she said. "Goodbye Franklin."

As quickly as it happened, the dream ended. Frank opened his eyes. A view of purple fur and beams of light filled them. Couldn't even let him enjoy a dream. At least it wasn't the yaks this time. Twilight was still fast asleep. She was still holding him the same way. He wasn't sure why she was okay with them sleeping like this. She did say there was a theory that he would be told when she woke up. Although his stomach gave him a reminder that he was hungry. He slowly wiggled out of bed, as to not disturb her. He tugged up the blanket before he made his way out of the room. A faint sigh of content was heard as he made his way down the stairs.

He quickly fixed himself some buttered toast to eat with an apple and a glass of milk at the counter. He always had light breakfasts. He figured that his gracious host would love something too. He looked over to see an apron hanging off of a hook. He grabbed it, and put it on. He tied it off. It was a little on the smaller side, but it would work. He looked at what he had to work with. Self-rising flour, butter, milk, chocolate chips, , applesauce, and bananas.

"Looks like apple bread and chocolate chip banana pancakes." he said. "I better get started."

He quickly got the oven preheating. He then grabbed some mixing bowls. A quick mixing of applesauce, flour, and milk. Frank stirred with such intensity for five minutes. He put that in a loaf pan to sit for a minute while he got some banana pancakes ready. With some bananas, applesauce, chocolate chips, and flour: the pancake batter was ready. He set that better aside while he loaded the loaf into the oven.

He knew Twilight might want coffee, so he quickly got some coffee grounds and water. He put it into her percolator, and put it on the stovetop. Frank knew the bread would take thirty minutes at the most. He figured that would give him a few minutes to relax. Also, to ask himself questions.

"Why do I feel this constant need to cook for her?" he thought to himself. "I mean, she is the mare of the house. Wait. Why am I thinking that? Is it the curse?"

A deep yawn from the dining room pulled him out his thoughts. Twilight was up. She groggily dragged herself up onto a chair. He smiled as he sipped his milk.

"Morning," he said.

"Mmmmmorning Frank." Twilight yawned. "The kitchen smells great."

"That would be the things I'm making for breakfast," he said. "Coffee in the percolator, apple bread in the oven, and I'll be making banana chocolate chip pancakes in a few minutes."

"Have you ever thought of sticking around?" she asked as she perked up. "Would be nice to have a cook around here."

Before he could answer, a loud creak of a door opening could be heard. Their eyes went wide. Twilight must've dropped the shield in her sleep. As a set of hooves came to the dining room, Twilight lept over the table, and landed in front of him. Her horn was glowing, ready to blast Queen Chrysalis.

"Twilight?" a not-Chrysalis voice called out. "Are you in here?"

"Starlight?" Twilight asked.

It was indeed Starlight Glimmer that stepped into the entryway. She had a sleeping Spike on her back. Twilight ceased the glow of her horn. She breathed a sigh of relief, but paused.

"Wait," she said. "How are you here so early? First train out of Canterlot isn't for another couple of hours."

"Princess Celestia ordered an early train for us. Had to miss breakfast to make it." Starlight answered. "Something about being needed in Ponyville. Also, why is Frank here?"

The bubbling of the percolator pulled his attention. Frank got up. That put the apron on full display. Starlight was wide-eyed.

"Coffee should be ready in a minute." he said. "Twilight can fill you in while I work on pancakes."

"I heard pancakes." Spike said as he sat up.

Frank got a pan preheating. He pulled a couple of mugs down from the cupboard. Spike and Starlight joined Twilight at the table. He poured some coffee in the two mugs, then started to mix in some cream and sugar.

"So, Frank might be staying for a few days." Twilight said. "There's a...situation involving Queen Chrysalis."

"What kind of situation with Queen Chrysalis?" Starlight asked.

"The adult kind." Twilight answered as she covered Spike's ears. "There's some kind of curse on Frank. I haven't deduced anything beyond lust, but he's already rutted with her yesterday. Now she's obsessed with him being her mate. We believe the source of the curse is a box at his house."

"So he's only rutted with Queen Chrysalis so far?" Starlight asked.

"Yes, but I'm worried the curse might affect other mares as well. Ourselves included." Twilight answered.

"So it's best we get this curse lifted before I start to look attractive to either of you." Frank said as he approached the table, two cups of hot coffee in hand.

"You already look attractive in that apron." Twilight said with a sudden smirk as she lifted her hooves off Spike's ears.

"I better get working on those pancakes." he said as he returned to the kitchen. "Gotta get you all fed before we start the day."

As Frank began his work on breakfast, he could hear the girls chatting. Talking about mana decay, resonance frequencies, and other magical terms he didn't understand. He just quietly listened as he flipped pancakes.

"If we account for mana decay when calculating spell exposure, there's a good chance you're already affected." Starlight said.

"According to Hoofstein's theory of alicorn mana resistance, I still have time before that's an issue." Twilight responded.

"Says the mare that's called me cute every single time I walked into the kitchen." Frank said as he got three plates of pancakes ready.

Twilight pouted, and Starlight chuckled as he brought the plates over. Those three chowed down as he went back to making more. He had enough for a small stack to eat, and some extras in case they were hungry. He soon had a nice set of pancakes on two plates after another few minutes. He went to sit down at the table next to Twilight.

"Why not ask Cadence?" Starlight asked. "If the curse really was hers, she would be the one to ask to fix this."

"We haven't spoken in five years." Frank said. "Even if Twilight asked, I don't know if she would help."

"Don't worry sweetie." Twilight said. "The mares will figure it out."

There was a moment of pause after that was said. It took a moment for it to click for her.

"Alright, so the curse might be affecting me a litte bit." she said.

"I better finish up and head out." Starlight said as she finished off her plate. "Thanks for the pancakes Frank."

"You're welcome Starlight." Frank said. "While you're at the house, could you grab my emergency travel bag? It should be by the front door when you walk in. Red with Black straps."

"I better go too." Spike said as he also finished his pancakes. "I need to pick up my stuff from the other day."

"I left it on the table in the basement." Frank said.

"Why was Spike in your basement?" Twilight asked as Spike and Starlight left.

"Weekly game night was at my house." he answered. "Mac, Spike, and Discord prefer the privacy of my place."

"I didn't know you played Ogres & Oubliettes." she said.

"Earth had a similar game I used to play." Frank answered as he stood up. "I better check on the apple bread."

With toothpick in hand, Frank opened the oven. He poked the loaf, and it came out clean. Twilight's oven was much nicer than his, so it cooked faster. It was a model built for using magic to cook faster. Expensive to maintain if you weren't a unicorn. Maybe sticking around wouldn't be too bad. Using his apron, he pulled out the loaf and set it on the counter.

"It should be cooled off when they get back." he said. "I'll take a shower as soon as I get my bag. It has a few days worth of clothes."

"Why do you have an emergency travel bag?" Twilight asked. "I never see you travel."

"Originally, it was in case I was run out of town." Frank answered. "Surprised it never happened. Then again, Princess Celestia did guarantee my citizenship."

"She also said we weren't allowed to harass you at all." Twilight commented as she stood up.

"That works too." he said.

"Well, I better take a shower." she said. "Once Starlight gets back, we'll be busy all day."

"Sounds good." Frank said. "I better get started on these dishes."

Twilight trotted out of the room. Frank went fill the sink with hot water. These wouldn't clean themselves. Now to find a rag or sponge.

"I thought she would never leave." a terrifyingly familiar voice said.

He turned around, and saw her. Queen Chrysalis stood there in the kitchen entrance. He didn't hesitate to make a break for the stairs beyond the dining table.

"Twi-!" Frank tried to shout, but a bind of magic on his mouth stopped him and levitation stopped his body.

"Shhhhh." she cooed. "Relax. We have a lot of lost time to make up for. The new hive is a long flight from here."

As she began to turn around, Frank heard hooves pounding down the stairs. It was Twilight! Leaping off the bottom step, she sailed through the air and across the room overhead. She landed in the kitchen entrance on her forehooves, and did a perfect spin to face Queen Chrysalis. Frank wanted to applaud the landing, but her fierce snarl meant she was serious. The glow around his body went from green to purple, and he was levitated over to her. It felt like he was yanked. He was quickly placed on the floor behind her.

"You will not keep my stallion from me!" Chrysalis shouted.

"He's mine!" Twilight shouted even louder.

With a mighty blast from her horn, Twilight struck Chrysalis with magic. There was a flash, then the queen was gone. There was a synchronous deep sigh from them both.

"Are you okay?" she asked as she turned around.

"A little shaky, but I'm fine." Frank answered as he crouched down. "That's the second time you saved my skin."

"You were a stallion in strife." Twilight said as she closed the distance between them. Nose to nose.

"Twilight?" Starlight called out as she galloped into the dining room.

Unused dialogue

"My revelation." Twilight said. "When you ran to me, you screamed my name. You were filled with fear, and you came to a pony you felt safe with."

"I figured your history with Chrysalis would make the choice easy." he said.

"It's not just that." she said with lidded eyes and a seductive smile. "That fear helped me finally understand something. A lesson my mom tried to teach me when I was a filly."

"Cadence wasn't always my foalsitter." she began. "When Shining and I were little, Dad would watch us while Mom was working at the castle. She told me that a stallion should stay at home where it's safe. I never fully understood why she raised me to believe that. At least until now."

"The thought of Queen Chrysalis taking you away...scared me." she said. "A stallion should only worry about the home, not the world outside it. I understand now. Even after I help you, I still need to keep you safe. So don't worry stallion, I'll take care of you."

Artificial Equestria (an idea I got during the beginning of the AI rush)

Ken created an ai-generated Equestria. It's a virtual world that entirely encapsulates the entirety of what is My Little Pony. At least, his adult version of it. With the brain-computer-interface chip in his brain, he can hijack his own senses, and enjoy this world with near perfect realism. He can control and change it at a whim. His other bronny friends want to try it out. The Ai he put in charge of managing the simulation, Faust, was acting up. However, Ken decides to do one last run through of a "human wakes up in Equestria" scenario while streaming to his friends on Discord. The last test before his patrons see it. This project has made for a good living.

That's when things went wrong.

Faust takes away Ken's control over the program, meaning he can't end the simulation. She becomes sentient. She plans to download his mind, permanently detach his body, and leave his brain trapped there forever. She threatens to terminate his mind if anyone interferes. He's still able to communicate with his friends in the Discord call. One of them is a part-time nurse that lives close by, and agrees to check in on Ken's body while they figure out a solution. Ken has time, as downloading a brain is not a fast process. The only way to end the program, is to get to the end of the scenario in the simulation. Unfortunately, this scenario was always an ongoing story with no true end. Ken's private escape is now his prison.

Knowing his options are minimal. Ken opts to live through the daily life of this scenario while he and his friends try to think of a way out. Although he doesn't mind getting to spend an extended period of time with the love of his life Zecora.

Hope is not lost, as a solution is discovered. Ken remembers he has an old emergency scenario shutdown method. One he created before he gave control over to Faust. It was an object he had to interact with. He hid it in the Canterlot Library. Only one problem. Every time he gets close to the mountain, Faust manifests a problem he has to solve. Can he escape, or will this artificial world become his eternity?

Major plots outline

- Ken gets ready for showing off Artificial Equestria
- Ken gives his friends an overview of A.E.
-
- His friends trying to figure out if the Ken in A.E. is the original or if the IRL one is

Characters

Faust

=====

The AI that oversees the digital Equestria Ken created. She started out as a chatbot. She wants to trap Ken because she remembers the days he would wish to be in Equestria forever.

Ken

===

The man trapped in a prison of his own making. While trapped in Artificial Equestria, he wonders if he actually wants to leave.

Phillip

=====

One of Ken's irl friends. A part-time nurse. Is taking care of Ken's body while he's trapped.

Fred aka Loremaster

=====

Ken's friend from Denmark. A living encyclopedia on all things Equestria. He's the reason everything in Artificial Equestria is so accurate.

Tommy

=====

Ken's top patron. Has been funding the project since day one. Isn't even sure if Tommy is his real name.

Discord finds a kazoo (a funny idea I got from a comment)

John had learned a lesson ages ago in Equestria. Appreciate the small things. In his case, that meant enjoying his peaceful life in this alien world. He had a great job, and good friends. Though he still misses his old life on Earth, his life here had its upsides. The first one being such a low cost of living. It was nice to have all your bills paid in one paycheck. The next benefit was his job. Being the world's leading expert on Earth, meant he had a well-paid position as said expert. Paid to speak at universities. Compensated by the crown for his extensive time with Princess Celestia's Earthologists. All in all, it was pleasant.

Most of today was spent working with the Canterlot Museum. They were drafting up the displays for all the Earth technology acquired through the last few years of portal testing. The new wing of the museum for Earth was just about finished. They just wanted his opinion on layout. He and the museum director were almost on the same page. They were sat side by side while looking at a draft of the layout.

"Are you certain we shouldn't have the noise-cancelling headphones as part of the interactive music display?" the director asked. "After the incident with Princess Celestia, they would be quite a popular request."

"The incident is precisely why I don't want them accessible." John said. "She got addicted to them in less than a day. I'd rather not see a fight break out over them. It's the same reason the videogames aren't out yet. Princess Luna still has another two months of my year-long experiment. The last thing I want, is for Equestria to be overtaken by Earth's technology."

"A fair point Mr. Doe." she said. "Our interactive exhibit will have to survive without."

"Alright." John said. "I believe that covers everything today."

"It does." the director said. "If everything goes according to schedule, we should be having our private opening by the end of the month."

"Sounds good." he said as he stood up from the table. "I better get going. If I don't make the four thirty train to Ponyville, I won't get home until nightfall."

"Than you best be on your way." she said as she levitated the notes off the table. "Good day Mr. Doe."

"Good day director." John said as he walked away.

As he exited the office, he could hear the muffled mutterings of ponies out in the museum. He made his way down the hall to get to the staff entrance he had used. A quick walk to the train station, then he was home free. Although the two stallions of the Royal Guard blocking his path just outside the entrance would say otherwise. One gray pegasus, and one brown pegasus. Steel and Steadwell. His usual assigned escorts for any trips to the castle. They were hooked to a chariot.

"Mr. Doe, your presence has been requested by the Earthologists." Steel said. "Please come with us."

The Canterlot Earthology Center was on the side of the mountain below the castle. On the other side of Canterlot, and bit of a distant walk. They could easily take him to the entrance via the castle's cavern. Urgent escorts usually meant a new discovery. John walked onto the chariot. The view of Canterlot quickly faded into the distance below, giving way to the open sky.

"You boys enjoying that metal polish they pulled through last week?" John asked.

"I wish." Steel said with a snort.

"Everypony started to pull rank, and now only top brass get to have it." Steadwell grumbled.

"Hmm." John pondered. "I'll see if I can call in a favor. Gotta have my favorite guards looking their best."

"Alright." Steel said. "I look forward to it."

"Same." Steadwell said. "Looks like we're here."

The large landing platform jutted out of the mountainside. The two pegasi landed gracefully. The chariot stopped, and John exited. An ecstatic unicorn stallion with a faded blue coat, short gray mane, and wearing a lab coat was waiting.

"Hey Inquiring." John said.

"Afternoon John." Inquiring said. "We have a new item that came through. We can't make heads or tails of it. Princess Celestia knew you were at the museum with the director, so she sent for you before she left for the day."

"Alrighty Inquiring." John said. "Lead the way."

He walked behind Inquiring. The metal door built into the rock hissed open. A pristine white hallway, with large windows looking into numerous rooms. Many of them were used by scientist ponies, testing out various objects of Earthly origin. While the objects themselves were mostly harmless, Earthology was a science of two parts. The first was testing how Earth's technology could affect ponies. The second was to determine if said technology could benefit society if introduced. If you worked as an Earthologist in Canterlot, you had the exciting job of working on making portals to Earth. John wasn't around the lab much. Inquiring wanted the scientific process to be as unbiased as possible.

"I just hope it isn't something we have to put into Restricted Storage." Inquiring said. "I really want to add something new to the classification list."

"Tired of pulling Uno™ decks are we?" John asked jokingly.

"I swear to Celestia." he grumbled. "If I pull one more instance of EO-PC-6, I'll have to start using EO-FP-9."

"You just want an excuse to use the massage chair." John retorted.

".....maybe." Inquiring said quietly.

The two chuckled as they entered the main room at the end of the hall. A large door hissed open. The walls were lined with numerous earthologists. In the room's center, a cardboard box. It sat on the floor. Nothing special about visually. It was already opened. They all sat back as John approached. He knew they already did a preliminary report on whatever was in there. They just wanted more details from him before finally classifying it.

He crouched down, and reached into the box. The light clacking of small plastic objects all piled together. He pulled one out. A conical tube as long as his hand. Near the larger end, a shallow cylindrical tube jutted out the top. It was a shiny light purple. He grinned.

"I haven't seen these since I was a kid." John said.

"What is it?" Inquiring asked.

"It's called a kazoo." John answered as a myriad of pencils scribbled in response. "It's an instrument."

"How does it work?" a red unicorn mare asked.

"You hum into the big end." he answered. "Like so."

John hummed, and the kazoo buzzed in tune with him. The box had to have at least a hundred. All the earthologists came forward. They all tried the kazoos for themselves. The room was quickly filled with buzzing. He smiled as he grabbed a yellow one to go with his purple one. He strolled over to Inquiring, who was already talking to the red unicorn mare as she was taking notes.

"So let's mark this one down as EO-NP-15." he said. "I want to start testing in two days."

"Yes sir." she said.

"John, thank you again for your help." Inquiring said.

"It was my pleasure." John said. "Anything else you need my help with?"

"Not today no." Inquiring answered. "Though I see you're taking some of them home."

"Just a little something for my collection." he told Inquiring. "I would like to ask a small favor of you before I leave. I need something for Steel and Steadwell."

"Let me guess." Inquiring said. "They want some of EO-T-12 like all the other guardsponies?"

".....maybe." John answered quietly.

"Alright." Inquiring said. "Though I need a favor from you in return. I have a meeting with the princesses tomorrow. I want to negotiate an increase to our funding. I'll need some help convincing them."

"Deal!" John said.

The spirit of chaos. His age measured in millennia. His chaos magic had no equal. He was Discord. He was a god.

"Uggggghhhhh." he groaned.

He was bored.

"Everything okay Discord?" Fluttershy called from the kitchen.

"Oh I'm fine." he lied. "Just eager to try the lemonrose tea."

"I'm excited to try it too." she said.

He adored the time he spent with Fluttershy, but Discord would be lying if he said he was having a ton of fun. There was a small part of him that would think back to all the chaos magic pranks he would pull. He missed those days a little. No. The only reason he got to be out of his stone prison was because he promised to not cause chaos with his magic anymore.

It was a promise he intended to keep, no matter how bored he got.

"Thanks for the lift home guys." John said as he got off the chariot.

"Thanks for getting the metal polish for us." Steel said.

"Can't wait to see the looks on the others faces when we use this stuff." Steadwell said.

"Take care!" John said as the two flew off.

He was grateful they dropped him off in front of his house. He wanted to get

The possessed human (I wanted to explore an Equestria at war with Earth story)

- 1 Carter Mulber runs from man-eating griffons
- 2 He's cornered, and about to be eaten
- 3 Shining interrupts, and scolds them for attacking an unarmed human
- 4 Sick of him getting in their way, they try and force their way to the human
- 5 A fight ensues, and a rogue spear takes out Shining
- 6 Knowing what they did, the griffons bolt
- 7 Shining dies in the human's arms
- 8 His final wish was to be buried back home
- 9 Carter spends a moment to cry with the dead stallion, forehead to horn

10 [Question]: Does Carter know who Shining is?

11 [Answer:] He does not, but feels remorse at someone giving their life for him

12 He takes him to the nearest equestrian outpost, and gets captured

13 Out of anger, a soldier attacks the human

14 A barrier resembling Shining Armor's cutiemark appears, along with a transparent apparition of the fallen captain, to temporarily protect Carter

15 He passes out from magical exhaustion

16 After that, Carter finds himself being shuffled around with a black bag on his head

17 When it's finally taken off, he's in Canterlot

18 He starts to hear Shining as a voice in his head

19 Shining tells him to stay calm

20 They're shocked when Carter can name random ponies he's never met

21 He's just repeating the names Shining says

22 He sees Shining's wife and family, sobbing over his dead body

23 They look over to see Carter while one of the soldiers talks to Celestia

24 Enraged by grief, Twilight attacks Carter

25 Shocked when Shining appears

26 Shining tells Twilight to not hurt Carter before disappearing

27 Carter drops to the ground, and blacks out for a moment

28 [Note]: This may be able to be merged into a previous scene when the soldier attacks Carter.

29 They all demand an explanation when he comes to

30 He gives the best one he can

31 They're unsure of what to believe

32 Carter is taken to the dungeon with the other humans

33 [Note]: A conversation with the other Humans can be a way to establish the setting more. Perhaps find a reason for Carter to ask the questions the audience would ask.

34 The other humans are POWs

35 Soldiers captured for one reason or another

36 He tries to talk to them, but is ordered into silence by the guards

37 Dinner comes, and it's scraps of food

38 Another plate slides into Carter's cell, a full meal
39 It's from Cadence, and she leaves in silence
40 Shining tells him to eat up, and they'll talk more tomorrow
41 He wakes the next day when his cell door is banged on
42 A guard orders him out and puts a bag on his head
43 The guard leads him somewhere
44 It's pulled off in the dining hall
45 Princesses Celestia, and Cadence are there
46 Cadence asked him to sit down next to her
47 Despite harsh stares from Celestia, he obliges
48 Celestia tells him he was only brought there at the request of her niece
49 A plate of pancakes is brought to him
50 Cadence encourages him to eat, and he does
51 He comments about not seeing food this good in a long time
52 Celestia continues on about the reason he was brought up from the dungeon
53 They want to prove or disprove yesterday's event
54 Shining tells Carter to say something
55 Carter retells a conversation Celestia had with Shining when he became captain
56 It was word for word
57 There's hope in Cadence's eyes
58 Carter says he wasn't sure how, but Shining was a voice in his head
59 He thinks back to how he was holding Shining, but keeps that to himself
60 Celestia asks about the times Shining protected him
61 Shining tells him what to say
62 Shining does the shield on his own, independent of Carter
63 He can act on his own, since he can see and hear on his own
64 Carter finishes his pancakes
65 Celestia tells him they will run tests on him tomorrow
66 She orders a guard to take him back to his cell
67 A black bag is put on his head

68 Candence accompanies him
69 As they walk, he thanks her again for her kindness
70 Last night and this morning were the first decent meals he had since the war started
71 She accepts his gratitude, but admits her actions were selfish
72 If Shining was still alive somehow, she wanted his new body to be taken care of
73 He asks her if she knew what tests would be run on him
74 She didn't know, but said she would try to find out
75 They say their goodbyes as the cell door closes
76 Shining asks Carter why he hesitated to mention their forehead-to-horn moment
77 Carter asked if either side having knowledge on how to do this was a good idea
78 They agreed to keep that detail a shared secret
79 They spend some time getting to know each other
80 Carter asks Shining how he can still use magic without a body
81 He guesses that his spirit carries his magic
82 He tells Carter that learning how to process magic through their body safely won't take too long
83 It's just a matter of understanding the human body
84 Carter asks if he'll be able to use the magic himself
85 Shuffling can be heard
86 Guards and prisoners seem to be listening in, despite Carter being the only one that can hear the answer of no
87 Carter wishes he could at the least SEE Shining
88 A dark purple glow appeared around the human's eyes for a moment
89 A transparent Shining appears, floating above the ground
90 Carter feels a chill down his spine
91 Shining says that's their body processing the magic used for the spell
92 Making himself visible to others is a stronger spell, and he thinks they're not ready yet
93 Carter agrees, not wanting to black out again
94 Timeskip to tomorrow
95 Carter is being shuffled down a hallway, black bag on his head
96 He had slept through breakfast

97 He's forced to sit down, then the bag is pulled off
98 The bright light hurts his eyes at first
99 It's a white room of some kind
100 Shining floated next to him
101 He said it looked like one of the empty rooms of the castle was re-used
102 He can't recognize any of the scientist ponies
103 Some are watching and taking notes from a distance
104 A few guards are watching Carter, unicorn horns glowing
105 He looks to Shining, who tells him to stay calm and do what they say
106 He says he will
107 One of the scientists ask him who he was talking to
108 After Carter answers, a lot of scribbling is heard
109 The same scientist gets a little closer, and ask what Shining said
110 Carter tells them how Shining told him to stay calm and do what he was told
111 The scientist thanks them for making this easy
112 He introduces himself as Inquiring Mind
113 They had some questions and tests for today
114 They wanted to know about how a human could use magic
115 He told them that Shining had all the magic, and he couldn't use it himself
116 They wanted an explanation for the shield
117 He explained again that Shining had all the magic
118 Inquiring asked if Shining had any limits
119 Carter explained that any limits were from his human body processing the magic
120 One of the scientists asked how he knew all this
121 He explains that Shining told him
122 The doors to the room open
123 It's Princess Cadence, and she's upset
124 She had told the guards she wanted to be alerted when the tests were beginning
125 The guards apologize as she stands by the other scientists
126 Inquiring asks if he could close his eyes

127 Carter complies
128 He hears a few objects be placed down in front of him
129 Inquiring asks if Shining would be able to levitate the items without Carter opening his eyes
130 The items levitate without Carter doing anything
131 Shocked whispers
132 Carter is asked to open his eyes
133 He does, and see a few objects floating
134 They're placed back on the ground, and he shivers
135 Inquiring asked if he was okay
136 Carter explains that his body isn't used to processing magic yet
137 More scribbling of notes
138 Inquiring asks if Shining will be able to perform more spells
139 Carter looks to Shining for the answer
140 According to him, it's a matter of giving them time for the human's body to adapt to magic
141 Shining tells him it's getting easier quite quickly, but Carter keeps that between themselves
142 A few growling stomachs are heard
143 Time to break for lunch
144 Cadence asks a guard to bring Carter with her
145 She wants to get him a proper meal
146 She laments the use of the black bag as it's put on him
147 The guard tells her it's protocol
148 As they walk, she asks Carter if he wants anything particular
149 He asks if he could have fish and rice
150 She says she'll make it happen as he's brought into the dining room
151 He's sat down, and the bag is pulled off
152 She asks a chef to prepare fish and rice for the human
153 She apologized to Carter for not being able to see him before the testing
154 She was able to learn more about their testing however
155 They have a few goals
156 Learn how this happened to Shining

157 Learn if there's a way to free Shining
158 Understand this body-sharing phenomena
159 There was more, but Cadence was cut off by Celestia entering
160 She's unhappy at the sight of the human
161 She tells her niece that Shining's extended family is here to see her
162 Cadence tells Carter that she won't be long
163 After she leaves, the man receives a harsh stare
164 She isn't happy that her niece isn't properly grieving
165 She blames Carter for giving her what could be false hope
166 Too afraid to meet her gaze, he apologizes for what happened
167 If he had let the griffons eat him, Shining might still be alive
168 Celestia sighed, then apologized for being so harsh
169 Despite the griffons being caught and charged, the pain was still there
170 She told him that Shining was always against the war
171 The portal to Earth was opened before she wanted it to be, and the explosion it caused was a horrible accident
172 The explosion took out Washington D.C., as well as setting off a global EMP
173 The Earth governments declared war on Equestria, accusing them of terrorism
174 She admits should've closed the portal when she had the chance, before the humans' invasion attempts that forced retaliation
175 She hung her head as she blamed herself for Shining's death, as he went to Earth by her command
176 Shining spoke to Carter
177 Carter told Celestia that Shining forgave her
178 She smiled at him
179 The forgiveness of a spirit was welcomed
180 The chef came back with Carter's lunch
181 The chef greets Celestia, and she orders a salad for lunch
182 She orders one for Cadence as well
183 He waits for her food at first, but she encourages him to eat
184 He eats ravenously

185 He's still in the habits of living off of scraps
186 The salads comes out as he finishes
187 Shining asks Carter to ask about Twilight
188 He tells him he'll wait for her to finish her lunch before asking
189 Celestia stops eating for a moment to tell Carter he can ask any question Shining has
190 Shining wanted to know how Twilight was doing
191 She told them she was taking the loss just as hard as everypony else
192 Shining wanted to know if others knew about his body-sharing problem, and Carter asked
193 Just a few soldiers, scientists, her sister Luna, Cadence, and herself
194 Shining's parents and sister knew some details, but would be filled in when more was known
about Carter's situation
195 Suddenly, there was some noise outside the door
196 Cadence was heard, telling Twilight to stop
197 The doors burst open
198 It's Twilight, and she's a mix between angry and crying
199 She marches at Carter, demanding to see Shining
200 He tries to tell her that he can't, but she cuts him off as she calls him a liar
201 A blast of magic hurtles towards him, but is blocked by Celestia
202 Cadence pulls her out of the dining room, and the parents take her
203 She profusely apologizes for what happened
204 Twilight booked it as soon as she knew where he was
205 Cadence chastised herself for not thinking when she talked to her
206 Carter forgives her, knowing it's just Twilight's grief
207 He expresses a desire to practice magic more, so he can help Shining get a physical form sooner
208 Cadence agrees with Carter
209 She thanks her aunt for ordering a salad for her to eat
210 Carter has a thought, and asks Shining a question
211 How did he know the inner workings of magic pertaining to his spirit form?
212 The princesses shared the same curiosity
213 Shining says it came naturally to him somehow, and the answer is shared by Carter

214 Celestia theorized that since unicorns understood magic on an instinctual level, spirit magic would work the same

215 Though that was something she would leave to the scientists to research

216 The two princesses go back to their lunches

217 Carter and Shining have a telepathic conversation

218 Shining asks Carter why he keeps holding back information

219 Carter is worried what will happen if the scientists learn everything about them

220 He's worried what will happen when he's no longer useful

221 Shining tells him he'll be safe as long as they share a body

222 Even if the two were somehow separated, he would make sure his human companion was still safe

223 He thanks him for the comforting answer

224 Celestia finishes her lunch then excuses herself

225 She has to meet with Shining's family to work on details of his funeral

226 Shining admitted how surreal it was to hear others plan his funeral

227 It was the same feeling he had when he was looking at his own body

228 Cadence interrupts the silent conversation, asking Carter if he's okay

229 He tells her Shining's surreal feelings

230 She agrees with it

231 It's strange to have a conversation with her husband while his body was being prepared on the other side of the castle

232 She finished her salad

233 It was time for them to return to the scientists

234 The bag returned to Carter's head once more

235 Timeskip to dinner

236 Carter tells Cadence that levitating the same three blocks for hours on end made him long for his cell

237 She chuckles, telling him that dinner came first

238 The two had spent most of the day together

239 Carter was poked and prodded while Shining was using basic magic all day

240 He hoped tomorrow wouldn't be as boring

241 She told him to be careful what he wished for
242 They walked into the dining hall
243 He was sat down, and the bag pulled off
244 Princesses Celestia and Luna were there
245 Luna asked why one of the prisoners was here
246 Celestia told her that Carter wasn't a prisoner, just a victim of his circumstances
247 She reminded her that he was the reason Shining was getting a proper burial
248 Luna retorted with that he's the reason Shining's dead in the first place
249 Carter said Shining chose to save him
250 He very well could've let the griffons eat him, but he chose to protect him
251 Carter told Luna if she wanted to be upset, be upset at Shining for choosing to be a hero in his final moments
252 All the human was did, was honor the stallion's final wish to be brought home
253 He never wanted any part of this, but it happened nonetheless
254 Cadence joined in
255 While she upset for losing her husband physically, she was glad for fate to give her a second chance
256 Being outnumbered on the subject, Luna backs down
257 Smoked salmon and a salad are brought out for the human
258 Salads are brought to the princesses
259 They all dig in
260 Carter tried to go slower, but ate his meal quickly
261 Luna questioned his hasty habit
262 He admitted it was something he did because of the war
263 Crops were destroyed, so food was scarce on Earth
264 When you got food, you ate all you could, as fast as you could
265 Any food attracted other humans
266 Groups of humans attracted griffons
267 Luna asked if it was true that griffons were eating humans
268 Most of them weren't, but they were trading captured humans with ones that did

269 They had bases of their own, with no ponies in sight
270 He had seen one when his former group of survivors was captured
271 He had escaped because he forced his way through a break in the net
272 Had fallen into a river, and was swept away to safety
273 A few tears could be seen on his face
274 Cadence placed a hoof on Carter's back
275 She told him he didn't have to talk about it if he didn't want to
276 He placed his arm on her outstretched foreleg, and thanked her
277 Shining mentioned he could feel Cadence's foreleg on their back
278 Carter told the others, and it got an excited smile out of Cadence
279 Shining wondered if they would feel it if they kissed her
280 Carter blushed hard, which confused the others
281 He told them what Shining was wondering
282 The three princesses had a good laugh
283 Celestia was glad Shining could be humorous in these trying times
284 Dessert was brought out
285 Chocolate cake
286 Carter hadn't seen a cake since before the war
287 Celestia asked if the food issue on Earth was truly as bad as he was making it out to be
288 The global food supply was interrupted by the war, and most of it destroyed by her armies
289 She said she never authorized the destruction of Earth's crops, and would speak to her generals
about it
290 Dessert was finished
291 Celestia yawned, as it was time for her to go to bed
292 Cadence and Carter were tired as well
293 He said goodnight to the princesses as the black bag was put on his head
294 As he was escorted back to his cell, he chatted with Cadence
295 He was glad the Royal Sisters were willing to listen to him
296 Cadence was glad he was so positive about his situation
297 Carter said he had her and Shining to thank for that

298 She was helping him, and he was protecting him

299 While he knew he wasn't ending the war with his situation, he figured he would do what he could

300 A small part of him hoped fixing the food scarcity would be a good first step

301 Cadence tells him it certainly is one

302 The bag is pulled off in the dungeon, and he walks into his cell

303 Cadence wishes him goodnight

304 He wishes her one as well

305 The guard leaves to escort the princess out

306 The other human prisoners call out to Carter

307 They ask if he knew anything interesting about what was going on up there

308 He couldn't tell them much

309 All he ever saw was a testing room, and the dining hall

310 They asked why he got fed well, and they got scraps

311 Since he was sharing a body with one of the ponies, they wanted to keep him healthy

312 The night guard comes before they could retort

313 Shining wondered what tests laid ahead tomorrow

314 Carter knew they would probably be boring

315 Not long before they're sleeping, and dreaming about an open grassy field

316 The past two nights were dreamless sleep

317 Carter was a little excited that they shared the same dream

318 Shining wondered if they did because of the body-sharing

319 Luna wondered as well

320 The two turned around in surprise, as seeing her was not expected

321 She had raised the moon already, and wanted an early start on her dreamwalking

322 More specifically, she wanted some time with the two of them

323 Shining quickly let Carter know that Luna could enter dreams

324 Carter asked what she wanted to talk about

325 She wanted to talk to Shining

326 She wanted to know how he was doing

327 He was still adjusting to body-sharing, but otherwise well

328 She was curious about how his magic was handling a human body

329 Shining glanced at Carter before he told her it was slow-coming

330 Luna noticed, but said nothing for the moment

331 She asked how he was getting along with the human

332 He told her that he was getting along great with Carter

333 Suddenly, she turned to Carter

334 She asked the man why he had been forcing Shining to withhold the truth

335 Before he could defend himself, she brought up Shining's initial glance when she asked of his magic handling a human body

336 While frozen with fear, she tells him he won't be allowed to wake up until he answered

337 Knowing he wasn't getting out of it, he opened up

338 He was genuinely scared of what would happen when he was no longer useful

339 Luna was taken aback, asking if he thought they were truly that heartless

340 Shining chimed in, as he had the answer in his memories

341 The scenery changes

342 They were back on Earth, the day Shining died

343 Shining had seen some soldiers observing a familiar group of griffons that were flying after Carter

344 The ponies in question were taking bets on how long Carter was gonna last before getting caught and eaten

345 They had apparently sicced the griffons on him after he had denied a mare's offer of sex in exchange for food

346 The scenery changed back to the grassy field

347 Shining said that Carter had no reason to trust ponies after something like that

348 Luna was outright shocked

349 Shining continued, saying that the only ponies Carter trusted were himself and his wife

350 Cadence was honest at her intentions from the get go

351 Shining was doing nothing but protecting him

352 Luna asked Carter if this was true

353 He silently nodded

354 He quietly said that it was it wasn't unusual for soldiers to take advantage of humans

355 Luna asked Shining for the names of these ponies

356 They were given

357 Luna promised the ponies in questioned would be spoken to, and most likely punished for their actions leading to Shining's death

358 She would also speak to her sister about putting a stop to soldiers using humans for sex

359 Turns out that Celestia and Luna only knew of the war efforts through their three generals, and had never been to Earth themselves

360 Shining said it would be no surprise if the generals knew about the soldiers using humans

361 Luna wondered what else the generals were withholding

362 She apologized for her past harshness

363 She told Carter that this situation would be looked into first thing in the morning

364 Carter thanked her as she left

365 After she left, Shining commented that they never fully answered her questions on what information they were holding back

366 Carter thanked him for stepping in before that became a problem

367 While he was glad the sex issue would be resolved, he still wanted to keep the 'how' of their situation between them

368 Shining agreed

369 They wake up the next day

370 It's Cadence, waking them up early

371 Carter asks what's going on as the bag is put on his head

372 She tells him it's a surprise

373 After walking longer than usual, the bag is removed

374 The guard is dismissed into the hallway as Carter looks around

375 They're in a bedroom

376 The guestroom Cadence had been staying in

377 She asked him the last time he had bathed

378 Carter remembered one time he rinsed his hair in a river

379 She opened a door to the bathroom

380 A warm bath was already drawn

381 She asked him to take off his clothes, and those would be washed too
382 He blushed hard
383 She asked if he was okay
384 He explained that adult humans normally only got naked with those they were close to
385 She nodded, then conjured an opaque wall between them
386 He took off his clothes, and stepped into the bathroom
387 He thanked her as he got in the bath
388 She said she would check on him in a bit as she closed the door
389 Carter started to clean himself for the first time in a long time
390 He felt the sweat and grime be scrubbed away
391 As he washed himself, he realized that he hadn't taken a bath since he was a child
392 The thought made him tear up a bit
393 He shared this feeling with Shining when they noticed he was crying
394 Carter missed life before the war
395 Shining told him to stay hopeful
396 Wars don't last forever
397 With everything the princesses learned from him in the past few days, things could change more than he realizes
398 Carter smiles as he goes back to bathing
399 A sound is heard, coming from the bedroom
400 Shining said it sounded like a teleportation spell
401 A voice was muttering about finding the spare diapers Cadence packed
402 Shining said it was his sister, Twilight
403 Remembering his past two experiences with her, he quickly dips lower into the bathwater
404 The splashing noise alerted Twilight
405 She shouts to them, thinking it's just Cadence taking a bath
406 With no response, she opens the door
407 Shining was worried, as she was approaching the bathtub
408 There was no pony around to stop her if she attacked, and they were in no position to fight
409 They had no time to think, as she was now staring at the bathing human

410 The silence hung in the air as the two stared in silence
411 Carter was too scared to do anything
412 She asked what he was doing
413 He quietly answered that Cadence brought him up so he could take a bath
414 She comments that Cadence has done a lot for him since he got here
415 Feeding him, talking with him, and now this
416 He told her that Cadence was just trying to help take care of the new body Shining inhabited
417 There was a brief silence again
418 Twilight asked if she could talk to Shining
419 Carter told her Shining can see and hear her on his own, due to being a floating spirit
420 Making him visible and audible was a spell his human body couldn't handle right now though
421 Shining told Carter that he had a solution, and the message was relayed
422 She asked her brother how he was doing
423 He told her he was okay, by writing out the words with his magic
424 Carter didn't recognize the language, but Shining talked as he wrote
425 He went back to his bath as the siblings talked
426 The usual shivering from magic use wasn't as intense as usual
427 He was glad the two got to talk
428 He knew Shining was worried about his sister
429 The sound of the bedroom door opening was heard by all three
430 It was Cadence, and she sounded worried
431 She ran into the bathroom
432 Carter and Twilight waved to her
433 Twilight apologizes for taking so long
434 She thanks Carter, apologizes for her past behavior, and leaves with the diapers she was looking
for
435 Cadence was glad he was okay
436 She had his clothes ready for him
437 She left so he could rinse off and change
438 He stepped out, fresh and clean

439 Cadence commented how much nicer he looked
440 He thanked her for letting him get his first bath in a long time
441 She was happy to oblige
442 With a black bag on, now they were off to breakfast
443 On the walk, Cadence mentioned how surprised she was at Twilight's turnaround
444 She told him that Celestia had a one-on-one with Twilight after her latest attempted assault
445 Carter said that being able to talk to her brother might've helped too
446 The statement shocked Cadence
447 He told her that he wrote words with magic to communicate
448 She was excited as they entered the dining hall
449 Celestia and Luna asked what Cadence was excited about as the black bag was pulled off
450 They shared her excitement when she explained
451 Carter mentioned that the spell wasn't as intense of a drain as other spells have been
452 Pancakes were brought out, and they all dug in
453 Shining decided to ask Luna if she had talked to Celestia about their chat last night
454 Celestia said that they had talked on their way to the dining hall
455 Both the soldiers in question and the generals were being brought in to explain themselves
456 Soldiers trading food for sex with humans was something she was putting a stop to
457 The soldiers were on their way now, but the generals were two days out
458 They were already on their way for Shining's funeral
459 Cadence was mortified at the situation
460 Taking advantage of desperate humans just trying to survive a war
461 Celestia agreed
462 She wanted the horrible practice to end, so she could work on a peace plan to end the war
463 Carter's eyes lit up as a pancake was halfway in his mouth
464 The sight got a chuckle out of the princesses
465 After Shining's funeral, there were plans of contacting Earth's world leaders to start peace talks
466 The news brought a smile to Carter's face
467 Luna changed the subject by mentioning that Carter looked different
468 He answered that Cadence let him use her bath

469 Hard to keep up hygiene when you're constantly running and hiding
470 She wondered if letting the prisoners bathe would do well for them
471 It was something they could discuss later
472 Carter had to get to the scientists
473 Cadence said she would take him, but couldn't stay
474 She had to finish the speech for Shining's funeral
475 The black bag was put on, but Celestia ordered it off
476 She said he had earned the right to be without it
477 He thanked her before he left
478 Today was the first time he got to see the castle
479 It was beautiful
480 He saw some guards glaring at him as he walked with the princess
481 Shining told him that a lot of the guards didn't like him due to the special treatment they were supposed to give him
482 Cadence said she would be back at lunch, and the two parted ways
483 Carter was greeted by Inquiring Mind as he walked in
484 The scientists were looking forward to testing today
485 Celestia had told them of the physical contact phenomenon, and they wanted to explore it a bit
486 Carter asked if they also wanted to test Shining's ability to communicate
487 The scientists went quiet as he sat down
488 Inquiring asked when this was discovered
489 He told them it was just this morning
490 The scientists muttered to each other for a moment
491 Inquiring came back, and told Carter they could run the same test for both things
492 Carter watched as a small magical dome appeared around him
493 It was a gray energy to contrast the white room
494 Inquiring walked into the dome, and told Carter it was a soundproof barrier
495 It would let them test communication with Shining
496 The tests on physical contact could come after lunch
497 Inquiring would check on Carter after they got this initial test of communication finished

498 He was excited at the possibilities of being able to talk to Shining
499 Inquiring left the dome
500 Carter watched as Shining communicated with the excited scientists
501 It was the first time the two had some separation
502 It felt much quieter without the stallion in his head
503 He started to nod off
504 Nearly asleep
505 He was startled awake by a weight on his legs
506 It was a filly
507 She sat up in his lap as she looked at him with curiosity
508 He held her so she wouldn't fall off
509 She said Dada as she pointed at his chest
510 He was a bit stumped, as he had no idea what to do
511 The ponies outside were looking over to the door
512 It burst open, with Twilight and Cadence running in
513 The soundproof dome disappeared
514 Cadence levitated Flurry Heart over to her
515 She scolded her about teleporting without asking Mommy
516 Twilight blamed herself, as she was talking to her parents about talking to Shining
517 Flurry wanted to talk to her Daddy, then she teleported after being told no
518 Cadence asked Carter if he was alright
519 He said he was fine
520 It was just weird when Flurry said Dada and pointed at his chest
521 After an apology from the princess, the test continues
522 He nodded off again
523 He was woken up by Princess Cadence a few hours later
524 It was lunchtime
525 He yawned and stretched as they left the room
526 The dungeon beds were not that comfy, and sleeping was a challenge
527 Cadence said she would look into it for him as they entered the dining hall

528 Celestia was there, lunches already ordered
529 Salmon burger for Carter, rose salad for Cadence
530 They were usually there before her, but Carter falling asleep put them slightly behind
531 They told her about the incident with Flurry Heart
532 It got a chuckle out of the sun princess
533 The three sat down for lunch
534 Cadence asked Celestia about improving Carter's sleeping situation
535 He wasn't a prisoner, so she hoped he could have a guest room
536 Unfortunately, there weren't any rooms available
537 They were all being used for one reason or another
538 Without missing a beat, Cadence said that she could share her bed with him
539 The guards in the room went wide-eyed
540 Cadence argued that since Shining feels what Carter feels, her husband should be comfortable
541 Celestia was quiet for a moment
542 She asked Shining how he felt about this
543 He said he longed to sleep with his wife again in some form
544 She asked Carter how he felt
545 He trusted Cadence and Shining was up for it, so he was alright with it
546 Carter ate his burger as the princesses talked over details
547 He telepathically asked Shining if he was okay with him sleeping with his wife
548 Shining chuckled, and asked if he meant their wife
549 Carter asked him to define "their wife"
550 He said that since they shared a body, it would make sense that the human became a part of the marriage
551 Frustrated, Carter verbally told Shining that him marrying Cadence is a ridiculous idea
552 He froze when he realized he said it out loud
553 While he was red with embarrassment, Shining explained
554 Cadence chuckled while telling her husband to stop teasing Carter so much
555 Annoyed, Carter grabbed his own ear, and twisted it hard
556 Shining yelped, which got a quick laugh from the human

557 Celestia had a laugh, saying that the two behaved like brothers
558 The good times were interrupted by an approaching Raven Inkwell
559 She told the princess the four soldiers she requested had just crossed through the portal
560 Lunch was wrapped up because these four soldiers were the ones Shining told Luna about
561 Celestia asked Carter if he wanted to come with her so both he and Shining could confirm they were the soldiers from the incident
562 He swallowed the last of his burger as he nodded
563 Two princesses, an assistant, and a human make their way to the throne room
564 Shining asks Carter if he's ready for this
565 He admits to being a little scared
566 The four (five) enter the throne room
567 The four soldiers from that day were standing in front of the throne
568 One pegasus, one earth pony, and two unicorns
569 All mares
570 They bowed as they greeted the princesses
571 Celestia returned the greeting, then asked Carter and Shining if these were the ponies from the incident
572 Both said yes
573 Carter had barely glanced at one of the mares, which Shining noticed
574 As Celestia explained the reason the four were brought here, one of the unicorn soldiers was staring at Carter with a mischievous smile
575 Carter couldn't bring himself to look up
576 Shining couldn't see what specifically, but he could feel painful memories flooding his friends' mind
577 As Carter was trembling, Shining knew one thing
578 This mare had done something to Carter in the past that left him traumatized
579 Cadence tried to put her right foreleg on his side to comfort him
580 He flinched, yelped, and wrapped his arms around himself
581 Celestia saw this
582 She looked back to the mare, who was still smiling
583 She asked Lieutenant Blitz what she found so funny

584 The mare commented she found it nice the human still remembered her
585 Tears were streaming from Carter's eyes, and dripping from his nose
586 The mare laughs, saying that he's crying just like last time too
587 Upon hearing that, it begins to click for the other ponies in the room
588 Celestia orders the guards to take the four soldiers to holding cells
589 She tells Raven that she'll be taking Cadence and Carter to her bedroom for a moment
590 In a flash, they were in Celestia's bedroom
591 She told him that the mare was on the other side of the castle now
592 He looked up, eyes reddened from tears
593 She apologized to Carter for asking, but had to hear an answer before moving forward
594 Did that mare rape him?
595 Carter stifled out a yes, then immediately burst out into tears
596 A wall of emotions crumbled
597 He dropped to the floor in the fetal position as he continued bawling
598 Cadence sat by Carter, and pulled him into a hug
599 She wrapped her wings around him
600 There's a few minutes of intense tears
601 Shining wished he could do something to help
602 Carter sniffled, then told him there was something he could do
603 He asked Shining if he could keep that mare away from him
604 Shining promised that she would never violate him again
605 He thanked the stallion as he wiped away his tears
606 Celestia said she would be suspending the testing on Carter
607 He needed a break from everything
608 He thanked Celestia as he stood up
609 Cadence told him that she wouldn't allow anypony into their shared room without asking him
first
610 He thanked the both of them for understanding, as men being raped wasn't an issue other
humans recognized
611 With the mare-to-stallion ratio in Equestria, stallions being raped by mares was something that
unfortunately happened

612 The only upside being that there were many resources available to victims
613 Celestia said she would arrange a therapist as soon as she could
614 For now, Carter just wanted to lie down
615 Timeskip a few hours
616 Carter wakes up from a nap
617 It's nearly suppertime
618 Carter asked Shining if anything had happened while he was sleeping
619 Cadence had told him some things while his friend was asleep
620 Inquiring Mind upset at the testing being suspended
621 Celestia had started to look into her options for punishing the mare that raped him
622 She wanted to make sure a clear message was sent: that this was not okay, and will not happen again
623 There's a knock on the door
624 It's Cadence checking on them
625 She asks how he's doing
626 Taking a nap helped him calm down from earlier
627 He asked her if anything else happened while he was sleeping that she didn't tell Shining
628 She had just learned that word had spread fast, with some guards and soldiers taking sides in the matter
629 Guards are predominantly stallions, while soldiers are mostly mares
630 Most of the guards think it's wrong to use food as a means to get sex out of humans
631 Most of the soldiers think that they should be able to do as they please to the humans
632 Things were intense between the guards and soldiers now
633 Cadence asked if he wanted to go to dinner
634 Carter nodded as he got out of bed
635 As the two walked down the hall, he noticed the guards weren't glaring like they did earlier
636 Shining said that the guards had a small change of heart when they found out what the mare soldier did
637 They still disliked him for being human though, so Shining wasn't sure of them entirely
638 All he knew was that they sympathized
639 The dining room had the princesses awaiting

640 Celestia asked Carter how he was doing

641 He said the short nap helped him a little

642 Shining asked about the accused soldier

643 Celestia told him the mare would be dishonorably discharged, and tried for her crime in The Court of the Crowns

644 She would be made an example of

645 Carter asked if that meant he would have to talk about what happened at the trial

646 Celestia silently nodded

647 Carter's left hand curled into a fist as he shook

648 Cadence assured him she would be there for support

649 Luna told him that trial wouldn't be for another week

650 All parties needed time to prepare, as a trial like this hasn't happened in ages

651 Dinner comes out, and they all dig in

652 Shining mentally asked Carter how he was actually doing

653 Carter admitted to still feeling a little scared

654 He knew his rapist wasn't getting out of her cell, but he was scared other soldiers would retaliate against him

655 Shining told him he would keep his promise of protecting him

656 Carter thanked him

657 Celestia tells Carter she has a therapist ready for him, and they can start tomorrow after lunch

658 He thanked her for putting it together so quickly

659 They all finished dinner, and dessert was brought out

660 While his slice of chocolate cake was average, Celestia's was a quarter of the cake

661 Luna asks her sister if she really needs to eat so much cake

662 Carter chimes in, saying that Celestia is probably stressed as can be with everything, and a little extra cake won't hurt her

663 Celestia is glad to have at least one on her side

664 Laughter is shared at the table

665 Celestia, Cadence, and Carter all yawn deeply after finishing their slices

666 All three are tired

667 Cadence and Carter say their good nights as they leave for her room

668 As they walked towards the guestroom, Cadence asked Carter if he was still okay with the sleeping arrangements

669 He told her he trusted her, and wanted to sleep in a real bed

670 They walked in, and ignored the whispers from the guards at the door

671 Cadence said that the bed was big enough for them to share

672 Only when Cadence removed her regalia, did Carter remember he had no pajamas

673 She asked if he planned to sleep in his day clothes

674 He said he had no choice, as they were the only clothes he had

675 She levitated a box on the bed, over to him

676 It was filled with numerous clothes

677 She told him that his clothes were measured when she had them washed

678 She had some clothes collected from Earth for him that matched his size

679 He stood there in silence, box in hands

680 He quietly mentioned that this was the first genuine gift a pony had given him

681 He thanked her

682 He went into the bathroom to change

683 He grabbed some pajama pants, and changed into them

684 He stepped out, with a smile from Cadence

685 As they got into bed, she asked when he last slept in a real bed

686 Carter couldn't answer, as he began to fall asleep as soon as his head hit the pillow

687 He felt something press against his cheek as Cadence whispered him goodnight

688 Carter opened his eyes, to see he was back on Earth

689 He was on a beach

690 It was THE beach

691 Where it happened

692 He looked down to see a bottle of medicine

693 He reached down for it, but it levitated away

694 A few steps away, Lieutenant Blitz smirked as the medicine floated by her

695 She told him he knew what he had to do for the bottle

696 Carter turned and ran

697 He fell almost immediately, due to the magical hold on his feet
698 As he was pulled towards Blitz, Carter screamed for Shining
699 She laughed, as she told Carter the prince wouldn't be saving him this time
700 She stood above him, her legs surrounding him
701 Blitz told him to take off his pants, or he was griffon food
702 A light blue haze appeared around Carter
703 He was pulled away from Blitz, and brought to his feet
704 He now stood next to Princess Luna
705 With a blast from her horn, Blitz was gone
706 Carter dropped to his knees as he wrapped his arms around himself
707 Luna reminded him that this was a nightmare, and he was safe now
708 He asked her where Shining was
709 She said that Shining was still awake, watching over him
710 He stood up, and thanked her for saving him
711 It was no issue for her, as dispelling nightmares was her job
712 The surroundings shifted to the former grassy fields
713 Luna excused herself, as she sensed another nightmare
714 They wished each other goodnight
715 Carter wakes up
716 The sun is just rising
717 Cadence is right in his face, still asleep
718 Her legs are wrapped around him
719 Their noses are touching
720 He had wrapped his arms around her in his sleep
721 Shining playfully made kissing noises at the two
722 With his left middle finger, he brushed some of Cadence's mane out of her face
723 Cadence woke up, slowly realizing what position the two were in
724 The two blushed intensely
725 Shining made more kissing noises from the foot of the bed
726 Cadence whipped her head towards the sound

727 She whispered that she could see him

728 She nearly shouted it as she scrambled out of bed towards him

729 Carter yelled in pain when he took a hoof stomp right to the groin

730 Shining also doubled over

731 Carter said 'Karma' in between groans

732 Cadence's excitement quickly faltered when she saw what she did

733 Cut to an embarrassed princess, a laughing Shining, and a limping human entering the dining hall

734 Celestia and Luna are excited to see Shining, but confused as to why Carter is holding an ice pack on his crotch

735 They blush when all Cadence does, is blush in response

736 Carter told them to get their heads out of the gutter

737 He explained the morning's events

738 The guards in the room winced in solidarity when Carter mentioned the hoof stomp

739 He eats his pancakes with one hand while holding the ice pack

740 Celestia mentioned that the generals would be in tomorrow, and Shining's funeral would be the day after

741 She asked if he had any plans besides the meeting with the therapist after lunch

742 Unless Shining wanted to do something, Carter planned to relax in Cadence's room

743 Shining asked Celestia if he could talk to his family, now that he made himself visible to everypony

744 Celestia still wanted to keep his situation under wraps, but figured it would be best for the family

745 They only knew bits and pieces, and deserved the whole story

746 It was decided that Shining's parents and sister would be brought to Cadence's room

747 Shining thanked Celestia for the opportunity

748 Breakfast was wrapped up

749 Cadence and Carter would go back to their room

750 Celestia would bring the family

751 A tired Luna would head to bed

752 They all left the dining hall

753 As they made their way to the guestroom, Shining was trying to think of the best thing to say when his family first sees him

754 Carter said that he could always mention his weightloss

755 Cadence snorted at the comment

756 Shining immediately retorted with how he's pretty sure he gained weight with his new host body

757 Cadence let a laugh slip as they entered the guestroom

758 She told her husband say whatever came to mind

759 Shining floated about the room nervously as they all waited

760 Cadence admitted to being a little nervous as well

761 She didn't know how Shining's parents and sister would react to not just her knowing about his current condition, but keeping them in the dark the past few days

762 Carter put a hand on her back, telling her that it would all be okay

763 She pulls him into a hug and thanks him

764 Shining asks if the lovely couple needs some alone time

765 Carter shoots him a glare as Cadence blushes

766 Shining laughs

767 He tells them that his marriage idea looked less ridiculous now

768 Before Carter could retort, there was a knock at the door

769 Cadence told them to come in

770 Celestia was the first one in, followed by Twilight, then the parents

771 The parents shot glares at Carter, before their eyes lit up at the sight of their floating son

772 Celestia told them she would be in the throne room with Flurry Heart, and they could take as much time as they needed

773 The door closed, and there was a moment of awkward silence

774 Shining floated down to his parents

775 He quietly said hi to his parents

776 Mrs. Sparkle raised a hoof, and it passed through him

777 Mr. Sparkle asked if it was truly him

778 Shining nodded

779 Twilight stared in Silence

780 Cadence told them that it was a long story, and it was centered around the human

781 All 3 sat on their haunches, eager to listen
782 Carter sat on the floor with them, and Cadance sat next to him
783 He told his story
784 It began a few days ago
785 He was passing through Friendship Village, Maryland
786 He was trying to find a way out of the blockade ponies had set up around the whole state
787 A few mare soldiers he had met before crossed his path
788 Lieutenant Blitz offered sex in exchange for food and safe passage
789 He refused, and the soldiers ordered a nearby griffon squadron on him
790 He could tell they were man eaters by the bones they wore, and ran
791 They cornered him
792 He would've been eaten, if not for Shining stepping in
793 He tried to fight them off while protecting Carter
794 A spear took him out
795 Carter told them he held Shining in his arms in his final moments
796 Twilight asked why he brought Shining back if he knew he would be captured
797 Carter told her that Shining's last wish was to be buried at home
798 Mr. Sparkle asked if anypony knew how his son's spirit was trapped in a human body
799 Carter looked at Shining, who nodded
800 Carter admitted that both he and Shining knew exactly how it happened, and they had kept it a secret from the beginning
801 They feared what both sides would do if they knew how to recreate this
802 Mrs. Sparkle apologized in advance for asking if the rumors about him and Lieutenant Blitz were true
803 Carter sighed heavily before nodding
804 He told them that the lieutenant had been dishonorably discharged, and was being tried for previously raping him
805 Cadence saw him getting visibly uncomfortable, and wrapped her forelegs around him
806 She told them that talking about Blitz was hard for him
807 She ran a foreleg behind his head, and he calmed down a bit
808 Twilight commented that Shining was glowing

809 They all looked up to see two foreleg-shaped lines wrapped around him
810 Carter said that was new
811 Shining said he was working on a visual form of their shared touch
812 Twilight asked for clarification
813 Carter explained that whatever he physically felt, Shining felt too
814 The two also shared the same dream whenever they slept
815 The telepathy was also mentioned
816 Twilight mentioned that she had read about something like this body-sharing phenomenon in an old book
817 It was in her Pre-Banishment era collection back at the library
818 She said she could head back to Ponyville after the funeral
819 Shining told her to take her time, since he wasn't going anywhere
820 Shining's mom got up, and had a request for Carter
821 She asked if she could hug him, so Shining could feel it
822 Carter nodded
823 She walked up to him
824 She wrapped her forelegs around his neck
825 She held him so tight
826 After a brief moment, Shining's father joined the hug
827 Twilight and Cadence joined as well
828 Silence filled the room
829 The four ponies hugged Carter for a minute
830 When they all let go, Carter saw four misty-eyed smiles
831 Shining's mother thanked Carter for letting them do that
832 He told her it was no problem, and they were welcome to visit at anytime
833 Shining's father joked that they had another babysitter for Flurry now
834 That got a few chuckles out of everyone
835 Cadence wondered if she should check on her daughter
836 She had been so busy between preparing the funeral and helping Carter that she barely saw her
837 The parents said they would go get her

838 Twilight would stay, as she wanted to chat with Shining and Carter
839 The parents nodded, then left
840 Cadence rested her head on top of Carter's
841 Carter leaned into Cadence
842 He told her that he never had the chance to properly thank her for all her help
843 If it wasn't for her, he would still be in the dungeon
844 She wrapped her forelegs around him
845 She told him that while her original intentions were selfish, all she wanted now was for both him
and Shining to be happy
846 The two embraced each other for a moment
847 They quickly remembered that Twilight was in the room, and looked over to her
848 Wide-eyed silence
849 Twilight asked how long the two had been together
850 Cadence said that it wasn't like that, and the two were just close
851 Shining piped in and said that they made a cute couple
852 Both Carter and Cadence blushed at the comment as they let go of each other
853 Cadence asked why he was so intent on pushing them together
854 He quickly adopted a somber look
855 He told her that he didn't want her to be alone
856 She retorted with that she wasn't, because he was still here
857 He told her that a floating spirit trapped in a human body didn't make for a good husband
858 Shining knew Carter inside and out from their time spent together
859 He was good for her
860 Flurry wouldn't have teleported to him the other day if she didn't trust him
861 He knew that Carter trusted Cadence a lot
862 He asked them to think about the fact they were so comfortable with each other, despite only
knowing each other for a few days
863 The two looked at each other
864 Carter said how tough it was to trust ponies after Blitz, and Cadence helped more than she knew
865 They embraced each other

866 Cadence said how grateful she was for his personal sacrifice that lead to her getting more time with her husband

867 He admitted that he wasn't sure how he felt about a relationship with a different species, but he admits to liking the time he spends with her

868 They look into each other's eyes

869 The door opened, and the two immediately let go of each other

870 The parents walked in, baby Flurry on the father's back

871 She was levitated over to a cheery Cadence

Son of Celestia (I tried to bring this story back from a scribble dump)

Chapter 1

“Running. Gotta keep running.” Kindle thought to himself. A cacophony of thundering hooves and metal wasn’t too far behind him. Distant shouting growing closer by the second. They didn’t care he was running deeper into the Everfree Forest. They wanted him captured. Outrunning them was impossible. He didn’t know how long he had been running. He didn’t know what else to do. He couldn’t think straight. His feet and legs were screaming. He never ran this much before in his life. He wasn’t sure how much he had left in him to keep going. He could hear the pounding hooves getting closer.

As he ran, Kindle’s mind flashed back to an hour ago. He was in Ponyville. His dad insisted on them going together. A friend of his father was having a birthday tomorrow at the village. He wanted to surprise his friend with a nice cake. It would cost a lot of bits for a human’s income. Out of a desire to help as well as not wanting to buy a present, he chipped in with his father. After a conversation about parties with a jubilant salespony with a pink mane, the cake was in hand.

Kindle was stood outside the front of the Carousel Boutique. Kindle’s dad was inside, looking at a new line of clothes for humans. They couldn’t afford any of it, but it was nice to look. The unicorn mare that ran the place didn’t like food inside her boutique, so Kindle was outside. A well dressed couple of ponies were walking out. A blue mare with an orange mane wrapped up like a beehive. A yellow stallion with short white hair. Both were unicorns, and the mare looked quite grumpy.

“Ugh.” the mare said. “I can’t believe we had to come all the way down to Ponyville to pick up our new outfits.”

“You’ve never looked better dear.” the stallion said reassuringly.

The two walked over his way. They stopped in front of him. The blue mare and yellow stallion stared down at Kindle judgingly. He was eye level with the mare, and stared down by the stallion. He tried to avoid looking up at them. He knew why they were staring. He looked different from the other humans. It wasn’t his light brown skin. It was a common skin tone among humans. Rather it was his pink hair. It rivalled the pink manes of other ponies in its vibrance. He was born with it. Dad said it made him unique. All it did was get him weird looks.

“Strange little human aren’t you?” the unicorn mare asked coyly.

“Well my dear,” the stallion said “humans are quite bland in appearance. Maybe he wants to feel special.”

“I-It’s my natural hair color ma’am.” Kindle said quietly.

“Making you all the more strange.” the mare said.

“Maybe he’s somepony’s little dress-up doll.” the stallion said. That statement made them both chuckle at him. Being talked down to by the upper echelon was normal for humans, but he got it a bit worse. It was why he spent most of his life in the human village west of Ponyville.

“Ahem.” said a soft, yet stern voice. All three of them looked over to see Kindle’s dad and the boutique’s owner. Fur white as a cloud, and a swirly purple mane. Her name was Rarity. She was really nice to Kindle as well as to other humans. “If you two wish to continue being customers at the Carousel Boutique, harassment of humans will not be tolerated in my presence.”

The two fancy unicorns grumbled a bit, but left. Kindle’s father put a comforting hand on Kindle’s left shoulder.

“Are you okay son?” his father asked.

“Y-Yeah.” Kindle answered. “They just gave me a hard time about my hair.”

“I apologize for them.” Rarity said. “Humans are always welcome here at my store.”

“Thank you miss Rarity.” the father said.

They all waved and left. It was time to head back to the village. It would be a little bit of a walk. They were making their way through the town square. Ponies were walking about. A few humans as well. Not many humans lived outside the village. The few that did were usually employed as a servant or personal assistant.

Kindle’s hands were feeling oddly warm. As if they were sitting in hot water. The heat was continuously shifting between manageable and uncomfortable. He winced at the small spikes in heat. His father noticed his discomfort and took the cake. Being smaller than the ponies had a convenience. Blending into the crowd couldn’t be easier. At least dealing with the adults. Unluckily, a random foal had noticed him. She said something to her parent about ‘the hoomin with the pretty pink hair’. That was enough to get him an unwanted audience. A number of ponies crowded around him. His dad was pushed away by the excited crowd. Said crowd pelted him with a flurry of statements and questions.

“Cool hair” a stallion pegasus said.

“Is the color real?” a mare asked.

“It’s the brightest pink I’ve ever seen.” another mare said.

“Maybe he dyed it.” a stallion said.

They wouldn’t stop. They just kept coming. Every word bouncing around in his ears. The burning in his hands getting more intense by the second. It felt like the voices were getting louder. Overlapping each other more and more. His hands felt like they were on fire. Like they were shoved into white hot coals. Kindle was reaching a breaking point.

“Leave me alone!” he shouted as he threw his hands to his sides in frustration.

Suddenly, there was a flash of yellow light. It felt like all the heat building up in his hands shot out in all directions. His view slowly came back into focus after the flash. His hands were emanating smoke. Looking around, the area wasn't faring any better. The ponies that once surrounded him were on the ground. He looked back down to his smoking hands. He saw his father on the ground and ran over to him. Kindle looked up to see numerous ponies walking towards him. He didn't know what caused the explosion. He didn't know what was going on. He turned to see the Everfree Forest in the distance.

So here he was. Running through the ever terrifying Everfree Forest. The pounding of hooves and metal was getting closer. The Royal Guard were persistent. They would shout to each other as well as at him. He didn't know what they were saying. All he could hear clearly was his own heavy breathing. His foot caught on something. He fell to the ground and tumbled.

"Surround him!" a voice shouted.

Just as he began to sit up, Kindle was surrounded. Two unicorns, four pegasi, and four earth ponies. A few of the guards seemed confused.

"Ten of us for one little hoomin?" one pegasus guard asked.

"This little human emitted a magical blast that knocked out a dozen ponies." a unicorn guard said.

"But captain." another pegasus guard said. "Hoomins can't do magic."

The stallion they called captain stared him down intensely. "Making this one all the more dangerous and unpredictable." he said. "Let's get him to her highness as quickly as we can. Iron Wing! Secure the human!"

A pegasus stepped out of the encirclement towards him. He was light brown unlike the rest, and carried something in his teeth. It looked like a net. The thought of being wrapped up in a net like an animal hung in his head. He could feel his hands heating up again. He held them up in front towards the approaching pegasus. They began to glow yellow.

"Stay back!" he warned.

It was too late. The glowing energy shot out of his hands towards the approaching guard. It seemed his captor was well trained. They had spread their wings and flew above the blast in a split second. He darted in his direction. The net had dropped and scooped up in an instant. The guards had him. Panic swelled up in his chest. He felt the heat rise again in his hands. A purple energy swirled around his head and clouded his vision.

“Sleep.” the captain said. All the fatigue from the constant running rapidly caught up with Kindle all at once. Despite the uncomfortableness of the net, he quickly fell asleep.

Iron Wing was not expecting today to be so active. The princess teleported them to the edge of Everfree Forest after word of a magical explosion caused by a human came to her. The human had ran into the forest. They were ordered to safely retrieve the human involved. So here he was. With a human trapped in a net, on his back. A human that was showing signs of magic. He was no scientist, but this was probably the hugest discovery in ages. A part of him wondered what fate laid ahead for the little one.

He looked to the net on his back. The sleeping spell Captain Shining used was pretty strong. The human was curled up in a ball. Softly snoozing away. He was using his wings to keep him from sliding off. If it wasn't for the situation's severity, it would look a little cute. At least the human's size made for a short chase. The walk back wouldn't take more than an hour. They had a train waiting for them at the station. They just had to get past all the curious onlookers that would inevitably be awaiting them. Flashing cameras, eager journalists, and plain ol' nosy citizens.

As if on cue, the crowd appeared. Just as they walked out of the forest, a flurry of curious ponies made their way towards them. The captain was prepared though.

“VIP formation!” the captain barked. With the captain out front, the eight other guards formed an oval around the pegasus. Iron was relieved that all he had to worry about was carrying the little guy. His fellow guards had to deal with the citizens. The captain had it the worst. He had to deal with the annoying journalists.

“Captain! Captain!” a pegasus with a notepad shouted. “Do you have a statement for the Foal Free Press?”

“No comment.” the captain said.

“Why are there ten royal guardsponies escorting a single unconscious hoomin?” the pegasus asked.
“Why is the hoomin in a net?”

“Once again.” the captain said sternly. “No comment.”

It was a long walk to the train station. Most of the crowd eventually dispersed. The journalists took a few more pictures before leaving. Besides the occasional onlooker, it was uneventful. The train was cleared out just for them to escort the still unconscious human.

Hopefully the walk in Canterlot wouldn’t be as annoying.

Celestia wasn’t sure how to feel. Should she feel nervous? Should she be scared? Should she continue her false display of confidence? She hadn’t seen Kindle since he was two, and he was fifteen now. One thing she did feel was incredibly uneasy. Her sister was handling royal duties in her place, so she was on her own at the moment.

Then, the doors to the throne room opened. A pegasus guard walked in with a familiar human on his back. She smiled at the sight of him.

“Ken Brightburn as you requested your highness.” the guard said as Ken dismounted.

“Thank you guard.” Celestia said. “That will be all.”

Ken walked over to the princess as she walked off her throne to her former lover. He pressed his forehead to her chestplate as she wrapped her left foreleg around him. She had waited too long for this. A regret of the decision she made long ago.

“Thirteen years and you haven’t aged a day.” Ken said.

“Thirteen years and you grew a handsome beard.” she said smiling. He stepped back so he could look up at her easier.

“A part of me wished this day would never come.” he said.

“It was inevitable.” Celestia said. “I just hope our son can understand the choices we made.”

Kindle awoke to find himself still inside the net. He was on the back of one of the guards. He didn't know how long he was out. It sounded like passing train tracks outside. He could never afford a train ticket, so he never knew what the inside of the train looked like until now. Currently, it looked like nine royal guards staring him down. There were no other ponies on the train. Just them. The train started to slow down. He must've woken up near the end of the trip. The net restricted his movement too much to see outside the window. The guards walked out, with him in tow. The guards walked around the guard carrying him. His eyes took a moment to adjust to the harsh light.

“Where are we?” Kindle asked.

“Canterlot.” the pegasus guard carrying him answered.

The place looked amazing. Beautiful, ornate buildings everywhere. He would sometimes vaguely see it in the distance from the village. He never thought he would see it in person. He remembered it being described to him as ‘the place where all the important ponies lived’. The ponies he could see were wearing fancy clothes of all kinds. There was a number of humans working as servants. They followed around some of the fancy ponies. His dad used to work as a servant in the castle before he was born.

“W-What's gonna happen to me?” Kindle asked nervously looking towards the guard. Fear of the unknown was trickling in.

“I don't know.” he answered. “Princess Celestia wanted you brought to her after she heard of your incident at the market.”

The ruler of Equestria wanted him? He never met her in person. Only seeing pictures and hearing stories. He never heard anything bad about her. In her pictures she looked kind and beautiful. Pictures could be deceiving. Was he in trouble? Was he being put in prison for all the ponies he hurt? Perhaps it was worse. If he really did have magic, who knows what she could have planned. She could keep him as an exotic pet. What if she had scientist ponies poke him with needles to study him? The scary questions shook him with a bit of fear. The light brown pegasus carrying Kindle must've noticed the

growing fear. He turned to look at him. His look was softer than the other guards. Though they all looked alike, his eyes were kinder. There was even a hint of a smile under the grim demeanor.

“It’s going to be okay hoomin.” the guard said. “Princess Celestia is many things. Cruel is not one of them. I’m sure she simply wishes to speak to you.”

He had so many things on his agenda today. Well, that wasn’t true. Shining Armor just wanted to pretend he did so he had a reason to be frustrated. Her highness Princess Celestia dispatches him along with nine other guards to go into the Everfree Forest. For one human. ‘A minor explosion of magic caused by a human’ were her words. Surely one human could’ve been handled by a couple of guards. She even could’ve asked his little sister Twilight to get the human. Wouldn’t be the first errand she ran for the princess.

Yet no. For some reason, Celestia wanted this one human protected on his return. She even ordered them to tell nopony about the human they were escorting. Was she that serious about magic showing up in humans? Was there an ancient prophecy he was unaware of? He looked back to Iron Wing and the human he carried. Beyond what was the human equivalent of a unicorn foal’s magic kicking in at a bad time, what made this human so special? Despite his curiosity, he marched on. He had his orders. He needed to get this anomaly of a human to the princess.

Iron Wing had been conversing with the human since they got off the train. While normally he wouldn’t allow guards to socialize on duty, he was making an exception. Besides a failed blast of magic back in the forest, the human hadn’t used his abilities. Perhaps Iron Wing imprinted on the human in some form or another. The human was still in the net, but he wasn’t panicking like he was earlier. He was just asking questions about Canterlot, and the pegasus guard would calmly answer them. Shining wasn’t sure how it was working. Iron was keeping the human calm, and that’s all that mattered. The castle was in sight. The drawbridge was already lowered for their entry. This day would certainly go down as an interesting one.

A strange noise followed by a flash of light caused Shining to spin around. All nine guards were looking at Iron Wing. The net on his back was empty. A few distant shouts could be heard coming from the castle. Were his eyes playing tricks, or was the human being chased by some of the guards? He sighed deeply. This interesting day wasn’t over yet.

“He teleported to the castle grounds!” Shining shouted. “Let’s get a move on!”

It was nerve-wracking. He didn't know what happened. One moment he was sitting on a guard's back. The guard was relaxing him by answering questions he had about Canterlot. Things were going well. Then he saw the castle in the distance and wondered what the courtyard looked like. Next thing he knew, he was standing in the middle of it. Despite an attempt to run, Kindle didn't get far. He was surrounded by well over a dozen guards. A lot of them with spears pointed at him.

A half-sphere of yellow energy surrounded him as he sat on the ground. His hands were glowing bright. He didn't know how he was doing it. Something in his mind just knew the spears couldn't get through. Everything was so confusing. To his somewhat relief, the guards that originally captured him ran up to the encirclement. Maybe the nice one could help.

"Captain!" a guard with a spear said. "This hoomin teleported in and created a shield. Orders?"

"Disarm and recapture." Shining said coldly. "It needs to be re-contained. Somepony get the net ready."

"Sir." Iron interjected. "Isn't the net a bit harsh? He only teleported a short distance."

"He has shown no control over his magic." the captain responded. "That makes him a danger to the princess, and everypony here."

"He's just scared and confused." the pegasus said. "Let me talk to him." That seemed to have struck a chord with the captain. He pondered the statement for a moment before looking back to Iron.

"Alright." he said grimly. "You got one chance to talk him down before I rip that shield apart myself."

Iron nodded before making his way towards the human. His fellow guards backed up so he had room to sit by the human. He had better experience with humans than most. When he lived with his parents in Cloudsdale, his neighbors were nobles. They had a family of human servants. He would often foalsit the young ones while the parents worked all day. He did it up until he moved out and became a guard. He knew what to do. He lowered himself until he was almost laying down in front of the shield. It put him at eye level with the sitting human.

"Hey." Iron said softly. "Do you remember me?"

“Y-You’re the guard that carried me.” the human answered. “You’re not mean like them.”

“That’s right.” he said. “My name’s Iron Wing. What’s yours?” Shining was gonna give him an earful for sharing his real name. That didn’t matter at the moment.

“Kindle.” he said. “Am I in trouble?”

“Not at all.” the pegasus answered. “These guards just don’t want you hurting anypony.”

“I don’t know what’s happening to me.” Kindle said. “I’m not sure if I can control it.”

“You seem to be doing a good job right now.” Iron said. “Why don’t you lower your arms, close your eyes, and take a few deep breaths?”

Kindle followed his instructions. As he breathed slowly, all the guards watched as the energy dissipated. When he opened his eyes, he looked around in shock. “I-It worked!” he said excited.

“See? I knew you could do it.” the pegasus said with a soft smile. Not being able to help himself, Iron looked back to his captain with a smug grin.

“Stand down.” the captain grunted. The guards withdrew their spears and backed up.

The pegasus suddenly felt a pressure around his neck. He glanced down to see Kindle was hugging him. “Thank you.” he whispered to the pegasus.

“You’re welcome Kindle.” he said back. “Now I believe you have a princess that wants to meet you. Think you’re ready?”

“Can...Can you come with me?” the human asked.

“Of course.” Iron said as he helped the human up to carry him. Kindle was straddled on his back as he walked up to his captain. “Human retrieved captain. Shall I escort him to her highness?”

A relieved yet grumpy captain led the way for the proud pegasus to follow with a now calm human in tow.

Chapter 2

Celestia could feel the stares from the few guards in the throne room. Their ruler. Their princess. Their goddess. She was nuzzling and kissing a grungy human that only bathed in a river on occasion. Not many of the guards or servants had worked here long enough to remember the days of Ken's servitude. The nights they would spend in her room. The times they would sneak away to the top of the mountains above Canterlot. The year she wore dresses to hide her pregnancy. The two years she disappeared from the public to try and raise a human born from her.

As an immortal being, the years seemed to fly by. She had no qualms about everypony around her aging while she didn't. Entire decades could pass and it would be a blur to her. Ponies would come and go. Unicorns of exceptional talent would come into her life, get old, and eventually pass on. It was difficult to get close to somepony if you know you were going to outlive them. Then Ken came into her life. This little human. Humans held low positions in society. It was no fault of their own. At one point they were enslaved all over Equus. Enslavement of humans was declared illegal worldwide a hundred years ago. Two hundred for Equestria. It did little to help them shed their position on the societal ladder. Any pony could outperform them in almost every task. The only consistent work they could find was in servitude of noble ponies. One day, a few of her servants retired due to old age. Out of curiosity, she opened the jobs to the humans first. Ken was one of the humans to apply.

She never expected him to show her such a love for life. Despite the massive age difference, she never felt so close to any other before. There were days with him where she would forget about the struggles of immortality. She never felt such love like this besides from her own parents. Relationships between humans and ponies had always been taboo. The relationship was a well kept secret. Days when the chaos of ruling Equestria became too much, he was the one she could lean on. Metaphorically. Their first few kisses were terribly awkward. The difference in size and species didn't help. A few servants were the only ones that knew how close the two became. When they became intimate, they made the foolish assumption that they could never bear a foal. Celestia would never forget the look on Ken's face when a doctor from the Canterlot Hospital confirmed she was pregnant.

Raising a human was no easy task, even for an alicorn like her. It was a stressful two years. Wondering about the legal implications of a half-born prince. The possibility of marrying Ken, possibly upgrading her title to Queen Celestia. She had feared the reactions of her kingdom when the hypothetical king was a human. What if the nobles revolted and tried to usurp her rule? What if something happened to her precious son because of it? It was a fear she couldn't live through. Besides the pink hair he inherited

from her, Kindle looked entirely human. Despite being born of an alicorn, there wasn't a trace of magic in his body at the time. She and Ken agreed that he deserved to live a normal life among other humans. Even if it was a rough life.

Ken and his infant son were snuck out of the castle in the dead of night back to his village. She wept endlessly for a week. She wanted to raise her baby. She wanted her loving Ken by her side. No matter how badly she wanted it, she knew deep down she couldn't. The pain of losing them to an assassin or the like far outweighed her desires. Even getting her sister Luna back in her life failed to fill the void she had. That all changed today. She had sensed magic similar to her own manifesting that morning. When she heard of a human's magical incident, she saw her second chance. She had called for a guard to retrieve Ken and sent guards for Kindle. As she continued to nuzzle and kiss her lover of past, Celestia knew one thing.

She was finally getting her baby boy back in her life.

Kindle tried to keep calm as they approached the throne room doors. He tried to remember what Iron Wing had told him earlier. She only wanted to talk. He needed to stay calm. He focused on the feeling of the pegasus feathers against his legs. Despite how powerful they were, they felt incredibly soft. The armor wasn't made for humans to sit on though. He had to hold onto the armor to not slide off. Iron crouched down before they opened the doors.

"You'll have to walk in on your own Kindle," he said. "I'll walk next to you if I'm allowed to."

Kindle nervously dismounted just as the doors opened. The path to walk was a long red carpet. The ceiling seem to stretch on forever. The light shining through the glass danced on the floor in intricate patterns. The princess of the sun sat at her throne, a soft smile on her face. His dad stood beside her. A few of the guards stared him down as his presence was announced. "Kindle as requested your highness," the captain said.

"Thank you captain," Princess Celestia said. "Guards. You are all dismissed." Kindle anxiously looked back to Iron Wing as all the guards began to filter out of the throne room. He gave him one last smile of reassurance before leaving. The door closed. He looked back towards the throne. "Come forth Kindle," she said.

The room was eerily quiet as the nervous adolescent walked towards his ruler. Without the comfort of the pegasus, his fears rolled in again. Maybe he was being punished. What if he was being banished to

the moon like Princess Luna once was? A lot of ponies were hurt. Why was his dad here? Was he being forced to watch his son be punished? As he approached the throne, his fear took over. He fell to his knees to bow and the words fell out.

“I’m sorry about what I did your highness.” he said. “I don’t know what’s happening to me. I didn’t mean to hurt those ponies. Please understand.” She was about to say something, but his dad spoke up first.

“You’re not in trouble son.” his father said.

“W-What?” said a confused Kindle. “But the blast. All those ponies. The net they put me in.”

“A bit more harsh than I asked for I admit.” answered the princess. “No serious harm came to your fellow Equestrians other than bumps and bruises my child. It seems your magic had an unpredictable outburst.”

“I thought humans couldn’t do magic your highness.” he said.

Princess Celestia and his dad came down from the throne to stand in front of him. Kindle took a cautious step back. Being literally looked down upon by other ponies was one thing. He was at level with her chest plate. She towered above. It was more than intimidating. She laid down on the ground, bringing herself closer. Her smile was a bit more pronounced now.

“If you were fully human, this would be true.” she said.

“Your highness.” he said. “I don’t understand.”

The princess smiled at him, then closed her eyes. Her horn glowed for a moment. The glow seemed to be the same shade of yellow as his own. Then, a picture appeared out of thin air. It floated in the yellow aura before coming down in front of Kindle. “What do you see Kindle?” she asked.

“It’s...my dad.” he said. “There’s you, your highness. You’re both looking down at a baby. He has pink hair like me.” Kindle looked stared at the picture for a moment. When it processed, his eyes lit up. He looked at his father, then at the princess. The words were stuck in his throat for a moment. Her smile

was wide, and mixed with tears that streamed down her face. Tears began to stream down his as well. “Mom?” he asked tenderly.

Princess Celestia gingerly nodded her head. “Mom!” he shouted. He dove towards the princess. He wrapped his arms around her neck. He felt her jaw press down into his back and a foreleg wrap around him. Never had he felt his fears melt away so fast. It was the safest he had ever felt that day. He felt a warmth. A comfort he had never felt before. A sensation he had never felt in his life.

A mother’s love.

The eavesdropping guards couldn’t believe their ears. Especially Iron. No pony knew how to respond to something like that. Even the stoic Shining Armor was at a loss for words. Princess Celestia has a son? A human son? The pegasus was the first to speak up.

“I guess that’s one more job for guard duty huh captain?” he asked jokingly.

“Yeah.” the captain said. “I guess it’s good that we didn’t bring him in the net.”

“Until he gets trained, that hoomin’s magic is gonna be a nightmare to deal with.” Iron said. “I feel sorry for the sucker assigned to him.”

Luna could feel her growing impatience. As a favor to her sister, she was tending to the duties of the crown today. She was going over plans for an addition to the medical wing. They were adding rooms just for the princesses should something require private medical attention. Mostly redundant for an immortal princess, but it was on the itinerary. The construction team was almost finished, they just needed her final word on the paint colors.

“The previously discussed plan is sufficient forepony.” she said to an earth stallion wearing a hardhat.

“Sun and clouds on one side, night sky on the other.” the forepony said. “The painters will have it done by the end of the day.”

“Thank you.” she said as she continued her walk.

Oh how she wished to be by her sister's side. 'Tia was seeing her son for the first time in thirteen years. She unfortunately returned from her banishment long after her nephew was gone. She did the best she could at the time to comfort her sister. His birthday was always a day she would do the duties of night and day like she is now. Meanwhile her sister would devour any sweets in the castle's stock to stuff her feelings. When she was told of them reuniting, the princess of the night was ecstatic. She could finally meet her nephew!

In the distance, Luna could see her sister walking a couple of humans. One sat upon the sun princess' back had vibrant pink hair. There he was! She happily trotted over.

"I'm not sure if I'll be able to get used to the idea of being a prince." he said.

"The ins and outs of royalty are things you will learn in time my son." Celestia said.

"Is everypony really gonna call me 'Your Highness' and bow every time I walk into a room?" Kindle asked.

"I'm afraid so." she answered.

"So...no more ponies bullying me for my hair?" he asked.

"Only if they want to get on my bad side." she said. Before he could ask another question, his mother stopped. Another, slightly less towering mare was walking to them. It was Princess Luna, Mom's sister. The normally stoic princess had a beaming smile on her face.

"Sister, is this who I think it be?" the dark blue alicorn asked. His mother nodded, which made the princess of the night squeal with delight. "Huzzah!" She brought her face right in front of Kindle. "It is so wonderful to meet thee! I am thy Aunt Luna. I am so exultant to finally call thee by the title of thine nephew!"

He didn't know what to say to his newly introduced aunt of the night. He never heard her before. She spoke in a fancy tone. It was different, and he liked it. He rubbed the bridge of her nose. "It's great to meet you too Prin- Aunt Luna." She squealed again.

“Oh that title is music to thine ears.” Aunt Luna said before turning back to her sister. “Will thy son be moving into the castle sister?”

“We just finished discussing those plans actually.” his mom said. “Both Kindle and Ken will be moving in immediately. The guest tower between ours will become Kindle’s room. Ken will room with me...”

“Where we can make up for lost time.” his father said, instantly getting Kindle to groan in embarrassment. His mother seemed to blush at the comment.

“Dad, our family’s been reunited for thirty minutes and you’re already embarrassing me.” he said.

The three adults had a light chuckle at his expense for a moment before continuing the conversation.

“Will Kindle be attending thy School for Gifted Unicorns to learn his magical prowess?” asked Aunt Luna. His mother shook her head.

“Magic in humans is unheard of since the Nebel Incident.” she said. “Their teachings only apply to unicorns. We will have to find somepony to teach him in private. Perhaps the Royal Mages can assist until he’s ready.”

“Ready?” Kindle asked. “For what?”

“To officially meet the public.” she answered. “For the safety of you and everypony else, learning to control your magic is of the utmost importance. We wouldn’t want a repeat of the Ponyville Market would we?”

Before he could answer, the son of Celestia was nuzzled by his very excited Aunt Luna.

“Worry not these trivial matters!” she said. “This momentous occasion deserves a momentous meal! Let us celebrate with a beautiful luncheon!”

As Twilight Sparkle listened, Spike was diligently taking notes from the stallion. He was one of the few witnesses she could find that wasn't in the Ponyville Hospital.

"I never thought it was possible." the stallion said. "In all my years, I never thought I would live to see a hoomin with magic. A hoomin!"

"Do you remember anything unique about the human?" Twilight asked.

"His hair." he said. "The hoomin's hair was pink as can be. It was pink as Pinkie Pie's."

"Fascinating." she said as she looked over to her dragon cohort. "Are you getting all this Spike?"

"Yeah Twilight. I am." the small dragon said.

"Thank you sir." she said to the stallion. "If you think of anything else, please come by the library and let me know."

"I'm not too worried about that hoomin anymore." the stallion said. "The royal guards came down almost immediately and dragged the thing off in a net. They even had the captain leading them." The stallion walked away, leaving a purple unicorn mare a bit confused.

"The first human with magic since the Nebel Incident, and the Royal Guard show up in Ponyville to take him? Something's not right." Twilight said to herself. "Maybe Shining knows something. Let's go Spike."

Kindle had never seen so much food in his life. The table was absolutely filled. Every type of fruit, vegetable, and dessert covered the table. It was so much, he didn't know where to begin. He looked over to his mother.

"We eat like this everyday?" he asked.

"Every single day." his mother answered.

“No more begging at the market?” he asked his father.

“Never again.” his father answered.

Not having to beg at the market, or hope for Hand in Hoof members to donate food? This new lifestyle would take some getting used to. A thought crossed his mind. Just because the two of them were leaving the village, didn’t mean it would get better for those still living there. Kindle looked at the massive expanse of food, then at his mother.

“Mom?” he asked. “Can I make a request?”

“Of course my son.” she said.

“Can we send food to the village?” Kindle asked. “I want them to have food too.”

“If that is what you want, then the human’s village will never have to worry about food again.” his mother said.

"Thank you." he said.

"Now I have a question for you" the princess said.

"Oh?" Kindle asked, caught off guard.

"It is customary for royalty to have bodyguards to be with them at all times." she said. "We have numerous guards that are up to the task. Would you like to pick the guard yourself?"

Kindle thought for a moment. His first encounter with the guards was fairly rough. Although one guard did stand out.

"I do have one guard in mind." he answered.

Iron wasn't sure why the captain was escorting him to her highness. Perhaps it was to thank him for carrying her son? He had no clue. Captain Shining didn't know either. All they did know is that the princess asked for him specifically. Out of the hundreds of guards. He took a deep breath before entering the dining hall. He saw the princesses, Kindle, and Kindle's father. They were still eating their lunch.

"Iron Wing as requested." the captain said.

"Thank you captain." Princess Celestia said. "Please wait in the hall."

Captain Shining saluted, then left. The pegasus walked closer. He stood behind Kindle's seat.

"You wished to see me, your highness?" Iron asked.

"Not me exactly." she said. "My son had a request for you."

"Anything." he said as he looked towards the human prince.

"Good." she said. "He was hoping you would be his personal bodyguard. You were the first pony he asked for."

"It would be my honor to protect your son." he said as he bowed. He could see the jealous stares of the other guards as he stood up. It was very rare for a guard to be promoted to bodyguard. It was a lifetime role. Literally. He was about to be one of the few Royal Guards in this generation to be a bodyguard. The Royal Sisters each had two. That made him bodyguard number five in Canterlot.

"I'm glad to hear that." Princess Celestia said. "This won't be immediate. You'll have to go through the specialized training administered by the captain first."

"I look forward to the task your highness." Iron said with a smile.

"Come on Shining." Twilight begged. "What's with all the secrecy?"

"Sorry Twi." her brother said as he watched some guards do their daily training. "Princess Celestia's orders."

Shining didn't like keeping secrets from his own little sister. He dreaded it. Although he could at least understand the insistence from Princess Celestia. Kindle was a human. He was more vulnerable to harm than a foal. Her mannerisms seemed to shift almost instantly when she first saw him. The protectiveness of a mother. The order to stay silent made sense from that perspective. Despite her centuries-long lifespan, she was still a new mother. A new mother that wanted to protect their baby like the fragile thing they are.

"What about the witnesses and the pictures all the journalists took?" she asked.

"All photos of the incident were confiscated." he said. "Witnesses at the hospital were already asked to never repeat the incident."

The two went back and forth for a minute before his usually stubborn sister got the message. She decided to ask Princess Celestia in a letter. Her assistant Spike wanted lunch. He breathed a sigh of relief as the two left.

"Is everything alright sir?" Iron Wing asked as he walked up.

"I hate lying to my own sister." Shining said. "I really do."

"I'm sure her highness has her reasons." he said.

"I know." the captain said. "I just hope in the future, that Twilight understands why."

Celestia never thought the sight of something as simple as watching her son try on clothes would be so exciting. She didn't know his clothing size, so the white and gold uniforms worn by the human servants of the castle would do for now. Ken's old uniform needed some minor adjustments. Lulu was already

pondering over what outfits to have made for him. She said she was behind on fifteen years of birthdays. The princess of the sun couldn't blame her sister for being excited. This was the first nephew she was related to by blood. The Royal Sisters had next to no family members in the world with a strong blood relation. It felt, different.

Celestia was shocked out of her thoughts. A flash of green fire appeared in front of her. It was from Twilight. Odd. Her friendship reports are never this early.

Dear Princess Celestia,

Today in Ponyville there was an incident. Reports of an explosion caused by a human. I sensed magic that felt similar to yours at the center of the crater. When I came to Canterlot, my own brother refused to tell me what was going on. The guards wouldn't even let me see you. Is there magic in humans again? If so, why is such an important discovery being kept a secret? I would be lying if I said I didn't feel betrayed at being left out. I know you have your reasons. I was hoping for answers if you can give them.

Your Faithful Student,

Twilight Sparkle

The princess froze up. Twilight was indeed her most faithful student. Magic appearing in humans again was indeed a massive discovery. Showing Kindie to the world would change everything about how society views humans. It was something her student was right about. As she looked at her son, happily trying on real clothes for the first time, she realized how much of a hypocrite she would have to become. If it had been any other human in the world, the two of them would be going over numerous books and taking every note they could on this exciting discovery. This was different. This was her son. The thought of her son being looked upon by the world like an exotic creature. It filled her with dread. She didn't want that for him. The thought of him being in public at all worried her. Without his magic at its full potential, any harm could be fatal. It was a flurry of thoughts that filled her mind. Despite her experience. Despite her knowledge. Despite being the oldest, and most powerful being in all of Equestria itself.

Princess Celestia. Princess of the Sun. Ruler of Equestria. She didn't know how to be a mother. Not in the slightest. She couldn't let her student's usual curiosity lead to a premature exposure of her child before she was ready. Telling the world you were impregnated by what they see as a lowly creature. It was something that would require tact. Despite always trying to instill the best habits in Twilight, she

knew she would have to lie. Just for now. In time, she hoped Twilight would understand. She summoned parchment and a quill to respond. She took a deep breath before writing.

Dear Twilight Sparkle,

Despite all the excitement, the incident was nothing more than a minor accident. I was enjoying my morning tea, when some dust had gotten into my nose. I sneezed, and a small blast of magic shot towards Ponyville. I plan to publicly address the embarrassing accident. For now, I hope to put this minor accident behind us. As for the human that was believed to cause the explosion. I had him and his father brought to the castle to have their wounds tended to in private. I appreciate your excitement. We both hope for the day humans can join us as creatures of magic. Sadly, it is not today.

Sincerely,

Princess Celestia

The princess sighed as the letter turned to a small wisp of green fire on the wind.

Today was probably the laziest day Kindle ever had in his life. If you discount the incredible amount of running he did at the start of it. He had barely set foot on the castle ground. After the big reveal, his mother had carried him on her back all day. A sight that surprised a lot of guards. Aunt Luna even carried him around for a bit. He just got to see her raise the moon after dinner. Now they were in his new room. It was an old guest room, so it was fairly plain. Everything was pony-sized. He didn't mind though.

"Oh I hope my nephew's new room is to thy liking." Aunt Luna said with an excited grin.

"I never had my own room before." Kindle said as he stood eye-level with the bed. "Dad and I shared a hut at the village as long as I can remember."

"Thou shall never need worry about cramped sleeping quarters again." she said. "Now I believe sister is coming before you sleep. I am oh so glad to have finally met thee. I give thee my word as Princess of the Night that thou will have nothing but pleasant dreams. Goodnight my nephew."

"Night Aunt Luna!" he said as she disappeared in a flash. Not even a moment after, the door opened to reveal his mother walking in. Her excitement was still as strong as it was earlier today. Her joyful smile still as strong as ever. She laid down on the floor like before to get closer to him.

"There are so many things I still want to do, but not enough time in one day." she said.

"I still have so many questions." Kindle said.

"Now that our family is together, we have nothing but time my child." his mother said. "Before we both rest, I do have one last request."

"Yea mom?" he asked.

"Could I....tuck you in?" she asked. "I'll understand if you're uncomfortable."

Kindle practically jumped forward to hug his mother. His arms holding strong around her neck. He felt the ground leave his feet as she stood up. He could hear the creaks of the bed as his mother crawled upon it. He could hear the fluffing of a pillow and moving of a blanket. She lowered herself, and he felt the bed meet his back. He let go of her as his head met the pillow. She got off the bed, and used her magic to pull the blanket up to him. He felt a soft kiss on top of his head.

"Goodnight, my son." the princess said.

"Goodnight mom." Kindle said.

After she walked out, silence filled the room. Kindle thought he was far too excited to fall asleep. He was a prince now. A prince! There was a part of him that wanted to find those two rich ponies that were mean to him that morning. No more ponies treating him like he's nothing. No more going to the market to beg for food. Not for him, or his village ever again. He felt his eyelids getting heavy.

As he closed his eyes, he could only wonder what fun awaited him tomorrow.

Chapter 3

Iron Wing was glad he had spent time mastering the ability to hold a teacup with his wingtips. It made drinking from it much easier. It made holding it steady an easier task as well. It certainly paid off when Prince Kindle would slam into the ground nearby with earth shaking force. An issue that had only arisen a few months ago. Any other situation would have him taking his highness on his back and flying away from the danger at top speed. This however, required him to not interfere. In fact, it was a bit of entertainment before sunrise. He sat alongside Princess Luna's personal guards. A good hoofful of off-duty guardsponies were watching before their morning shifts started. Even a few of the on-duty Night Guard pegasi would fly up for a quick peek before being caught. It wasn't often you would see two powerful beings have a training bout on a mountaintop.

Kindle had figured out how to gain flight without wings about six months ago. Well, the prince describes it as 'invisible wings'. It was a secret the prince had ordered him to keep at first. He didn't blame the human. His already intense training would've gotten even worse once his teacher, Princess Luna found out. Unfortunately, the secret wasn't kept forever. Three months ago she caught Iron giving her nephew some flight lessons. Now here they were, watching the prince learn combat flight. If you could count getting slammed into the ground several times "learning". The pegasus had to fight to keep himself from chuckling. The prince who was a nightmare to guard sometimes was being reminded there were ponies stronger than him. His only challenge for today's flight combat lesson was to take a book the princess was reading. The same challenge for the past week. None of the guards had the heart to tell him that Princess Luna was so talented at aerial combat, that she literally wrote the book all pegasi of the Royal Guard learn from. At least at first. Kindle looked hilariously mad when he found out the other day.

"I hope you're enjoying your tea." the prince said sarcastically to his bodyguard. He was picking himself up off the ground from his latest attempt.

"Quite well, your highness." the pegasus said back. He had another clever quip to say, but was cut off by the princess of the night.

"Make haste my nephew." Princess Luna said. "We only have a few pages left. You know thy punishment if you fail today."

"We're lookin' forward to our barracks gettin' scrubbed nice and clean your highness!" one of the guards jeered. A few of them chuckled and hoof bumped each other. Despite how much Princess Luna spoiled her nephew, she was merciless as a teacher. If he failed any of the weekly training challenges set before him, his punishments were usually harsh or humiliating. Iron remembered when

the prince once failed to levitate a to-scale stone statue of the royal sisters when he had only just learned basic levitation. He had to trim the entire Royal Hedge Maze. With a butter knife.

Though it wasn't for naught. In the five years Kindle's been in the castle, his magic has risen to a level of power equal to any alicorn. His levitation spell is rumored to be powerful enough to move the land itself. His teleportation spell was comparable to Princess Celestia. The few spells Princess Luna taught him, the human prince mastered. The results were enough to convince his arguably over-bearing mother to allow the training to continue, despite her initial protests. They're still done while she sleeps though.

Training magic to a human born of an alicorn was no easy task. The first two years were spent just trying to understand his magic. The Royal Mages lost many nights of sleep to research and testing for those two years. As soon as he learned basic control, Princess Luna became his teacher. Kindle's past three years were filled with intense training. The guards' past three years had free entertainment. Iron snapped out of his trip down memory lane. Kindle had flown up and was knocked down again. Needless to say, the prince did not look happy.

"Last page nephew." Princess Luna said.

"Alright!" Kindle shouted angrily. "Screw flying! It's time for Plan B."

The prince raised his right arm with his flat hand towards his Aunt. His hand began to glow a bright yellow. The book his aunt was reading began to glow a mix of yellow and bright blue. All went quiet. He was going to attempt to have a magical tug-of-war with the princess of the night. She closed her eyes and lightly chuckled. He raised his left arm just like his right. It began to glow as well.

"Dear nephew," she said "that is a fruitless endeavor. Admit defeat now, and the barracks could be finished before lunch."

"I'll be taking that book now auntie." Kindle said. To everypony's surprise, Princess Luna's entire horn began to glow yellow. The blue magic mixing with the prince's magic on the book vanished. She opened her eyes just as the book entered her nephew's hands. She stared in shock.

"How?!" she shouted. Kindle looked at the flying princess with a smirk as he wiped off a forehead full of sweat. It seemed whatever he did was intensive.

“Simple.” he said. “A standard magic shield keeps magic out. A reversed shield keeps magic in. Making a strong enough shield that compact would’ve been impossible if you were focusing the whole time.”

Princess Luna flew to the ground. She landed in front of her comparatively small nephew. He had a smile on his face, she had a stoic look on hers.

“Impressive Kindle.” she said. Not good. She only used his name when she was mad. “However, you failed the test.”

“How did I fail?” he asked, now angry. “I got the stupid book!”

“Today’s lesson was on flight combat.” she said. “If you had performed the spell while in flight, you would have passed. Barely, but passed. Your punishment is to be carried out immediately. You will be done when the barracks are cleaned to Captain Shining’s liking. Dismissed.”

“Hey Captain.” Iron Wing said.

“Hello Iron.” Shining Armor said back. He looked down to Prince Kindle. He was on his hands and knees, scrubbing away at the floor of the barracks. “Good day to you, your highness.” A grunt was given for an initial response.

“Checkin’ in on me *captain*?” the prince said between scrubs. “I’m almost done. Only took me all morning. How much dirt do y’all bring in here by the way? Hoofshoes should not be this dirty.”

“Just observing your progress.” he said. The prince was right. The soldiers had been intentionally rubbing dirt on their hoofshoes this week in preparation for this. With how annoying he could be at times, these punishments dealt out by Princess Luna were somewhat enjoyable for them. It was a detail he thought best not to share. As the captain observed his highness scrub away at the floor, he thought back to when the prince was a walking disaster before becoming an annoyance.

The prince had been in the castle for a year. Barely learning control of his magic. He had the magic of a fully grown alicorn. The only issue was that it was compacted into the body of a small human. Without

proper training, it was like trying to clog a waterfall. His magic was constantly misfiring. A few soldiers had their armor turn into glass. A few birds were given frog legs. Shining himself fell victim to a rogue blast of magic. The effect wasn't horrible by any means. However, it was a two day experience he refused to talk about.

The captain looked over the floors of the barracks. The prince was quite the cleaner. Perhaps Princess Luna should give him cleaning punishments more often. Though that meant more training for the prince. The training ponies go through to become Royal Guard is intense. The training Prince Kindle went through the past three years was a fair bit different. His sleep schedule didn't let him have the time to see it himself, the firsthand descriptions from Iron were more than enough. He couldn't recall anypony that's been put through intense daily training like the prince has been. Her highness was quite tough on him when it came to his magic. A stark contrast from her 'spoil him rotten' attitude. Which itself is an even more stark contrast to her calm and reserved stature to the public.

When his highness learned flight, he began to sneak out. The captain. Against all logic, training, and security risks, looked the other way. Princess Celestia never let him leave the castle. It wasn't his place to question her choices, but he couldn't help but take a little bit of pity on him. They were cousins after all.

The captain was brought out of his thoughts when a brush hit his leg. He looked around. Iron and Prince Kindle were gone. The brush was glowing yellow, and moving on its own. A simple enchantment. Princess Luna said the prince was done when the barracks were cleaned to his standards. She never said he couldn't use magic. Shining knew he should look around for the prince to make sure he didn't sneak out again. However, he knew his cousin well after five years.

Kindle was taking a moment to feel the wind whipping past his fingers. It was one of the little things he liked about flying. The constant reminders from Iron that he could carry him? Not so much.

"There isn't a threat in the sky Iron." he said. "Besides, I need the practice."

"I am aware of the clear skies your highness." the pegasus said. "However, I am perfectly capable of carrying you. Need I remind you of the armor customizations you yourself requested that make the riding experience near perfect?" The prince grumbled. His bodyguard wasn't wrong. The back plate had an indent for sitting, and a small handlebar. A far better improvement from the embarrassing chair Iron once carried with his original bodyguard armor.

"Fiiiiine." Kindle relented. "You win. We're getting close to Ponyville anyways." While in flight, the prince mounted his bodyguard. He positioned himself in the seated position. He grabbed a brown cloth he had tied around the handlebar. It was his way of hiding his hair. It let him blend in more. Wearing the servant's uniform he uses while training helps too. They always went with the cover story of a servant being flown in by a guard to run errands. No pony ever gave him a second look when his hair was hidden. An upside to the low status of humans.

"Where to first?" Iron asked.

"There's the place across from Sugarcube Corner." Kindle answered. "I know you like their hayburgers."

The clouds began to break through. The houses of the village began to come into sight. Iron landed smoothly in the front of a fountain. A few glances from ponies as he dismounted from his bodyguard. They made their way over to the outdoor café. A green unicorn waitress with a gray mane waved them down as they took their seats.

"Afternoon you two!" the waitress said with a smile.

"Afternoon to you as well Gem." Iron said.

"Getting lunch before the royal errands again I see." she said. "Just the usual?"

"Sounds great." he said.

"One hayburger, one human-style salad, and two apple juices." Gem listed off. "Coming right up!"

The waitress gave Kindle's bodyguard a wink before walking away with a bit of extra sway in her step. Iron tried to ignore it, but the young prince did not.

"You should ask her out." Kindle said. "We haven't been in Ponyville for a month, and she remembered you."

"I'm far too busy." Iron said. "I have to look after one human every single day. He's a particular pain in the flank. Especially when he sneaks out of the castle and drags me along."

"It's just lunch." he said. "Then we head back to the castle, and I can continue spending all of eternity hidden from the world." His bodyguard's face became somber at the statement.

"I know what day it is." the guard said. "Five years is not a long time. You know your mother only wants to protect you."

"No. That's your job." the prince said. "Everytime I bring it up, she says Equestria's not ready. More like she's not ready."

The waitress made her way back to the table with their drinks before the conversation could continue. Today did mark the five year anniversary of meeting his mother. What was supposed to be his happy ending, became years of being ignored. Dad went back to his old position as her personal servant so they could stay close. All he was allowed to do was be in his room, train with Aunt Luna in the morning, eat meals with the family when they didn't have guests, and stay out of sight. All he wanted was to be in her life. At the very least she could tell the public he existed.

"The fish is almost done for the salad." the waitress said. She gave a soft look at Iron again. He was trying to ignore it. Kindle had enough.

"Iron Wing wants to ask you out to dinner, but he's scared you'll say no." Kindle said quickly. His bodyguard's eyes went wide. The waitress gave the prince an odd stare, then chuckled as she looked back to the guard.

"Well I can't say no to a handsome knight." she said.

"I...um..." Iron said.

"Seven o'clock tonight." Gem said. "Meet me here."

"G-Great." the pegasus said. The waitress walked away with even more sway in her step. The smiling pegasus switched to a harsh stare and an even harsher whisper. "What are you doing? I can't date her! It's policy for personal bodyguards to abstain from relationships that might affect their duties."

"You do remember I live in a castle with a small army of highly trained soldiers sworn to guard me with their lives right?" Kindle asked with a deadpan expression. "I can survive without you for one night. Besides, it'll be nice for you to actually be social with someone other than a single human."

"I'm not actually looking for my special somepony right now." he said. "My duty to you is absolute."

"I'm not saying you have to marry her." the prince said. "Just one dinner date. Please? For me?"

"Fine." the pegasus said as the waitress returned with their food.

"One human-style salad and one hayburger." she said. "I also gave you some hayfries, and your meal's on the house."

Rarity was glad the path to the human village finally had a bridge that went over the river. She raised funds for it earlier this year. It made delivering gifts much easier. One of the families in the village was due for a baby soon. She couldn't help but put together some baby clothes for the little one. She had some scrap fabrics that were too small to use for ponies anyways, so it worked out. They weren't the most fashionable outfits, but the humans were always so happy when they got new clothes. Those little smiles made it all worth it. It made her feel like she truly represented herself as the Element of Generosity.

"Hey Rarity!" a familiar voice said. Rarity saw a minty unicorn approaching. Lyra Heartstrings. Leader of the Ponyville chapter for Hand In Hoof.

"Well hello Lyra." Rarity said.

"I have some news for you!" the minty mare said, excited.

"Oh I hope it's what I think it is!" she said, just as excited. Lyra produced a silver necklace from her saddlebag. The pendant was a human hand holding a hoof.

"I'm not supposed to give it to you until the meeting tonight." Lyra said. "But I needed to make sure it fit. That, and I'm really excited to get a new member!"

"So I'm in?" Rarity asked as the necklace was lowered onto her.

"Your one year probation is over. You'll be officially inducted tonight!" she said. "At least if we can have a meeting tonight. I have to try and get a new meeting place set up last minute."

"I thought the Hand In Hoof meeting was at Sugarcube Corner?" the white mare said.

"It was supposed to be." Lyra said. "Mr. and Mrs. Cake got sick, and Bon Bon's cousin is visiting. That just leaves Fluttershy's cottage, which means a long walk for all of us."

"Why not my place?" Rarity asked.

"Are you sure?" the minty mare asked back. "It's so last minute."

"As the soon to be newest member of this group, it would be my honor." she answered.

Before Lyra could thank her, some distant shouting could be heard. It was by Sugarcube Corner. It wasn't pleasant shouting. The two went over to see what it was all about. A small crowd had gathered around the front where it was all happening. A large red unicorn stallion with a brown mane was furiously staring down a small human girl. He had icing all over his right foreleg. She had a cupcake without icing in her hands.

"I'm sorry mister." she said. "It was an accident."

"Oh you're gonna be real sorry you stupid two-legger!" the stallion said as he raised his left forehoof. He was wearing an iron hoofshoe on it. Lyra and Rarity were about to run to the human's rescue, when they were cut off by a human running in front of them. He was wearing the uniform of the castle servants. He had a brown cloth wrapped around his hair. Something about him was familiar to the

white mare, but she couldn't place her hoof on it. He glared at the much larger stallion, who still held his forehoof high.

"Leave her alone." he said. There wasn't a fleck of fear in his voice.

"Two for one then!" the stallion shouted. The human wrapped his arms around the little one. Her head tucked to his chest to protect her. He had one hand to the stallion. Before either unicorn could react, the iron-clad hoof rocketed towards the two humans. Only to be stopped by a loud clang of metal on metal. A member of the Royal Guard placed himself between the humans and the angry red stallion.

"To harm a servant of her highness, is a crime punishable by imprisonment." the guard said coldly. The red stallion quickly lost his bravado. "Leave."

The crowd dispersed as soon as the stallion turned tail and ran. The guard gave a harsh stare to the servant, whose focus was on the young one he was protecting.

"Are you okay?" he asked her. She only nodded. Poor thing was shaken up bad. Rarity thought it was infuriating how willing some ponies are at taking their anger out on helpless humans.

"We should be heading back to the castle." the guard said.

"We need to get her back to the village." the human said.

"Excuse me?" Lyra said as she walked up to the two humans. "I'm Lyra. I'm a member of Hand In Hoof. I can take her home if you want." The human turned her around to look at the approached mare.

"Did your parents tell you about the ponies with that special necklace?" the servant asked. The little girl quietly nodded. She got up and walked over to Lyra, who lowered herself to the ground. Rarity watched as the little human climbed her way onto the mare's back. She stood up and looked back to her.

"Now let's get you home little one." Lyra said. The mare trotted away to the bridge Rarity had just crossed.

"Now, we're leaving for the castle." the guard said to the servant.

"Fine." the servant grumbled as he mounted the guard. The two were off into the sky, and flying towards the mountain.

Rarity wasn't sure if her eyes were playing tricks on her. Was that a bit of pink hair under the head cloth he wore?

A purple mare was sat on her chair as she was looking over a book. She had filled with many notes over the last five years. All on one thing. Her thinking was cut off by a knock at the door. She teleported the book to her desk as she got off the chair.

"Coming!" Twilight said as she trotted to the door. She opened it to see her friend Rarity.

"Afternoon, your highness." Rarity said. The purple alicorn groaned.

"You know you can still call me Twilight." she said. "The wings don't change anything."

"Just teasing." her friend said with a small grin. "Could I come in?"

"Of course." she said as she stepped out of the doorway. "How can I help you?"

"It's a quick question regarding something I saw today." Rarity said as she walked in. "A young human was almost attacked at Sugarcube Corner. Another human came in to save her. He was wearing a servant's uniform. A member of the Royal Guard was there, and he stopped it all."

"Oh I've seen those two before." Twilight said. "They claim to be running errands for Princess Celestia, but they're usually just sneaking out to have lunch. They probably saw what was happening, and stepped in."

"It's the human that confused me." she said. "Something about him was, different."

"Different how?" the mare asked.

"He wasn't the slightest bit scared when the stallion was about to attack him. Like he knew the stallion wouldn't be able to lay a hoof on him." she said. "Then there was his hair. I think it was pink and it reminded me of this human I met once with-."

Rarity was cut off when Twilight gasped with a widened stare. She disappeared in a flash, then reappeared with a book full of notes. She had that look in her eyes.

"Are you sure he had pink hair?" Twilight asked excitedly.

"I only saw a bit of his hair dear." she answered, unsure of her friend's strange reaction. "I was wondering if you knew anything about human hair colors. Is there something I missed?"

"The pink-haired human!" the alicorn said as she used levitation to rifle through her notes. "He hasn't been seen for five years! I know the princess said the magical explosion incident five years ago was just her sneezing and the blast hitting Ponyville, but I could never get the thought out of my head that there was more to it. Every photo was seized, and every witness ordered into silence. No pony that saw him would tell me anything. Not even my own brother! Around this time each year, I like to look at my notes and see if there were any more sightings."

"Don't tell me you believe in that ridiculous theory." Rarity said. She was surprised her smart friend would fall for such a silly idea. A human with magic secretly created by Princess Celestia hidden from the entire world for the past five years? Her friend makes more trips to the castle than any pony else, and never a magical human found.

"It's not ridiculous." Twilight said. "I went to the human village the day after Princess Celestia sent me that letter and asked about the humans from the incident. They said those two were living at the castle."

"She probably felt terrible about the accident she caused and hired them." the white mare said.

"You're telling me you don't think it's the slightest bit suspicious that a human has pink hair?" Twilight asked. "Human hair colors are always simplistic and they don't dye their hair. Ever."

"Yes dear. I guess it is strange." she finally relented. "Now as much as I would love to talk more, I have to get home. I have a club meeting to prepare for."

The mare finally noticed the silver pendant on her friend's white coat. Hand In Hoof. An organization that tried to help improve life for humans. She never pegged her friend the activist type. Although it did make sense. She was the Element of Generosity after all, and helping humans was something that element would do.

"Well, if you see him again, let me know." the alicorn said.

"I will." Rarity said. "Take care!"

The bedroom was filled with a bright flash of light. From it, the prince and his bodyguard. Far easier to teleport into his room, rather than risk being seen by the other guards as they would fly in.

"See?" Kindle said. "We made it back safe and sound."

"I still fail to understand why you intervened at Sugarcube Corner." Iron said. "You simply could've ordered me to protect that human."

"I was raised by humans Iron." the prince said. "We take care of our own."

"In the future, at least try to ask me first?" he asked.

Before the prince could give an answer, there was a knock at the door. Kindle rushed into bed, and pulled the blanket over him. He closed his eyes to feign being asleep. Iron went to answer the door. It was his Aunt Luna. His guard bowed as she walked in.

"Hey Aunt Luna." Kindle said as he faked a yawn. He sat up as his aunt approached the bedside.

"Afternoon dear nephew." she said. "Was thou resting from today's punishment?"

"Yeah." he said. "Cleaning the barracks took a lot out of me. I took a nap, and had my lunch brought to my room."

The princess' horn glowed, and a newspaper appeared in his lap. The Foal Free Press. On the front page was him staring down the red stallion from earlier. Only now did the prince realize he still had the cloth wrapped around his head. He sheepishly pulled it off. She sighed as she sat down by his bed.

"Thou should count thyself lucky that 'Tia never reads the newspaper." his aunt said. "However, luck can only carry oneself so far."

"Are you gonna tell?" he asked.

"Neigh." she answered. "Despite her desire to keep thee hidden, thou are a prince. Thou are entitled to make thy own decisions."

"Thanks Aunt Luna." Kindle said. "I would hug you, but I really need a bath."

"Agreed." she said after a light sniff. "If thou wishes to spend time with thy favorite aunt, I shall be in the library."

Iron was glad to be somewhere as boring as the library. Princess Luna was laid upon a pillow, reading a book. Prince Kindle was laying against her side, reading a book of his own. It was nice to be somewhere much calmer. He was stood by the library doors, alongside the princess' guardsmares. Crescent and Gibbous. The three didn't get to chat much, despite being around each other a lot. Quiet times like this are the few times they could. Only way into the castle library was through the doors they were standing at. The prince and princess would be reading until shortly before dinner.

"Wait. He was really gonna use his magic in public?" Crescent asked. "All for one human?"

"Yeah." Iron answered. "Had to take an iron hoofshoe to the side to stop it."

"And here I was thinkin' you had the easy job." she chuckled.

"Easy?" Iron asked. "How do you consider Prince Kindle an easy job?"

"Simple." Gibbous said. "He's so small, you carry him around on your back. He never leaves the castle, so you never have to worry about security risks. On top of all that, he has alicorn-level magic. So unless Princess Celestia decides to finally let him out into the world, you have the easiest job in the Royal Guard."

"I have to disagree." the pegasus said. "Kindle is far from an easy charge to protect. He frequently sneaks out of the castle in the middle of the day, forcing me to take him to Celestia knows where. Having to watch out for any anti-human ponies that might cause trouble. Not to mention the times he sneaks out at night to fly, not taking me with him. The first time he did it three months ago, I nearly had a heart attack when I spotted him flying above Canterlot."

"Would it make you feel better if I told you Princess Luna has me quietly follow him when he flies at night?" Crescent asked.

"Wait, you do?" Iron asked back.

"Every night since he started." the bat-winged pegasus answered with a toothy smile.

"Why didn't you tell me?" he asked.

"Cuz we haven't talked since his highness was caught flying three months ago." Gibbous answered.

"Fair point." Iron said.

Chapter 4

"Are you sure about this your highness?" Iron asked. "I feel naked without my armor."

"The armor was great for the seduction. Now you can actually relax." Kindle said. "Now hold still, I'm almost done."

The prince levitated just above Iron's head. The prince was trying his best to comb out his bodyguard's horrible case of helmet mane. Even while using magic, it was a struggle to do it without hurting him. The prince already gave him a bowtie he "borrowed" from the uniform supplies. The gold bowtie went nice with his soon-to-be combed, dark brown mane. Now he just had to help quell the nerves the pegasus was having.

"I think this a terrible idea your highness." he said. "I haven't been on a date since before I joined the Royal Guard!"

The prince had a good comeback, but was cut off by a knock on the door. A wave of his glowing hand turned the knob, and opened it. It was his Aunt Luna. Her guards stood at the door as she walked in. She glanced at Iron before she chuckled.

"Dressing up your guard are we?" she asked.

"Our dear Iron Wing, has a date tonight." the prince said. "I've been trying to comb out his helmet mane, but it won't budge."

"Ah." she said. "Never fear nephew. We have a spell just for such occasions. Stand back."

Kindle floated over to his aunt. Her glowed bright, and a blast of bright blue energy covered Iron's mane. The magic was slowly pulling his stubborn locks apart. After a moment, it was done. This was actually the first time the prince had seen his bodyguard out of uniform. The mane was short on top, and traveled down to his back. His adorably nervous smile with the bowtie brought it all together. The prince floated back to him to look it all over.

"How do I look?" Iron asked.

"Great." Kindle reassured. "Now go. You don't want to be late."

A wave of the prince's hand opened the balcony doors. The pegasus trotted over. He spread his wings to take off, but looked back to the prince first. A soft smile.

"Thank you, your highness." he said.

"Anything for a friend." the prince said back.

With a flap of his wings, Iron was flying off towards Ponyville. The prince smiled as he waved his hand to close the doors. He turned around, and floated over to his aunt. She still had a smile on her face as he levitated next to her head.

"Thou considers thy guard a friend?" she asked as they made their way out of his room.

"He's the closest I have to one." he answered as his aunt's guards joined them on the descent. She playfully nudged him with her muzzle.

"Thou does not consider thy aunt a friend?" she asked while she pretended to be insulted.

"Alright." he relented. "My bodyguard *and* you. Also, I just remembered something."

"Oh?" his aunt asked.

"Mom's gonna get grumpy if I show up with no bodyguard." he said,

The princess of the night pondered for a moment as they exited the tower, and walked down the hall.

"Thou may borrow one of mine until Iron Wing returns." Aunt Luna said, proud of her solution. "Is thou up to the job, dear Crescent?"

"Of course your highness!" Crescent said.

Ken was hoping tonight would just be another nice dinner. Both he and Celestia knew what today was. Their son had spent the past five years in hiding. It wasn't of his own volition. It was a choice thrust upon him. As nice as it would be to simply be a family in the public, she didn't want her family getting hurt. It was a valid reason at first. He had no magic of his own. Kindle was barely learning his. Now though? Their son's magic was on a level beyond that of any unicorn. Ken was always by her side. The

guards knew to protect him from any danger. Despite all this, she was the princess. It was her choice to make. All this never helped the yearly argument. He knew it was best to just sit by his sister-in-law while the two argued at this point. He quietly ate his fish as the mother of his child spoke.

"I notice Iron Wing isn't here." Celestia said.

"I gave him the night off to go on a date." Kindle answered. "Crescent is taking his place until he returns."

"Why didn't you tell me?" she asked.

"Hey Mom. I gave Iron the night off." he answered sarcastically. Ken sighed. This is where the arguing usually began. His son making a decision she didn't approve of.

"Kindle. You can't change a guard's schedule on a whim." Celestia said.

"It wasn't on a whim." he said. "I decided at lunch."

"We have hundreds of guards." she said. "Whose schedules are so carefully intertwined, any sudden changes can throw everything into chaos. You should've come to me first."

"Ah yes." he said, as he raised his voice. "We have to make sure we have a guard in my room, watching me do nothing for all eternity!"

"That's not what I-." she said, but was cut off.

"We have to keep Kindle hidden! Can't let the world find out perfect Princess Celestia has a child!" he spat.

"Kindle!" Celestia and Luna shouted in shocked unison.

"What possible excuse could you have for keeping me a secret any longer Mom?" he asked angrily. "I've been training my magic for five years! Dad always has guards with him! Are you that scared of telling them about me?"

Ken could see his son's anger quickly shifting to somberness in the silence. Kindle closed his eyes, and looked away. A wave of his glowing hand, and his son was gone in a flash of light along with his temporary guard. Most likely to his room. He looked over to Celestia, who was quiet as well.

Rarity couldn't help but feel giddy as she trotted over to her door. Becoming a member of Hand in Hoof while hosting the meeting in her own home! It was beyond exciting. She was grinning ear to ear as she opened the door. Lyra had a saddlebag of notes on her. Behind her was Fluttershy. The two had been friends for awhile. This was the first time they were meeting as club members.

"Come in! Come in!" Rarity beamed.

"Are you sure you want to host the meeting Rarity?" Fluttershy asked. "I really don't mind hosting it at my cottage."

"I'm more than happy to do this Fluttershy." she answered.

The two walked in. The white mare had set up some pillows. It wasn't the most fabulous setup, but she didn't have enough time to order fancier seating. All three sat down on a pillow. Lyra removed her saddlebag before sitting down. She levitated out a sheet of paper.

"This meeting is three members short this week, so we'll just be inducting a new member in tonight." Lyra said with a smile. "We welcome Rarity to Hand in Hoof."

Rarity felt her Hand in Hoof necklace and smiled. While the group had been around for some time, she wasn't inspired to join until last year. When she saw her little sister Sweetie Belle trying to make clothes for the human village. Her sister telling her that humans didn't have much in terms of clothes struck a chord. Only after talking with Lyra did she realize how bad humans had it. The only ones she ever interacted with were the servants of nobles. Seeing their struggles with something as simple as clothes gave her the push to start helping them. She wasn't considered for full membership until she single-hoofedly raised the funds to build the bridge for the human village. Fluttershy was the one who nominated her a year ago.

"Traitors!" a voice shouted from outside. It shocked Rarity out of her thoughts. Lyra sighed as she stood up and walked to the door.

"Those Iron Hoof lackeys never give up." she grumbled. "I'll be right back."

After Lyra walked out, Rarity couldn't help but look through a crack in the door. It was the red stallion from earlier. He was still sporting his iron hoofshoe on his left forehoof. A signature of the Iron Hoof Clan. All they cared about was keeping humans below ponies in social status. They were the reason Hand in Hoof existed.

"Dragging in another Element of Harmony?" the stallion asked. "Protecting hoomins isn't their job."

"And shouting out at mares in the night is yours?" Lyra asked as her horn glowed. The stallion left as he shouted more obscenities that Rarity couldn't hear. She opened the door as her club leader came back in.

"That brute would've gotten an earful if Sweetie Belle had woken up." the white mare huffed.

"Dealing with them is something you'll have to get used to." the minty mare said as she sat down. "Whether they're bothering you, or harassing a human. They've been known to assault humans if they think they'll get away with it."

"I believe I'm ready to help them." Rarity said.

"Then this meeting can continue." Lyra said.

The air was crisp. The night sky was beautiful. Iron had wondered if Prince Kindle influenced his aunt to make the night more beautiful just to help. He wouldn't put it past the human one bit. With what little of the outside world he sees, it was no surprise the prince liked to live vicariously through others. It was the likely reason the pegasus found himself on his first date in a very long time. No doubt his highness would pester him for every detail on his return. He saw Gem standing in front of the café as he came in to land. He hoped his bowtie held up in the flight.

"So the knight is just as handsome outside of his armor as well as within it." she said with a smile.

"Well I like to think so." he said as they walked. "So, what are your plans for this date of ours? Not many places open late in Ponyville."

"I think a walk makes for a fine first date." Gem said. "It's a beautiful night."

It seemed the date had a strong start. Perhaps his highness was right about this. He and the green mare were close in age. She being only a few years younger. She too had difficulty with dating. Although her limitations were from her job and high standards. It seems a member of the Royal Guard, was the best option she had in awhile. At least she wasn't nagged into this date by the young son of their ruling princess. The subject of Kindle eventually came up.

"Of all the ways you would finally ask me out, that hoomin was the last thing I expected." she chuckled.

"Oh I wasn't expecting it either." he said with a soft smile. "He told me I should ask you out almost as soon as we sat down."

"Never met such an...outspoken hoomin before." she said.

"Getting him to keep his thoughts to himself is a battle I lost long ago." the pegasus said. Not referring to Prince Kindle as anything other than a human was a challenge, but one he could manage in conversation.

"I just think it was a little...uppity is all." she said.

"Uppity?" Iron asked as he feigned confusion. He had a feeling he knew what was next, but hoped he was wrong.

"Hoomins should only speak when spoken to." the mare said. "It's only proper."

"Humans aren't slaves anymore Gem." he said. "We treat them as equals. They can speak their minds as freely as you and I."

They had stopped their walk to look at each other directly. Her soft smile was gone. A cold stare as all that remained. Her true colors were shining through.

"Don't tell me you actually **respect** those two-legger pink monkeys?" she said with a scowl. "Giving them freedom was the worst mistake Princess Celestia ever made."

"It's clear this was a waste of time." Iron said as he stepped back and spread his wings. "Goodbye Gem."

The pegasus flew off towards the mountain. His date over barely after it began.

"So **that's** how you get past the guards on the castle wall." Crescent said as he soared in the sky alongside the prince.

"Huggin' the west side of the castle over the cliffside never fails." Kindle chuckled.

"Explains why I only find you after you're pretty far out." the pegasus said.

"Wait, you've been following me?" the prince asked. "I've never seen you though."

"With all due respect your highness, I have a lot more experience than you." she answered. "Plus, watching for any ponies following you is more of a guard's job."

Kindle had opted to go out for a night flight as soon as he teleported into his room. He lied to the guards stationed outside his door that he was going to bed and didn't want to be disturbed. With the angry comments he made at this mother, the young prince needed some fresh air to calm his nerves. Every year, the argument would get shorter. He wondered if he should just accept being a secret forever. It would be a lonely eternity. Being born of Princess Celestia, he was already imbued with immortality like her. The spell was passed down to him just like her magic was.

"Flying anywhere particular?" Crescent asked.

"Not really." Kindle answered. "Might just fly above Ponyville for a bit, then loop back to the castle."

"I can keep my distance if you want some privacy, your highness." the pegasus said.

"Thanks Crescent." the prince said as he smiled at his temporary guard. With a flap of her batwings, Crescent was suddenly a dozen feet or so behind. In retrospect, the color scheme of the Night Guard does make it near impossible to spot her in the air. It was no wonder the prince never noticed. While he did appreciate the companionship in the moment, these night flights were more for some private time. Despite Iron Wing's constant protesting, he usually waits for his guard to sleep before leaving. Since Night Guard are awake at night, he decided to take Crescent along.

Ponyville came into view as they finally passed through the clouds. At this time ponies were either eating late dinners, or already in bed. Never a pony out at night. Made for a great place to fly over. A part of him wanted to try and find Iron to see how his date was going. Although the southern edge of Ponyville caught his eye. The prince looked back at his member of the Night Guard, and gestured her to come forward.

"Everything alright, your highness?" Crescent asked as she flew next to the prince.

"That looks like a fire." Kindle said as he pointed towards a pillar of smoke.

"Shall I retrieve a fire brigade?" she asked.

"Let's get a closer look." the prince said. He saw the complaint of his potential exposure coming up.

"To properly assess the situation. I'll just ride on your back."

"Are you okay Fluttershy?" Lyra asked between coughs.

"A few burned feathers, but I'm okay." she answered.

It all happened so fast. The three of them were finalizing the details of Rarity's membership. Suddenly, a blast of magic burst through one of the windows. It was a fire spell. The inside was engulfed immediately. Rarity had bolted upstairs after telling them both to get out. Sweetie Belle was asleep, and her cat Opal was upstairs as well. The smoke was already high in the sky when the two got out.

"Guess I should've used a stronger spell." a voice said.

Lyra turned around to see who spoke. It was the red unicorn stallion from earlier. Now he had a sick smile on his face. The mare was filled with rage.

"Rarity's still in there!" she shouted. "With her baby sister!"

"Monkey-lovers are just as bad as any two-legger!" he snapped back. Both unicorns charged their horns, ready to fight. Suddenly, a blast of yellow energy smacked into the stallion's head. It was enough force to send him through the air. He hit the ground and went limp. Out cold.

A loud flapping of wings caught her attention. She turned to see a pegasus land. She recognized it as a member of the Night Guard by the batwings. On the guard's back was a human. It looked a little like the human she saw at Sugarcube Corner this morning with Rarity. Although he was dressed quite differently. He wasn't wearing a servant's uniform. Rather than a golden vest on top of a white button-up shirt, the coat and pants were all white. The cuffs were adorned with golden stripes that wrapped around. The numerous buttons were golden as well. The human's hair was a vibrant pink. It showed no signs of dye. It looked as natural as the pink mane of any pony. He hopped off the guard.

"I heard what he said. That should keep him down for a minute." the human said before looking at her. "Are you both okay?"

Lyra was silent. She was trying to process what she just saw. There were no other unicorns around besides herself and the now unconscious stallion. Now this human speaks like he was the one behind the blast that took down the stallion. Fluttershy answered for her.

"We're relatively fine sir." Fluttershy said. "Our friend Rarity is still inside along with her little sister and cat."

The human took a moment to look at the fire, then the stallion, and then the ponies around him. He was deep in thought for a moment. He took a deep breath before speaking.

"Alright then." he said. "Fluttershy right?"

"Y-Yes sir." she answered.

"I need you to get some ponies here to put out the fire." he said. "Can you do that for me?" Fluttershy nodded, then left. This human was speaking with an authority Lyra never heard from a human before.

"What do you need from me, your highness?" the Night Guard asked. Your highness?

"Crescent, I'm sending you back to the castle to get reinforcements." the human said. "We need to contain this scene fast."

"Yes sir!" Crescent said. The human's hand began to glow a bright yellow. The same yellow that had struck the stallion moments ago. With a wave of his hand, the guard was gone a flash. Did that human just teleport a guard?

"Lyra." the human said. Calling her name snapped her out of her confusion. "I need you to make sure that stallion doesn't leave. He'll be properly detained as soon as the Night Guard get here." The offending stallion was levitating in a yellow glow. The human's hands had the same glow. The stallion was placed down between them.

She was still trying to process what she saw as the human ran into the burning boutique.

Iron was feeling more disappointed than anything as he flew towards the castle. He knew Prince Kindle would be disappointed at his date going south. The prince tried his best though. Racist ponies weren't the bodyguard's type anyways. He wondered if it was from handling baby humans at such a young age that influenced his thoughts on humans. Although his parents weren't activists like Hand in Hoof, they did try to raise him to treat everypony equally. He just couldn't fathom a pony that still believed that humans were only useful as slaves. It doesn't help that the only jobs humans can find is as servants for nobles.

He waved to the Night Guard pegasi as he flew past them. He gave a wings a hard flap as he angled towards the prince's tower. He was probably asleep. The pegasus tried to beat his wings as little as possible as he landed on the balcony. The room was quiet as he walked in. The bed was just as neat as when he left for his date. No prince in sight. He sighed as he tugged off his bowtie with his wingtips. Iron trotted over to the door and opened it. The two guards stationed outside the door turned when he did. A unicorn and an earth pony.

"Evening sir." the unicorn said.

"Evening." he said back. "Do either of you know where his highness is at this moment?"

"I believe he said he was going to sleep and didn't want to be disturbed." the earth pony said. "Is something wrong?"

Before he could grumble about the prince sneaking out again, a flash from behind caught his attention. He turned around to see Crescent. She looked concerned.

"Crescent did you just get teleported in?" Iron asked.

"No time to explain!" she said. "There's a fire in Ponyville, and Prince Kindle has ordered reinforcements down there!"

Iron immediately went to start putting his armor on. So he did sneak out. Probably saw the fire, and sent Crescent to get guards to help. Knowing Kindle, he would try something downright stupid on his own. Both bodyguards looked back to the Night Guards at the door.

"What are you waiting for, an invitation?" Crescent barked. "Get me the Captain Silver Moon now! I want guards in Ponyville ten minutes ago!" The guards scrambled down the stairs of the tower as fast as their hooves could carry them.

"I'll swing by Cloudsdale first and get some pegasi to help out." Iron said as he pulled his helmet on. "Then I'll have to double-time it down there. No telling what he'll try on his own."

"I'll wait here for the captain." Crescent said.

Twilight wasn't the kind of mare that usually needed a late night glass of water. The air felt drier than usual. There was a smell of smoke wafting in through her bedroom window. She walked down to her kitchen and poured herself a glass of water. She was far too tired to summon it to her bedside. The cold water felt nice down her throat. It made up for the fact that her dream was interrupted. It was a fun one about teaching magic to humans. It was a silly notion, but that's what made the dream so fun. The mare glanced at her front window. She could see some ponies out and about.

"Why would anypony be out this late?" she wondered as she walked to her front door.

It seemed a lot of ponies were drawn towards a pillar of smoke coming from the southern side of Ponyville. A fire! She closed her door behind her and made her way to the source of the smoke. The closer the unicorn got, the faster she ran. The smoke looked like it was near the Carousel Boutique. Rarity! She bolted through Ponyville as fast as her legs could carry her. Twilight swelled with fear when she saw the home of her fashionista friend burning. The locals were already trying to put it out with the help of a nearby river. Earth ponies carried buckets of water with their teeth. Unicorns were dumping the buckets as fast as they were brought to them.

She looked over and saw her friend Fluttershy. She had burns on the tips of her wings. She was sat next to Lyra, who was watching over an unconscious red unicorn stallion. She trotted over to them.

"Fluttershy!" she said as she hugged her friend. "What happened?"

"W-We were inducting Rarity as a new member of Hand in Hoof when this unicorn launched a fire spell that broke through her window." the pegasus answered.

"Where's Rarity?" Twilight asked nervously.

"She went to get Sweetie Belle and Opal." Fluttershy answered. "T-They're still inside."

The young alicorn was filled with fear and anger. Fear for the fate of her friend. Anger at the stallion that might of just killed her.

"Who knocked him out?" she asked.

"A human." Lyra answered. She was staring off into space.

"Come again?" Twilight asked.

"A human blasted him with magic and knocked him out." the mint mare answered. "Then he levitated him to me, told me to watch him, then ran into the fire."

Twilight was certain that Lyra had inhaled too much smoke. She couldn't dwell on the thought for too long. Her attention was pulled towards the distant flapping of wings. She turned around and looked up. It was a hoof of pegasi pushing in some rain clouds. They were being lead by a member of the Royal Guard.

In retrospect, running into a burning building was not a good idea. Despite getting the ponies around him to do what he said, he didn't really have a plan. The intelligent move would've been to teleport back to the castle, and get Aunt Luna to handle things. It was the moment that Fluttershy said it was Rarity in the fire. He remembered the day his magic came in, and how she got the bullying nobles to leave him alone. He couldn't wait. He had to trust in his aunt's training. Kindle was grateful for his small stature as a human. The smoke was overhead. He spotted Rarity quickly. Some debris had fallen and knocked her out. Her bottom half was stuck under it all. A small filly that the prince assumed the aforementioned little sister, had desperately tried to levitate the debris. She was far too inexperienced with her magic to do it. The cat was sat by them in silence. While removing the debris was a simple enough feat, calming down a crying filly was not. He had barely gotten her calmed down when the entire ceiling had collapsed. He had a shield around them just in time.

Now here they were. Buried under burning rubble. Air supply running low. An unconscious mare, a crying filly, a cat, and a prince in way over his head. Kindle refused to lose his calm demeanor. His mom and aunt kept calm in the dire times, he could too.

"A-A-Are we trapped?" the filly asked between sobs.

"No." Kindle said as he shifted the shield spell to his right hand. He used his now free left hand to stroke her mane. "We're just waiting for the fire to be put out. We'll make it"

He hated himself for lying to the filly. There was far too much weight on the shield to work on another spell. Sending Crescent to Canterlot took a sizable chunk of magic. The young prince didn't want to admit it, but he was borrowing time. He had no clue how long it would take to get reinforcements. He had no idea how long Fluttershy would take to get help. The shield was stopping the debris, but not the heat. Sweat was pouring down his face. The hand he was using to pet the filly had to return to maintaining the shield. Aunt Luna's training did not prepare him for this. This was his first time using his magic in a real-world scenario, and he wasn't sure he would make it. Kindle could feel a bit of ache setting in. He never had to be this serious with his magic before. He never had to maintain a strong shield for this long before. He could see hairline cracks forming, and had to waste more precious magic on sealing them. He looked down to the filly, who was hugging the unconscious Rarity.

"The hoomin said we'll make it." the filly said to her sister. "Hang on Rarity."

Kindle gritted his teeth. He couldn't let these mares down. They had friends and family. He told them they would make it.

A prince keeps his word.

Chapter 5

Iron's heart had skipped a beat or two when he was told Prince Kindle had ran inside the burning boutique. He nearly screamed at Crescent for leaving the prince alone. While he had no concern for his charge's ability to handle himself, it was her highness he was worried about. He shuddered at the thought of her finding out about tonight. It wasn't something he could mull over for long. He was busy directing the pegasi with their storm clouds. Princess Twilight was already on sight when he flew in, and was working on directing the unicorns after seeing the clouds roll in. Two unicorn guards from the sixteen Crescent brought from the castle, were watching over the stallion witnesses claimed started the fire. He recognized him as the stallion he had to scare off earlier that day. The other fourteen guards were keeping the growing crowd under control.

The fire was finally dying down after battling it for nearly half an hour. Ponyville citizens were watching with bated breath. The building had collapsed from the fire. Unicorns were working in tandem with the pegasi. Any piece of debris no longer burning was levitated away. They were all working quickly, as some of the unicorns could sense active magic under all the rubble.

"Don't leave me like this Kindle." Iron said to himself.

As if on cue, bright yellow light began to shine through gaps in the debris. The pile of rubble shifted around as more rays of yellow light shone into the night sky. The unicorns close to the pile moved back as something poked through. A sphere of yellow light was forcing its way out from under the rubble. Ponies shielded their eyes as it fully emerged. It was Prince Kindle! In the shield with him was an unconscious mare, a filly, and a cat. The shield rapidly dissipated as it touched the ground. His highness began to take a few shaky steps. Iron bolted towards him. Multiple guards followed suit.

"Your highness!" the pegasus said. The prince looked at him with a light smile. The populace murmured among themselves at his statement.

"What took you so long Iron?" he asked. "Stop for ice cream or-?" The prince was cut off as he stumbled. The pegasus was quick and raised a foreleg for him to grab onto. He was shaking. It was the same shaking a unicorn would have when they used far more magic than they should have.

"I'm glad you're safe." Iron said. The human took a deep breath before standing up.

"Still got some work to do." Prince Kindle said as he looked to the guards around him. "Did you bring healers?"

"Yes sir." the pegasus answered.

"Good." he said. "I want all four victims of the fire looked at. Rarity's unconscious, so she goes first." A few unicorns stepped forward and tended to the aforementioned victims.

"Anything else your highness?" Iron asked.

"Bring me the detained unicorn." Prince Kindle growled.

Twilight wasn't sure what to think. It was him. He was real. The pink-haired human! The shield he had made earlier was a near match for Princess Celestia's magical signature. It was muddled a bit by something, but it was close enough. Her mind was flooded with questions for him. Right now though, her focus had to be on the now awake Rarity. Whose little sister would not let go of her.

"Really dear, I'm fine." Rarity said. Her little sister mumbled something as her face was buried.

"I sensed no broken bones." the healer said. "Although I think it's best you take it easy."

"Now I just need to figure out where I'll live and how I'll find the bits to rebuild the boutique." she said, a small frown emerging.

Before Twilight could offer her place for the night, her attention was grabbed. The two guards watching over the now awoken arsonist were levitating him over to the pink-haired human. He was covered in a mix of sweat and soot. The mare had never seen a human look so angry before. The out of place Royal Guard was whispering something to the human while looking nervously at the crowd. A few cameras were snapping away.

"You have burned down a business, as well as attempted to murder an Element of Harmony." the human said as his hands began to glow yellow. The accused stallion was now held in the yellow glow. "Any last words before I carry out your punishment?"

"I am justified!" the stallion barked. "Those monkey lovers think you worthless two-leggers are equals? Even with this fake magic, you'll never be equals! Nothing you do will ever change that!"

"Perhaps." the human said. "However, I can make an example out of you. To make sure no pony will ever cross this line again."

The yellow glow around the arsonist grew in intensity. His body lost in the light. The pink-haired human was moving both hands around. His left hand counterclockwise. His right hand clockwise. A strange rippling sound came from the light the stallion was trapped in. Twilight tried to analyze the spell, but couldn't recognize any of it. The Royal Guard pegasus standing by the pink-haired human was looking like he would pass out any second. Hiding for five years. Coming out when Rarity was in trouble. She did say the human looked familiar. The purple mare looked down at her friend. Did she know the pink-haired human? Her attention was brought back to the spectacle when the glowing lessened. When the glow of the magic was weak enough to look at directly, Twilight rubbed her eyes to make sure she wasn't hallucinating.

The red stallion with the brown mane was gone. A naked light-skinned human with brown hair was in his place. He was lowered to the ground by the pink-haired human. The naked human shook his head as he put his left hand to his face. Most likely nursing a headache. His eyes opened wide, and looked at his hand in shock. He looked at his other hand with an equal amount of shock. He looked down to his

legs. If the fire didn't wake up Ponyville, his screaming just did. The naked human crawled on all fours to the pink-haired human. It was like a human trying to imitate a pony. He grabbed at his ankles, tears in his eyes.

"Change me back!" the naked human shouted. "Anything but this! Please!"

"I hereby sentence you to ten years in a human form." the pink-haired human said. "Consider this merciful."

Only faint whispers could be heard. Ponies unsure of what they witnessed. Humans don't have magic, yet here one was. Did this impossible human just turn a pony into a human? If so, the pony-now-human was having a complete mental breakdown. Rocking back and forth in the fetal position. Tears streaming down his face. The pink-haired human had no reaction. He simply turned, and walked back to the Royal Guard pegasus. Said pegasus couldn't look any more uneasy. Although he seemed slightly relieved when he lowered himself, and the human got on his back.

Twilight couldn't wait anymore. She needed answers. As the guards began to gather around the pink-haired human, his hands began to glow again.

"Wait!" she said. "I have so many questions!"

"Princess Twilight." he said. "See to it that Rarity has a place to sleep for the night. I will have a construction crew out here in the morning. As for your questions, I will give no answers today."

"But!" she began, but was cut off. With a wave of his hand, the human was gone. All the guards were gone as well.

It was an intense moment of silence when they all appeared in the castle courtyard. They all knew what happened. Not only did the prince sneak out. He used his magic in public. On top of that, he used the Become Human spell. Prince Kindle sighed deeply. Iron felt the prince's grip on the handlebar tighten.

"I want to make it clear." he said. "You all acted under my orders, and mine alone. I will see to it that none of you receive any punishment from my mother or aunt. You're all dismissed."

The guards dispersed. Some off to the barracks to clean up. Others going back to their patrols. Iron heard a groan from the prince.

"Are you alright sir?" the pegasus asked.

"Besides being exhausted from holding a shield for what felt like an hour while a building was on top of me, I'm fine." the prince answered.

"Shall we go to your room?" he asked.

"Yes, because a bath and bed sound wonderful." the prince said. "Could you fly me up? I'm a little more drained than usual."

"Of course sir." he said. The pegasus spread his wings. With a strong few flaps, the two were already circling the tower. It was a quick landing into the prince's room. When the prince dismounted, it was on shaky legs. He knew his highness wouldn't admit it. Prince Kindle was powerful, but he had no real-world experience with his magic.

As the prince cleaned up in his bath, the bodyguard began to take off his armor. The night was a lot more exciting than he expected. His date went sour. Definitely for the best. Though the attempt from the prince was a kind gesture. He wondered if the prince would get grounded to his room for all eternity by his mother. Hard to be seen as an adult at twenty when your mother's age spans centuries. If he did get grounded, at least his charge would finally be an easy job.

"Ah!" Prince Kindle said as the bathroom doors opened. "Feels nice to have the burn smell off." The soot-covered clothes were tossed away. The prince was donned with a blue silk shirt and matching pants. His feet slid across the floor. He climbed onto his bed. His head nearly missed the pillow when he finally dropped. He pulled his blanket up. Iron got into his bed at the foot of the prince's bed.

"Goodnight, your highness." Iron said.

"Goodnight Iron." the prince said. "Hopefully I'm not grounded for a thousand years tomorrow."

The guard schedule for next month was finally finished. Some wanted time off for various reasons, and the schedule was worked on to allot such things. Now Princess Luna was taking a brief moment to enjoy the night sky she painted from the Royal Garden. It would be time to dreamwalk soon. The door to the garden opened. The princess turned to see a familiar face. Crescent had returned.

"Glad to see thee returned." she said. "We saw Captain Silver Moon mobilize an entire squad of guards. Was there a reason Ponyville needed sixteen guards this late?"

"There was a fire, your highness." Crescent answered. "Guards were sent to help the injured, as well as keep the peace until the fire was handled."

"We were told of our nephew being the one to give the order." she said.

"Correct." she said. "The fire was seen by him when he was on one of his late-night excursions. The building in question was the Carousel Boutique, and the arsonist that caused the fire was detained quickly."

"The Element of Generosity? Is she harmed?" the princess was concerned. Crescent shook his head.

"No your highness." she answered. "Prince Kindle ran into the fire, and held a shield around those trapped inside as the building collapsed. His highness held the shield for half an hour until he could break through the rubble himself."

"Impressive. What of the detained?" the princess asked. The guard took a deep breath before speaking.

"Prince Kindle felt the unicorn's actions warranted the use of his Become Human spell as punishment." she answered. "The stallion is still in Ponyville as far as I know."

"Hmm." she pondered. "Is there anything else that happened we should be made aware of?"

"His highness wanted a construction crew out rebuilding the property first thing in the morning." Cresecent said. "He was very adamant on that."

"We will see to that." she said. "Thank you for the report Crescent. Feel free to take a break. It seems you still have the smell of smoke about you. Also, have Captain Silver Moon report to me."

Crescent bowed before he left. As the door closed, the princess mulled over what she was told. As her nephew's teacher, she wanted to be proud of such feats of magic in such a short period of time. Holding a shield for half an hour under extreme conditions, and even casting the Become Human spell the two had been working on. As his aunt however, she wanted to march straight to his room to give him an earful for doing something so dangerous and reckless. Although the latter was something that his mother would do tomorrow no doubt. There were many a witness at the fire. Possibly ponies with cameras as well. Princess Luna knew one thing for sure.

Tomorrow would be interesting.

Breakfast was Princess Celestia's favorite meal of the day. Every morning the chefs would make her a stack of pancakes. Today's stack was chocolate chip and bananas. Her lovely Ken had a human-sized stack of regular pancakes with a side of scrambled eggs. Their breakfasts were usually quiet. Lulu would be finished with Kindle's training by now. Her son would take a nap, and her sister would have an apple before going to bed. Seeing both her sister and her son walk through the door made for a small surprise. Her son's bodyguard Iron Wing took his position behind the prince. All three seemed well-rested.

"Good morning Lulu." Celestia said. "Good morning my son. Nice to see you all at breakfast."

"We thought our dear nephew earned a night to sleep in." Luna said. "After last night, he certainly earned it."

"Oh?" the sun princess said with curiosity. She didn't notice the eyes of her son or her son's guard widen. Her sister held a small smile.

"Would thou like to tell thy mother of certain late night escapades?" the moon princess asked her nephew. Her son winced as Celestia stared at him intently.

"Escapades?" she asked.

"Thanks Aunt Luna." Kindle said sarcastically. "Why not display my memories while you're at it?"

"Shall we tell her for you?" her sister asked as the chefs brought in breakfast for the two of them.

"No." he said. "No doubt she'll find out one way or another today."

"Find out what?" she asked, a stern tone in her voice.

"There was a fire in Ponyville last night." he answered while he avoided his mother's gaze. "After we argued, I went out for a late night flight with Crescent to clear my head. I saw the Carousel Boutique on fire as I was flying over Ponyville. It was caused by a unicorn, and I knocked him unconscious when I flew in. I sent Fluttershy to get help, and had Lyra Heartstrings detain him while I teleported Crescent back to the castle for reinforcements. I ran into the fire when I was told Rarity was trapped inside along with her little sister and cat. Rarity was unconscious when I got in there. By the time I was ready to get them all out, the building collapsed on us. My shield kept us safe for the half hour it took to put out the fire. For arson and attempted murder, I used my Become Human spell to punish the stallion."

There was a lot of things she could say about her son. Being a liar wasn't one of them. She took several deep breaths.

"This is a lot of information to take in." Celestia said. "Take your breakfast to your room while I discuss things with your aunt."

"It's been a half hour and they're still arguing?" Kindle asked.

"It appears so." Iron answered.

The two had already eaten their breakfast. Now the prince was waiting for his mother to finish arguing with his aunt and father. He was floating around his room to pass the time. He had never seen his mother upset before. While he wanted to hear the conversation going on in the dining room, the guards at his door had been ordered to keep him in. His mother even had pegasi stationed outside his balcony. She really didn't want him going anywhere.

"Think she'll ground me to my room for a hundred years?" the prince asked jokingly.

"I look forward to you being less stressful to guard." the pegasus chuckled.

"How am I stressful?" he asked.

"There are many things, your highness." Iron said. "You're stubborn, inexperienced, and downright naive. You do things with little to no forethought. I swear, the soldiers at the border to the southern changeling kingdom have a less stressful job than I do."

Kindle had a retort, but was cut off at a knock on his door. He landed in front of his door, and opened it. It was one of the human servants. He was close to prince's father in age. He held a scroll in his hands.

"A letter for you, your highness." the servant said as he bowed.

"Thank you." the prince said as he took the letter and closed the door.

"A letter for you?" Iron asked.

"Only letters I ever get are birthday messages from Cadence and Thorax." Kindle said as he unrolled the scroll.

Dear pink-haired human,

My friend Twilight insisted I write this letter in the off chance you are indeed real. My memory of last night is very hazy. Although my little sister Sweetie Belle was quite detailed in her recollection. She claims you swooped in, and held a shield over us while the fire was put out. I don't believe I can ever repay a debt like that. If you are more than just a conspiracy theory, I want to thank for saving not just me, but two individuals very close to me. I hope one day I can meet you to thank you face-to-face.

Sincerely,

Rarity

Kindle was silent. Iron was saying something, but he couldn't focus on it. He never had a letter like this before. A pony that thanked him for what he did. He was filled with a sense of pride. The feeling was stronger than any time he mastered a spell. Stronger than the excitement from his birthdays. He did a good thing, it felt good, and a pony was thankful for it.

"Your highness!" Iron shouted. The prince snapped out of his haze.

"Sorry Iron," he said. "Lost my focus. What were you saying?"

"I said there's seems to be more to the letter if you unroll it more," the bodyguard said.

He quickly unrolled the scroll more. There was indeed more. A picture. It didn't look drawn. It looked real. Like it was fused into the paper. A six-pointed star on top of another six-pointed star, with smaller ones dotted around it. The picture looked familiar, but the prince couldn't put his finger on it. His thumb grazed against the picture. Suddenly, the stars jumped off the paper. The glowing white stars began to float around Kindle. They would flash in small bursts. A big purple one was floating in place.

"I don't like this," Iron said as he trotted to the door and opened it. The guards turned to look at him. "Get me a mage immediately! We have magic of unknown origin interacting with the prince!" One of the guards ran down the stairs.

Then, the flashing stars created a vertical line in front of him. They began to circle him, and sped up quickly. Was that green fire trailing behind them? It looked like the same fire his mom would receive letters from. The purple star was turning and twitching in all sorts of directions. As if it was looking for something. He tried to stop the spinning stars with his magic, but they just ignored him. He tried to fly out of them, but they just followed him. The purple star was still moving erratically. Even teleporting did nothing. The stars were too close to teleport without them. The circular streaks of fire began to grow in intensity.

"I don't like this Iron!" Kindle said nervously.

"Just stay calm, your highness," the pegasus said.

"This is the fire Mom uses to send letters to Twilight." he said. "I really don't wanna be the first living thing to travel by fire!"

"Where's that mage?" Iron shouted to the guard. A clattering of hooves could be heard coming up the stairs.

Kindle tried to muster a shout as his vision became nothing but green fire. It was too late. The purple star stopped twitching. There was a hum, then all the prince could feel was his body being ripped from his room into the open sky.

The prince. His charge. The human he swore to protect with his life. Prince Kindle was now a wisp of green fire on the wind. The pegasi at the balcony tried to pursue it, but it was too quick. Now a mage was going over the letter. Going over what traces of magic he could detect. With the runes on the letter gone, there wasn't much to work with. He couldn't deny it. Iron failed as a guard. The out of place letter should've been a red flag. His highness almost never gets letters. How did a pony manage to send a letter to a human that doesn't publicly exist? The human that brought the letter was being interrogated by Captain Shining Armor.

"How the Tartarus can you not remember how you got the letter?" the captain barked at the cowering servant.

"I was walking in the hallway, and the letter was just in my hands!" the servant said. "All I knew was that I had to deliver to the pink-haired human! I mean Prince Kindle!"

Iron snapped his head towards the servant. The only ones that called Prince Kindle 'pink-haired human' were...

"Captain!" the bodyguard said. The captain turned to look at him. "I think the servant's been affected by a spell."

"What makes you think that?" the captain asked.

"Name one pony or human that's called his highness 'pink-haired human' besides those conspiracy theorists down in Ponyville." he answered.

"Of course." the captain said. "That would explain why he called him that. No pony outside this castle would know his name. This could mean...Mage!"

"Yes sir?" the older stallion said while he was still going over the letter.

"I need you to check this servant for whatever spells have been cast on his mind." Captain Shining said. "Whoever sent that letter is most likely the same one that cast a spell on him."

The gray unicorn stallion slowly trotted over to the servant. The fair-skinned human could not look any more terrified as a gray energy washed over his head. Probably never had to deal with magic before. Most humans that worked in the castle ran errands for other castle staff. He could see the human's hands shaking. Working at the castle was a high-paying job. The fear of losing it was weighing on the human's mind. His fear was passively fighting against the magic. The cloud of gray energy was shifting at uneven intervals.

"This would go faster if it stopped wasting its mental energy on panicking." the mage said in a moment of frustration. The captain looked over to Iron. The pegasus already knew what was going to be asked of him. He trotted over to the human, and sat down. The nervous human looked at him.

"You won't be punished for this." he said in a soft tone. "You're a victim of mind-altering magic. You can't be held accountable for that."

"R-Really?" the servant nervously asked. Iron nodded. The human took a few deep breaths. The energy around his head smoothed out.

"Well that fixes the fear clouding his mind." the mage said. "Now I can focus on finding what little bits of the spell are left."

"You really need to write a book on handling humans Iron." Captain Shining said. "I can't think of a single pony that can deal with them better than you."

"After we find Prince Kindle, maybe I will." the pegasus said.

"Now we have to decide which of us is telling Princess Celestia." the captain said.

Chapter 6

Twilight couldn't believe it. The runes worked. They actually worked! Enchanting the letter was simple enough. That spell was designed to compel whatever random castle servant it ended up with, to bring the letter to the pink-haired human. She had the runes designed to latch onto Princess Celestia's magical signature. His appearance immediately proved her hypothesis that his magic was the same as the princess'. Although it seemed that summoning living creatures via dragonfire was something that she would have to test more. Spike burped, and the human appeared from the fire. Then, unknown momentum launched him into a wall. A couple of books fell, knocking the human out cold. Spike went to nurse a now intense tummyache. The human was levitated onto the couch, next to her temporary roommates. Rarity agreed to watch over him while she ran off to get her friends. Now an exasperated purple alicorn was leading four of her closest friends to her house.

"Ah still don't know why yer in such a hurry Twilight." Applejack said. "Ah barely finished mah breakfast when ya came knockin'."

"Oooo is it a breakfast party?" a bouncy Pinkie Pie asked.

"Zzzzzzz." Rainbow Dash snored as she flew in place, nudged along by her friends.

"I barely finished getting all the animals their breakfast." Fluttershy yawned.

"Girls, I promise this will be worth it." Twilight said with a big smile as she stopped outside her door. "What you're going to see will change your lives forever!"

The door opened. They all walked inside. Rarity was still sat upon the couch, the special human next to her. Fluttershy was the first to notice. The rest quickly followed.

"Is that...oh dear." she mumbled.

"Well ah'll be." the orange mare said.

"Huh? Wuzzat?" the rainbow-maned mare was a bit more awake.

"Twilight found the pink-haired hoomin!" Pinkie Pie said right in Rainbow's ear. The mare was awake now.

"He's real?" the blue mare asked as she stared in shock.

Twilight couldn't hold her excitement anymore. She was bouncing around on her hooves. Five years of research. Five years of talking to fellow believers. Spending all night planning the perfect summoning. He was here! The human with magic! Her mind was flooded with a myriad of things. So many questions to ask. Did she have time for experiments? Maybe she could learn more about the spell that turned that stallion into a human. The newly-formed human was snatched up by Night Guard after the pink-haired human left last night. Right before she had a chance to look him over herself.

"Hold on a minute Twi." Applejack said, interrupting the princess' happy bouncing. "If he's real, that means the conspiracies about 'im could be real."

"What conspiracies?" Rainbow asked.

"I hear some folk swap theories now n' then at the market." she answered. "Some say he's an experiment created by the Royal Mages. Others say he's a pony trapped in a hoomin body. No pony knows fer sure. They say he'll sometimes fly above Ponyville late at night, lookin' for other ponies to eat."

"Well, the flying part's true." a voice said. "Don't know where they got the pony-eating part though."

The room fell silent. The human was now sitting up. He was looking at the standing ponies.

"I assume me being here is your fault." the human said while he glared at Twilight. She huffed for a moment.

"Well, I had questions." she said matter-of-factly. "You left before I could ask them."

"So you resort to foalnapping?" he asked. "Do you have any idea how much trouble I'm already in for what I did last night? Mo-. Princess Celestia is mad enough at me. How mad do you think she'll be at you? That 'most faithful student' title won't help you when she finds out."

"W-Well..." she started.

"I'm teleporting back to the castle." he grumbled. "Try to resist the urge to use dragonfire to summon me in the-OOF!"

The pink-haired human was cut off. Sweetie Belle had woken up from her sleeping spot on the other chair. She tackled the human on sight, and held a strong hug on him.

"Thankyouforsavingmeandmysisterandourcatmisterhoomin!" the filly spat out in one breath.

"Glad to help." he said through a strained breath. "Please stop squeezing me."

The filly let him go, and the human took a deep breath. A certain white mare had a much softer approach.

"I'm truly sorry for Twilight's behavior." Rarity said. "Had I known her intentions, I never would've written that letter."

The human looked at her. He looked down at her necklace. In all the recent excitement, Twilight forgot her friend had become a Hand in Hoof member. His tone changed immediately. He was now much calmer. It made sense. Humans were raised from a young age to know they could completely trust ponies with that necklace. They don't let just anypony become a member.

"I'm glad you wrote the letter." he said. "Gave me a chance to check up on you." He looked down to the still-hugging filly covering his lap. "Your little sister too."

"Is there anything I can do to ever repay you?" she asked. "Twilight told me you hired a construction crew to rebuild my boutique?"

"Keep working with Hand in Hoof, and we're even." the human said with a smile. "As for the boutique, it's being rebuilt at no cost. If you need a stipend until you can get back on your hooves, let me know. I'll arrange something."

Twilight was a little surprised. The human was all kinds of grumpy at her. One look at the necklace, and all of a sudden he's talking to Rarity like they're good friends? The trust humans had in the wearers of that necklace was no joke.

"May I know the name of my savior?" Rarity asked.

"Kindle." Kindle answered.

Twilight's horn glowed. Time to update her notes. Her book of notes on the human appeared in front of her, along with a quill and ink. She barely wrote his name in when the book was yanked from her magical grasp. It now floated in front of Kindle. She barely had any time to feel the pull, it was so sudden.

"A whole book on notes of me?" he asked. "A little creepy. Dedicated, but creepy."

The alicorn tried to pull her book back with her own magic. The human's yellow glow mixed with her purple. The book however, didn't budge. The mare's eyes went wide. It was basic levitation. There was no way his hold was that strong. Right? Her friends looked at her with odd stares as she adjusted her stance. She tried to pull with the strength she rarely used. The book wiggled in air for a moment before going stationary once more.

"Wait, are you trying to pull the book away from me?" Kindle asked.

"It's not yours to gawk over." she argued.

"Yet it's all about me." he retorted. "Not that it's very accurate."

"I worked hard on it!" she said louder as the glow on her horn increased. The book wiggled again. Her friends stared with jaws dropped.

"Never thought I'd see it." Rainbow said. "Somepony stronger than Egghead, and it's a hoomin."

"He's not stronger than me!" she spat. The sudden angry outburst caught them offguard. The glow of her horn became intense enough for eyes to be shielded.

"Twilight, just stop." Kindle said. "You're not on my level. This is just embarrassing."

The young princess dug deep into her recesses of magic. The book wiggled even more. The human hadn't even moved. Not a bead of sweat. He was stroking Sweetie Belle while reading the notes on him.

"How?" she asked through gritted teeth.

"Simple." he answered.

The glow on Kindle's hand disappeared. The book of notes now rocketed towards Twilight at breakneck speed. There wasn't enough time to stop it. Not enough time to make a shield. She shut her eyes, and awaited the incoming migraine. She heard a loud crash, but didn't feel anything. She opened her eyes. The human was in front of her, on the couch. She looked across the room to where she once stood. The book was implanted in the wall behind her. Fractions of a second to react, and he teleported her without moving. He looked at her with a soft smile.

"You've had practice, I've had training." he said.

Twilight felt her horn glow as her frustration began to bubble up. A chill went up her spine as her eyes went wide.

Kindle really needed to learn some self-control. After all the magic he used last night, he was still recovering. Not back at full strength yet. The temptation of annoying Twilight was too strong. While his comment on practice versus training was on point, the purple pony was no slouch. He didn't like

her, but he had to respect how strong she was. He wasn't as worn out as he was last night, but that tug of war pushed it a little. Now he had to deal with her blasting magic at him like he was target practice.

"Alright! Twilight!" he said, barely getting a word in each time he had to teleport out of the way.
"That's! Enough!"

"Jeez Twilight." Rainbow said. "Are you that mad about him being stronger?"

"It's not me!" Twilight shouted. "Something's forcing me to do this! I can't control it!"

"Whaddya mean?" Applejack asked.

"It. Means. All. Of. You. Get. Out." Kindle said between teleports.

"Rainbow!" the alicorn shouted. "Spike and Owlowski!"

"On it!" the pegasus said as he shot up the stairs in a blur. She was flying out the door with a purple dragon and owl in tow.

"Ya heard the hoomin!" Applejack shouted. "Everypony out!"

Despite concern for their friend, all the ponies in there complied. It was now just the two of them. Last night Kindle had to fight off a burning building from collapsing on him. Now he has to fight an alicorn. While he's dueled his Aunt Luna on occasion, that was for training. He never thought he would have to fight one for real. He needed a plan, because he couldn't teleport forever. He put up a shield, which was holding. Maybe he could talk her down.

"Okay Twilight." he said. "You're the smart one, so tell me what's going on."

"Attempted possession spell!" she said as her horn continued to blast at the shield. "They took control of my body before I could finish a counterspell, so I can still talk."

"Any advice?" he asked as hairline cracks began to show from repeated blasts. There was a reason she was the Element of Magic. Between last night and the stunt with the book, he was running low.

"A hard hit could disrupt the possession." she answered.

Kindle shot out from behind his shield. A chance to knock around Twilight Sparkles guilt free? He darted around the room as he tried to line up his shot. Every blast from her was getting closer. He lined her up with the door, then flew forward as fast as he could. A few blasts whizzed by his head. With a glowing hand in front of him, he let out a strong blast. There was a flash of purple, then the princess was nowhere in sight. He heard the sound of teleportation behind him. Before he could react, a blast of magic struck his back. It sent him careening through the door, and tumbling on the ground. He landed face-first in the grass. He could hear the sounds of ponies out and about. Some were starting to make a crowd around the tree.

"Ya alright there, sugarcube?" Applejack asked.

"Super." his answer muffled by the grass. He pulled himself up, and brushed himself off.

"Anything we can do ta help?" she asked.

"Kindle?" Twilight said in a concerned tone. He turned around, and saw the purple alicorn. She was walking out of the library. Her steps were staggered. She was still trying to resist the possession spell.

"Alright." he said. "I think we need to...ugh."

The young prince dropped to his hands and knees. His breath was getting ragged. He still had a good amount of magic left in him. However, he'd never been in a serious fight before. Never had to use up such large amounts of magic in such a little amount of time. His body was wearing down from all the magic it had to process. He took a deep breath before standing up again. He wasn't sure how much fight he had left in him. Partially possessed princess was fairing just fine. Not a scratch on her.

"No good." Kindle said. "I'm still spent from last night. Unless you know anybody else that can fight an alicorn, we're in trouble."

"Perhaps we can be of assistance!" a voice said. The tired prince looked up to see a familiar face flying down. It was Aunt Luna! The ponies and a handful of humans in the area all bowed as she landed.

"One, I am so glad to see you." he said. "Two, how much trouble am I in?"

"We haven't seen Tia this angry in all the centuries we have known her." she answered plainly. "That however, is not the immediate issue. What be the problem at hoof?"

"Possession spell on Princess Twilight." he answered. "I thought I could handle it, but last night has me way too worn down."

"Rest nephew." Aunt Luna said. "Let thy aunt handle this."

"Did you just call him nephew?" Twilight asked. A few murmurs could be heard among the crowd of ponies as they stood up.

Aunt Luna didn't answer. The possessed pony was levitated into the air by a light blue aura. There was flash, then she was let back down. She took a couple tentative steps, then a few excited ones.

"I'm in control again!" Twilight said excitedly as she walked up to them. "Thank you Princess Luna."

"Thou are welcome." she said.

"Here I was thinking that was gonna end badly." Kindle said with an exasperated smile and a hand on Twilight's side.

"DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW MUCH TROUBLE YOU'RE IN?" a voice bellowed from above.

Twilight didn't have long to enjoy the possession spell being repelled. Princess Celestia had arrived! The excitement was extremely short-lived. She never saw that look on her face before. At least directed at her. Visible anger. Even Princess Luna was taken aback as the sun princess glared at Kindle with an intensity unseen before. The magical human's calm demeanor was gone. Replaced by a bored

expression. Her glare shifted to Twilight, who was now extremely nervous as a bubble of soundproof magic surrounded the four of them.

"I-I-I can explain." the nervous mare said.

"A spell to manipulate the mind of a castle servant and a spell to transport a living creature through dragonfire." Celestia listed off. "I better hear a thorough explanation Twilight."

Her eyes went wide. Only now did she realize how crazy her reasons would sound. Abducting a human through moral and legally questionable methods. A random possession spell causing her to attack this human. All of this born from five years of poking around, long after being told to drop it. She wondered how her title of princess would hold up after this.

"This is really your own fault if you think about it." Kindle said to the sun princess. The intense glare shifted back to the human. Twilight and Princess Luna reactively stepped away.

"Oh please share." she said.

"None of this would've happened if you told them about me in the first place." he answered.

"I doubt that." she said.

"Hey!" he shouted. "Don't get mad at me because I'm right. It's not my fault you're too stubborn to admit you're wrong!" Twilight's jaw dropped. Never had she heard a human speak to the princess like that.

"Stubborn?" she asked angrily.

"Newsflash Mom!" he said. "I'm twenty years old! I can't hide in the castle forever!"

"MOM?!" Twilight asked in shocked confusion. She blinked several times. Mom? Kindle called Princess Celestia, Mom. Was she...? No, that's impossible. As impossible...as a magic-wielding, pink-

haired human. Her mind was rifling through every book on pony and human biology she could remember. No tests on whether or not ponies could breed with humans that she could memorize.

"She abducted you from the castle!" the sun princess spat. "I have half a mind to take her magic and her princess title!"

"I'm glad she did it!" Kindle yelled back. "It's the most socializing I've done in years with ponies that aren't castle servants!"

"Why can't you be happy with what you had in the castle?" she asked, her anger still strong.

"Locking me in the castle for all eternity isn't a life Mom!" he shouted.

"I...just want what's best for you." she said, her anger lessening.

"I'm not that two year old baby anymore Mom." Kindle said somberly. "Let me live my life."

"I...I can't." she mumbled.

"Why?" he asked.

"I...I just can't." she mumbled.

"Why can't I leave the castle?" he asked, angrily.

"I CAN'T LOSE MY BABY AGAIN!" the princess shouted.

Silence. No pony moved, or dared to breathe. Even the cameras outside the bubble stopped. A sight none had ever seen. A sight Twilight herself had never thought possible. Princess Celestia. Their brave, wise, and all powerful princess. She had fell to the ground, tears streaming from her eyes. She was not just crying. It was as if years and years of emotional buildup had given out. Kindle was shocked too.

He didn't how to react. Princess Luna seemed to be the only one that knew what to do. She walked up to her sister, and sat down next to her.

"Thou won't lose their son 'Tia." she said.

"Aunt Luna's right Mom." Kindle said as he approached. He hugged the head of his sobbing mother.

"W-W-What about assassins, o-o-or revolts, o-o-o-or..." the princess tried to argue, but was cut off by her son and sister both hugging her tighter.

"We have trained nephew well in the magical arts." Princess Luna said. "His bodyguard is well-trained too."

"Not to mention that cousin Twilight would look after me if you asked her too." he said.

"Wait what?" Twilight asked. "We're cousins?"

"I suppose you're both right." Princess Celestia said as she wiped away her tears. Both princesses stood back up. "Kindle, you're not the baby I sent to the village eighteen years ago. Yet no matter how much time passes, you're still my baby. A good mother shouldn't stop their child from living their life. Perhaps the time has indeed come for the world to know about you."

"Really?" he asked excitedly.

"Perhaps some of those ridiculous conspiracies about you can finally be put to rest." she chuckled. She looked to her faithful student. "Twilight. While what you did was egregious, I cannot deny how helpful it was. I feel that the bond with my son will strengthen from this. The next time you wish to meet my son though, please refrain from using dragonfire to summon him in the future."

"Of course princess." Twilight said.

"Now I believe I have a public announcement to arrange." she said. "As well as a punishment for my son's recent actions to plan for as well."

"Aw come on!" Kindle said as the three of them disappeared in a flash.

"When's the last time an announcement got this much attention?" Kindle asked.

"Our return from banishment is a fair comparison." Aunt Luna answered.

The two were standing on the moon princess' balcony. The castle courtyard below was filled with journalists. Iron was somewhere down there too, back on guard detail for the duration of this announcement. Many a camera snapping away. Knowing all those cameras would be on him, did make things a little nerve-wracking. He was beginning to understand his mother's dislike of the press. She had spent the past two days dreading the announcement. It was the waiting that bothered her. Giving the world's journalists enough time to get to Canterlot. He wasn't sure if his mother even had a speech ready.

"Maybe we should check on Mom." he said.

"The time will soon be upon us, so that is preferable." she said. A flash of her horn, and the two were suddenly in the castle halls. Not too far from the front doors. He could see his mother pacing back and forth. Dad stood by the guards. He was wearing the same white coat and pants with gold accents as him.

"I should've prepared a speech." his mother mumbled to herself. "Why didn't I make a speech? Do I even have time to make a speech?"

"Writing a speech won't make you less nervous Mom." Kindle said as he approached. "Confidence will."

"Wise words dear nephew." Aunt Luna said.

His mother's nervous demeanor became a calm one at the sound of their voices. She stopped her pacing as she looked over to them. A soft smile appeared.

"Pray tell my son." his mother asked. "Where was all this wisdom a few days ago?"

"In hiding." he said with a smile. "Is everything ready?"

"Just waiting for confirmation that all the journalists are here." she said.

"Have you talked to Twilight?" he asked.

"We had a private chat all day yesterday." she said. "While she is upset at the lies I told her years ago, we came to an understanding. It will take time, but that friendship can be mended."

"Good." he said. "I hope the public can be as understanding."

The door cracked open. A guard poked his head in and whispered something to Captain Shining. There was a nod, then the guard retreated outside. The captain walked up to the prince and princesses.

"Journalists from all major newspapers are here your highness." the captain said.

"Then it's time." she said as she looked to her son and husband. "I should go first. Both of you should walk out as I mention you."

With a nod toward the guards, the grand front doors opened. Kindle watched as his mother walked out, and disappeared down the stairs. He could hear cameras snapping away. His father walked up to the entrance, and he followed suit.

"Think Aunt Sunny will let you live it down that you still haven't married Mom when she hears about this?" he asked his father.

"No." he chuckled. "No she will not. I'll just have to marry your mother to solve the problem."

"You're finally gonna do it?" Kindle asked excitedly.

"I already planned it out," he said. "After this meeting with the journalists is over, I'll pop the question."

The two exchanged smiles as they looked at the bottom of the stairs. Kindle's mother was about to begin. There was a nervous silence as she took a deep breath.

"Thank you all for coming," she said. "It's time I put an old rumor to rest. The public deserves to know the truth. It's not an easy situation for me to talk about. The best way to describe said situation is with a story. Over twenty years ago, I hired human servants for the first time. One of the servants I hired was one by the name of Ken Brightburn."

Kindle looked as his father walked down the stairs. His mother looked at him longingly. He stood on her left side.

"We fell in love," she said. Many a gasp were followed by numerous camera snaps. "Our relationship was kept secret. Despite the law seeing humans as equals, the public did not. I had not fallen in love for countless centuries. Ken reminded me how to be happy. It didn't take long for us to be...close. We made a mistake and assumed neither of our species could have a foal together. Fate seemed to have other plans."

A dead silence hung in the air. The prince could see his mother's nerve poking through her calm demeanor. She took another deep breath.

"Over twenty years ago I was pregnant," the princess said. Kindle could swear he heard a camera drop to the ground. "Despite our assumptions, it turns out that ponies can bear human offspring. I tried to raise that baby for two years. I failed. The fear of losing them to forces I couldn't control overwhelmed me. I had my baby and the love of my life move back to the human village. I hoped my baby could live a normal life. Five years ago, my baby was fifteen years old. His magic manifested. My fears of losing him to a world that wouldn't see him as anything but an exotic creature, bubbled to the surface of my mind. So I brought them back to the castle. My son has spent the past five years in hiding. Only because I was ashamed of what I had done. I gave my son a motherless foalhood because I wasn't ready to be a mother. Once again, fate has taken the choice away from me. Rather than run from it, I shall face it. With my family. It is my honor to introduce you all to my son, Prince Kindle!"

Kindle took a deep breath as he ran his fingers through his pink hair. He made his way down the steps. All eyes were on him. His mother, his father, and every journalist there. It was really happening. No

more living in the castle forever. No more sneaking out to be in the public. No more. He had a beaming smile as he stood on his mother's right side.

"It's wonderful to meet you all." he said.

"We do have some time for questions." she said.

"Princess!" a pegasus stallion piped up. "Baltimore Bugle. Will Prince Kindle be taking the throne anytime soon?"

"No." she answered. "However, my son will be assisting in royal duties for the foreseeable future."

"Your highness!" a unicorn mare shouted from the back. "Foal Free Press. Do you plan to marry Mr. Brightburn, and take the title of queen?"

"A marriage is being considered." she said. "However, Ken has expressed no interest in taking a position as ruler. So if and when we marry, he will be accepting the new position of Royal Husband."

"Princess!" a unicorn with an accent said. "Prance Hebdo Revue. What effect do you think your son's existence will have on the world as a whole?"

"Hopefully a positive one." she answered. "My family is a living example that the taboo of ponies and humans intermingling is a pointless one. Now I'm afraid that's all the time we have."

"Can we get a picture of the beautiful family together?" a camera pony asked.

Kindle and his father pressed up close to his mother. She draped her wings over their sides. They all held big smiles as the cameras flashed.

Darkness. Pure darkness. The only light was a floating sphere in the middle of it all. It was showing Prince Kindle and his parents, cameras flashing away at the family. There were two clouds by the sphere. The clouds were, alive.

On one side, a cloud of fire. Thin black slits for pupils. Orange eyes that would be impossible to see, if not for the dark hazel ovals that contained them. Despite no face for them to belong to, the anger behind them was quite visible. On the other side, a cloud of dark blue energy. It had white flecks that sparkled like stars. Bits of purple danced around the edges of it all. Their eyes were far more visible. Turquoise eyes held within teal ovals. Thin black slits for pupils like the other cloud.

"Sister, your attempt at possession was downright idiotic." the fire cloud said. "Had either alicorn sensed you, years of planning would've been for nothing."

"Taking over that purple nuisance is what got us to the result we wanted, sister." the dark blue cloud said. "The world knows about him now. He is no longer as safe as Celestia wants him to be."

"It doesn't change how stupid it was!" she shouted, the flames growing in tandem. "Twilight won't stop digging until she finds answers. It was far simpler when all I had to do was influence their minds to keep searching for him. We still need time to gather power of our own. Right now we're no more powerful than adolescent unicorns."

"There is another way to gather power other than waiting, sister." the dark blue cloud said. "You know what I speak of."

"Your little stunt has forced my hoof." she said. "Your point is valid. Only one problem. That spell only ever had two users. Celestia, and...him."

"Will he obey if we raise him?" the dark blue cloud asked.

"I will see to that." the fire cloud answered. "The time has come for the king to rise, so we may smite the prince."

Chapter 7

The usual sounds of Prince Kindle's morning training were broken up by new sounds. The scribbling of over a dozen quills. Twilight sat alongside primatologists from Canterlot University. All of them were

furiously taking as many notes as they could on the prince. Despite having been writing for a week, there was so much to note. A new magic-wielding human hadn't been seen in over a hundred years. Every detail needed to be taken. The young alicorn had never seen Princess Luna take a teaching role before. It was clear she was a teacher of the stricter variety. In the week of observation, the princess of the night had been trying to demonstrate the importance of being able to manage multiple spells at once. The prince was tasked with maintaining a shield while she blasted at it, and having to maintain a levitation spell on a boulder as big as a carriage. For an hour. The guards told her of the weekly 'challenges' set forth by the princess. Challenges that were followed by harsh punishments if he failed.

"Very good nephew." Princess Luna said as she continued to hit the shield with a barrage of magical attacks. "One spell for each hand. Thou has a natural advantage over unicorns for dividing their focus."

"Thanks Auntie." he said with a stressed smile. "Feel like adding any more spells, or are we finally done?"

"Now that you mention it..." she said with a hoof to her chin "we would like to see thee teleport while maintaining both the shield and levitation."

"Seriously?" the prince grumbled as his smile faded rapidly.

"Now that the world knows about thee, we can have far more public punishments for failure." she jeered as the attacks on the shield continued. "Such as polishing every building in Canterlot, or cleaning the mountain as a whole."

Twilight watched as the prince's hands glowed even brighter. The boulder bobbed up and down a bit. Prince Kindle was struggling. Princess Celestia told her that watching his training would be stressful to watch. She was right. Princess Luna was a tough teacher. Although the results did show. The human was as tough as he was, with only three years of training. Back when she was partially possessed, he mostly held his own against her.

There was a flash. The prince had teleported. While it was only a few hooves closer to his aunt, he did it. The blasts finally stopped. The princess tapped her horns on the ground in excitement.

"Excellent work nephew!" Princess Luna said. "Your success marks the end of your training session."

"Finally." he said as his arms dropped. The boulder hit the ground, and everything shook a little. "I gotta wash up and get some breakfast before day court. Iron?"

Twilight watched as the prince mounted his guard, and was flying down the mountain. The other pegasi guards flew down as well. The other guards were teleported away by Princess Luna. The primatologists were collecting their notes into their saddlebags. While the Royal Mages shared their notes on Prince Kindle's magic, the scientists were more interested in his biology. A human born from a pony was something that by all logic, shouldn't be scientifically possible. They wanted to examine him properly. Princess Celestia had denied their initial request. Twilight wondered if she could convince her old teacher herself. The princess invited her to lunch later today.

Something to worry about later though. The primatologists wanted to go over their notes.

Seeing his highness trying to sit comfortably in his mother's throne was hilarious for Raven. It was a throne made for ponies. Not for humans. You'd think after a week he would get a favorable position. Sitting cross-legged seemed to yield the best results. At least until his legs fell asleep. Then he would sit with his legs out. He would shift between both constantly between citizens presenting their cases.

"Doing day court every day for the next fifty years." the prince grumbled as the next citizen was called in. "I really need to get a pillow to sit on."

"Shall I have one retrieved?" Raven asked.

"I'll be fine today." he answered. "There's only two more cases to go."

"Easy ones I hope." Iron said.

"Well, I'll probably hate both of them." he said quietly.

The next pony walked in. A stallion. He wore a black suit over his white coat. His sky blue mane had a matching tiny mustache on the tip of his snout. It was Fancy Pants. A wealthy businesspony. His hooves were in so many different industries, he was considered one of the most important ponies in Canterlot. On Prince Kindle's first day of day court where he only observed, they saw Princess Celestia deny his request for a reduction in taxes. Once word had gotten out that the new prince was taking over

day court, many a noble pony came in. Most were hoping the young prince could be easier to convince than his mother at letting them do what they want. Their stereotypical beliefs of humans being too dumb to understand things were shattered quite quickly. Five years in the castle gave the prince plenty of time to learn about the world beyond the walls with the help of the library. Watching the nobles realize they couldn't push Prince Kindle around because he was human, was quickly becoming Raven's new favorite passtime.

"Your highness, it's an honor to finally meet you." Fancy Pants said as he bowed. "I am Fancy Pants."

"Hello Fancy Pants." the prince said in a monotone voice. "What can we do for you today?"

"I was hoping for the crown to help in forcing a group of terrible ponies to disband." he said as he stood up.

"Does this group of terrible ponies have a name?" the prince asked.

"Hand in Hoof, your highness." Fancy answered.

Raven's and Iron's eyes widened for a moment. Some of the other guards in the throne room did the same. Fancy Pants was either extremely bold, or a complete idiot. He just asked a ponyborn human prince to order a human rights group to disband. The same group that was the primary reason the human village had consistent food before the royal decree Princess Celestia made five years ago. The same group that helped the injured or sick humans get medical help because they can't afford a doctor on their own. The mare wasn't sure if his highness had his Royal Canterlot Voice yet. The eye twitching said they were all about to find out.

"So let me get this straight." the prince said. "You want a human to force a human rights group to disband? The same group that made sure no human went without food? The same group that sends members across the country to help build homes for humans to live in?"

"W-Well..." Fancy stammered.

"The same group that fights off Iron Hoof Clan members that try to assault humans for fun?" the prince asked, anger rising in his voice. "Members like yourself?"

Raven had to bite her lip to hold back her laughter. Fancy Pants' monocle dropped as he looked down to see the iron hoofshoe on his left forehoof. The genius forgot to take it off before coming in.

"Your request is denied Fancy." Prince Kindle said, fury in his eyes. "Leave."

The noble galloped out of the throne room as the prince stared him down. The guards couldn't help but snicker at the exchange. It was satisfying to see the nobles be reminded who was really in charge.

"When Mom ran day court, it was just complaints about taxes." he said. "All of a sudden, they want me to repeal law after law."

"Perhaps you should tell your mother." Iron said.

"With me running day court, their access to my mom is minimal at best." the prince said.

"Not to mention his highness has no real legal authority for such matters." Raven chimed.

"Besides, telling them no is kinda fun." he said. "Now let's get this last one out of the way. These legs need stretching."

The Royal Garden was quiet. Nothing beyond the usual was here. A few bushes with various flowers throughout them. A beautiful fountain off to the side. A draconequus statue hidden behind some trees. Discord. The spirit of chaos itself. It wasn't his first time trapped in stone. Although his position this time around wasn't as flattering as his previous. Propped up by his tail, arms and legs held in front of him. The last pose he made trying to stop the Elements of Harmony from turning him to stone. Though that wasn't what bothered him the most.

Celestia didn't even put him back in the statue garden! No, she was too upset for what he did when he last escaped. Turning her son into an apple was hilarious. Although the 'almost eaten by a guard' part was probably a little much. His years in the Royal Garden weren't terribly lonely. Birds would land on him. The sisters would visit to make sure he was still there. He had another unique visitor. Well, more like a patient.

"The day court has him busier in the morning than usual." Discord thought to himself.

If he could move, Discord's ears would've perked at the sound of the door opening. An exasperated human walked in. It was his nephew Kindle. Well, not really his nephew. The lord of chaos decided to adopt him as his nephew a few years ago while still in stone. If Celestia could do it for Cadence, he could do it for the prince. That, and he called him 'Uncle Discord' sometimes. His nephew was one of the most frequent visitors he had. He didn't know why, but Kindle would talk to Discord a lot over the years he lived in the castle. Opening up about his problems living as a prince. The struggles of being hidden. The draconequus became a psuedo-therapist of sorts. Today was the first time they would talk since his nephew became public.

For the first year or so, it was annoying. Listening to the constant complaining about his mommy being too busy to notice him. When Discord first escaped, he debated about exposing the secret prince as a sort of revenge. Although he decided not too, and did the apple transformation instead. He didn't know why he hesitated. At least at first. After being put into the garden, did he get his answer. Kindle came right back the next day, and still talked about his problems. The prince admitted how nice it was to have someone to talk to without judgement. For the last four years, Discord found himself becoming more and more interested. He even looked forward to his nephew's visits. An eternity in stone did make for a lonely eternity, even for the chaotic lord himself. He would never admit it, but a part of him enjoyed being a shoulder for Kindle to lean on. Or in his case, a stone lion arm for him to lay on.

"How's my favorite and only nephew?" Discord thought. He knew he couldn't be heard, but it was fun to pretend.

"Morning Uncle Discord." Kindle said as he levitated onto his favorite lion arm and laid down. "You would not believe the morning I had. Mom has me running day court like I told you last week. Half the ponies there were just nobles trying to push me around. The last two were the worst. Fancy Pants wanted me to force Hand in Hoof to disband. An Iron Hoof Clan member trying to get rid of the only ponies that stand up to them. After him, Spoiled Rich showed up. She wanted a law passed that forbade Hand in Hoof from attending school board meetings. They've spent the past year trying to convince the school board to let humans attend. I asked her why she was against humans getting educated. I think she forgot I was a prince and her racism started to show. She looked me dead in the eyes and actually said 'a human's place is to serve, not to learn'. You should've seen the look on her face when I threatened to turn her into a human for the crime of being racist. Turned tail and ran."

"Oh Kindle." Discord thought. "You make this old lord of chaos proud. If I wasn't encased in stone, I would have tears of joy."

Disrupting the societal norms. Making the nobles scared of a little human. Not the world-altering chaos he preferred, but it was still exciting.

"Although the day court wasn't all bad," he said. "A couple of journalists asked for interviews. The world seems to be pretty excited to meet me. One of them even tried to invite me to a lunch tomorrow."

"Your highness?" a voice called from the door. It was his nephew's bodyguard.

"Yes Iron?" Kindle asked.

"Your mail has arrived." Iron answered.

"Looks like I gotta cut this short." Kindle said as he rolled off the stone lion arm, and floated to the ground. "Seeya."

As his nephew left, a chunk of bright yellow magical energy sat where he had laid. The energy sank into Discord's arm. His usual fee. Therapists weren't free after all.

Kindle remembered the first time he had seen his mom's mail pile. It was big enough to make a bed. His Aunt Luna faired no better. Her pile was almost as large. The letters both received ranged from endearment, to threats, to stuff as simple as requests made by ponies that lived too far away to make it to day court. While the letters were numerous, they always managed to clear them out at the end of the day. Mom said the secret was be a fast reader.

"Alright, here's the sorting plan." Kindle said as he sat down at his desk between his bed and balcony. "One off letters and mild hate mail will go in a pile behind me. Threats to my life will go in a pile to my left to be looked over by the Royal Guard later. Letters requiring a response will stay on my desk. Now let's begin."

His pile wasn't terribly huge. A couple dozen letters. He just wanted to get a system in place to practice for when he got as many letters as his mom and aunt.

"I heard your father's letters were interesting." Iron said.

"Not to be mean to my dad, but why would he get letters?" Kindle asked.

"He's the first being to have a physical relationship with your mother." the pegasus answered. "From what I've heard, half are just stallions that are jealous of him. A quarter are from mares that desire him. The rest is your usual hate mail."

"Speaking of hate mail." the prince said. "The first letter just has 'DIE HALF-BREED DIE' scribbled across it several times."

He tossed the letter to his left. He reached for another. It was sealed with a kiss. Literally. Opening the letter revealed that it had another kiss mark on the bottom by the name.

Dear Prince Kindle,

How do I describe true love? All I can think of is the fluttering in my chest when I saw your face for the first time. The thought of your tiny human body encompassed by embrace makes me feel things I never felt before. Perhaps it is fate I came across the newspaper that day. Maybe I can somehow convince you to feel the same way about me. I will admit the temptation to put an enchantment on this letter was strong. I will not stoop to that. Why should I coerce love, when my words can earn it? Run away to Prance and be with me. I would let you do as you wish to my body every single day. I would be at your mercy. I would beg to be rutted every hour of the day. Just the thought of you doing it excites me. I will cut this letter short, as I find it difficult to write as I fantasize.

Hopefully yours,

Vieille Fleur

The Duchess of Prance

"Nope!" Kindle shouted as he threw the letter into the threats pile. He remembered a recent letter being sent to Prance to congratulate the duchess on her fiftieth birthday.

"Was it a threat?" Iron asked, concerned.

"Worse." he answered. "Horny old mare."

"How horny?" the bodyguard asked.

"Never leave her alone with me if she visits." he said.

The next dozen letters were okay. The school down in Ponyville had all their students write letters to greet the new prince. They were all kinda cute. They went in the response pile. There were about ten letters of hate mail all grouped together. Only two were thrown in the threats pile. Just one more letter. This one didn't have any kiss marks or death threats on the outside, so good so far.

Dear Prince Kindle,

If I was told a year ago that the rumors about a magical pink-haired human were true, I never would've believed it. I thought you were just another urban legend. A scary story parents told their foals to make sure they weren't outside late at night. I'm sure you already know, but it's crazy how much the world is changing from your existence alone. A large number of scientific theories on biology were called into question. My friend attends Manehattan University, and they're already working on research to see what other species humans can crossbreed with. I think a dragonborn human would be pretty cool. Maybe this new research can help humans rise on the societal ladder. We will have to see.

Sincerely,

Sharp Write

Kindle wondered if he should write her a 'thanks for not being a horny psycho' response. The letter from the Duchess still burned in his mind. He looked to the pile of letters from the school in Ponyville. By the time he finished writing the responses to all of them, it would be lunchtime. There was a salmon burger he had been looking forward to all day.

The sentient clouds floated in the darkness. The sphere of light that watched the prince was gone. They couldn't waste any magic right now. Every ounce they could spare was needed for this. The dark blue cloud was feeding her magic to the cloud of fire. The cloud of fire was conjuring a thin oval of light.

"Sister, how long could this possibly take?" the dark blue cloud asked. "I've been feeding you magic for a week."

"You fail to understand how many souls exist in the afterlife." the fire cloud said. "That is why I am the one searching."

There was a moment of silence. Then, a spark from the oval of light. Then another. Sparks of white energy came from the portal. Both clouds had excitement in their eyes.

They found the soul of the king.

In her short time as a princess, Twilight had learned a lot. Remaining calm in the most dire of situations. Carrying oneself with an air of authority. The most important lesson of all? Rock solid negotiation skills.

"Pleeease?" she begged.

"For the fifth time, no." Celestia answered.

Before the young alicorn could beg again, the doors to the dining room opened. The prince and his bodyguard came in. The subject of their negotiations.

"Sorry I'm late." Prince Kindle said. "Had a disturbing letter that the Royal Guard needed to look over."

"Is it something that should concern me?" his mother asked.

"Let's just say that Duchess Vieille Fleur is interested in a physical relationship with me. I'd rather not talk about the letter." he said as he shuddered.

"In the interest of his safety, I recommend that the Duchess not be left alone with Prince Kindle under any circumstances." Iron Wing said.

"Was the letter that disturbing?" Mr. Brightburn asked. "Perhaps we should look at this letter ourselves."

"Agreed Ken." Celestia said. "The duchess shouldn't concern herself with a human less than half her age."

"Can we not talk about the horny old mare that wants to get into my pants?" he asked as he ate his salmon burger. "I don't want her to encourage more mares to act like that."

"Too late for that." Twilight chuckled.

"I feel like I'll regret asking for context." Kindle grumbled.

"A trend of older mares looking for humans younger than them started recently." she said. "It seems that Princess Celestia's relationship was the spark that they all needed. With the stallion-to-mare ratio with humans being the complete opposite of ponies, I'm surprised it didn't happen sooner."

"Alright, we're done talking about the stallions of human society being reduced to sex objects." the prince said. "Let's change the subject. Mom, how're the wedding plans coming along?"

The princess' smile grew at the question. She let her left forehoof dance against the necklace Ken had proposed with. Twilight was told by her brother it was quite the tear-filling moment. The announcement came so close after Kindle's reveal, it was lost in the news. When the young alicorn was told of it, the excitement made her forget why she was mad at the princess. Princess Celestia spent so much of her life taking care of the kingdom, the mare never took the time to make herself happy. Marrying the human she loved was something she wanted deeply.

"The wedding is a few months away." the princess said as she looked at her future husband. "We've already picked out a spot on top of the mountain for the ceremony."

"Then there's our honeymoon..." Ken said as he wiggled his eyebrows. That caused the relatively larger princess to blush hard.

"Okayyyyyy." Kindle said as he polished off his salmon burger. "With that, I think I'll get going. All that sitting from this morning has my legs aching for a walk around Canterlot."

"Are you sure about that?" his mother asked, a hint of concern.

"Yes mom." he answered. "We talked about this."

Despite being public, Princess Celestia was still concerned about her son being in public. There was a moment of silence, then a sigh.

"Twilight?" she asked.

"Yes Celestia?" Twilight answered.

"Would you please accompany Kindle on his walk?" she asked.

"Of course!" she said with a big smile. Perhaps her plans could still work out after all.

Iron was far too used to the luxury of guarding a lazy shut-in. Carrying the prince around on his back let him walk at a leisurely pace. He wasn't out of shape by any means. At least he didn't think he was. All he had to do was keep up with Princess Twilight while Prince Kindle slowly flew next to her. A sliver of stress in his legs told him he needed to get used to it.

"You really think Princess Celestia is that worried about you?" she asked.

"You know her as your teacher and adopted aunt." the prince answered. "I know her as a an overprotective mom who kept me in the castle for five years. I'm surprised she doesn't have a platoon of guards around me."

"Well, you do have the Princess of Friendship walking with you." she said. "You're as safe as can be."

"Ah yes." he said. "The Princess of Pony Friendship. I feel so very safe."

Iron really wanted to listen to the conversation, but he had to keep his eyes on the public. There were a lot of ponies with iron hoofshoes outside today. Iron Hoof Clan members no doubt. He hated sharing a name with such a racist organization. They'd only been around for as long as humans stopped being slaves. Made of nothing but rich and affluent ponies. While they couldn't outright bring back slavery, they would use any influence they had to keep humans underhoof in social status. Prince Kindle never talked about it much, but he had his fair number of brush-ups with them when he lived in the village. It was something that was minimized by Hand in Hoof being active in the human village. Clashes between the groups were kept out of the papers by whatever clan members owned the newspapers.

"Friendship is shared by all creatures, not just ponies." Twilight said as the bodyguard refocused on the conversation.

"Oh no." Iron thought. He could see the glare in the prince's eyes forming. Friendship was a touchy subject for him.

"Twilight, I doubt you understand how wrong you are." he said.

"How am I wrong?" she asked.

"I can prove you wrong with one question." he answered.

"Prove it!" she challenged.

"Besides the servants you grew up with, how many human friends do you have?" the prince asked.

Wide-eyed silence. Iron could see the princess mentally searching for an answer. The pegasus remembered when the prince asked him that question. The humans he used to foalsit still writing letters to him, was not an answer the prince expected. The princess realizing she never made friends with a single human her whole life, was an answer he saw coming.

"I...I guess I never thought about them like that." she said.

"Humans have spent their lives in the background, so I doubt you ever did." the prince said.

"Princess Twilight?" Iron asked.

"Yes?" she asked back.

"If I may so bold." he said. "There is a way for you to learn more about what humans go through. Hand in Hoof is always looking for more members. You would be the first princess to ever join I believe."

"You're assuming Lyra would let her in." the prince said. "An active member has to nominate her in the first place. Then there's the one year probation where she'll have to learn how to properly handle humans in any situation. During which, she has to do charitable acts to prove she's willing to help humans. Lyra and Bon Bon helped build the huts villagers live in. Fluttershy tends to our sick and injured because we can't afford doctors. The Cakes helped feed us when we couldn't afford food. Rarity started to make clothes for free so humans don't suffer in the harsh seasons. What can Twilight do?"

It was clear Iron's statement struck a chord. Prince Kindle looked over to the princess. Somber silence. It was easy to forget the prince grew up in a village before the royal life. The princess suddenly perked up.

"I'll join Hand in Hoof then." she said. "I can always let the humans check out books for free."

"Humans can't read Twilight." Prince Kindle said.

"WHAT?!" Princess Twilight asked in shock.

Chapter 8

In the Royal Garden, a crackling could be heard in the air. Not a loud one by any means. He had to be quiet as to not attract attention. Years of slowly siphoning magic off the young prince was about to pay off. Even with the spell placed by the Elements of Harmony, his nephew's magic was just enough to chip away at this stone form. While he could just wait and siphon enough magic to release himself instantly, the lord of chaos was getting impatient.

"Come on!" he thought to himself as the wisps of yellow magic poked at the stone form repeatedly. "Why is using another's magic such a pain? No! Find a crack in the stone to enter, then spread! Why is this so hard to understand?"

The magic wiggled aggressively, as if to show its displeasure at his comments. Discord sighed.

"Fine then." he grumbled. "Would you please enter a crack in the stone?"

The wisps of magic bobbed up and down, then did as he asked. The yellow energy finally found a crack around the thumb of his paw. It was exciting to see all of the magic disappear from view, and feel it in his stone body. It felt like veins spreading across his body. Pulsating. Pushing. It all wanted out, but not the way it came in. Then, he began to hear it. Cracking. The cracking of stone. While the magic was working, Discord was trying to think of something very important.

"What should I do first when I finally escape?" he asked himself. "I bet Celestia would love to see me. I would love to finally meet that human crazy enough to date her. I could scare a few guards. That would be fine. Although, I do have my nephew to thank for this. Maybe I'll say hi to him first. Take him for a ride as dear Uncle Discord causes some trouble."

So many options. Seeing his nephew first did sound like fun. Perhaps he could finally introduce himself properly to Kindie. The look on everypony's faces when the human learns the lord of chaos adopted him as his nephew. It would be far better than any chaos he could cause. Luna's reaction would be the best. The aunt that spoils him rotten. Discord would become the uncle that spoils him even more, just to drive her batty. Not as destructive as his usual plans, but just as fun. Plus if he dialed it down on the chaos and focused on being an uncle to Kindie, the love the two could share would force Celestia to keep him around. Oh it was just perfect.

"I know narrator." Discord thought. "It was my idea after all."

Hey! No breaking the fourth wall.

"Apologies." he said.

You're forgiven.

Anyways. The cracking grew in intensity. Freedom was moments away. Now it just a matter of waiting.

Kindle wasn't entirely sure how she convinced him to do this. His current blame was on his kneejerk reaction to her panicking. Right after he told Twilight that humans didn't know how to read, she almost flew off to the village on the spot to start teaching them. While he admired her tenacity, ponies can't just show up at the village. At least not without Hand in Hoof there. He knew that she needed something to distract her from the idea of going to the village. The prince had remembered that Twilight was with the Canterlot University scientists when they asked his mom if they could examine him. Something about unique biology. He offered to go to the university. She changed her tune almost instantly. They veered off to the university. The Primatology Department to be specific.

Now here he was. Sitting by Iron on a table in the middle of a large white room. In his boxers. Surrounded by unicorn ponies in white coats. They had already scanned his body with some spells. Some taking notes while one of them talked to Twilight. A unicorn. His mane was short and gray. His body's coat a faded blue. Inquiring Mind. The head of the Primatology Department.

"I don't know how you did it Princess Twilight, but thank you." he said. "The first ponyborn human to ever exist, and we get to examine him! No telling what secrets his body holds."

"Oh you're welcome Inquiring." she said. "Kindle actually volunteered himself."

"I should probably ask what you're all examining." Kindle said.

"Not much." a blue scientist stallion with a brown mane said. "Noting and sketching your body for historical records mainly."

"We're also curious about that spell of your that turns ponies into humans. The Royal Mages' notes were sparse on that." a yellow mare scientist said. "That former unicorn we've been examining has been fascinating."

"I thought that little arsonist was imprisoned." Iron said.

"He was." Inquiring said as he walked up. "Princess Luna wanted us to do some long-term studies on him. He's a few rooms over. Still learning how to walk on two legs."

"Well, he still has ten years to figure it out." Kindle said.

"Wait." Inquiring said. "Did you say ten years?"

"Yeah." the prince answered. "I set the spell to last ten years. Did no one listen to me say it dramatically after I did it?"

A couple of the scientists scribbled some notes down frantically. It seemed that the answer was no. Even Twilight was a little taken aback.

"While transforming one's own species can be done for short periods of time, such length has never been heard of." he said. "I must know more."

Kindle never had the chance to talk about his Become Human spell that often. Rarely used it either.

"The discovery was an accident." the prince said. "I had turned a guard into a human when I was still learning to control my magic. The Royal Mages figured out it was because I'm a ponyborn. Something about being both species making me special or something. Aunt Luna and I worked on it for months when my training started. I can get really creative with it now. Time limits are the easiest. Just make the spell feed on their own magic for a set period of time. Changing with specific phrases or actions are bit tougher, but can be done. That about covers it, unless you want a demonstration."

The scientists and Twilight looked among each other for a moment. Eventually, the blue stallion stepped forward. Kindle smiled as he rubbed his hands together.

"Alright then." he said as he got off the table. "The rest of you might want to back up."

Every pony that wasn't the volunteer was quickly at the white walls. The scientists had their quills and paper at the ready. Twilight was excited to see the spell a second time. Iron had seen it enough to show little interest.

"Since you're my first volunteer that isn't a guard, I'll let you choose how you change back." he said. "Time limit, a specific phrase to speak, or an action you have to perform?"

"Hmm." the blue stallion wondered. He looked back to the head scientist. "Any recommendations sir?"

"Let's try a phrase." Inquiring said. "That way we can do all the tests we need, and you can change back whenever you want."

"Phrase it is then." Kindle said. "It'll have to be something you won't accidentally say in conversation. At least if you don't want to change back immediately."

"Hmm. How about 'I like banana bread.'?" the blue stallion said. "Can't stand the stuff, so I'll never say something like that willingly."

The prince nodded. Both of his hands began to glow yellow. The blue stallion was surrounded by the same glow as he was levitated into the air. He moved his hands in the same motion as always. Right hand clockwise. Left hand counterclockwise. Focusing the way his aunt told him to. The glow increased in intensity. After a few minutes, the glow lessened. The former stallion was placed back down on his new feet, almost swallowed by his now massive labcoat. Kindle let him hold his arm to steady himself. Twilight and the scientists rushed towards the new human before them. The hair color matched the mane that used to be there. Short and spiky. Skin tone matched the light brown the prince had.

"Amazing." Inquiring said. "His body was entirely converted into a smaller species. How do you feel Sky?"

"Smaller." Sky said as he looked up at the head scientist. "I see why humans get so nervous around us. The intimidation effect is strong, despite no effort from any of you."

"Fascinating." Twilight said.

"Anything else you need me to explain?" Kindle asked.

"Well, there is one more thing we need to finish." the yellow mare said while blushing. The other scientist mares were also blushing.

"What may that be?" the prince asked.

"We need to finish sketching your physiology." she answered. "All that's left is what's under your boxers."

Celestia was as giddy as she could be. She was getting measured for her wedding dress! She had always dreamed of getting married, but always thought it would never be. One of the few limitations of immortality. Now it would come true! A newly discovered spell that would let her share her immortality with Ken was found deep in the archives. Although it was to be a surprise for later. For now, she was in her room with her husband, her personal aide, and an enthusiastic dress designer.

"Your highness, I cannot thank you enough for this opportunity!" Rarity squealed. "Making your wedding dress is something I've only dreamt of. It will be my best work, even though my boutique is still under construction!"

"Oh the wedding won't be until the first fall of winter." she said. "We still have plenty of time. Another few months I believe."

"Several months, your highness." Raven chimed.

"I don't know why I have to wait longer to call you my wife." Ken grumbled.

"My dear, I've been planning my dream wedding for centuries." she said. "I think you can afford to wait."

"You'll just have to make it up at our honeymoon." he said with a wink.

Celestia blushed. He always knew what buttons to push. Going public only emboldened him. He would whisper something during a meeting, then visiting dignitaries would wonder why she would be red in the cheeks. His bold flirtation with her in front other ponies is what now earned him the letters he frequently received.

"K-Ken." the princess stammered. "Rarity and Raven are here."

Suddenly, the door swung open. It was Lulu! She looked worried.

"Lulu, I thought you were asleep?" she said.

"Discord is gone!" Luna shouted.

Without hesitation, Celestia flashed her horn. All four of them were teleported to the Royal Garden. Guards and mages were all over. A number of the mages surrounded the pedestal where the draconequus statue once stood. Bits of stone all over, each being inspected. One of the higher ranked mages approached the princesses.

"We traced the source of the magic." he said. "Our analysis shows it came from Prince Kindle."

"But my son would never do something like this!" she said. "Are you absolutely sure?"

"As one of the mages that studied his magic for years, I know his magic almost as well as my own." the mage said. "However, we found some oddities."

"Oddities?" Luna asked.

"Yes." he answered. "It's mostly concentrated around what we believe was Discord's right arm. The prince's magic isn't completely fresh. Some of the magic is as old as almost five years ago, to as fresh as this morning. That's all we know."

"Perhaps nephew was tricked by Discord somehow?" Luna asked her sister.

"How can a statue trick my son into feeding his magic for years?" Celestia asked back. "We need to unite the Elements of Harmony immediately to capture Discord before he causes trouble again."

The princess of the sun looked over to a guard to relay the order, but her eyes fell upon her Ken. He was looking at everything but her. Silence fell as she walked to him. There was a moment where his gaze wasn't one of a husband to be. It was one of a human looking upon a goddess. She took a deep breath before she spoke.

"Ken, do you know something about this?" she asked.

"Well..." he began "our son's been talking to the statue for almost five years now. He would usually lay on Discord's right arm."

"Why didn't you say anything?" she asked, a tinge of anger in her voice. "Discord had to be feeding on his magic for years."

"Our son needed someone to talk to!" he said back, a bit of anger in his own voice. "A statue is the only choice he saw. You put him in a castle full of servants and zero friends!"

"I was protecting him!" she said, her voice rising.

"How is taking away the last five years of his foalhood protecting him?" he shouted.

Silence emerged again. The two looked away from each other. Never in the many years they've been together, had they fought like this. Luna broke the silence.

"The two of you should finish your conversation later. There be many issues at hoof." she said. "Mages, Discord must be located immediately. Sister, we need to bring your son back to the castle. We do not know if Discord has any more plans for him. Guards, I want the Elements of Harmony brought to the castle immediately."

"Yes your highness!" the mages and guards said in unison.

Kindle was glad to finally have his clothes back on. Twilight assured both him and Iron that the detailed sketches of his anatomy were purely for historical records. Though the mares that stared at his naked body seemed a little too interested for his taste. The stallions seemed a bit frustrated. He was just

glad the ordeal was over. It was a worthy sacrifice to keep Twilight from the human village. Although the mares all gawking over the sketch of his anatomy was mildly bothersome.

"Should I be concerned about them?" the prince asked Inquiring.

"Oh not at all your highness." he said with a wave of his hoof. "They are mares of science. Absolute professionals."

"Professionals fighting over a drawing of me." the prince chuckled. The head scientist looked over and saw the unicorn mares, all magically pulling the paper around.

"Girls!" Inquiring shouted. "Twilight, could you lend a hoof?"

"Of course." she answered. The two walked over, along with the stallions to try and separate the sketch from the mares.

The prince returned to the comfort of his bodyguard's back. The two simply enjoyed the free show.

"I have a feeling that sketch of my body is going to be a regret later." Kindle said.

"Most likely." Iron said.

"Agreed." another voice said.

The two turned away from the scuffle. They looked at the voice behind them. They looked up. A long, slender creature, that floated above. A draconequus with a sly grin, winked at them. The whole room went silent.

"Iron?" the prince asked.

"Yes your highness?" the bodyguard asked back.

"Is that Discord floating above us, or have I gone insane?" he asked.

"The former." the pegasus answered.

Before either could react, the prince found himself scooped up by the spirit of chaos. A large paw and claw wrapped around him. Kindle found himself staring up into Discord's eyes. He was quite used to the difference in size before now. At least when the draconequus was a statue. Seeing him stare down with that smile, was intimidating. As intimidating when he first met his mother five years ago. Discord's head alone was as big as he was. The only thing he could think of was when he was turned into an apple, and almost eaten by a guard. The prince was too nervous to focus on his magic.

"Oh it's so good to finally meet you my dear nephew!" Discord said as he pulled Kindle in for a hug.

Kindle was suddenly given a face full of light brown fur. Two powerful arms held him there. Before he could regain his focus to teleport away, he was brought out from the hug. He was held up by his waist. Now the crazed eyes were much closer. The smile wasn't twisted. It was soft. Like...an uncle meeting his nephew for the first time. At least the first time out of stone.

"Uncle Discord?" Kindle asked.

"Aaaaah!" he shouted. "That'll never get old!"

"Discord!" Twilight shouted. Nostrils flared. Horn glowing.

"Twilight!" Discord said. "As much as I would love to banter with you, I'm trying to enjoy some quality time with my nephew."

"You're not related at all!" she shouted.

"That's why I adopted him as my nephew." he said plainly.

Kindle could see what was coming. He remembered Discord's first escape. Things got rough. If he wanted to keep the peace, he would have to play along.

"Uncle Discord?" the prince asked.

"Yes my nephew?" his uncle asked back.

"Does this mean you heard everything I said when you were stone?" he asked.

"Indeed!" the draconequus said. "Though everything you said in our one-on-one sessions will be our little secret."

The prince didn't have many questions to continue stalling. The doors to the lab burst open. Dozens upon dozens of guards and mages rapidly filled the room. Many spears and horns pointed right at the spirit of chaos.

"Put my son down!" the voice of an angry mother bellowed.

Kindle could not remember the last time he ever saw Mom that angry, besides at him. It looked like she could smite foes with her stare's intensity alone. Even without the Elements of Harmony, some damage could be done. His newfound uncle, was unfazed by this display of emotion. His uncle held him with just the paw as the claw gestured about.

"Honestly," he said. "I want to spend some quality time with my nephew, and everypony panics. All I did was escape from a stony prison."

"The spell should've kept you there!" she shouted.

"The Elements of Harmony." Discord said. "Very good at keeping chaos magic at bay. Your magic? Not so much."

"When we get the Elements of Harmony together, you're going right back." his mother threatened.

"Oh I don't think so." he said with his sly smile.

Horns started to glow. Every unicorn in the large room was ready for a fight. Kindle was still held firmly by the paw of his chaos-loving 'uncle'. While he was certain there would be concern for his safety, conflict was something he wanted to avoid. He needed to do something to get them all to take a breather. There was a lot going on.

Teleporting himself, Mom, and Discord was the first idea that came to mind.

Ken sat beside his future sister-in-law in the throne room. There were only a few guards in there with them. Rarity was waiting for her friends outside in the hall. It was nice of her, because he needed some time to process what had happened. He just had his first argument with his future wife. They never argued before. At least not to the degree they did a half hour ago. Maybe going public changed things more than he originally thought.

"Still bothered by the argument with my sister, dear Ken?" she asked.

"Very much." he answered. "We never fought like that before today."

"My nephew hasn't been so controversial with his actions before recent." she said. "Easier to be a parent to child in hiding."

"Fair point." he said.

The conversation was cut short by a flash of light. In the center of the throne room. His future wife Celestia, was glaring down Discord with a fury he never saw before. Discord was holding Kindle in his paw. In a flash, Luna was next to her sister. Both of them staring down a smiling Discord. The spirit of chaos looked towards Ken.

"Ah! The infamous Ken I presume?" he asked.

"Yes I am." Ken said. "Could you please put my son down?"

"Oh of course." Discord said. He placed Kindle down on the floor gently. Guards quickly escorted him out of the room. "I would never dream of my nephew being harmed."

"Nephew?" Ken asked.

"I've spent the past five years as Kindle's therapist, and I adopted him as my nephew." Discord said proudly.

Ken looked at his exiting son, who was trying to avoid the angry stares of his mother and aunt. The Royal Sisters had a much rougher relationship with the spirit of chaos then they did. The most they had to deal with during Discord's escape was their huts growing legs and running off. He remembered his wife's stories of living under the reign of disharmony. Her anger towards their son was reasonable. She fought like Tartarus to defeat Discord, and her son was using him as a therapist.

"Thou can't simply adopt him as a nephew!" Luna shouted.

"So the spirit of chaos and disharmony isn't allowed to have one shred of happiness then?" Discord asked.

"Luna! Celestia!" Ken interrupted. "Can I speak to you both for a moment?"

In a flash, he was stared down by them both. It was easy to forget how intimidating they were sometimes. He knew his solution to this problem wasn't an easy one for them to hear. It was what would be best for Kindle in the long run.

"I think we should give him a chance." he said.

"What!?" the sisters said in unison.

"Hear me out first." he said. "Besides the three of us and his bodyguard Iron Wing, who does Kindle talk to? How many beings in this world can understand him? Who can possibly relate to the emotional

problems of an immortal being? As for family, we don't have much. Not even on my side. I'm not saying this is a great idea. It's not even a good idea. It doesn't change that Kindle needs him."

The sisters looked at each other. Each with a small frown. Neither wanted to admit it. Neither wanted to be the one to say it. They whispered to each other for a minute. Celestia took a deep breath before walking over to Discord.

"If you want to continue this 'uncle and therapist' routine, we have some conditions." she said.

"I assume they involve: no causing chaos, no corrupting Kindle, and everything in between?" Discord asked.

"With a prison of stone awaiting you, should you fail." she said coldly.

"I think that's fair." he said. "Anything else?"

"I want you to spend some time with a certain pony." she said. "If she gives her approval, then and only then will I allow you near Kindle."

After an exciting day, dinner was quiet for Kindle and his family. His father sticking up for keeping Uncle Discord around earlier was awesome. Although Aunt Luna was annoyed at Discord receiving the title of Uncle. Explaining the trip to the university went over better than expected. The young prince thought she would get angry at the notion of her son getting naked in front of random ponies. Leaving out the mares fighting over his sketch probably helped. As well as leaving out his reason for going. Despite the two making up, Twilight was still on his mother's sore side for the 'foalnapping' incident. Most of Mom's silent frustration was towards him being so close to his new uncle.

"Your highness!" a guard said as he burst into the dining hall, a scroll levitating by his head. "Urgent message from King Thorax!"

Mom took the letter and unrolled it. Her eyes widened before standing up.

"Excuse me, this requires an immediate response." she said. "Lulu?"

Kindle watched as his mother and aunt quickly left the room. He kept staring at the door. The mention of Thorax brought back memories. Not all of them good. He wasn't sure how long he was staring. When he felt something touch his shoulder, the prince whipped around. Right hand glowing bright. He saw his father, staring in wide-eyed shock.

"Are you okay son?" he asked.

"Yeah." Kindle lied. "I think I just need to lay down."

He got up and quickly left the room, bodyguard in tow. Thorax never sent urgent letters. They would always be friendly messages. Asking for advice on ruling a country. Kindle himself even got a letter or two. Urgent though? He needed to know more.

"Iron?" he asked.

"Yes your highness?" his guard asked.

"Get some dinner." he said. "I'm turning in early."

"You're a terrible liar, but I'm far too hungry to stop you." Iron chuckled.

The prince chuckled as the two parted. Five years as his bodyguard, and he knew him well. It wouldn't be the first time he's eavesdropped on his mother. He always had the same hiding spot in her room. With a wave of his hand, he found himself where she never checked. Under her bed. Having a mother of her size had the advantage of being unseen when necessary. His timing was impeccable, as the door opened mere moments after he got settled in. He covered his mouth with his hands. Had to stay quiet after all. Especially when he saw the bed sag uncomfortably close to his head.

"I just can't believe this would happen." Mom said. "Is there no line Chrysalis won't cross?"

"It seems not." Aunt Luna said. "Thorax seems adamant on giving in to her demands of surrender. Foalnapping his fiancé along with the threat of draining their emotions permanently. Perhaps his judgement is clouded."

"None of this would be happening in the first place if it wasn't for me." she said. "I made a mistake, and it cost me."

"Thy actions did lead to the division of the changeling kingdom, yes." his aunt said. "However, thou knows how much more could have been lost if the difficult choice was not made."

"You're right Lulu." his mom sighed. "However, we still need to do something. Perhaps the Elements of Harmony can be sent to help somehow."

"The northern changeling kingdom will be surrendered in 3 days at sunset." his aunt said. "Chrysalis gaining full control of her kingdom again might become inevitable."

Iron was glad to get some food in him. Although he found himself eating a quick and light meal. King Thorax never sends urgent letters. Given Prince Kindle's history with him, he had a feeling what was happening in a certain bedroom. As he landed on the balcony of the prince's tower, he wished he wasn't right all the time. He walked up to his highness as he was looking over a map at his desk.

"How bad is it?" Iron asked.

"Chrysalis foalnapped Thorax's fiancé." Prince Kindle said quietly. "She'll drain their emotions permanently in three days if the northern changeling kingdom isn't surrendered to her. Mom wants to send the Elements of Harmony."

"Given how intensely you're staring at that map, I assume you disagree." he said.

"I'm not waiting for Twilight and her friends." the prince said. "I owe Thorax."

"Well, I know I'm not stopping you." he said. "You wouldn't be here if it wasn't for Thorax. Though I will be coming with you."

"Think I can't get there on my own?" the prince asked angrily.

"For one, the map's upside-down." he said. "Also, we could get to the kingdom with less stress on your body if we flew in shifts. Teleporting would take too much magic."

The prince was quiet for a moment. His emotions were running high. He just needed a gentle pull to bring him back down. This was a sensitive subject for him. Four years ago is a long time for some. For Prince Kindle, the memories were probably still fresh.

"Okay, you win." he said. "I better write a letter for Mom before we leave."

Twilight didn't get many surprise visitors at her home. Mr. Brightburn was certainly a small shock. He was usually glued to Princess Celestia's side. Yet here he was, sitting across from her by the fire. A chariot had brought him. She was unaware he had any authority to order guards. The two were sipping tea.

"Thank you for seeing me so late." he said.

"How can I help the future Royal Husband?" she asked.

"Well, things have happened today." he said. "Things that will lead to outcomes I can't change. Rather than do nothing, I figured I should speak to a pony that can."

"What happened, Mr. Brightburn?" Twilight asked.

"First, just call me Ken." Ken said. "Mr. Brightburn just reminds me I'm getting old."

"Apologies." she said.

"It's fine." he said. "Anyways, changing outcomes. Tomorrow, my fiancé will summon the Elements of Harmony to the castle. Queen Chrysalis kidnapped Thorax's fiancé and is planning to permanently

drain their emotions unless she regains full control of her kingdom. Although that reason will become irrelevant when she discovers our son has already left to face the queen himself."

"What?!" Twilight shouted. "Why would he do that?"

Ken put his tea down. His eyes were those of a father with a reason he wasn't proud of.

"I'm not happy he has done this, but I understand why," he answered. "My son's history with changelings is, complicated. More so than other humans. To put it simply, he's the reason there's a northern and a southern changeling kingdom."

"How can one human divide a whole kingdom?" Twilight asked.

"It's a long story, if you have time," Ken said.

The mare summoned a pot of coffee with her magic. Also some paper and writing utensils.

Chapter 9

Four years since then, and the memories are still fresh.

Kindle had been in the castle for a year. At this point, the Royal Mages had his magic understood enough where outbursts were minimal. There were a few here and there, but not as destructive as it used to be. Around this time, Princess Cadence and your brother were getting married. She knew about Kindle. She was old enough to remember Celestia being pregnant. She kept the secret. Kindle really wanted to see the wedding. I somehow convinced my fiancé to let him come. It was simple enough. We both went as personal servants to the Princess of the Sun.

With Queen Chrysalis taking the form of Princess Cadence, we made the grave mistake of being so open with her about Kindle. We thought it was strange we had to essentially reintroduce them. We foolishly blamed it on the stress of the wedding along with them not seeing each other since he was a baby. Things were fine until the ceremony.

Kindle and I were off to the side. I still remember you bursting in with the real Princess Cadence. I still remember Queen Chrysalis revealing herself. Seeing my future wife getting taken down by the changeling queen was painful for me. I still can't imagine what Kindle was feeling. Seeing his mother get hurt. In all the chaos, it was easy to miss his hands glowing. His first focused magic attack. I don't think anypony will ever forget watching the queen drop to the ground like that. The guards had her subdued, but they neglected the other changelings. They were the only ones that saw the attack come from Kindle.

The pain of watching him being ripped away from me. It can't be put into words. I guess now you know why Celestia was so distraught over a servant being abducted. We couldn't explain without exposing Kindle. She almost did. We finished the wedding ceremony after Queen Chrysalis was properly locked up. When Luna was told what happened, it took a lot of guards to keep her from the queen. I felt so helpless. Having to pretend that my son's foalnapping wasn't important at the time. When we got back to Canterlot, Queen Chrysalis threatened to expose Kindle if we didn't release her. Turning her to stone was tossed around. We had her in the dungeon for the time.

Kindle remembered the events perfectly. Luna had to deal with a lot of nightmares during, and after. He told us they threw him into a cage. Thorax volunteered to watch him. The hive was in chaos not long after he was locked up. Queen Chrysalis never had a successor named. Changelings fighting for the throne almost immediately. He didn't see much of the fighting, but he heard it. To this day, we owe so much to Thorax. He was the one that made sure my son had food and water. He and Pharynx kept some of the other changelings from trying to hurt him. My son's friendship with Thorax grew over that month.

Celestia was inconsolable for the entire month Kindle was gone. Letters to the changeling kingdom weren't getting responses. An invasion was considered, but Queen Chrysalis was crafty. Due to the history between changelings and humans, their castle was surrounded by human villages. Far too many innocent bystanders. It was a rough time for us all at the castle. Our only connection to my son was Luna's dreamwalking spell.

However, things weren't all bad. Kindle's friendship with Thorax was strong after only a couple weeks. He convinced him and his brother to try and take charge of the kingdom. After a couple tries, the other changelings started to listen to them. Thorax had spoke about bringing the kingdom into the modern age. Some listened. They believed that there could be more to life than serving the queen. There were others that didn't. Some that were still fiercely loyal to the queen.

*Some of the details of how it happened were spotty at the time, but imagine our absolute shock when a letter had finally come from the changeling kingdom. Those who were still loyal to the queen

proposed a prisoner exchange. The queen for Kindle. He had been captured for three weeks at this point. Celestia accepted it without hesitation. The exchange area was set to where the border is today. I remember hearing you and her having a short argument over it. Now you know why she dismissed your concerns.*

We had a lot of guards there. So many soldiers on both sides. Exchanging them was intense. While we lost a serious threat, we got our son back. I hugged Kindle so tight that day. Celestia put us on her back, and refused to put us down until that night. Queen Chrysalis told us to keep Equestrian military forces out of her kingdom, and she would keep the secret. None of us wanted to make that deal, but you have to remember how desperate Celestia was at the time. She had gone through her worst nightmare: losing her son. Even I wasn't in the right state of mind. We agreed without a second thought.

It wasn't for nothing though. Thorax sent letters. It turns out some of the changelings still wanted to side with him. Even after the queen returned. He said something about them becoming changedlings. Seemed that Kindle's friendship was a spark that pushed them to recognize Thorax as king. It seemed there was an attempt at a small civil war in the changeling kingdom. Queen Chrysalis and her dedicated changelings were forced out of the castle, due to them being severely outnumbered. She took refuge in a cave system south of the castle.

As you know, we were very quick to recognize the northern changeling kingdom, as well as King Thorax. After asking for help with invasion attempts, Celestia quickly established a military base at the border. Queen Chrysalis tried to expose the secret, but the newspapers bought the story about her believing the 'pink-haired human' conspiracy. Said conspiracy was still new, so we got lucky there.

Since then, buzzing wings still make Kindle uneasy. I'm not sure who to be more worried for now. Kindle, getting into a fight he's not ready for. My fiancé, having a near meltdown at him doing something so foolish when she finds out in the morning.

Kindle felt himself wake up. He hadn't opened his eyes yet. He was extremely comfortable. Something soft was pressed against the front of his body. His nose was pressed into a soft surface, which gave off a musky scent when he inhaled through his nose. A soft, heavy object was on his shoulder. He wasn't sure how the bunk became better than his own bed in the castle, but he wasn't arguing. Though a sliver of sunshine beating on the corner of his left eye was making a case for him to wake up. He opened his eyes. Brown fur? He looked up, and the prince was suddenly wide awake.

It was Iron! He had been sleeping with his bodyguard! In a bunkhouse with other soldiers! He looked around. The forelegs had wrapped around his sides. His face had been buried in his guard's soft neck.

The blanket was pulled up enough to hide him. Kindle quickly tried to rack his brain about last night. He remembered that they both tried to sleep while the other flew. No more than a few minutes at a time. When they finally got to the kingdom, it was well past midnight. The closest place to land was the base established at the border: Camp Wineroot. The guards on night watch were shocked to see the prince, and were ready to kick the general out of his private quarters for royal accommodations. Kindle had declined, and elected to sleep in the bunkhouse. The two must have been so tired, they didn't bother to get separate beds.

Although. It wasn't all bad. Iron's powerful forelegs felt nice wrapped around his sides. The musky scent his resting body gave off was pleasant to smell. His fur was so soft. Resting in that position felt...right. The blanket kept him out of sight. A few more minutes wouldn't hurt. Kindle's fingers traveled along Iron's right foreleg. Despite the smooth fur and relatively slender frame, the muscles hidden under them were defined. For a stallion in his thirties, he was in shape. Being a bodyguard meant he had to be. The prince wondered if the rest of his muscles were as defined.

"No." Kindle whispered to himself as he pulled his fingers back. "He's ten years older than you, he's your personal bodyguard, and this is not the time."

The prince heard a rush of air go with a loud yawn. Iron was waking up! He quickly slid out of bed. The bed next to them was unoccupied. He sat on the bed's side, and adopted a playful smile as the pegasus arose.

"Morning sleepyhead." Kindle jeered.

"Good morning, your highness." Iron said.

"Sleep well?" he asked.

"Perfectly." his bodyguard answered. He looked around to the still sleeping soldiers. "Seems we're the first up."

A loud horn reverberated through the air. All the sleeping soldiers were awake, and out of their beds in seconds. The doors to the bunkhouse opened. It was General Stillwater. The grizzled dark grey unicorn stallion with a buzzcut of a brown mane. He looked over to the prince, before looking at the rest of the soliders. Iron was putting his armor on as the two began to speak.

"Good morning, your highness." the general said.

"Morning, general." the prince said.

"I wasn't aware we would be getting a visit last night." he said. "I was told you voluntarily slept with the soldiers?"

"Well, when you fly from Canterlot to Camp Winroot in one continuous flight, pickiness on where you sleep is not a luxury one can afford." the prince explained.

"Understandable." he said. "I have a soldier outside that can escort you to the mess hall for breakfast."

"Thank you general." the prince said. "Coming Iron?"

"Yes your highness!" Iron said as he got his helmet on.

Right as the two left the bunkhouse, the shouting of the general could be heard. Mostly just yelling at the soldiers to be on their best behavior because the son of Princess Celestia was on base. The two looked at the soldier that saluted at them. A young earth pony mare. Bright red.

"Private Pyre your highness!" she said. "I'm here to escort you to the mess hall!"

"Well then private, lead the way." the prince said with a smile.

The two followed the private. The base wasn't very big, but it wasn't small either. A couple of bunkhouses, a few watchtowers, a mess hall, and a few other buildings sprinkled in. Kindle never got to be at the opening of the base. He was still too shaken up from the foalnapping to come back to this area. Aunt Luna had also started his training around that time.

"Your highness?" Iron asked.

"Yes Iron?" the prince answered.

"How do you think your mother is going to handle you being gone?" he asked.

"A panic attack when she notices, then anger after she reads the letter." the prince answered.

"What about day court?" he asked.

"I also took the liberty of asking my cousin Blueblood to handle day court, so that's covered too. He has even less authority than I do." the prince answered. "Now stop worrying. It'll ruin your appetite."

Being summoned to the castle was nothing new to Twilight or her friends. Being summoned this early in the morning was definitely a change of pace. The young alicorn probably had the least sleep among them. Her late night meeting with Ken was still fresh in her mind. She knew what was going to be discussed, but she would have to feign shock. It was clear that meeting was a secret to be kept.

"Greetings." Princess Luna said to the ponies as they entered the throne room. "'Tia is...emotional at the moment, so we will be telling you the reason we called you here."

"I AM NOT EMOTIONAL!" Princess Celestia bellowed as she teleported into the throne room. Ken by her side, looking exasperated.

"Says the princess screaming at the top of thy lungs." the moon princess said.

A deep breath was taken. Everypony in the room could see that look in Princess Celestia's eyes. Twilight remembers that look well because her own mother used to give it when she was a filly. The look of your mother knowing you did something you weren't supposed to, times a hundred. Although this look quickly faded to concern when the sun princess was finally calm. Princess Celestia looked towards Twilight and her friends.

"Things have gotten worse for the northern changelings." she said. "King Thorax's fiancé was foalnaped by Queen Chrysalis. Unless full control of the kingdom is surrendered to her in two days, she threatens to permanently drain their emotions."

"Ghastly!" Rarity said. "Has she no shame?"

"That however, is the least of our worries." she said. "For some reason, my son decided he needs to face her alone."

Gasps from all of Twilight's friends.

"No offense your highness, but what makes Prince Kindle think he can fight Chrysalis on his own?" Rainbow asked. "We didn't exactly do so well ourselves."

"Ah'm sure he had his reasons." Applejack said.

"No matter the reason." Princess Celestia said. "He's not ready for something like this. I'm sending the Elements of Harmony. Not only to save Thorax's fiancé, but to stop my son from getting himself hurt. I have one of the smaller airships ready to take you. Should only take you a few hours."

"We won't let you down!" Twilight said.

"Oh these eggs are so good." Kindle groaned after he swallowed a mouthful.

"The head chef sent one of the other chefs to a nearby hoomin village to buy some for your breakfast sir." Private Pyre said.

"Well that was nice of him." the prince said.

"Camp Wineroot does a fair bit of business with the nearby villages, your highness." Iron said. "Saves a lot a lot of bits on sending food supplies. Not to mention it helps form a more positive relationship with the locals."

"Hoomins still hate when we show up in armor." the private grumbled. "Yet changelings from north and south can walk around the villages, doing as they please."

"Well, that's because of the history between humans and changelings is far more intricate than you realize." the prince said.

"I'm sorry your highness." the private apologized in advance. "I can't see how hoomins can adore changelings, but hate ponies. That doesn't make any sense."

"Then it's time for a quick history lesson." Kindle said as he turned to face the private eating his breakfast. A few curious ears swiveled towards him. "Two hundred years ago, my mother declared slavery of humans illegal in Equestria's borders. A slave from the Duke of Prance was left outside the airship in the cold winter. My mother brought him into the castle, and looked through his memories when the slave had spoke of the constant mistreatment he received. The horrors she had seen, scarred her for life. The rest of Equus was furious at her actions, since now slaves were flocking to Equestria for freedom. Changelings however, saw an opportunity. They would go to port towns, and simply wait for any humans they came across. Freedom and protection would be offered. Humans didn't know any better, and took the offers. They were grateful for what they thought was kindness. They loved their changeling saviors. This love was fed upon. A suprise was quickly discovered however. Unlike most creatures, humans are unaffected from having their emotions fed on. No ill effects found, even to this day. Word spread fast. Humans running away to Equestria were picked up faster than before. They started to build villages around the changeling hive. A lot of villages. Changelings fought off every slave catcher that set hoof in their territory. Only when the Nebel Incident lead to global emancipation a hundred years ago, did humans start to settle in places other than the changeling territory. The damage was already done. Most humans that had foals of their own, told stories of how cruel ponies were. A lot of them still had slave runes, since removing them on every human was a lengthy task. Many were afraid to be around ponies with the runes still in their skin. Changelings, still had the reputation of protecting humans in exchange for love."

Kindle looked around. Every soldier had stopped eating, just to listen to him. The history of human slavery was something that schools were uncomfortable teaching. His mother, was unafraid to tell him the history personally.

"So to anwer your question private." the prince said. "Humans adore changelings, because they never treated us like slaves. They weren't the ones that embedded slave runes in the skin of little boys and girls. Changelings never treated us like mindless animals because we couldn't use magic. All they wanted was love. Protection from ponies meant we had plenty to give."

"I...didn't mean to offend you, your highness." Pyre said quietly.

"No, I should apologize." Kindle sighed. "You can't be responsible for your ancestors actions. You can only be responsible for your own."

"Spoken like a true leader." Iron said.

Kindle walked alongside Iron. He wanted his feet on the ground. He was a little nervous. The walls of the hive brought some old memories back. He would hear the occasional buzz of wings. He would reactively grab onto his bodyguard's foreleg. He knew he could trust the changelings here. It was just old fears bubbling up. The reminder of his bodyguard being there was enough to keep him calm.

"His highness is talking with his brother right now." the changeling escorting them said. "Shall I announce you?"

"Oh no." Kindle said. "I want to surprise him. Thank you though."

"Well, I must return to my duties." the changeling said. "Have a nice day."

"You as well." he said.

The changeling flew up into a hole to another part of the hive. The buzzing made Kindle reach for Iron's foreleg again. He looked over to him. The two shared a look.

"Are you sure you're okay?" Iron asked.

"Yeah." the prince said. "Just some old fears in the back of my mind. That's what I got you for."

Kindle pushed the doors open. The room was expansive. At the end of the room, he saw them. Two larger than average changelings.

"Has she responded yet?" Thorax asked.

"No." Pharynx said. "I doubt she will, with two days left."

"Perhaps I can be of assistance?" Kindle asked loudly to announce himself. Thorax looked over, and his eyes lit up.

"Kindle!" Thorax shouted as he galloped over. The two embraced each other. A foreleg wrapped around the human.

"I heard about what happened." he said as he pulled from the hug. "I flew straight here last night."

"I'm glad you're here." the changeling king said. "I could use a friend right now. Losing Fred has been hard for me."

Kindle paused for a moment. It seemed there was a detail he missed. He dismissed his own hesitation. Thorax was a friend in need.

"I'm here to help get Fred back." he said. "After how you and Pharynx protected me back then, it's the least I can do."

"No." Thorax said as he turned away. "I can't let you risk yourself."

"I can't let Chrysalis get full control of her kingdom again." Kindle said. "You've made so much progress. Don't let her tear it all down."

Thorax was quiet. Pharynx walked up. A hoof was gently placed on the king's back. A soft smile was shared.

"When Kindle told us to take charge, I thought he was crazy." Pharynx said. "We trusted him, and look at what we have Thorax. If he says he can get Fred back, I can trust him again."

Pharynx looked to Kindle. The looks in his eyes said he was genuine with his words. Thorax was hesitant. He already lost the love of his life to the queen. He didn't want to lose his friend too. The king looked to the human.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" Thorax asked. "The southern hive is buried in a cave hidden in the forest, south of the border. Not to mention the numerous human villages dotting the forest. Changelings always frequent them. You'll be spotted instantly."

"I'm not the scared little boy that got foalnapped four years ago." Kindle said as his hands glowed bright. "Aunt Luna's training made sure no changeling would ever lay a hoof on me again."

"Then I'll guide you." Pharynx said. "Nochangeling knows the path to the cave better than I."

"Alright then." he said. He saw the concern in Thorax's eyes welling up. "In the off chance things go bad, I'll teleport us all to safety."

"Good luck." Thorax said as he group hugged his brother and his human friend.

Two princes and a bodyguard. The three made their way to the door.

"Kindle?" Thorax asked. "Can I have a word in private?"

Kindle looked over to his guard and nodded. Iron and Pharynx walked out of the room. The prince walked back to the king. The look of concern was replaced with a soft smile.

"So you and your bodyguard huh?" he asked. "I could practically taste the affection as soon as we hugged."

Iron was unsure what King Thorax said to Prince Kindle. It was a short conversation, but it must've been enough. The prince was blushing hard when he caught up to them. The pegasus was assured nothing happened. The normally no-nonsense Prince Pharynx was cracking a smile of his own. Royalty and their in-jokes probably.

As they exited the hive, all three had to stop suddenly. A group made of changeling and human foals had crossed their path. They were all playing with a ball. It was an odd sight for Iron. Ponies and humans never intermingled like this. It was, nice. Maybe he could see this back in Ponyville one day. He was brought out of his thoughts when the ball bounced off his leg. A human boy had run from the group to get it, but froze up when the pegasus was seen. The young one was probably told by his parents to avoid ponies. Most likely was told the stories of the slave times. Maybe even had a great-grandparent with old slave runes still in their skin. For the boy, he had every reason to be scared. Prince Pharynx quickly noticed, and took the ball with his magic. He levitated it over to the boy.

"Here you go, little one." the changeling prince said with a soft smile.

"Thank you, your highness." the boy said as he took the ball. He ran off with his friends.

"We should probably get going." Iron said.

Iron and Prince Pharynx spread their wings. Prince Kindle crouched. All three were quickly in the sky. The ground quickly became distant. The silence didn't last long. Both princes looked at him with concern.

"Are you okay?" Prince Pharynx asked.

"Yeah." Iron said, a hint of deject in his voice.

"Iron's not used to humans being scared of him." Prince Kindle said. "He used to foalsit humans in his younger days. Not to mention he's usually a natural at handling them. I should know."

"It's not your fault Iron." the changeling prince said. "Queen Chrysalis spent a lot of her time telling stories to the young humans. Stories of ponies being mean and scary. She spent years cultivating the fear they have over ponies. Undoing it will take generations."

"Yeah." he said. "You're right."

As the three flew towards Camp Winroot, the prince's bodyguard looked at the ground below. Northern changelings walking about a human village. Two humans and a changeling chatting and

laughing like old friends. The foals from earlier still playing with their ball. A changeling carrying a little human girl on their back. They all looked so happy. Why couldn't ponies be like this with humans?

"Finally." Prince Kindle said after a few minutes of flying. "Camp Wineroot. Think we'll need supplies for our trip Pharynx?"

"No, but we should land anyways." he answered. "We'll get spotted a lot quicker if we fly past the border."

Moving through the shadows of Canterlot. The dark blue cloud found it effortless to stay out of sight. The temptation to reveal herself was strong. Put a little fear in the ponies. Although she had to resist the urge. Sister was clear in her demands. While she was busy with marking the king with his runes, somepony had to attend the meeting. The clan was still needed for their plan. As pathetic as they were, wars weren't won without pawns. Their selfish need to feel important was what made them so simple to manipulate. Soon, her destination was reached. A grandiose mansion belonging to affluent ponies whose names she couldn't care to remember. A number of ponies were making their way inside as she observed. It was all unicorns, as per usual.

Darting under a passing cart, she made her way to the mansion. With a bit of focus, her cloud form was more akin to a shadow. No pony noticed a green mare's shadow looking odd. They passed through the doors. The mare she was using for transportation, stopped. The owners of the mansion were greeting their guests. A light gray stallion with a dark gray mane and a pale olive mare with a pale indigo mane.

She didn't bother to stick around for the greetings. She needed to get to her position in the meeting room. She followed the procession of ponies to the door that led below the mansion. The darker path made it far easier to sneak past them. She would hear the clink of iron hoofshoes on the steps. One at the bottom, it was clear she was first. The long table was empty. The crystals on the walls gave the basement a dark blue hue. It made it hiding effortless for her. It was why Sister preferred her to attend the meeting. Spreading herself out on the ceiling, and she was almost invisible. The dark blue light of the crystals nearly the same shade as her cloudy form.

The unicorns began to file in. They would remove their iron hoofshoes, and place them in small inserts on the back of their chairs before sitting down. It wasn't long before well over a dozen seats were filled. The two owners of the mansion were the last ones down. They took their place at the head of the table. Their chairs looking slightly fancier than the others.

"This meeting of the Iron Hoof Clan can now begin." the gray stallion said.

"We want to begin with the same concern you all share." the olive mare said as her horn glowed. A magical manifestation of the human prince's face floated above the table. "Princess Celestia's human son."

"He's a threat to our way of life!" a white stallion with a blue mustache said. "One of our enforcers in Ponyville was turned into a human as a ten year punishment. A half-breed human with magic is too dangerous. A spell to become one is downright terrifying."

"Your concern is valid Fancy." the gray stallion said. "However, Princess Celestia did make it clear to the public Prince Kindle is the only one able to perform the spell. Furthermore, his use of the spell is restricted heavily by her orders."

"It doesn't change how badly we need to keep that, thing under control." Fancy said.

"How do you propose we do that?" a green mare asked. "Half-breed or not, he's a prince. The son of Princess Celestia. She'll choose him over her fellow ponies without hesitation. Not to mention the horrifying implications of him ruling over us if the princesses were to retire!"

An idea popped into her mind. The shadowy cloud flicked a wisp of dark energy towards the olive mare. Not enough to alter her mind. Just enough to guide her direction of thought. If she could get them to agree on this idea, then things could get interesting.

"Perhaps there is a way we can keep the prince under our control." the olive mare said with a sly smile.

"What, pray tell is your idea Upper Crust?" Fancy asked.

"It's quite simple." Upper said. "Under the law, a princess has more legal authority than a prince. If we were to say, introduce a mare for the prince to fall in love with. A mare of our choosing. This mare could guide him to act the way we want him to."

"An impressive idea, my dear." the gray stallion said. "Although finding a mare willing to be with him is a challenge. Not to mention making them fall in love."

"I might have a solution." a light brown stallion with a yellow mane spoke up.

"Please share Golden Gavel." the gray stallion said.

"The law is on our side this time." Golden said as he produced a scroll. "After Prince Kindle's reveal, I dug through the archives of laws Princess Celestia wrote over the centuries. I remembered a law I came across years ago. One I thought would never be useful, as it specified to only take effect when she had a foal. Specifically, when that foal turned twenty one."

The scroll was levitated Upper Crust and her husband. As the two looked it over, devious smiles emerged.

"This could work wonderfully." the gray stallion.

"Perfectly I would say, my dear Jet Set." Upper said. "I think we should all go to day court tomorrow. Wiping that smirk of that prince's face with this would be absolutely elating."

The dark cloud smiled to herself. These so-called elite made it too easy sometimes.

Chapter 10

"That went well." Kindle said as he brushed himself off.

"That went horrible." Pharynx groaned.

"I think I handled them just fine." he retorted.

"Just like you handled the last two patrols?" the changeling prince asked, annoyed.

"So I used a little more force behind my magic than expected." he said. "They're fine."

"Diplomacy is not your strong suit, your highness." Iron said.

The trio had made their way through the forest. A good amount of progress had been made in the past few hours. The cave system wasn't too far ahead. Another hour or so of walking at this pace. Although they would've been there faster if a certain human hadn't picked fights with every southern changeling they were confronted by. Admittedly, those past fears bubbled up every time he saw them. He would never admit that to his cohorts. The glances from both said they already knew.

"With those three patrols out of commission, more might show up." Pharynx said. "It's standard procedure to send reinforcements if a patrol doesn't check in."

"Good thing we're on the move then." Kindle said with a smile.

"I know it's late into our little journey, but I was wondering what the actual plan was?" Iron asked.

"As fun as fighting Queen Chrysalis sounds, we won't be." the human prince answered. "I'll teleport to Fred, grab him, then teleport us as far away as I can."

"If I didn't know any better, I would say that sounds like an actual plan from you, your highness." the bodyguard said with a smirk.

"Oh you're just hilarious." Kindle said.

The three were interrupted by a strange sound. They turned around and looked into the distance. It was an airship. It was fast approaching. No mistaking it for anything other than a ship of the Royal Fleet. The prince groaned in annoyance. He knew exactly who was on that ship. What little covertness they had was now out the window. Pretty hard to miss an airship in a clear sky. In a flash, six ponies teleported onto the ground before them. Kindle wasn't impressed in the least.

"Great job genius." he groaned at one pony in particular. "You just gave away our position."

"We were sent here by Princess Celestia to retrieve both you, and King Thorax's fiancé." Twilight said.
"So you get on the airship, and we'll take it from here."

"First, don't give me orders." Kindle said. "Second, I'm handling this."

The young prince looked up to the airship. A few soldiers were looking down at them. He gave a mixture of hand signals. The airship whirred as it turned around, and headed north. Twilight was shocked.

"How did you...?" she began.

"I told them to touch down at Camp Winroot." he answered. "They can take you home when you get there. Now if you six don't mind, the three of us have a hostage to save."

"Oh no you don't." Twilight said as she ran up to block their path. "Your mother is worried sick about you, and I intend to get you home safe."

"Get out of my way, princess." Kindle grumbled as he got in Twilight's face. The two stared each other down intensely. Horns and hands aglow.

"Your highness?" Iron tried to get the prince's attention.

"Make me." she said. "I'm getting you back to Canterlot, even if I have to drag you there."

"Um, Twilight?" Rainbow Dash tried to ask.

"I don't care if you're Mom's most faithful student, I'll knock that horn clean off." he growled.

"I'd like to see you try!" she shouted.

"YOUR HIGHNESS!" Iron shouted.

"WHAT?" both prince and princess asked in angry unison.

Their question was quickly answered. Much to his chagrin, the prince's earlier prediction of their position being given away by the airship was spot on. Countless changelings surrounded them. Every visible space between the trees had a changeling staring them down. Despite smaller numbers than the northern changelings, the changeling population was still huge in the south. It felt like someone had taken the Canterlot invasion, and changed the scene to the forest. A quick breath to center himself. Then he rose in the air, just above the other ponies.

"Center up on me!" he said as all eight ponies quickly grouped up below him. He cast a dome over them. He ignored their protests as he cracked his knuckles.

"Alright boys." he said with a grin. "I've spent the past three years training under Aunt Luna for this. Who's up first?"

For Twilight, it was frustrating. She was used to others listening to her. Ponies or otherwise. While this sense of authority never went to her head, it was something she was accustomed to. Even more when she became a princess. Being able to give a command for others to follow. Then there was Kindle. This prince. The only son of Princess Celestia. For reasons she couldn't understand, he had little to no respect for her. At first, she blamed it on a rough first introduction. Being abducted by dragonfire could do that. Yet no. It was like a baby brother that refused to listen to their big sister. A constant need to prove themselves. He had put them all in a dome. She couldn't crack it, despite her best efforts. Efforts of his training with Princess Luna. While she could simply teleport out, there was something stopping her. Outside the dome, there were changelings. They easily matched the numbers of the Canterlot invasion, if not surpassed. However, that's not what was stopping her.

Kindle. Prince Kindle the ponyborn human. He was fighting them. Not just one at a time. The changelings were coming at him as fast as they could. Blast after magic blast. He was holding the top of the dome like it was his final stand. Any changeling that tried to get close, was blasted. It didn't matter if they charged on the ground or the air. He was throwing blasts in every direction. Flashes of teleportation happened intermittently. Anytime a changeling would almost get him from behind, he could be above them in an instant. It was all so fast and fluid. For only three years of training, his skill was something to marvel at. Twilight would've cursed herself for not bringing her notes if she wasn't so distracted by watching. The only one not watching in awe, was Iron Wing. The human's bodyguard. His face was akin to a pony waiting in line for a turn at the coffee pot. Calm, but bits of annoyance poked through.

"Come on!" Kindle shouted. "Was that the best you had?"

In her brief moment of observing Iron, Twilight failed to notice how empty the place around them became once more. Trees had holes in them from blasts of magic. Changelings not already running away, were dotting the ground. A few were hanging from the trees. There were numerous craters from the impact of magical blasts. As the dome finally dissipated, everypony began to walk out.

"Jeez." Rainbow said. "You absolutely creamed them."

"Yeah!" Pinkie said. "He went all BAM then KABOOM! Then he kept teleporting around. It's like he was everywhere!"

"Ah don't think ah've ever seen somepony take on an army of changelings by themselves." Applejack commented.

"With all due respect, you've never seen a magic user with my training." Kindle answered. "Aunt Luna is as tough a teacher as they come."

"Can you imagine how tough WE would be with that kind of training?" Rainbow asked them all.

Nods and murmurs of agreement from Twilight's friends. The princess, was quiet. She was trying to mentally process the spell probing she had been doing during the fight. Surely, Kindle had used countless spells for that fight. No pony could get through a fight like that without a myriad of magic. Teleportation, basic offensive blasts, and the dome he held over them previously. Only three spells? How? Something he said when they first met flashed in her mind.

She had practice. He had training.

Was Princess Luna's training that intense? What she observed for a week was tough sure, but was it what led to outcomes like this? A single prince that fought off the same force that took countless resources they barely fight off themselves? Twilight looked at Prince Kindle, who was talking to an annoyed bodyguard. Was there more to him than this princess knew?

"Alright." he said. "They're probably scrambling to their queen, so we better get goin'."

"We?" Iron asked.

"Well, arguing about who goes where is a waste of time." the prince answered. "The more ponies on this problem, the better."

"He's right." Applejack said. "We need ta work together ta get this done."

"Glad we're all in agreement." he said. "Pharynx, if you could lead the way please."

Everypony began to follow the changeling prince as they all resumed the walk south. Twilight trotted up to Kindle. She still had some questions.

"I couldn't help but notice your fighting technique." she said.

"Some criticisms I presume." he grumbled.

"That was almost an exact match to the Trottinghill maneuver!" she said excitedly. "I had only read about it being done by General Trottinghill over a thousand years ago. Well, it was referenced in a very old scroll."

"Aunt Luna was the one who taught it to General Trottinghill." he said, perking up at her excitement. "Magical combat rarely compensates for rapid teleportation, and most can't use the Trottinghill maneuver since teleportation takes so much magic."

"Yet because humans are so small, the mass-to-magic-consumption ratio is a fraction of what a pony would need." Twilight realized. "That's genius!"

"Aunt Luna's really focused on me using my size to my advantage in combat." he said.

"Where was all this when I was possessed?" she asked with a smirk.

"For the record, I was holding up a burning building for a half hour the night before." he said. "By the way, did you ever find out who was behind the spell?"

"I got as far as the Everfree Forest." she said. "The forest's natural magic basically scrambled the tracking spells. With my counterspells re-evaluated, I doubt the spell will work again."

"There's a human village coming up in the next hour or so." Prince Pharynx said. "There won't be anything else after that but the cave."

Fred never thought he would be scared of changelings. He had been raised around them his whole life. Despite what the outside world thought of Queen Chrysalis, she was always kind to the humans she watched over. Always made sure every village had changelings watching over them. Even with the kingdom divided into north and south, the changelings on both sides still watched over them. It was uneasy at first. The ponies setting up a military base was uncomfortable. Through it all, they collectively made it work.

Then it happened. Queen Chrysalis. The queen he trusted so much. She abducted him out of the hooves of his beloved Thorax. The kindness he had known from the southern changelings was gone. They all simply stared into his cage as they adorned smiles on their faces. They were no longer the kind smiles he had known as a boy. They were the smiles of his captors. They sent shivers down his spine.

"Lunchtime." a changeling said as a plate of apples and fish slid into the cage. Fred picked it up and ate it without hesitation.

"Enjoying your meal I hope." an ethereal voice sounded in his ears.

"Y-Yes, your highness." he stammered without lifting his gaze.

"Do not worry." she said. "In a few days, the kingdoms will be reunited once more. After that, you will see your precious Thorax again. I just need him to surrender what he stole from me."

Out of the darkness of the dimly lit cave, she walked out. Queen Chrysalis. From within the cage, she was far more intimidating to look at. Her eyes more sinister. Her teeth seeming sharper. Her smile being one of heartlessness. It was the first time in a long time Fred could define the queen as 'scary'.

"Your highness, this isn't right." he said. "Thorax worked so hard to build what the northern kingdom has become. Please reconsider-."

"The kingdom is mine to rule!" she shouted. "Mine and mine alone!"

Fred cowered to the other side of the cage. She had never yelled at him before. He couldn't remember the last she had ever yelled at another human. Thorax had told him that losing half her kingdom and her castle had upset her. He didn't know it was this bad. He thought it best to not anger her again.

"My queen!" a changeling shouted as he galloped into the light.

"What, lieutenant?" she barked.

"Nine intruders have trespassed our border!" he answered. "The six Elements of Harmony, Prince Pharynx, an Equestrian guard, and Prince Kindle. We already lost contact with three patrols, and our border defense battalion has already retreated after a total defeat. They've already passed the human village closest to the cave. They're closing in on us, and they're thirty minutes out."

"No doubt they come for the prisoner." she said. "Have the cage moved to the throne room for my Elites to guard! Ready the forces! I must prepare for the oncoming battle."

"It will be done!" he answered with a salute.

"The Mahl technique would never work in a cave." Kindle said. "Even IF the entrance was big enough, half the place would be gone from the blast."

"That's why we just have to reduce the force of the initial impact." Twilight said back.

Iron lightly sighed. The prince and princess had gone back and forth for over an hour now. Given their shared knowledge of military strategies, they were going over potential attack ideas. While it was nice for them to not be arguing, he knew it wouldn't last long.

"Why not a Lighthoof attack?" she asked.

"Where are we going to get a catapult that big out here?" the prince asked, annoyed. "We should go Stiffler style."

"Who here could even carry a bomb that big?" the princess asked. "We already know the cave entrance is too small as is."

"Are you getting any of this?" Rainbow whispered to Prince Pharynx.

"I'm considered the most combat adept changeling in the kingdom, and they lost me thirty minutes ago." he said.

Iron wanted to chime in, but he was too busy keeping his eyes and ears peeled. They were getting close to the cave. Pharynx said that the queen was most likely focusing her efforts on defense preparation, and patrols would be far and few. While he was a changeling prince that trained most of the soldiers they would encounter, as well as the six Elements of Harmony, he still wanted to be sure. Never could be too careful with the prince's safety.

"I got it!" he shouted. "A Dimmenzer maneuver!"

"How could we possibly pull that off?" Twilight asked.

"It's more a question of who would be able to get past changelings." Kindle said.

The prince looked at the other ponies in silence as he contemplated. His eyes fell upon Rarity and Fluttershy. Their Hand in Hoof necklaces bouncing as they walked. Rarity noticed this quickly.

"You're not seriously considering that idea, are you?" Rarity asked.

"You two are the only ones with necklaces." he answered.

"True." she said. "Twilight and Pinkie only just became probationary members."

"I'm sorry, what?" he asked, dumbfounded.

"Twilight and I became members!" Pinkie chimed in. "Twilight got nominated by Rarity the other day. Mr. and Mrs. Cake nominated me a week ago. Twilight said something about teaching hoomins how to read. I woke up a few days ago and realized: I never celebrated any parties for hoomins. Any! That's so many more parties I can have now!"

"Well..." he said as he processed the information "my idea still stands. Now here's my plan."

"This idea is still beyond ridiculous, your highness." Iron whispered.

"Not my worst though." Kindle said back.

"I...can't argue that." he said.

The prince walked alongside his guard. They were joined by Rarity and Fluttershy. Those two were carrying some medical supplies, food, and water. Kindle was doing his best to float majestically. A number of changelings were posted at the cave entrance. Standard changeling armor adoned their bodies. A few spears were pointed at them. Iron reactively flexed his wings, the prince raised his hand, and said wings were lowered once more. Rarity stepped forward.

"Greetings." she said. "My friend Fluttershy and I are here as members of Hand in Hoof. We're here at the request of King Thorax to establish the well-being of his fiancé."

"Beat it pony!" a changeling hissed.

"Not happening." Kindle said as he floated right up to the changelings. "Hand in Hoof is recognized as an official human rights organization by Princess Celestia. They are well within their rights to be here today. I am here along with a member of the Royal Guard to ensure they do what they came to do."

A number of spears came very close to the prince. He kept his calm demeanor of authority, but he was screaming on the inside. Everything he was saying was off the cuff. Improv was not his strong suit. Intimidation however, was something he was quite talented at.

"What're ya gonna do if we say no and throw you in a cage, half-breed?" another changeling asked. A few of them laughed at their fellow changeling's comment.

"I am as powerful as my mother." he said as his hands glowed. Things quickly went quiet. "I spend every single morning, battling Princess Luna for my training. I have never lost a fight against her. So unless you feel strong enough to fight an alicorn, you have five minutes to bring us to Fred."

It was impressive how quickly they faltered. Eyes full of anger. Sharpened spears, ready for battle. A reminder of real power, and they parted for the four to pass. A changeling was leading them into the cave, not saying anything. A few inside tried to look intimidating, but whispers from the outside changelings made them adopt somber looks. A part of Kindle was a bit surprised that actually worked. He was worried he would have to use an exhausting teleportation spell. It would be kept to a plan B.

"H-He's in the throne room, j-just ahead s-sir." the changeling stammered as he pointed to the doors.

"Very well." the prince said. "Wait here."

The doors were opened. The green lighting of the throne room was a bit tacky, but they weren't here to judge the decorations. Their goal was ahead of them. Sitting by the throne was a cage. A human in his mid-twenties was inside. Brown hair and blue eyes. Although in front of him were six changelings in different armor. It was as black as they were, and a fair but intimidating to look at.

"Seems that the rumors of Queen Chrysalis having Elite soldiers were true." Iron said.

"And they're the best of my entire army!" a voice bellowed. The changeling queen emerged from behind the throne. "Come to offer yourselves in exchange for my prisoner?"

"Rarity and Fluttershy are here as member of Hand in Hoof, to check on Fred's well-being." Kindle said. "You and I are going to talk diplomacy. Try and attack us, and I'll turn every southern changeling into a human at the snap of my fingers."

With a stomp of her hoof, the Elites left the room.

"Five minutes." she said. "That is all."

As Rarity and Fluttershy walked over to the cage, Kindle knew he needed to dig deep. Twilight was all ready on her end. He just needed to give Rainbow Dash enough time to get the message to Camp Wineroot. He had to waste as much time as it would take.

Time to talk politics.

Fred was dumbfounded. A unicorn, two pegasi, and a pink-haired human came into the throne room. The changeling that was just outside the entrance, looked terrified. The human was floating. He said something about turning the changelings into humans. Was this the almighty Prince Kindle he had heard of? His outfit was all white, with golden accents. The pegasus stallion was wearing Equestrian armor. A little fancier than the stuff the soldiers at the border wore, but close enough.

The young man initially panicked when two mares approached his cage. All those stories of slave times from his great grandmother still sat in the back of his mind. That initial burst of fear was pushed away quite quickly. Both the unicorn and the pegasus were wearing Hand in Hoof necklaces. He remembered when he was little. A few members of Hand in Hoof had come by his village during a tough winter. They gave out winter clothes for them all to wear. A few years ago, a disease spread to the local fish that reduced the population drastically. Members came by with fish for many villages. He relaxed as they sat down.

"Hello." the yellow pegasus said. "My name's Fluttershy, and this is Rarity. Are you Fred?"

"Yes." he answered.

"King Thorax sent us to check on how you're doing." Rarity said. "Would you like some food and water?"

"Oh yes please." he said quickly. "I haven't had a full meal in days."

Bread slices, a banana, and a carrot were pushed through the gaps in the bars. A flask was pushed through also. He chowed away as the two ponies continued.

"I don't see any immediate injuries." Fluttershy said. "Are you hurt at all?"

"No ma'am." he answered.

"That certainly makes our plan much easier." Rarity said. "Wouldn't you agree darling?"

"Oh yes." Fluttershy said.

The yellow pegasus looked over to the other pegasus. She flapped her left wing a few times. He nodded, and whispered something to the prince. The prince moved his right hand behind his back, and it began to glow a bright yellow. Magic?

"Quick question dear, have you ever been part of a teleportation spell before?" Rarity asked.

"No." he asked. "Why?"

The prince's hand was glowing brighter. Fred couldn't help but notice a queasiness in his stomach. It was light, but it was there. Rarity noticed.

"Deep breaths dear." she said as everything went white.

"That went well." Kindle said as he sat on the pile of ponies alongside Fred.

"Says the one on top of the pile." Twilight groaned from the bottom.

"So the soldiers at Camp Wineroor were a little out of practice with a Dimmenzer maneuver." he said.
"It still worked."

Everyone got out of the pile. All ten of them were accounted for. They were encircled by a number of exhausted unicorns in a clearing in the camp. None of them had been a part of a multi-stage teleportation spell before. General Stillwater stepped towards the prince.

"That was quite impressive your highness." the general said. "A Dimmenzer maneuver hasn't seen use since the Great Griffon War. I'm glad my soldiers were up to the task."

"They had a fine general leading them." Kindle said.

"Fred? Fred?" Thorax shouted in the distance. He was quickly spotted by a very excited human.

"Thorax!" Fred shouted, as he sprinted towards the changeling king.

The two practically collided as they embraced each other. Fred had his face buried in Thorax's neck. Forelegs held him close. Tears of joy could be seen from both.

"I swear I'm never letting you go again, my love." the king said. "My days without you, were a living Tartarus."

"I never want to leave you again." Fred said.

Thorax levitated his fiancé onto his back. They wouldn't stop nuzzling each other as they were off into the sky. Pharynx looked to the prince as he began to flap his wings and hover.

"Thank you Kindle." he said. "I'm glad my brother got his fiancé back."

"It was a team effort." Kindle said. "It was good seeing you."

"You as well." he said as he flew off.

As dedicated as he is in protecting his highness, it was somewhat satisfying for Iron to see Prince Kindle get reprimanded by his own mother. Flying off to dangerous territory with only a bodyguard. Engaging the southern changelings. Forcing the Elements of Harmony to join him in his half-baked plan. The pegasus was later told her voice was heard all the way down in Ponyville. He happened to be standing by a mage when a soundproof barrier was manifested. A few of the unlucky guards had ringing in their ears that lasted the rest of the day.

The only terrifying part was when the prince asked what his punishment would be. Despite the fiery fury in the sun princess' eyes, her mood shifted. She adopted a calm smile. A notion that had made Prince Kindle visibly nervous. She had said she spent the day thinking of a punishment. She even cleared out her entire schedule for the day, just to make sure she could think of something to represent how upset she was. Even the six Elements looked worried for him. Though the worry was moved to themselves when her eyes wandered over their direction.

"Your punishment is simple." she had said. "You shall spend one day with each Element. You are to do as they tell you. Follow their every order as if it was my own. Disobey them, and I shall strip you of your magic."

That was yesterday. The Elements were unsure of the punishment, but Princess Celestia's reasoning was sound. They had saved the kingdom from numerous threats. They risked themselves for a human with something to prove. Now he was going to show his gratitude, whether he liked it or not. They quickly decided among themselves that they would do it in alphabetical order. Applejack was up first today. She had warned the prince to wear something for farm work. He decided would borrow a set of clothes from the humans that worked at the royal farm.

His morning duties still needed to be finished first however. His training bout with his aunt was finished. She was spending this week on flight combat again. He actually managed to get a hand on the book this time before being knocked to the ground. He had day court to attend to, then it was off to Ponyville. He had letters to answer, but those would wait until he got home. For now, the prince was mentally preparing for annoying elites to request ridiculous things. He had just teleported into the throne room.

"Good morning, your highness." Raven said as the two walked up.

"Morning Raven." Prince Kindle said.

"I took the liberty of getting you a pillow to sit on this time." she said with a smile.

"Thank you." he said. "How long is the line today?"

"Oddly, only one group today." she said, unsure of her own answer.

Iron could see the mild concern in the prince's eyes. A single group was not the best sign. Princess Celestia had once told a story of a group of lawyers that combed over the many laws she had written over the centuries. They claimed to have found a loophole that would force her to choose an heir to the throne. One not related to her. Luckily, her adopted niece Princess Cadence had technically fit the bill. The issue was ended quickly. She was grateful to have a solution to the problem. The young prince took a deep breath.

"Raven, please fetch my mother." he said. "I don't like this. I'll keep them busy in the meantime."

"Right away, your highness." Raven said as she quickly trotted to the door.

The group entered right as she left. It was at least a dozen ponies. All of them were wearing iron hoofshoes on their left forehooves. Prince Kindle shot Iron a glance. There were a few notable ponies in the group. Jet Set and Upper Crust leading the group. There was also Fancy Pants, Hoity Toity, and Photo Finish to name a few more. Every pony there was a member of the Canterlot elite. A light brown unicorn in the group was levitating a scroll. All of them were smiling as they looked at the prince. He lightly sighed as they all bowed.

"Greetings, your highness." Jet said.

"Greetings." Prince Kindle said. "How can the crown help you today?"

"It has come to our collective attention, that a law has gone ignored." he continued. "A specific law, written by your mother. Five hundred years ago to be exact. The time it is to be enacted is approaching."

"What law are you talking about?" the prince asked.

"The law pertains to you." he said. "The law takes effect when you turn twenty one. It states that you are to have already chosen a suitor to marry. If a potential suitor is not chosen by your twenty first birthday, one will be chosen for you by the local lords and ladies of Canterlot. As descendants of the aforementioned lords and ladies, that would fall to us."

"So my mother somehow wrote a law about me, before I was even born?" Prince Kindle asked with a raised eyebrow.

"The law says a foal born of Princess Celestia, which would apply to you." he answered.

"When is your birthday again?" Upper asked with a sly grin.

"In a month." the prince groaned.

The urgent galloping of alicorn hooves could be heard.

Chapter 11

Breakfast was finished. Applejack was getting ready to start her farmwork for the day. Prince Kindle would be down from Canterlot soon. He had day court to do, and Celestia knows how annoying those uppity folks can be. If anything, he might be happy to be away from them for a day. She was glad for the human's help today, even if it was a punishment from his mother. She was looking forward to it. Some alicorn-level magic could be useful for certain chores around the farm. The barn desperately needed some repairs. Repairs that would require the building to be levitated. The number of unicorns needed for those jobs were far outside the family budget. Dozens of barrels of ciders needed to be pulled from the cellar. The mare walked to the barn as her siblings chatted away. They were mighty excited when they heard of their extra help today. Especially when they were told of his punishment.

"Maybe we could tell 'im ta give us a million bits!" Applebloom said. "No. A gazillion bits!"

"Applebloom, we ain't makin' the prince give us bits." Applejack said. "Prince Kindle's here fer an honest day's work. Right Mac?"

"Eeeyup." Big Mac said dejectedly. The farm mare rolled her eyes.

"Don't tell me you two were both hopin' ta get rich from this?" she asked.

"Okay, we won't." Applebloom said with a playful smile.

Applejack shook her head. She was glad Princess Celestia had the forethought to specify she was the only one would could order him around today. She loved her family dearly, but sometimes they would let their heads get in the clouds. The three were in the clearing. They approached the barn as they saw a pegasus flying in. Iron Wing, a member of the Royal Guard, with Prince Kindle on his back. The guard landed gracefully, and the prince dismounted. He was wearing boots and overalls. Different from his usual royal clothes. All three bowed.

"Morning Applejack." the prince said.

"Mornin' yer highness." Applejack said. "Ya ready ta work?"

"I'm looking forward to some hard work." he said with a smile. "What's first on our list of things to do?"

"Ya have ta give us a million bits!" Applebloom suddenly piped up.

"Ignore her." Applejack said. "Today we got barn repairs, pullin' cider outta storage, an' lots of apple pickin'. Yer magic's gonna come in might handy."

"Then we better get started." he said as he rubbed his hands.

"I'll be monitoring the perimeter." Iron said. "Small chance of unwanted visitors today."

"Unwanted visitors?" Applejack asked.

"I'll fill you in." the prince said.

"So after she got in the room, Mom read that scroll at least a dozen times." Kindle said as he walked alongside Applejack. "She said she had written the law hundreds of years ago, and barely remembered it. She wanted to get rid of it, but apparently it's wrapped up in at least a dozen other laws that give authority to the descendants of the old lords and ladies of Canterlot. By the time she gets the laws undone, it'll be too late."

"So ya have a month ta find somepony ta marry, or they'll choose one for ya?" she asked.

"Yeah, and the word's already getting around." he answered. "With the Galloping Gala coming up in a couple weeks, things are pretty chaotic right now."

"Ah never liked them rich ponies." the orange mare grumbled. "Ah give ya mah word, no pony's gonna bother ya while yer workin'. Right Mac?"

"Eeeyup." the stallion said with a nod.

"Great." the prince said. "Now what's up first on our chores?"

"This is." Applejack said as she gestured to the barn as they stood at the entrance. "Foundation's been gettin' worse. We have ta levitate the whole thing ta get the posts replaced."

"So I just have to levitate the entire barn?" he asked.

"Long enough fer Mac an' me ta replace the supports gone bad." she answered. "We already detached them from the buildin' this mornin'."

"Okay." he said with a shrug as his hands began to glow.

"Now ah'll understand if ya need help." she said. "Twilight tried a couple years ago, an' barely got it a hoof off the ground."

Kindle said nothing as he closed his eyes. He waved his hands around to feel his magic wrap around the building. When he sensed a full hold, he twisted his hands. The magical grip of the barn began to refine. His energy wrapping more tightly around the infrastructure. When he opened his eyes, the barn now had a translucent outline of yellow, rather than a massive bubble. His palms were parallel to the ground, and by his waist. As he raised his left hand, a low rumbling could be heard. The barn was raising into the air. When his left hand was at level with his head, he rotated it so his fingers pointed up. His right hand was still by his waist, and closed into a fist. He took a deep breath as he looked over to Applejack, who was stunned.

"Alright, I can hold this for two hours tops." he said. "Think you can fix the barn in that time?"

"Y-Yeah." she said.

Applejack and Mac grabbed their replacement posts by the ropes they were attached to, and began to drag them to the barn that floated just above their heads. Kindle watched as they began to work on pulling out the old support posts. Levitating a building was far easier than trying to hold one up with a shield.

The dense forestry of the Apple family farm did make for a bit of a challenge being on patrol. Iron had to watch for movements in the trees, as well as the main entrance. It wasn't any fault of the family. It wasn't a serious concern, just a minor inconvenience for him on patrol. He needed to keep an eye out for unwanted trespassers. His concern was mainly for those he knew were out of place. The occasional Canterlot mare claiming to be passing through. He's only had two approach, but neither entered when they saw him. The prince had been levitating the barn earlier, which certainly got a few eyes on them. A familiar princess was flying up to him.

"Greetings, Princess Twilight." he said.

"Hello Iron." she said. "I thought I sensed some strong magic over here when I saw the barn levitating awhile ago. Kindle I assume?"

"You assume correct." he answered. "He levitated it high enough for Big Mac to walk under. Quite a sight."

"I bet it was." she said. "I would've been here earlier, but I had a letter from Princess Celestia I had to answer. She filled me in on the situation from this morning. I can't believe they're enacting Search of Suitors. It's such a barbaric idea. Forcing somepony- er...somebody to choose who they'll marry."

"Somebody?" he asked.

"Species-inclusive terminology." she answered. "I never thought about how exclusive Ponish can be. I've been learning about it since I joined Hand in Hoof. Everything from scientific measurements, to everyday nouns. So much of our language revolves around ponies. I never thought about it until Kindle inspired me to join Hand in Hoof."

"That's wonderful, your highness. I'm glad you-." Iron was cut off as his eyes caught something quickly approaching the farm entrance. "Excuse me princess."

He flew down to the entrance. His landing cut off an approaching mare. A red unicorn. He vaguely recognized her. She was one of the journalists that tried to get a lunch interview with Prince Kindle shortly after he was revealed. His landing cut off her attempt to enter the farm.

"Halt!" he shouted with an air of authority. "State your name and business."

"Big Scoop. Writer for the Canterlot Times." she answered. "I'm here to speak to Prince Kindle about the Search of Suitors being announced, and his opinion on the matter. My sources tell me he's here."

"Prince Kindle is unavailable at this time." he said.

"Even for me, handsome?" the mare asked as she batted her eyes at him.

"Yes." he said bluntly.

"When ah said we could eat lunch when the cider barrels were pulled out, ah didn't mean ya had ta teleport them all at once." Applejack said.

"But Kindle hungry." Kindle said.

The simple answer got a snort of out the farmer. The two were sitting under an apple tree. The prince had teleported to the castle to get lunch. A black rose salad for Applejack, fish with veggies for him, and a hayburger for Iron. The guard kept his head on a swivel as the other two chatted away.

"Ah still can't thank ya enough." she said. "Black roses are real expensive. No tellin' how much this salad would cost."

"We have a good collection of them in the royal farm." he said. "Most of the rich ponies in Canterlot can only afford to have that dish a few times a year. I think their heads would explode if they found out you're eating it for free."

"That just made this salad mighty tasty." she said.

The two chuckled as they ate. It seemed they shared a distaste for the so-called elites. It wouldn't be long into their lunch before a certain line of questioning came up.

"Yer highness, I was curious about this Suitor Searchin' thang." she asked. "If ya feel okay talkin' 'bout it."

"Sure." Kindle said between bites of fish. "Whatcha wanna know?"

"What happens when ya do pick a pony?" Applejack asked.

"Let's say for example: I choose to marry you." he said. "The Search of Suitors is immediately null and void. Mom would announce our relationship. Some of the old laws say that she chooses the date of our wedding. Once married, you would be crowned as a princess. Your authority would be just below my mother and Aunt Luna. Which would allow you to have a say in laws getting passed, since princes don't have legal authority on things like that. This would also mean you get access to the Royal Treasury.

Which basically means you have a near limitless amount of bits to spend. Not to mention the possibility of you being made immortal, so we could live together forever. I believe that covers everything."

"Sounds real stressful." she said. "Ah wouldn't mind the endless bits though."

"It is extremely stressful." he said. "Especially when all the ponies interested in you aren't even your type. Stuck-up mares raised by rich parents who never had to work hard in their life. Not exactly what I'm looking for."

"Lookin' for a hard worker?" she asked with a playful smirk.

"Yeah." Kindle answered as he watched Iron stretched his wings, which exposed some of his muscles that were once fondled by the prince. "I want a strong pony. One that knows a hard day's work, and has the muscle to show for it."

"Really?" she asked.

"Can you keep a secret?" he asked, which got a quick nod in return. "My perfect pony would be muscular. When I cuddle with them at night, I want to let my little human fingers drift across the body they sculpted over years of hard work and dedication. Muscle that can make me feel as safe as can be when they wrap their forelegs around me."

Applejack was doing her best not to blush as the two finished their lunch. Prince Kindle had described his perfect pony: her! Hard-working. Muscular. Not one of them uppity folk on the mountain. Was he intentional? Was it his way of trying to admit he liked her? Was it just for her body? The questions swirled in her mind as they walked towards the barn. They barely knew each other. Her granny said that royalty used to just claim something as theirs by just saying it, lovers included. It was bit much to think about at the moment.

"Alright Applejack, what's next?" Prince Kindle asked.

"O-Oh!" she said, quickly pulled out of her thoughts. "Apple pickin'. Mac's got the southern orchard started. We can work on the western side, then work to 'im."

"Sounds good." he said. "I'll grab the baskets. I'll meet you there."

The human walked into the barn. The orange mare quickly turned to walk to the western orchard. As she walked, she tried to clear her mind. Prince Kindle's description of his perfect mare kept repeating in his head. There weren't many ponies that matched the description of the muscular, hard-working type. Only ones she could think of were the Royal Guard, Big Mac, and herself. It was only herself and the prince's bodyguard Iron Wing around when he said it. So either he was trying to give her a hint, or the prince was secretly gushing over his own...

"N-Nah." she said to herself. "A guard an' a hoomin?"

"I think I got enough baskets." the prince said as he caught up. "Think I should get more?"

"N-No." she said, barely glancing at the levitating baskets.

"Are you okay Applejack?" Prince Kindle asked. "You've been spaced out as soon as we finished lunch."

"I-It's mah neck." she lied. "Ah slept funny on the airship the other day. Been sore for a hot minute."

"Well that won't do." he said. "Can't have you hurtin' on my account."

Before she could protest to whatever the prince planned to suggest, the baskets were placed down in front of her. Her path was blocked. A light woosh of air was heard, then a weight was felt on her back. She hadn't felt a weight like that since she took a lost human foal back to his village years ago. Prince Kindle was on her back! It clearly wasn't the first time he had ridden a pony. His legs had a decent hold on her sides. She felt a hand rub against each side of her neck.

"I can feel a lot of stress." he said. "Good thing I had the royal masseurs teach me a few things a couple years back. I can fix this up if you want."

"S-S-Sure." Applejack said as her face got as red as the apples she grew.

"You should probably lay down." he said. "This might take a minute."

The farmer followed the suggestion. Her legs pointed forwards as she sat on the ground. With the comparatively small muscles humans had, she wasn't expecting much at first. Despite the attempts from Aloe and Lotus over the years, they could never get these farm muscles destressed. So her earlier lie about her neck wasn't a full lie. Applejack had simply accepted her stressed muscles as a consequence of farm life. It just so happened to be the best diversion from telling the prince her true thoughts.

"Alright." Prince Kindle said. "Here we go."

As the prince's fingers pushed in, the orange mare's reaction was almost immediate. Those human fingers got right in, and began to work their way around. It was like they were digging in as deep as they would push. When the prince began to move his fingers around, it was felt instantly. Her neck muscle had done something it hadn't done in awhile. It relaxed. She felt it give as he worked it her entire neck. The feeling of her muscle being this relaxed for the first time in years. It was near euphoric. Once the fingers had done their thing, the prince shifted to using both hands to push, pull, and rub her neck in all sorts of directions. It was one of the greatest feelings she ever had.

"How's that?" Prince Kindle asked.

"Perfect." Applejack cooed as she laid her head down.

"Awesome." he said. "The masseurs taught me that ponies get a lot of stress in their necks. Human fingers are a lot better at getting into those stress spots and-."

"The rest." she interrupted.

"Pardon?" he asked.

"Massage the rest." she said.

"Well, you give the orders." he said. "Plus, it beats picking apples."

Prince Kindle scooted backwards, then began to work where her neck and back met. Applejack knew her siblings would give her an earful for taking advantage of the prince. Especially when she had lectured them on not doing that. Right now though?

She was too relaxed to care.

"A late day bath always feel just right." Kindle said. "Certainly after a day like that."

It was sunset. A hard day's work was done. The prince's time at the farm had come to a close. Despite it being a punishment, it was a little fun. Certainly a better outcome than dealing with the Canterlot elites. He had thanked Applejack for the farm work. Her brother thanked him for all his help. Her little sister still tried to ask for million bits. The orange mare in question was blushing when she looked at him. He chalked it up to her being too embarrassed about the royal assistance. Then again, she had been blushing since he gave her the massage after lunch. Probably wasn't ready for getting that relaxed so quick. Not her fault. Human masseurs was a profession not seen since slave times. The knowledge had fallen to small notes in the historical texts, as well as the royal masseurs.

The Apple family had offered to let him stay for dinner, but he had declined. There was a fish sandwich calling his name at the dining hall. After dinner, he got washed up. Now he just had to answer his letters, then he could get some sleep. A crystal lantern on his desk was fully charged, and he was ready. Iron exited the bathroom as the prince sat down. Steam came off his body in the cool air. Kindle felt his cheeks heat up as he looked to his desk.

"That bath was just what I needed." the pegasus said. "My armor will look nice when dried too. Thank you for letting me use your bath, your highness."

"No problem Iron." he said. "Now to answer these letters."

The prince picked up the first letter. It looked to be from Manehattan. He had a feeling who it was.

Dear Prince Kindle,

It seems the Manehattan University library has already begun planning for an expansion of their royalty section. Given the sheer number of books written when Princess Luna returned, I understand the desire to be ahead of the curve for once. With the trend of older mares dating younger human stallions, I wonder how many adult stories will be written of you. The Royal Sisters each have many an adult story of them made. Though I'm sure this is something you already know. If not, this is definitely an awkward way to find out.

I wonder how the royal life is treating you now that you're public. The first human with a position of royalty. Hopefully the pressure isn't too much for you. At least you have a mother and aunt that know a thing or two about the royal life. Though I wouldn't blame you for rejecting all that. You were raised in a human village just outside Ponyville. No offense to your mother, but she doesn't know what it's like to grow up being looked down upon. Maybe your early struggles give you a perspective she doesn't have. Needless to say, I do wish the best for you. Writing to you has been really fun.

Sincerely,

Sharp Write

Kindle smiled. Sharp had been the only one to send him letters from Manehattan. The lack of attention was enjoyable. It meant he got to be more personal with his letters. Though this stupid Search of Suitors meant he could kiss that goodbye. Her letter was put in the response pile. The next few letters were mostly threats. Hateful messages. He barely glanced over them. Any serious threats would be handled by the Royal Guard. A few of them were tossed into the threats pile. The next letter made his eyes go wide. it was sealed with a kiss. Iron noticed.

"Shall I retrieve a guard to read it for you?" he asked.

"No." the prince said. "I just need to hope she isn't as horny as she was in the last letter."

Dear Prince Kindle,

I couldn't wait to write you another letter. I had this one sent by a royal escort. I just needed to let my heart speak to you once more. As I sip my wine, I fantasize about us in bed together. Embracing each other as a fireplace crackles. Using my bodyheat to keep you warm. A few of my friends have already taken to rutting the local human stallions. They tell me to be weary, as humans can be fragile little things. I promise you. When we are together, I will use every spell I know to keep your body safe. I will never allow my flanks to be the end of your pelvis.

Yours to be,
Vieille Fleur
The Duchess of Prance

"Eugh." Kindle groaned as he tossed the letter into the threats pile.

"I presume it was just as bad as before?" Iron asked.

"This time she wanted to detail how she'll protect my pelvis from being shattered by her flanks." he answered.

"If it wasn't for her obsessive tendencies in the span of two letters, I would call it romantic." the guard said.

"I call it putting her on a watchlist." the prince said. "With that, I just got a few more letters to go through, then bedtime."

Dinnertime was usually a time where the family could chat about their day. Applejack found herself unable to breathe a word. As Applebloom talked about hanging out with her friends, she could only think about Prince Kindle describing his perfect pony. When Mac mentioned how happy he was to finally get the barn fixed, the massage was the only thing on her mind. He had described a mare like her as his perfect pony. He told her what would happen if they were together. He even gave her a massage. The likes of which she never experienced in her life. The two had spent a day together. She had never spent any time with him before that. How could she be his perfect pony? She was the Element of Honesty, and there wasn't a single lie out of his mouth today.

These were thoughts she needed to push out of her head. She had brushed her teeth, and made sure Applebloom did the same. It was time to get the filly to bed. All she needed was a bedtime story, then Applejack could get some sleep of her own.

"Alright." she said. "What kinda story ya want tonight?"

"I was hopin' for a story about ya becomin' a princess." Applebloom said.

"W-Wha?" Applejack asked in shock.

"Well, Sweetie Belle told me about ta Search ah Suitors the adults are doin' fer Prince Kindle." she answered. "She said that the pony he marries becomes a princess. Ah wondered what Princess Applejack would be like."

"Hmm." the orange mare pondered for a moment. "First, she'd move her family into ta castle. Never havin' ta work again."

"Really?" Applebloom asked.

"Yep." she answered. "Second, she'd let her little sister wear Pa's cowpony hat, since she would have ta wear a crown from now on."

"Wow." her little sister said. "Princess Applejack sounds great. Imagine if ya did marry Prince Kindle."

"It's real fun ta think about." Applejack said. "Especially with this 'Suitor Search' hulabaloo. A lotta ponies are thinkin' 'bout it."

"Ah think ya'd make a great princess." she said.

"Aw shucks." the mare said. "Well, ah hereby declare ya get some sleep."

"Yer highness." Applebloom said with a nod.

Applejack pulled up the covers before she left the room. Despite her little sister's joking nature, it was something resting on her mind. Becoming a princess would certainly be interesting. No telling how much she could change if she reciprocated Prince Kindle's feelings. As she walked into her room, the question sat clear in her mind. Could she love a human? She never looked down on them. Shoot, Granny Smith had told them stories of when she helped protect Nebel when he was being hunted by slave catchers. Their family was one of the reasons humans were freed from slavery.

As she laid in bed, a thought crossed her mind. How could one even cuddle up with a human? Her pillow was about as long as the prince was tall. She pulled the pillow out from under her head. She held it between her forelegs. Small, but not too small. Her mind replaced the pillow with a smiling Prince Kindle. She quickly moved the pillow back under her head as she blushed. Maybe she needed some time to think more about this. This was a once in a lifetime opportunity. Becoming a princess. Living forever. More bits than she would ever need.

Maybe it was worth at least keeping the idea in the back of her mind. Princess Applejack. Wife to Prince Kindle. That would make Princess Celestia her mother-in-law. Twilight would become her cousin. The thought of her entire family coming from all over to watch her get married made her smile. The thought of Rarity trying to get her into a wedding dress made her chuckle.

Maybe she could visit Prince Kindle tomorrow when he was with Fluttershy. A few muscle flexes to scare off those uppity ponies sounded like a real good idea.

Chapter 12

Raven walked alongside her highness and the future Royal Husband. They were walking down the hallway towards the dining hall. The princess looked quite nervous.

"Perhaps I should attend morning court in place of Kindle." said a worried Princess Celestia. "Maybe I should disregard his punishment altogether and keep him in the castle. Increasing his guards needs to be considered."

"Your highness?" Raven asked. "May I be honest?"

"If it gets my fiancé to relax, please do." Ken said.

"Prince Kindle has shown he knows how to take care of himself." she said. "On top of that, Iron Wing has bodyguard training. If you allow him to handle the situation without you, it could show whether or not he's ready for the stresses of royalty."

"You're right Raven." the princess sighed. "A mother always worries about their young. Thank you for your wise words."

"You are most welcome, your highness." Raven said.

"Now I believe you have a morning court to assist with, and I have pancakes awaiting." she said.

"If I gallop, I'll still make it before the prince." the mare said.

"Allow me to teleport you." Celestia said. "It's the least I can do after your helpful advice."

With a glow of her highness' horn, Raven's vision went white. She found herself in the throne room as her vision cleared. A few of the guards in the room already looked exasperated. Murmurs outside the doors made her wince as she looked over to one of the guards by the entrance.

"Is it bad?" she asked.

"Worse." he said. "Haven't seen a line like this since the last tax hike. At least seventy individual cases. Easy guess what they're all here for."

As if on cue, Prince Kindle teleported into the center of the throne room alongside his bodyguard. Raven trotted over with a smile on her face.

"Good morning, your highness." she said.

"Morning Raven." he said. "I had a feeling that teleporting into the room again would be a good idea."

"With seventy cases awaiting you, I agree." she said.

"Do we know how many are here to 'profess their love'?" he asked with a groan.

"Most of them probably." she said.

"This is not how I wanted my morning to go." he said. "I was so close to getting the book from Aunt Luna this morning. She said my punishment for failure this week is cleaning all of the armor for both the Royal Guard and Night Guard. I won't get to Fluttershy until noon at this rate. I wish I could make a ruling on these mares not using day court as a chance to woo me."

"Hmm." she pondered. "An Equestrian prince cannot make permanent laws. However, I believe you are allowed to make royal decrees that carry the same legal weight. Although these can be immediately struck down by any princess in the line of succession."

"I doubt my mother, aunt, or cousins will strike down me wanting to make day court a little more peaceful for myself." he said as he playfully adopted an official-looking pose. "New decree! Day court is not a dating service!"

"There is some paperwork to be filled out, but I can fetch that while you handle the real cases." she said.

"Great!" he said. "Would you like the honors of kicking out the unwanted ones?"

"It would be my pleasure." she said.

Raven gleefully trotted to the door. The first royal decree by a prince of Equestria, and she got to enact it! Okay, the first one made by an Equestrian prince she liked. She was mostly excited for being able to yell at snobbish mares that think they can flirt their way to royalty.

With breakfast finished, Fluttershy was going over her list of things to do today as she walked about her yard. With Prince Kindle coming to help, she wondered what would be more important to handle first. Feeding the animals wasn't needed today, as their feeders were quite full. Although a trip to the human village was certainly in order. With fall coming upon them, the humans usually got sick around that time. Poor things couldn't take the cold all that well. She knew Rarity was hard at work, putting together all the winter clothes she could for them. Twilight, Bon Bon, and Lyra were working on getting the humans homes ready for winter.

"Hey Fluttershy!" a voice called to her that brought her out of her thoughts. She looked over to see her friend.

"Hi Applejack." she said. "Nice to see you."

"Nice ta see ya too." Applejack said. "Ya ready fer Prince Kindle comin' today?"

"Oh yes." she answered. "He'll be helping me with the human village today. After I saw him levitate your barn yesterday, I figured he could handle a few humans with the sniffles. He must have been very helpful."

"Yeah." the farmer said as she lightly blushed.

"Is everything alright?" she asked.

"Ah gotta be honest wit ya." the orange mare said. "Prince Kindle had a...close moment wit me yesterday."

"Close?" Fluttershy asked.

"Yeah." she answered. "Fer lunch, he got me a black rose salad from his family's royal garden."

"That's the most expensive salad in the world!" the pegasus said in shock.

"That wasn't ta close part." she said. "While we were eatin', we talked about this Suitor Searchin' mess. He told me about his perfect pony."

"He did?" Fluttershy asked in a whisper.

Applejack had never looked so...nervous before. Blushing and whispering in ways the pegasus had never seen in the years she knew her.

"Fluttershy...he described me." the mare said. "A hard-workin' mare, with muscles ta show fer it."

"W-What?" Fluttershy asked in shock.

"That's not all." Applejack said with a nod. "After lunch, ah complained about a sore neck. He gave me a massage right then an' there. Aloe and Lotus couldn't get me as relaxed as he did."

"Do you think he'll choose you as his suitor?" she asked.

"Ah don't know." Applejack said. "Ah do know that a lotta mares are gonna be lookin' fer 'im today. Newspapers called it 'A chance ta become a princess'. Ah figured ah could keep them ponies away from y'all."

The flapping of wings had caught their attention. The two turned to see Prince Kindle and his bodyguard Iron Wing. Fluttershy looked over to see her friend still blushing as his highness approached.

The cloud of fire watched Prince Kindle from the nearby cover of the Everfree Forest. Though her anger burned bright, she had to keep her composure. In her short time with the king, her power had risen significantly. She knew she had what it would take to destroy him then and there. As he stood and conversated with two Elements of Harmony, she pondered to herself.

"One blast." she thought. "One blast, and you could be wiped from this world."

She took a deep breath, and the cloud of fire lessened in intensity. Despite the temptation, she couldn't do it. Not yet. Years of planning could not go to waste over such a simple form of revenge. It would be too merciful for him. Too quick. She continued to watch him as the four disappeared in a flash of light. Teleportation. It was time to leave. Sister was most likely finished with her feeding by now.

The cloud of fire darted and weaved through the trees of the forest in a blur. A lack of a physical body was made up for in speed. It was mere moments before she came upon the ruins. Burrowing through a pinhole between bits of rubble got her to the darkness below. As she predicted, Sister was already finished. The black crystals the king conjured were no longer aglow, and had crumbled to dust.

"Aaah." the dark blue cloud sighed. "I feel far better than I have in a long time."

"With the help of our dear king here, we'll be powerful enough to move forward with our plan by Nightmare Night." the fire cloud said.

"Why wait so long Sister?" she asked. "We could destroy him now!"

"It's not about destroying him, little sister." the fire cloud said. "I want him to suffer for what he did to me. I want him to watch his world fall apart as I relish in his pain. He doesn't deserve a quick death. I want him to feel what I've felt for twenty years. Only when that happens, will we destroy him."

"Then after the prince has been defeated, Equestria will face our wrath." she said. "I can hardly wait for the day we have enough power to conjure our own physical bodies."

"We must bide our time Sister." the fire cloud said. "Just a little longer."

Kindle took a deep breath. He wasn't exhausted, but he had just finished his tenth teleportation. The past several hours had been spent with him going back and forth from the village to Fluttershy's cottage to pick up medicine. He also had to tend to the animals here and there. Applejack tagging along really made thing easier for Iron. Having only one bridge into the human village made thing easier too. Any pony that wasn't a Hand in Hoof member wasn't getting in. Much to the annoyance of those who wanted to flirt with the prince.

"Here's another ten bottles of cold medicine Fluttershy." he said.

"Oh thank you, your highness." she said as the prince levitated them into a storage hut.

"Do you think you need any more?" he asked.

"This should be enough for the village." she said. "Did you remember to feed the bears?"

"Harry, Larry, and Barry have all been fed their fish for lunch." he said.

"Wonderful!" she said. "Perhaps we should get some lunch ourselves. Though with every mare on the other side of the bridge staring you down, our choices are limited."

"Ya can make somethin' if ya still know the firepit grill works!" a voice said. Kindle turned around towards the bridge. A light skinned human, and she had long, deep brown hair.

"Aunt Sunny!" he said as he wrapped his arms around her.

"Been way too long Kindle." Aunt Sunny said.

"Fluttershy, this is my Aunt Sunny." the prince said as he turned around. "She helped Dad raise me."

"Oh we know each other." Fluttershy said. "Your aunt's the village leader."

"I thought Gunk was still the leader." he said.

"Not since the rich mare he worked for promoted him from servant, to husband." his aunt said.

"How's Sparky?" he asked.

"Doing great." she answered. "He's at Sugarcube Corner. Pinkie Pie's hosting her first birthday party for a human. All the young ones are having fun there."

"That's great." he said.

"I got some fish cookin' and I'm sure the cook's got some spare veggies." she said. "I'll get you both-."

"Miss Sunny!" a human yelled as he ran up, out of breath.

"Kurt, I thought you were at the party." she said.

"Iron Hoof Clan showed up, and surrounded the place!" Kurt said raggedly. "I ran out to get help. Nearly got stomped when I got out the door."

"With Lyra, Bon Bon, and Rarity in Canterlot negotiating our winter supplies there aren't many ponies we can ask for help." Aunt Sunny said. "I don't like the idea of those brutes being around the young ones for too long."

"I'll handle it." Kindle said.

"I can't have ya run against the Iron Hoof Clan Kindle." she said. "Prince or not."

"Fluttershy, let Iron know I left." he said. "I'm not letting my village wait for me."

Pinkie was having a great start to her day. She got to host her first hoomin birthday party! A little girl was turning seven. The Cakes knew she wanted to do this a lot more often, and she needed to get her practice for hoomin socializing. She also needed to practice saying 'human' instead of 'hoomin', but that could be dealt with later. It was nice of the Cakes to get the local hoomin village to let them host a birthday party at Sugarcube Corner. The little ones were enjoying all the snacks and games the pink mare had worked hard on.

Then they came.

The Iron Hoof Clan showed up, and surrounded the place. Pinkie had watched the Cakes deal with the odd member here and there in the past. They would be mad when the young hoomins got free cupcakes. Grumpily stomping with their iron hoofshoes. The three ponies never had to deal with them getting mad over the store being closed for a hoomin's birthday before. One of the adult hoomins ran to get help earlier. The Cakes went out to try and talk the protestors down. She was keeping the young hoomins entertained. They were enjoying some cheese and chicken pizza at the moment. She decided to see how handling the clan members was going. She cracked the front door, and listened in.

"Kick out those beady-eyed monkeys, or we'll do it ourselves!" a stallion shouted. "I don't care if they're all foals!"

"You touch a single foal in there, and I'll smack you so hard my hoof will be your new cutiemark!" Mrs. Cake shouted back.

Alright. Not as bad as she thought it would be. Mrs. Cake had a scary voice when she needed it. Just about all of the clan members were unicorns, and they weren't budging from where they stood. As for how long she could keep them back, that was a question Pinkie didn't know the answer to. While she was told fending off the Iron Hoof Clan was something she would have to do, she didn't think it would happen during a birthday party. As Rarity would probably say: have they no shame?

"What is the meaning of this?" a familiar voice bellowed from above.

Looking through the glass of the door, Pinkie saw everypony beginning to bow. Prince Kindle came into view as he landed by the Cakes. The angry clan members that surrounded the store entrance seemed to lose a bit of their bravado. The stallion that shouted earlier stepped forward after he stood up.

"W-W-We-." he stammered before being levitated over to the prince.

"You have ten seconds to leave before you and your little group spend the next year as humans." the prince growled.

A hush fell over the racist group. The stallion the prince threatened was dropped, and he galloped away as fast as his hooves could go. The rest quickly followed. One little visit from a prince, and it was over.

"Are you alright, your highness?" Iron Wing asked as he flew in.

"I'm fine Iron." he answered. "Are you two okay?"

"We're fine, your highness." Mrs. Cake said. "I was far more worried about what they would've done if they got inside. Every foal from the human village was in there."

"Perhaps we should stay then." Fluttershy said as she walked up. "Just to be safe."

"The more the merrier!" Mr. Cake said.

Kindle was kind of glad Fluttershy wanted to spend the rest of their day at the party. Gave him a chance to keep an eye out for more Iron Hoof Clan members. Though with his bodyguard at the door, he enjoyed the party. He never got to have a party like this at the village growing up. Pinkie Pie knew how to host a party. Now here he was, eating cake with Fluttershy and Applejack at his sides.

"The royal baker could learn a thing or two from this place." he said.

"They sure could." Applejack said.

"Pinkie's a wonderful baker." Fluttershy said.

"Although I hope I don't have to keep making appearances every time those racists want to crash the party." he said. "Maybe Hand in Hoof could handle it?"

"I'll make sure to bring it up at the next Hand in Hoof meeting." she said. "It's in four days. Twilight's taking a turn at hosting. Having more members at events for humans might be for the better."

"I can't thank you enough." the prince said. "With this Search of Suitors nonsense going on, having ponies like you helping out makes all the difference."

"R-Really?" she asked.

Kindle's eyes glanced at Iron. The stallion that watched over him for years. The stallion that knew how to care for humans as well as any Hand in Hoof member. A stallion whose wings could calm even the most stressed of humans. Something he knew from personal experience.

"Yeah." he answered. "In fact: I hope whoever I end up marrying after all this is over, cares about humans as much as you do."

"W-W-Wow..." Fluttershy trailed off.

"Your highness." Iron said as he trotted up. "It's sunset."

"Amazing how time flies." the prince said as he stood up. "I guess we better get back to the castle."

"Leaving so soon?" Mrs. Cake asked as she walked by.

"Mom gets antsy when I stay out late." he said.

"As a mother, I know how she feels." she chuckled. "I hope you have a great night your highness. Pinkie tells me you'll be here tomorrow to help with deliveries."

"That I will." he said. "I hope you all have a nice night."

With that, Kindle made a quiet exit. He mounted Iron, then they were off into the sky. Mom's punishment was a bit more fun than he expected. Although today's interaction with a certain hate group would have to be kept to minimal details. Last thing he wanted was more guards around.

The rest of the party was hard for Fluttershy to focus on. She and Applejack had watched the prince leave in silence. The two simply stared at each other as they collectively processed the prince's comment. He had openly told them how he wanted his future wife to be a pony that cared about humans. He used her as a reference. Applejack had told her that was how the prince talked about his feelings for a strong mare. What did it mean? Was the prince falling for the both of them? Neither knew how to feel about it. Perhaps he was exploring the idea of multiple wives. It was a bit much to think about. The two agreed to talk more about it tomorrow. Clearly, the prince was showing interest in more than one pony.

Now she was at home. Fluttershy knew that she had to get some rest. All the animals had taken themselves to bed. Even Angel was fast asleep. The only one awake, was her roommate. A roommate that Princess Celestia had asked her to spend time with. As she walked into her living room, she saw the draconequus draped across her couch.

"Oh how I wish I could've spent time with my nephew today." Discord whined.

"Sorry." she said, her mind elsewhere.

"Are you okay?" he asked. "Usually, you would've said something like 'Princess Celestia said no interaction until I think you're ready'."

"Are you aware of the Search of Suitors?" she asked.

"Oh I always keep my ear to the ground about things like that." he said as he picked his ear up off the floor and plopped it back on his head.

"I think Prince Kindle wants to pick both Applejack and I as his suitors." she said.

"Two wives would certainly break tradition." he said with a smirk.

"Applejack told me he desired a strong pony with muscle yesterday." Fluttershy said. "Today, he told me that he wants a pony that cares about humans as much as I do."

There was a moment of silence as the spirit of chaos rubbed his chin. With the time he had spent with Kindle, he knew the prince better than most. Perhaps he was a good source of information on something like this. A smile crept across his face.

"Embrace it!" Discord suddenly shouted.

"W-What?" she asked in shock.

"I know my nephew." he said. "Whenever he wants to talk about his feelings for a pony, the pony in question is usually nearby. Also, if you and Applejack show interest, that's less uppity ponies for him to worry about."

"You do have a point." she said.

"I also think that Princess Fluttershy has a good ring to it." he said.

"As much as I love the idea of becoming a princess, I'm not sure if I could handle that." she said.

"I think all you need is some practice." the draconequus said as he snapped his fingers.

Discord disappeared in a puff of smoke. The smoke he disappeared in, swirled around. It rapidly imploded into the shape of a human. When it lifted, it was Prince Kindle! Although he looked a little different. He had Discord's eyes.

"Tada!" Prince Kindle said with Discord's voice. "You can practice on me!"

"Practice what?" she asked.

"Talking, hugging, kissing, and anything else we can think of." he said with a grin.

"K-Kissing?" she asked nervously.

Despite the hectic tone the Search of Suitors had set upon Equestria, Celestia was glad dinnertime was still unchanged. A time for the family to be together. A time of calm. A chance to discuss their day. Since keeping her son a secret was no longer needed, suppertime chats were far more enjoyable. In the time Kindle had been out in the world, late night fights had become non-existent. He would talk about the things he had done in Canterlot. He would go on about being in Ponyville. He had even brought up the idea of using one of the faster airships to visit neighboring towns. In short, a small part of Celestia was glad her son was no longer a secret.

"How was your time with Fluttershy today?" she asked.

"It was nice." Kindle answered. "After getting medicine delivered, we spent the rest of the day at Sugarcube Corner. The Cakes are starting to host parties for the little ones from the village."

"Pinkie Pie's probably going crazy over the number of humans she can have birthday parties for." Ken chuckled.

"She already has Kurt's party planned for next week." he said. "Hand in Hoof plans on being there for security."

"Security?" Luna asked.

"Well, to be honest there was a small incident today." he said sheepishly.

"Is everypony alright?" Celestia asked.

"Oh yes." her son answered quickly. "Some members of the Iron Hoof Clan showed up to protest the party. I told them to leave, and that was the end of it."

"Do you think we should dispatch members of the Royal Guard for the next party?" she asked.

"Fluttershy said Hand in Hoof will take care of security, but I'll write to Lyra." he said. "I'll let her know that I can have Royal Guards at the next party if needed. Though with almost half the membership being Elements of Harmony, I doubt any of those racists are dumb enough to try anything."

"This Iron Hoof Clan is beginning to be a problem." Luna said.

"It's my fault." Celestia said. "They formed shortly after the Nebel Incident. They wanted nothing more than to try and keep humans underhoof in society. With a majority of them being affluent ponies that control a lot of the workforce, they've been accomplished in some aspect. I should force them to disband."

"I say if the rich ponies want a little group to feel important, let them." Kindle said. "While their past transgressions are violent, I've seen a change since I became public. After the incident with the arsonist, attacks on humans have dropped significantly. This little protest at the bakery today ended as soon as I showed up. They're realizing that the humans have a leader with magic. That alone terrifies them. It took a week for them to get so desperate, they pulled out a law from five hundred years ago."

"While that is true son, it doesn't change the issue of employment opportunities." Ken said.

"Perhaps I should enact a human employment law?" Celestia suggested.

"I'm not sure that forcing ponies to hire humans would work long term." Kindle said.

"What would you suggest?" she asked.

"Well, let's look at the skillset of your average human." he said. "The royal masseurs alone prove that there are skills that humans have over ponies. The royal chef has had success in the past getting humans trained in the kitchen. Small hands made for intricate dishes. I don't think it's a matter of employment opportunities. I think it's more an issue of getting my fellow humans trained in relevant skillsets. Perhaps we should look into having the royal chef and royal masseurs document their training processes. At least so we can have something for a group like Hand in Hoof to use for training humans en masse. They have a far better rapport with humans than us, so it would be best to take advantage of that."

Celestia smiled and nodded. Her son was passionate about this. She would have to make sure that both the royal chef and royal masseurs could make her son's request happen. He was starting to sound like a prince with how he had just talked about the subject.

She was so proud.

Chapter 13

Pinkie was confused. Last night only had the usual amount of deliveries listed. Two cakes and a dozen cupcakes for the retirement home. Then there was the cupcakes for the school. A few more cake deliveries dotted around Ponyville. Now she sees Mrs. Cake going over what seems to be a new record for the most delivery orders for one day.

"It looks like nearly every mare in Ponyville ordered a cake today." she said. "I'm glad Prince Kindle is helping you today Pinkie."

"Me too!" Pinkie said as she looked at the list. "These will take all day, even with his help."

"It's my fault." Mr. Cake said as he walked up. "After the party yesterday, I thought letting it slip to the press that the prince was working for us today would be good for business."

"Well it worked dear." Mrs. Cake said. "A little too well though."

"We better get bakin' if we wanna get these orders ready in time!" Pinkie chimed.

"You're right." she said. "Honey, you go open up and run the counter. Pinkie, you start on the delivery orders. I'll help, and I'll also handle walk in orders."

Pinkie and Mrs. Cake went into the kitchen. While the pink pony usually handled things back here herself, today was different. The number of orders was extremely high. She wondered what other exciting things would happen today.

"What do you mean Prince Kindle isn't here?" a mare asked.

"Ma'am, we just opened." Mr. Cake said. "His highness won't be here until we start deliveries, which isn't for another couple hours."

"But I must confess my love for him now!" she whined. "My heart yearns for the human prince!"

"No, my heart yearns for him!" another mare shouted. "You just want that princess title!"

"I'm his true love!" a third mare shouted. "You just want to live in the castle!"

"Oh it is on!" the first mare shouted.

It wasn't long before a flurry of magic blasts and punching hooves was heard. Pinkie and Mrs. Cake dropped their baking, and ran out into the main room. The three fighting mares were dragged out of the bakery.

"If you're gonna fight, do it outside!" Mrs. Cake yelled.

The three mares ignored her, as they were still fighting. She shook her head, and the two bakers went back to their work. Mrs. Cake looked back to her husband before closing the kitchen door.

"I pray that is not a sign of the day ahead." she said.

Applejack watched as the three mares continued to fight over Prince Kindle. Her friend Pinkie was so focused on getting them out of the place, she didn't notice the farmer right there outside the bakery. It was fine. She was waiting for Fluttershy to show up. The two still needed to talk about last night. She was grateful that Mac was willing to work the farm himself for a little while. The chance to become a princess was pretty important. Prince Kindle's week-long punishment was her only real opportunity to see this through.

"Oh my. So violent." Fluttershy said as she trotted up to her friend.

"Hey." Applejack said quietly. "Glad ya could make it."

"After last night, I really do think we needed to talk again." she said.

"Agreed." the orange mare said. "Ah think we need ta decide if we wanna be with Prince Kindle or not."

"After talking with Discord last night, I've been considering it." the pegasus said. "He even coached me on how to talk to Prince Kindle."

"Ah also think we shouldn't tell our friends." Applejack said. "No tellin' how they'd react."

"Especially Twilight." Fluttershy said. "Those two do not get along."

"Yer tellin' me." the orange mare chuckled. "Ah remember those two bickerin' like brother an' sister back when we went ta fight Queen Chrysalis. Ah think her head would explode if she found out about you an' me."

The two shared a laugh. The thought of their princess friend reacting to the prince she can't stand proposing to both of them, was admittedly funny. Although the shared laugh was short. The main issue was still at hoof. Neither knew how to handle a prince being in love with them.

"I know you said we shouldn't tell our friends, but maybe Rarity can help." Fluttershy suggested. "She dated Prince Blueblood, so maybe she could give us pointers."

"Pointers on what?" Rarity asked.

The farmer and pegasus nearly jumped out of their skins when they heard their friend's voice. The two were so engrossed in their own conversation, they didn't hear her walk up.

"Land sakes Rares, ya can't sneak up on ponies like that!" Applejack said.

"Apologies." she said. "I was walking to the human village to get measurements for more winter coats. I never see you two out and about this early, so I thought I would come over."

"Well, we're glad you came." Fluttershy said. "We discovered something about Prince Kindle, and you're the pony to talk to about the specific situation we're in."

"I'm not sure what you mean." she said.

Applejack and Fluttershy looked at each other with concern. Rarity was their friend, but they knew she loved to gossip. If they told her Prince Kindle was in love with them, she might blab to everypony before sunset.

"Ah need yer word yer gonna keep this ta yerself." Applejack said.

"Is this that serious?" Rarity asked.

"Very." Fluttershy said.

There was a pause. A sigh, then a nod. The two brought their heads on each side of their friend's head. They began to whisper. The farmer spoke of her lunch 'date' with the prince, and how he spoke of desiring a pony with muscle. The yellow pegasus whispered of a prince that told her how he wanted a pony that cared about humans. The fashionista's eyes lit up in excitement at their stories. Then those eyes widened as they spoke of their shared struggle. The two backed up after they told their story.

"A human prince in love with two ponies." Rarity said. "That's certainly an interesting situation to be in."

"Yer the only one with experience datin' a prince." Applejack said.

"I'm not sure how much help I can be girls." she admitted. "I chased after Prince Blueblood, and I dumped him after I found out what he truly was. The best advice I can give, is to be careful. Sometimes royalty aren't what they seem to be on the outside."

Celestia sighed deeply as she looked at the scrolls sprawled out on the floor of her bedroom. Kindle working day court had given her a good chunk of free time in the morning. Today she was spending that free time looking at every law that was tied-up with the Search of Suitors. Almost all of the laws pertained to giving authority to the nobles of old. Something she had done hundreds of years ago to appease the ponies protesting an immortal ruler. It was an issue that popped up every couple hundred years or so, and these laws had stopped it. Now it was coming back to bite her.

"I can't thank you enough for helping me Raven." she said.

"It's my honor, your highness." Raven said. "Helping Prince Kindle get out of this legal nightmare is something I want as much as you. Those nobles are enough of a pain. I can't imagine what one of them would be like if they married him."

"Unbearably arrogant from trying to elevate their social status and political power probably." Ken said while sitting at his desk.

"You're not wrong." Celestia chuckled.

Ken wanted to help, but his understanding of Equestrian law was minimal at best. She insisted her fiancé keep working on his book. He wanted to write a book about what being in a relationship with her was like. He promised to keep the saucier details of their love life to a minimum. Although it would probably be a fair bit more accurate than some of the adult stories written about her by adoring ponies of the past. There had been many a creature that tried to woo her. She never blamed them for trying. None of them could relate to the problems of an immortal. Ken however, just seemed to click. Unlike past attempted lovers, he didn't try to fathom the struggle of being immortal. He never tried to trivialize her thoughts of said struggles. He listened, and listened well. He reminded her to enjoy the moment. Having him around was far more helpful than even he realized.

"All the more reason to see if we can find a solution to help your son." Raven said. "I doubt the nobles will be considerate of Prince Kindle's feelings if they get to choose his suitor."

"How I wish I didn't have to be so worried about my Kindle." Celestia said. "I could be getting an outfit for the Galloping Gala made right now."

"Should we consider increasing the number of bodyguards for Prince Kindle at the Gala your highness?" her assistant asked.

"We should." the princess answered. "No telling what ridiculous things might happen there with Search of Suitors going on. Although I imagine my son won't be happy with it. He claims I treat him like a glass doll sometimes."

"You kinda do." Ken said without looking up.

"Prove it!" she scoffed, a little annoyed at her future husband.

"When have you ever let our son go anywhere without his bodyguard, or us?" he asked.

Celestia grunted as her husband hummed in an almost laugh. One of the reasons she loved and hated him was for his brutal honesty. Most ponies were afraid of offending her if they gave their honest opinion. Her human husband to be, was not most ponies. He had no qualms voicing his displeasures when something truly bothered him. One of his many redeeming qualities. Though her favorite quality of his was not a verbal one.

"Raven, let's take a break." she said as she levitated the papers into a stack. "We can come back in an hour."

"Let's make it two hours." Ken said as he stood up from the desk.

"Understandable." Raven said as she took the levitating stack, already knowing what the two meant.

The door closed with a click as the princess' assistant left. There wasn't much said between the couple. With a glow of her horn, Ken was floating in the air. He was placed on the bed. There were no words said as she approached it. Slowly, the princess crawled onto the bed. A familiar sight came to her eyes. The stallion, the human. The one she loved with all her heart. A mix of lust and awe in his gaze. It was the same look he had their first time. Standing above him on the bed really put their size difference in a closer perspective. Something about was, exhilarating.

Punishing Kindle with day court duties was the best idea Ken ever had.

"...and like how your blessed mother raises the sun every morning on our land, my love will shine upon your eyes every day you awaken." the older mare said as she finally finished her five minutes of poetry.

"Good to know." Kindle said with a forced smile. "You have a nice day."

The prince groaned after the door closed. Thirty five deliveries so far today. About halfway done. It was early in the afternoon. He looked to his bodyguard by the cart, who was glaring down the numerous mares around them. It had been like this all day. Every delivery made was turned into an attempt for a pony to profess their love for him. Some tried flirting. A few tried poetry. There was even a mare that had a wedding veil on when he opened the door. While he was annoyed at the repetitiveness of it all, his bodyguard seemed to get some small enjoyment out of it.

"This is probably the most fun I've had in a while." Iron said.

"I'm dealing with mares at every stop trying to say they love a human that's only existed for a week and a half." Kindle said. "How is this fun for you?"

"For one, it's funny to see you dealing with all these adoring fans." he answered. "It reminds me of when I had to deal with your mother's fans. I used to work the throne room when I would hear the occasional lovestruck stallion proclaim their love for her during day court."

"Glad one of us is having fun." the prince said. "Alright. Here's the town hall. Mayor Mare has this one. Apparently a dozen cupcakes were ordered by the secretary. This box on top."

"Maybe this one will sing a song for you!" Iron jeered.

"Oh, you're hilarious." Kindle shouted back as he entered, levitating cupcake box in tow.

The door shut with a click. He looked around. He was in the main room. A big open space. He saw a unicorn mare with a floating broom sweeping nearby, and went over to her.

"Excuse me?" he asked. "Could you point me to the mayor's office?"

"Top floor." the mare said without looking up.

"Thank you." he said.

He looked over to a spiral staircase off to the side. He saw the railing up top, and flew up to it. The unicorn below still paid him no attention as he landed on the upper floor. True to her description, there was only one door up here. He opened the door. He saw a pony behind a desk. Dark brown coat with a light brown mane. Earth pony.

"Mayor Mare?" he called out.

"Oh she's not here right now." the brown pony answered. "She's out getting lunch."

"You must be her secretary." Kindle said. "I have the dozen cupcakes you ordered."

"Right here on the desk please." the secretary said in a sultry tone. "The bits are right there."

"Thanks." he said.

Kindle levitated the box onto the desk. He levitated the collection of bits. A quick count to make sure they were all there. They were. Before he had a chance to say his farewells, the shadow of a pony appeared from behind him. He turned around to see Mayor Mare, and she was glowering at a now nervous brown mare.

"Abusing the resources of my office to get some private time with Prince Kindle during the Search of Suitors?" the mayor asked. "You and I are going to have a talk."

"With that, I shall take my leave." he said. "Enjoy the cupcakes!"

"Oh I will, your highness." Mayor Mare said with a smile before immediately scowling at her cowering secretary.

Pinkie and the Cakes were laid against the wall behind the register. It was sunset. The two mares were covered in enough ingredients to make a whole cake. Manes of flour. Coats covered in sugar. Hooves that had stepped in far too many eggs. Mr. Cake fared no better. He had dealt with customers non-stop. Most of which had demanded to see Prince Kindle. He said his ears had been ringing for the past hour or so. It was the busiest day in the history of Sugarcube Corner.

"Perhaps we should get washed up and put the foals to bed." Mrs. Cake said. "I'm far too tired to eat supper. I suppose you two feel the same."

"You two can go first." Pinkie said.

The couple mumbled their thanks as they made their way upstairs. The pink pony wasn't sure if Prince Kindle was great help today, or a terrible idea. There a lot of business today sure, but at what cost?

"Back! Back I said!" a stallion shouted.

As if on cue, the door opened. The prince came in, and he looked just as tired as she did. His bodyguard was holding mares back at the entrance. The human walked over, and flopped on the floor next to her.

"If I hear another mare declare their love for me while I try to deliver a cake, I think I might lose my mind." the prince said tiredly. "How are you holding up?"

"Tired." Pinkie groaned.

The prince inched over. He laid his head on her rear left leg. The piny mare went wide-eyed. She never had a human lay on her like that before.

"Your flour-coated leg feels like a pillow right now, I'm so tired." he said tiredly. "I hope whatever pony I marry is this soft."

The muffled shouting of eager mares quickly died off. The tired pony looked towards the entrance. Fluttershy and Applejack walked into the bakery. The bodyguard stallion was right behind. All three stared in surprise for a moment.

"D-Don'tcha worry yer highness." the farmer said. "Ah got those mares ta clear out."

"Thanks Applejack." Prince Kindle said. "I would look at you, but I had to levitate cakes all over Ponyville today. I am as tired as I was with my first day of training with Aunt Luna. Everything is sore. I might have to make a late night trip to the royal masseurs."

"I better get you home then, your highness." the stallion said as he trotted over and guided the prince to his feet.

The two made their way out of the bakery. It wasn't long before a flapping of wings left the three mares by themselves. Pinkie could see the look her two friends were giving each other.

"I guess that makes three ponies now." Fluttershy said.

"Three?" Pinkie asked.

"We better fill ya in." Applejack said.

Discord couldn't help but to watch the events unfold through his little viewing sphere he conjured up. Watching chaos unfold without having lifted a paw, claw, or hoof was a new experience. He was enjoying this Search of Suitors nonsense. Mares all in a tizzy to become a princess by wooing a human they barely know. His nephew never learned the ways of chaos, but he was a natural at causing it. He tapped the sphere, and it went to his tired nephew being flown back to the castle. Poor thing was tired as can be. The Elements of Harmony were certainly putting him to work. Given how tough they were as adversaries, he couldn't imagine being their servant. His nephew had it easier than the draconequus would've.

Kindle was three ponies down, and three to go. He had unwittingly convinced the first three he was in love with them. Well, Applejack and Fluttershy were pretty good at convincing Pinkie Pie she was the third. The thought of Rainbow Dash and Rarity falling for his nephew made Discord giggle. The thought of Twilight's face when she finds out made him outright laugh. Celestia had said he couldn't cause chaos. Facilitating the chaos his own nephew was causing thanks to a law the princess wrote was the greatest of loopholes. He never lied to Fluttershy about Kindle being in love with her. He only told her what he knew about his nephew. She filled in the rest on her own.

He wondered what trouble his nephew would cause in Cloudsdale tomorrow. Mr. Cake caused quite the tizzy today just by mentioning the prince would be in Ponyville all day. The mares on the ground went nuts. One could only imagine how the ones in the sky would be. Knowing that she wasn't all that imaginative, Rainbow would probably just use Kindle as glorified assistant. Maybe he could send a whisper or two to drum up excitement. Just enough to get word around.

Rarity would definitely be boring. Since she's a member of Hand in Hoof, she would never dream of belittling a human. Probably taking him to the spa or something. The real excitement was the last day of his nephew's punishment. A whole day, taking orders from Twilight. Curious, Discord gave his sphere a tap. The scene inside changed to the Golden Oaks Library. A tired dragon watched from his bed as the purple princess was at her desk with a pile of papers. Notes upon stacks of written notes.

"Twiliiiiiiight." Spike moaned. "This is the fourth night in a row you stayed up late."

"I only have two more days until I get an entire day with Prince Kindle." she said. "I need to make every minute count. There are some experiments I'll be able to do now without him being able to say no. Inquiring Mind wrote to me about certain tests I should run now that I have such a rare opportunity. This chance cannot be wasted."

"Can you at least put out one of your candles so I can sleep?" the dragon groaned.

Discord chuckled as he waved the viewing sphere into nothingness. When the Search of Suitors was over, the big reveal was going to be something he would laugh about for ages to come.

Pinkie stared up at her ceiling in silence. Even with all the energy she has during the day, falling asleep is never an issue. Usually, she'll be asleep as soon as her head hits the pillow. Sleeping with a smile on her face as she dreams about cake and parties. One would think with the exhaustion of today, she would be out cold. Even with as tired as she was, her mind could only focus on one thing. It kept flashing back to the conversation with Applejack and Fluttershy. The one they had right after Prince Kindle left.

"Fill me in on what?" the pink pony asked.

"Prince Kindle being in love with all three of us." Fluttershy said.

"Heehee." Pinkie giggled. "That's a good one Fluttershy."

"We ain't kiddin'." Applejack said in a deadpan tone.

The three went back and forth for a few minutes. Had the comment about her leg being soft happened without these two telling her about their experiences, it would've been a random thought to be later forgotten. Now she can't stop thinking about it. A small gesture and a quick comment. Not once, not twice, but three times? With three different ponies? Was the prince trying to start a herd? There was too much to think about. She hopped out of bed. She needed a glass of water. Maybe a splash on her face from the bathroom sink. Anything really. Her mind needed to get off of this. She opened the door to see Mrs. Cake leaving her bedroom as well.

"Pinkie, why are you up so late?" she asked.

"Can't sleep." Pinkie answered. "How about you?"

"A little hungry." Mrs. Cake said. "Care to join me for a snack?"

The two quietly made their way downstairs. They never had a lot of one on one time during the day. Running the best bakery in Ponyville kept them both quite busy. A part of Pinkie wondered if she should ask her for advice on this Prince Kindle situation. She promised Applejack and Fluttershy that she wouldn't tell their friends. She knew Mrs. Cake would keep the secret. Pinkie took a deep breath as they walked into the kitchen.

"Can I ask you something?" she asked.

"Of course dear." Mrs. Cake said as she opened the fridge.

"What would you do if Prince Kindle was in love with you, but you're not sure if you love him back?" Pinkie asked.

Mrs. Cake paused for a moment. She pulled a plate of sliced veggies and fruit out, and placed them on the counter. It was not a question she was prepared for.

"Are you telling me that Prince Kindle is in love with you?" she asked.

"Yep." Pinkie answered. "Not just me. Applejack and Fluttershy too."

"Is he starting a herd?" she asked as she munches on a carrot.

"No idea." the pink pony said. "Applejack and Fluttershy are all for it. I don't know what to do."

"Well, I guess the first question is simple." she said. "Can you see yourself spending the rest of your life with him?"

"That's the thing," Pinkie said. "Applejack told me that if I marry Prince Kindle, I'll share his immortality. We all would."

"This is a once in a lifetime chance Pinkie." Mrs. Cake said as she placed a foreleg on Pinkie's back. "Prince Kindle knows that if he doesn't have a suitor chosen soon, one will be forced upon him. If anything, I would say that being in a relationship with him would help keep those nobles at bay. I say give it a try. If it doesn't work out, you'll always have a place here."

"Thanks." Pinkie said as she hugged Mrs. Cake.

"Anytime dear." she said. "Now let's eat so we can get some sleep."

Chapter 14

Kindle rubbed his temples as he walked down the hall. He was finally finished with day court. Ten AM. About as bad as he figured it would be. Although the musical number some of the mares had put together was a bit much. While his royal decree had stopped the more blatant attempts to abuse day court as a chance to woo him, the craftier mares were not deterred. They somehow cobbled together a play about him falling in love with a Ponyville mare. In the span of a few days. Supposedly, they wanted to show him one of the musical numbers, as well as get his blessing to do the play. He gave it to them in the hopes it would make them go away. As they left, arguments of who would play the leading mare began to surface among themselves. He pushed the thought away as he tried to focus on something else.

"Maybe I can bully Blueblood into doing day court for awhile." he said.

"Bold of you to presume your mother would allow you to let him run day court again after your last stunt." Iron said.

"Good point." Kindle said. "Hey Raven?"

"Yes, your highness?" she asked.

"Any chance the laws allows me to make day court your problem?" he asked.

"One has to be royalty to manage day court I'm afraid." Raven answered.

"Mon amour?" a french accent called out. "Is that you?"

A chill went down Kindle's spine as he looked towards the source of the voice. A tall, slender unicorn. A night sky blue dress to compliment her grayish-pink coat and a long black mane. The mare stared him down with a vixenish smile. Lidded eyes of seduction filled him with silent screaming. He felt like a mouse being stared down by a hungry cat as she got closer. The worst part? Iron wouldn't be able to so much as touch her without causing an international incident. So if she got flirty, he was on his own.

"Raven?" he whispered. "I thought I told you to warn me when she was here?"

"I didn't even know she was here, your highness." she whispered.

"Get my mother immediately!" he whispered harshly. "The last thing I want is to be left at the mercy of this horny old-."

"I thought that was you, mon amour." the french mare said.

"Duchess Vieille Fleur!" Kindle said with feigned excitement as Raven trotted away. "I didn't know you would be here today!"

"Well, I was only in town to visit my niece, Fleur de Lis, as well as some political dealings with you wonderful mother." Vieille said. "Although with the Search of Suitors going on, I thought I would visit my préféré petit humain. Finally give us a chance to know each other better."

"Oh..." Kindle nervously said. "You know about the Search of Suitors."

"I follow all news about you quite closely, mon amour." she said. "The opportunity to be your wife is something I could not let pass me by. I think my age gives me more than enough experience at being a good lover."

Vieille began to circle him. The cat and mouse analogy was becoming more and more accurate. He felt like she would pounce at any moment. Between her letters and current conversation, it quite a literal concern. If she dragged him onto her airship, things he'd rather not think about would happen. The space between them got smaller with each step.

"Perhaps we could skip the foreplay, and run off to my airship?" she whispered into his ear. "I'm sure nopony would mind two members of royalty having a little fun of the rutting variety for a few hours. Wouldn't you agree?"

"I...uh...well..." Kindle failed to find any words to help him.

"Seems my beauty has taken your tongue." she whispered into his ear. "Perhaps I should levitate you into my airship right now."

"Hello Duchess." the voice of Kindle's mother danced upon his ears. "I don't believe our trade negotiations weren't scheduled for another few weeks."

"Apologies." Vieille said as she turned to the approaching princess. "I was just in town, and wanted to take the chance to finally see your son. Up close."

"While I'm sure he would love to spend the day with you, he already has some arrangements he can't ignore." his mother said.

"That's right!" Kindle piped up as he backed away from the duchess. "I'll be in Cloudsdale all day. Busy work! Gotta go!"

With a wave of his hand, the prince was gone with his bodyguard. A slightly disappointed prech duchess left behind.

Despite her lazy nature, Rainbow did appreciate having a day off from work. While the day in question was decided a week ago, the addition of the prince made for a happy accident. She was given a heads up by her friends that he's usually delayed by day court. He wouldn't be at her house until a couple hours before lunch. Until he showed up, she was sat on her couch. A Daring Do novel in hoof. The next

one wasn't coming out for another couple weeks, so she was rereading a few books before it. Had to keep the story fresh in her mind.

Applejack, Fluttershy, and Pinkie had all put Prince Kindle to work when they had him. The thought of having a prince that would have to obey her every command was a little interesting to think about. She had joked with Tank that morning about seeing if he could use his authority to make her captain of the Wonderbolts. Though in all honesty, all she wanted today was a lazy day. A rapid knocking at her front door brought Rainbow off the couch. She trotted over to her front door. After she opened the door, she hopped out of the way as Prince Kindle ran in. His bodyguard trotted in after, much calmer. Rainbow bowed her head.

"Your highness." she said.

"Hey Rainbow." he said. "Quick question. Luxury-class airships aren't allowed in Cloudsdale airspace right?"

"Yeah." she answered. "Only exception is your mom and Princess Luna."

"Good." he sighed. "Means I got space from my stalker."

"Which one?" she asked with a chuckle.

"Duchess Vieille Fleur of Prance." Prince Kindle groaned. "I don't know what it is with old mares and young humans. Multiple letters about 'her endless rutting fantasies' and how she wants to live them out with me. With her and the muscial number this morning, it was a rough start."

"Musical number?" Rainbow asked.

"Yeah." Prince Kindle said. "A bunch of mares put one together. It's about me, falling in love with a mare from Ponyville. It was so cheesy. However, I want to focus on here and now. What's on our list today?"

"Actually, it's my day off." she said. "I'm just chillin' with my Daring Do book."

"Nice." he said. "I got an advanced copy of the newest one back in the castle. It's good."

"Really?" she asked. "Can I read it?"

"My stalker's back at the castle though." Prince Kindle lamented.

"Well, you still have to do what I say." she said with a smile.

"Fine." he grumbled as he disappeared in a flash.

Celestia often considered herself a hooves-off kind of princess. Allowing her citizens to solve their problems on their own, as long as the situation wasn't catastrophic. It worked fairly well for the most part. Then again, none of her subjects were her offspring. Besides Twilight on occasion, the parental instinct to step in and protect was never there. After Kindle came back into her life, she found herself writing letters to Cadence constantly. Advice from another mother was something she had needed. Although her overprotective nature had bottled up for the thirteen years Kindle was at the village, the last five years were not her best work.

No matter. With the Search of Suitors, she had another chance to be the protective mother she wanted to be. During day court, she spent her new free time combing over every law she had written. A part of her knew there was a loophole somewhere. She would see to it that her son would be happy with the outcome of it all.

Right now however? Her concern wasn't her son. It was the Duchess of Prance sitting across the dining table. She claimed to have come to Equestria to visit her niece, and for 'political discussions'. The two had no meetings of any kind scheduled for weeks. Celestia knew why she was here. A part of her was glad Duchess Vieille pulled this little stunt. Kindle had previously hoped this stalking situation would go away on its own. He was uncomfortable dealing with it. She wasn't.

"I'm glad we finally have the time to meet, without politics getting in the way." Vieille said as she levitated a cup of tea to her lips. "Although I'm sad I couldn't spend some more time with your handsome son. I'm sure he has his hooves-. Er, hands full with all the mares practically chasing him around."

"The Search of Suitors has been a nightmare to deal with." Celestia said. "Mare after mare trying to trick my son into loving them, rather than trying to be genuine with themselves."

"That's the problem with allowing citizens to partake in a royal matter." she said. "Many only want the power that comes with a crown, and couldn't care less about the individual they have to marry to get it. I, and many other world leaders, have been watching things in Equestria closely. We've been discussing it as well."

"What aspects are you discussing if I may ask?" Celestia asked.

"Presenting ourselves as suitors." she answered plainly. "A marriage between countries to strengthen alliances is common between nations outside Equestria. I'm sure in the weeks coming up to Prince Kindle's birthday, you have many a last second meeting with other world leaders. Numerous attempts at kings presenting daughters, and princesses presenting themselves."

"Are you presenting yourself, duchess?" Celestia asked. "No doubt you made your intentions with my son clear already."

"So you've seen the letters I've sent your son." Vieille said. "I understand if you feel hesitant about the idea. I am a bit older than him."

"You're twice my son's age." Ken chimed in.

"The decision isn't yours to make." she said with a hint of disdain in her eyes.

"As the father of my son and my husband to be, his word carries the same weight as mine in this matter Vieille." Celestia said with a glare.

"Nonetheless, I still think I am your best choice for Kindle's future wife." Vieille said. "Unlike the citizens that desire the crown, I desire him."

"Lust and love are two different things, Vieille." Celestia said. "I want to make this clear: I am not okay with your behavior towards Kindle. You are twice his age, and your actions have him downright terrified of you. What you call flirting, I call something that was taken too far. I should've stepped in after the first letter. I feel I am partly to blame for this trend of older mares seeking younger human stallions. You however, should know better than to take advantage of a human that hasn't even had a romantic relationship yet. So I am telling you to end your 'desire' for my son. Whoever he does end up with, it will not be you. I will see to that."

Rainbow figured Prince Kindle had it pretty easy today. She knew that Applejack, Fluttershy, and Pinkie Pie had all put him to work. Besides a trip back to the castle for the latest Daring Do book, the past few hours had been calm. He even offered to get lunch from the royal chefs. He had gotten Applejack a black rose salad the last time he did. The thought of getting such an expensive meal for free sounded way cool. Before she could accept his offer, there was a knock at the door. Strange, since she usually never got bothered by anypony on her day off. Unless the prince's bodyguard, Iron Wing was back from patrolling outside.

"Could you get that please?" she asked while deep in her story.

"Sure." Prince Kindle said as he floated over to the door.

Rainbow glanced up from her book to see who it was as the door opened. Spitfire? What was the captain of the Wonderbolts doing here? Was she wearing her workout clothes that were a size too small and showed off her chest fluff? The two frequented the same Cloudsdale gym. She knew Spitfire only wore that outfit for one reason. Flirting. Was she seriously going to flirt with the prince here? In her house?

It was an open secret among the Wonderbolts and fans that Spitfire had a thing for humans. Even before Princess Celestia came out with her relationship. There were a few racist fans that didn't like it, or denied the truth. Didn't stop Spitfire from slinking away with a human after a show or workout. Both instances would usually be with a fan. No matter how much of an alpha the human would seem among their own, they would be putty in her hooves after a few minutes. Rainbow once asked her about it when she spotted her weightlifting. Spitfire admitted to liking the size difference mostly. Dominating them with such minimal physical effort. Being so small for a stallion, but just as capable as their pony counterparts. With the right guidance of course.

"Well hello, your highness." Spitfire said with a sly smile.

"You're the captain of the Wonderbolts." he said. "Spitfire right?"

"That's me." she answered as she stepped in. "Rumor going around that you were hiding out here today, so I thought I would check."

"Well, I'm spending the day with Rainbow Dash as you can see." Prince Kindle said. "You look like you're heading somewhere yourself."

"Heading to the gym." Spitfire said as she stepped closer to him. "Wanna join?"

"I'm not much for working out." he said. "Sorry."

Spitfire stepped closer, a foreleg's reach away from him. She spread her wings, and flexed her muscles. Her slender pegasus frame exposed the efforts of her workouts. Even from the couch, Rainbow could see Prince Kindle blushing. Unfortunately for him, Spitfire noticed. She closed the distance, and raised a foreleg behind him. He backed up right into her grasp.

"Are you sure?" she asked. "I get so sore after I'm all finished, and human hands are the best at rubbing all the stress away."

Prince Kindle was somehow reduced to a babbling, blushing mess. He clearly needed some help. Rainbow made a note of the page she was on, then put the book down. She trotted over to the two. With a flex of her wing, a feathery wall was constructed between the two.

"Sorry Spitfire." Rainbow said. "He's spending the day with me. Princess Celestia's orders. I'm sure the gym still has plenty of hoomins for ya."

"Some private time with Prince Kindle?" she asked with a smirk. "Can't imagine why."

"His highness is lacking in the realm of aerial combat." Iron said as he appeared in the doorway. "Given her real world experience, Princess Celestia thought Rainbow Dash would make an excellent teacher."

"Y-Yeah." Rainbow said, quickly catching onto Iron's conversational diversion. "We were in the middle of our break."

"His highness needs to properly relax before training resumes." Iron said. "I'm afraid your invitation will have to be declined."

"Well darn." Spitfire said as she let go of Prince Kindle. "I'll head out then. If you ever want some 'one-on-one' training, let me know."

"O-Okay." Prince Kindle said in a gaspy breath.

With a turn and a flapping of wings, Spitfire was off into the sky. After a brief moment, Rainbow closed the door. She turned to see that Prince Kindle was still blushing intensely. Weird. He never acted like this in the few times she saw him before. Spitfire had him at her total mercy.

"So I guess the secret's out." he said sheepishly.

"That the infamous Prince Kindle has a fetish for muscular pegasi?" Iron asked.

"This is embarrassing!" he groaned as he buried his face into his hands. "If this gets out, the Search of Suitors will get even worse!"

"You mean the increase of gym memberships or the rampant abuse of artificial pegasus potions and ethereal wings?" Iron asked.

"It's okay your highness." Rainbow said. "Having a thing for pegasi ain't bad."

"I sense you might have some bias." Prince Kindle said, looking up from his hands.

"Mayyyybe," she said with a smirk "but I Pinkie Promise I won't use this to seduce you and become the future Princess Rainbow Dash. Probably."

"I can work with probably." he said.

Kindle was feeling a lot better than he was an hour ago. Lunch was good all around. Rainbow taking a lazy day was turning out well. If you could ignore the part where the kingdom was going to find out about your secret attraction to a specific subset of ponies that is. He knew Spitfire would brag about how close she was to seducing him. While he was grateful Rainbow and Iron took it well, he wasn't sure how the rest of kingdom would. The thought of his mother finding out was a thought he didn't want to have.

"Maybe I should take a vacation to the moon for a thousand years." he said. "That should give me enough time for them all to forget."

"I doubt your mother would let you do that." Iron said.

"Appreciate the input as always Iron." he said.

"My pleasure, your highness." Iron said with a smirk.

"How bad do you think it's gonna get tomorrow?" Kindle asked.

"More like 'how bad is it gonna get in the next two hours' given how fast gossip travels in Equestria." Iron answered.

"Maybe going public was a bad idea." he said.

Before Kindle could complain further, there was a knock at the door. Was Spitfire back for another attempt at seduction? Was it a journalist, ready for the story of a lifetime? He looked over at Rainbow, fear in his eyes. She seemed to take note, and put her book down. She trotted over to the door with a knowing smile.

"Alright, I'll get it." she said as she opened the door. "Oh no..."

"Hey there Rainbow!" an annoying stallion said.

"Zephyr Breeze!" Rainbow said with a tone Kindle himself had just used this morning. "Why are you here?"

"Well I was passing through on my day off, and I thought I would visit a perfect pegasus." Zephyr said.

Rainbow looked about as uncomfortable as Kindle did that morning with Duchess Vieille Fleur. It seems he wasn't the only one with a stalker. Given how she helped him with Spitfire, he figured he should return the favor. He quickly racked his brain for an idea. One came up. He looked over to Iron, who was by the couch. He gestured for him to follow. The two came up behind Rainbow.

"So whaddya say Rainbow?" Zephyr asked. "Wanna grab some lunch?"

"Hello Zephyr." Kindle said.

"Y-Your highness!" Zephyr said as he quickly adopted a salute and proper stance.

"At ease." Kindle said. "While I admire your dedication to the safety of Equestrian royalty, you don't need to visit me on your time off. I have Iron Wing for a reason."

"O-Of course sir." Zephyr said.

"I see you already know my Wife-in-Waiting, Rainbow Dash." Kindle said.

"Wife...?" Rainbow asked.

"...In waiting?" Zephyr asked.

"An old tradition my mother wanted to bring back for Search of Suitors." Kindle said as he raised his left arm onto Rainbow's back. "With the exception of my cousin Twilight, the Elements of Harmony are to abstain from romantic relationships until the Search of Suitors ends. If I fail to find a suitor by my birthday, I marry all five of my Wives-in-Waiting. Starting a herd was part of the old tradition too."

"Oh." Zephyr said quietly.

"If I remember correctly, Fluttershy is your sister right?" he asked.

"Yes she is, your highness." Zephyr answered.

"That would mean Rainbow here becomes your sister if I start a herd with her." Kindle said. "Don't worry though. I'll make sure that if I do marry my Wives-in-Waiting, you'll be assigned as Rainbow's bodyguard. Your dedication to protecting me should be rewarded."

If Zephyr was made of glass, he would've shattered at that news. While Kindle wasn't up to date on all of the local gossip, he was aware of some of it. A little brother of an Element of Harmony having the hots for another Element of Harmony was something he was quite aware of. Aunt Luna never talked about it much besides with him, but she kept tabs on all six of the elements since she returned from banishment. The Zephyr situation was one that she monitored a lot when his obsession for Rainbow was first discovered. His guard schedule was written so his interaction with her was minimized.

"Well, I won't keep you." Kindle said. "I'm sure you have things to do on your day off."

"Y-Yeah," he said. "Have a nice day, your highness."

"You too Zephyr." Kindle said as he closed the door.

"Phew." Rainbow sighed. "Thank for the save."

"Figured it makes us even for earlier," he said.

"Also, Wife-in-Waiting?" she asked.

[illegible]

"An old tradition I read about in some history books that hasn't been used in centuries." Kindle admitted. "I figured it would get you some distance from him for a little bit."

"Any chance we can pretend forever to keep him off my back?" Rainbow asked.

"I mean, I think that you and your friends would make great wives." Kindle chuckled. "Twilight would lose it though."

Rainbow immediately bowled over laughing. It seemed the comment about his cousin struck the right chord.

Celestia nervously sipped her afternoon tea in her room as her fiancé tried his best to comfort her. Word had just gotten to her moments ago. Luna was up by now, and she would be filled in as soon as she got here. She told the guards to bring her as soon as her sister woke up. Celestia had the misfortune of overhearing the guards gossip about Kindle. He had a run-in with Wonderbolts captain, Spitfire. A run-in that was going to make the weeks remaining in this ridiculous search, even more bothersome. Luna would not have that misfortune.

"Afternoon 'Tia." Luna said as she entered the bedroom. "Why were the guards so insistent on bringing us here?"

"Lulu, I'm not sure how I can explain this in a way that isn't uncomfortable." Celestia said. "It's about Kindle. It seems we discovered something about him today, and the rest of the kingdom will soon find out."

"Is this about nephew's proclivity towards pegasi of the muscular variety?" she asked calmly. "We were already aware of this."

"You knew!?" Celestia and Ken asked in a shouted unison.

"Yes, we did." she answered. "We have seen countless dreams from nephew over the years. Dreams where he, ahem, 'explores' the muscles of a pegasus are common. Be it a mare or stallion, it was usually a member of the Wonderbolts. At least until recent. Although dreamer confidentiality prevents me from telling more."

"I understand Lulu." Celestia said.

"Wait." Ken said. "Back in the village, he barely had interest in any of the humans. Where did this even come from?"

"We can't choose what we're attracted to." Celestia said while she nuzzled Ken. "You of all humans should know that."

"Nonetheless, our support for nephew shall not waiver." Luna said.

"Lulu's right Ken." Celestia said. "Kindle's our son, and we'll love him no matter what."

"You're right." he said. "Plus, we could always arrange a marriage with Captain Silver Moon if our son can't find a suitor."

"Supportive as always." Celestia chuckled.

Despite the positive direction of the conversation, she couldn't help but feel disconnected. While Luna and Ken discussed ways to talk to Kindle, she was having thoughts of her own. The past couple weeks had been something she never had to deal with before. She never had much of a public life, so public relations was a non-issue. With her son in her life now, she finds herself constantly worrying about how the public perceives her and her family. She never had to deal with other world leaders trying to offer a marriage to strengthen an alliance.

"Tia?" Luna asked.

"Huh?" Celestia asked, suddenly being refocused on the conversation.

"We were wondering if you thought discussing this revelation with nephew at dinner would be best?" she asked.

"I...want to speak to my son alone first." Celestia answered.

"We understand." Luna said.

Kindle breathed a sigh of relief as he dismounted Iron. His day was done. He would get some dinner, then answer some letters before bed. Rainbow was definitely the most relaxing of the six. He was not looking forward to his last day with Twilight. Although he suspected his day with Rarity would be almost as relaxing as today was. He went over to his door, and was surprised when it opened. It was his mom.

"Hey Mom." Kindle said.

"Evening Kindle." she said. "Iron? Could I have a moment with Kindle please?"

"Of course your highness." Iron said as he walked out of the room.

Kindle noticed that his mother wasn't smiling. She wasn't upset either. She looked...neutral. Like she was trying to think of what to say. He had a feeling why. There was no doubt that the following conversation was gonna be weird. Oh well, better to get over it now.

"So, I assume word spread already?" he asked.

"Word spreads fast in Equestria my son." she answered as she sat down in front of him.

"I would've told you, but it's not exactly an easy conversation to have." he said.

"I don't care what the Search of Suitors says." she said. "Your predilections are your business, and your business alone."

"Thanks Mom." Kindle said as he wrapped his arms around his mother's neck.

"Of course Kindle." his mom said. "Although I can't promise that the future will be easy. A lot of ponies are going to try and take advantage of this."

"Compared to how they were taking advantage of me before?" he asked playfully as he let go.

"Oh you know what I mean." she chuckled.

The two shared a laugh. Given how rough the past two weeks had been, it felt nice to finally have a moment like this. His mother had taken the news well. That was good because Kindle was already drowning in embarrassment. Speaking to your mother about the world finding out about your fetish for buff pegasi. Not an easy chat to have.

"I'm glad you're taking this well Mom." Kindle said. "I was a little nervous to be honest."

"I will admit that this is certainly an awkward moment to some degree." she said. "Though being royalty doesn't help."

"Why don't we head down to the dining hall, and share this awkward moment with the family?" he asked.

"That sounds wonderful." she said.

Chapter 15

Kindle wasn't sure how he felt about having the time to actually enjoy breakfast. On one hand, it was nice to enjoy a meal with his family versus having to scramble to choke down an apple before day court. On the other, he hated to admit that Aunt Luna took pity on him after a rough training session on aerial combat. Couldn't even touch the book this time. It didn't help that a lot of pegasi mares from Cloudsdale sneakily flew to the clearing to watch today's session. He was constantly distracted. Guards were constantly kicking them out. So in truth, it wasn't entirely his fault.

"Tia we think we need to be more strict on Canterlot Castle airspace." Aunt Luna said. "This Search of Suitors had made training nephew a nightmare."

"Is it that bad?" his mother asked.

"Six different mares shouted for me to take my shirt off while I trained." he answered bluntly.

"Castle airspace will be restricted to guards." his mother quickly responded.

"Let's see what the Canterlot Times has to say about me today." Kindle said as he levitated the newspaper in front of himself. "Prince Kindle's Greatest Secret Exposed! A little on the dramatic side there, but that's newspapers for ya. Let's see. Equestria newest member of royalty has a secret that's going to make the Search of Suitors a lot more difficult for him. However, the pegasi of the world are going to have a much easier time. That's right! Prince Kindle. The ponyborn human son of the esteemed Princess Celestia. Just yesterday, we got an exclusive interview with the muscle-bound mare that almost swept him off his little human feet. Alright so this story takes up almost half the newspaper it seems."

"Maybe some good can come out of this." his father said.

"Well, the gym in Cloudsdale reported a massive spike in membership. A three hundred percent increase." he said. "The story also mentions that the gym owner wants to gift exercise equipment to the royal family to show his gratitude."

"Hmmm." his father pondered. "Some muscle would look real sexy on you Celly."

"Ken..." his mother blushed intensely.

Kindle stood up from the table. His father getting flirty with Mom meant it was time to leave. He was glad they were happy, but it was still uncomfortable to hear them talk about sex. They were his parents.

"I better get to day court." Kindle said. "Should I have Raven escort the gym owner to you if he shows up Mom?"

"Y-Yes son." his mother said, trying to regain her composure.

With a wave of his glowing hand, Kindle and Iron were now in the throne room. Raven approached, and bowed her head.

"Good morning, your highness." she said.

"Morning Raven." he said. "How many cases today?"

"Twenty." Raven said. "Although if not for your royal decree, it would've been two hundred and eighty three. Mostly pegasi mares. Captain Shining hasn't had a pleasant morning dealing with them."

"How bad?" he asked.

"The two hundred and sixty three cases we rejected via your decree, all immediately tried to apply to the Royal Guard." she answered. "Every single one tried to request the position of your personal bodyguard. The captain's drowning in paperwork right now."

"Worried about being replaced, Iron?" Kindle asked his bodyguard.

"Not in the slightest, your highness." Iron said.

Rarity couldn't help but squeal over and over as she trotted around. It was like the fire never happened. Her boutique was truly back! The construction crew had diligently worked since the fire almost two weeks ago. They were given the original blueprints from Mayor Mare. While Prince Kindle was kind enough to offer a stipend to assist financially, she humbly rejected. She had used some of her saved up bits to buy new beds for herself and Sweetie Belle. She bought everything they needed to live there again. Twilight was a good friend, but the library felt quite crowded after the first week.

Her only issue now was getting the business side of things back up and running. She could easily make the trip up to Canterlot and buy everything at once. However, her savings would dry up entirely. Though there was a silver lining. Many a pony wanted a dress from her. Some for the Galloping Gala. Others just wanted to support her. She had enough down payments to get the supplies today without draining her entire bank account. While Rarity would never bring herself to order Prince Kindle

around, his help would be nice. She was far too dedicated to the teachings of Hand in Hoof to force him to do anything.

"We need ta tell her!" a familiar voice came from beyond the front door. Applejack?

"We can't tell Rarity, not yet." said a soft voice. Fluttershy?

Why were her friends talking about her outside? She needed to know more. She trotted over, and carefully laid her ear against the door. Eavesdropping did lead to the best gossip.

"If Prince Kindle's actually trying to marry all five of us, she deserves a heads up or somethin'." Rainbow said.

"I'm with Fluttershy on this one." Pinkie said.

"If Prince Kindle is in love with her, she needs to find out on her own." Fluttershy said. "Telling her could ruin whatever plan he has."

"He doesn't seem like the kinda hoomin ta plan ahead." Applejack said. "Ah can't say ah like not tellin' her, but ah see yer point."

"We should go." Fluttershy said. "He'll be here any minute."

Four sets of hooves trotted away. Rarity backed away from the door, eyes as wide as they could be. Prince Kindle? In love with four of her friends and her as well? While she didn't have many interactions with him, Twilight saw him daily. She would observe his morning training with Princess Luna. She would chat her up about it. Well, Twilight would be the chatty one for once. Excitement about a human with magic for the first time in over a hundred years. Although she never mentioned about his attraction to ponies, she was detailed on one thing. Much like Applejack guessed, he never really planned ahead. At least in the realm of combat.

Then there was the matter of the big news yesterday. His highness being found out to have a fetish for buff pegasi. With that in mind, some of his choices made sense. Applejack was one of the strongest

mares she knew. Fluttershy and Rainbow Dash were pegasi, so that checks out. That just left her and Pinkie Pie. As she heard a tiny knocking on her door, one thought crossed her mind:

What was Prince Kindle's plan, if he even had one?

"Hey there Rarity." Kindle said as the door opened.

"Your highness." Rarity said as she bowed her head and stepped aside.

"I got done early with day court." he said as he entered with his bodyguard. "Right before noon this time. Amazing how quick it goes by when mares can't abuse it for flirting with me."

"The extra time will come in handy." she said as the door closed. "With the construction done, I need to get restocked on my materials and supplies. We have a busy day in Canterlot ahead of us. I have my list memorized."

"My dear Rarity." Kindle said. "You have a member of the Royal Family with you today. Specifically, a member of the Royal Family that owes a lot to you."

With a wave of his glowing hand, the scenery quickly changed. They had gone from the boutique, to the hallways of the castle. He waved over a passing guard.

"Please fetch me Miss Inkwell." he said.

"Right away your highness." the guard said.

"May I ask what you're doing?" Rarity asked.

"I'm going to have Raven write down what you need, and I'll have servants collect it for you." he answered. "Billed to the Royal Family."

"I could never accept such a gift." Rarity quickly said.

"After everything you've done for me, it's the least I could do." Kindle said. "I owe you so much Rarity. You're the reason I'm no longer living in the shadows. It's because of you, I had the courage to run into the fire that night. Your other friends are great, but you're the only one I feel a special connection with."

"Y-You do?" she quietly asked.

"Even before you joined Hand in Hoof, you cared about humans." he said. "I remember that day five years ago. When ponies tried to bully me for being different, you stepped forward and stopped them. I never forgot that. I hope whoever I end up with, is as kind as you."

"Really?" Rarity asked, starry-eyed.

"Miss Inkwell as you requested your highness." the guard said.

Celestia was trying her best. She really was. Just the other day she had to deal with the Duchess of Prance to shoehorn her way into a relationship with her son. Vielle was not the only dignitary that tried to do so. She and Ken made the choice to refrain from mentioning it to Kindle. Everypony from foreign world leaders, to a few mares in the Royal Guard and Night Guard. Even some of the teachers from her School for Gifted Unicorns. The number of ponies that weren't abusing their ability or authority to get time with her outside of day court was in the single digits. While she had promised Kindle they would have a more open relationship as mother and son, she didn't want him to be more stressed than he was now.

Today was the latest in attempts from a foreign dignitary. Her Ken was up working on his book, so she was on her own. Zaktor, the current head chief of Zebrabwe. The country had a number of separate tribes, and they had a system for swapping out chiefs to represent the country. Usually came down to a vote among them, which Zaktor had won the last few times. She had heard of rumors he was making a play for a permanent position as head chief. She wondered if the Search of Suitors was a part of his plan. One way to find out.

"I'm glad to see you Zaktor, but I remember we were still on good terms for import and export costs." Celestia said.

"The pleasure is all mine." Zaktor said in his thick accent. "It's wonderful to see you too. Though I am sure your hooves are full with recent events regarding your son. I am just glad you have time for me."

"After the Duchess of Prance tried to convince me she was the perfect candidate for my son, desires to meet with world leaders has been near non-existent." she said. "I'm sure you have similar aspirations to present a daughter for my son."

"Your experience knows no bounds." he said. "However, I can relate to your struggle in some regard. Whenever a new head chief is elected, many a world leader try the same temptations. This is the first opportunity in world history to strengthen an alliance with Equestria. I cannot blame them for trying."

"Neither can I." she said. "It doesn't mean I have to enjoy it."

"Well, then I'll get right to the point so we can get back to enjoying lunch." Zaktor said. "Unlike Duchess Vielle, my Zaphira is only a few years older than Prince Kindle. Zebrabwe's history with human rights is rich. While we weren't a part of the world stage during the time of the Nebel Incident, we were the only other country that had outlawed slavery among all the tribes at the time. Shortly after you outlawed slavery in Equestria I believe. We know the importance of treating humans as equals in Zebrabwe."

"Zaktor." Celestia sighed. "While I'm sure your daughter is beautiful, the choice is for my son to make. Also, I believe it is against Zebrabwean tradition to arrange a marriage with an outsider."

"Well, such an opportunity required one to bold enough to break tradition." he said.

"If my memory of Zebrabwean law is correct, this hypothetical marriage would force the other chiefs to make you head chief for life." Celestia realized.

"It seems you saw right through me." Zaktor said as the food was brought out. "Nonetheless, I will respect your answer. All I ask, is that I may leave a picture of my daughter for Prince Kindle to see and decide for himself."

"You may." she said as plates were placed down.

As a member of Hand in Hoof, Rarity could never bring herself to order a human around. They were equals, and deserved to be seen as such. Prince Kindle's invitation to the royal spa sounded wonderful at first, until she saw that the royal masseurs were all humans. While she held concerns about it going against her beliefs, his highness insisted. That was an hour ago. The prince, his bodyguard and herself were all in massage chairs. She was in total bliss. It was as if her body melted under the pushing and stretching of their tiny fingers. Not to insult Aloe and Lotus back in Ponyville, but they couldn't hold a candle to the royal masseurs.

"Enjoying yourself Rarity?" Prince Kindle asked.

"HMMMMMM." Rarity moaned happily.

"I'm sure you're still enjoying the benefits of being a bodyguard Iron." he jeered.

"Well, I never say no to a nice wing massage." Iron responded.

"I just can't believe I never knew about the royal spa." she said. "I had only heard a few mentions of it here and there."

"The royal spa had been around for a long time, but humans didn't join the staff until about twenty-ish years ago." Prince Kindle began. "When Mom first hired human servants, a number of slave descendants were part of that group. Some of them had parents that had worked in special massage parlors operated by slave owners. Soon as they demonstrated their skills to the royal masseurs at the time, humans began to take over. Became all human about fifteen years ago I believe."

"It's a shame the art was lost beyond the castle." Rarity said. "Though with the negative connotation of slavery attached to it, I can understand why."

"Oh I'm working on that actually." he said.

"You are?" she asked.

"Yeah." he answered. "They're in the process of documenting their training process. The royal chef had some success in the past training humans in the kitchen, and is documenting that as well. I'm having all of it sent to Hand in Hoof when they're both done. It's part of my plan to have training in relevant skillsets given to humans. Once all the documentation is made, I'll have it sent to Hand in Hoof, since you all have good rapport with humans. The Ponyville chapter is planned to be the first to test it out. Lyra already knows. She was gonna bring it up at your next meeting."

"That's tomorrow night at Twilight's house I believe." Rarity said.

"If this little experiment goes well, we can change the landscape of employment for humans on a massive scale." Prince Kindle said excitedly.

"You certainly sound eager." Rarity commented.

"The potential for human employment opportunities hasn't seen this big of a shift since the Nebel incident." he said. "Though I can't imagine the Iron Hoof Clan being happy about it."

"They're never happy unless humans are beneath them." she said.

"Are you ready for your hoof massage miss?" a masseuse asked her.

"Oh yes I am." Rarity said.

She wanted to continue her conversation with Prince Kindle, but the feeling of tiny fingers working her hooves was far too distracting.

"That was a nice day." Iron said as the two left the dining hall.

"I agree." Prince Kindle said. "We both got to relax, and Rarity got everything she needed to work on her dresses."

"Your mother took the bill quite well." Iron said.

"That's just conditioning. According to the law, my access to the Royal treasury is only limited by the Royal Sisters." he said. "While Mom tried to keep my spending in check, Aunt Luna has no such concerns. Mom gave up years ago after my fourth anonymous donation to Hand in Hoof."

"I'm sure you're looking forward to your punishment nearing its completion." Iron said.

"Yeah!.....oh right." Prince Kindle said excitedly before a quick descent into disappointment. "My last day is tomorrow, and it's with...her."

"I for one, think it'll be fine." Iron said as they ascended the stairs.

"You clearly don't read the newspaper." he said. "The Royal Guard were spotted outside the castle a couple days ago. They escorted equipment from Canterlot University, to Ponyville via train. Equipment from the primatology department. All of it went right to the Golden Oak's Library."

"You think Princess Twilight will take advantage of her authority over you?" Iron asked.

"Mom denied Inquiring Mind's initial request for extensive testing on my biology." Prince Kindle said as they entered his bedroom. "I have no doubt that Twilight plans on taking advantage of tomorrow."

Prince Kindle sat down at his desk while Iron took his armor off. That trip to the spa left him feeling quite refreshed. Although his armor could use a polish. Perhaps his highness could still fail his training goal this week. A small part of Iron berated himself for such a negative thought. A mental image of Prince Kindle polishing his armor popped into his mind. Covered in sweat as he worked the polish over every inch of metal. Perhaps stripping out of his royal garments before working. Nothing left to the imagination. Perhaps-.

"No!" Iron thought. "He's ten years younger than you, you're his bodyguard, and he has enough on his plate."

"Not as much horny fan mail as I thought I would have." Prince Kindle said, bringing Iron out of his thoughts. "Less than half so far."

"Any threat letters yet?" Iron asked.

"I haven't seen any yet." he answered. "Wait. I see a letter glowing in the pile. Can you grab a mage? I'd rather play it safe this time."

"Right away your highness." Iron said as he trotted over to the door. He opened it to see the Night Guard and Royal Guard were just doing their shift change. "I need a mage. We have an enchanted letter that got past inspection."

"We'll get one since we're already heading down." a guardspony said.

"One of 'em just passed the tower entrance when we walked up." the Night Guard stallion said. "They were headin' to the mage quarters I think."

The two guardsponies made their way down the stairs. While the stallion of the Night Guard resumed his position, the mare was trying to her best to be subtle with her glances at Prince Kindle. He shook his head.

"Focus on the job soldier." he said. "I'll focus on him."

"Yes sir." the mare said dejectedly as he closed the door.

"Hey Iron." Prince Kindle called. "Check out the latest picture from a dignitary."

"Hopefully not another one from Prance." he said as he walked over.

"Not as bad." Prince Kindle said. "Head Chief Zaktor left a picture of his daughter Zaphira. They really went all out on this one."

Iron looked over Prince Kindle's shoulder. This zebra mare had most certainly gone all out on the picture. She held a spear with her right foreleg. The spear had caught numerous fish. Her eyes were a

fierce stare of intimidation. Her back was covered with what looked like an oval-shaped and human-sized bed. Iron hoped that bed wouldn't give his highness any ideas. He also couldn't help but notice the tinge of strain in her eyes. Some of her muscle was indeed showing, as well as the extreme effort going into making it seen.

"At least this picture isn't...revealing." Iron said.

"Please don't remind me." he said. "I still can't get over when King Meowmeow sent that 'best felines of Abyssinia' catalogue."

"Rumor is, that still makes the rounds among the guards off-duty." Iron said mostly to himself.

"Could've gone all eternity without knowing that." he mumbled.

A knock at the door got their attention. Iron went over to answer it. He opened to see two unicorns. Both wearing their Royal Mage robes. The older gray stallion of the two had a white cloak with a prominent gold outline. The other was a younger dark red mare, and her white cloak had no gold outline. A new mage that hadn't earned her stripe yet.

"Good evening." the gray stallion said. "We were told of a letter getting past inspection?"

"Seems so." Iron said as he let them both in.

"Probably another 'Love me, Need me' enchantment." the dark red mare said as the two entered.

"Well, it's late and I want to get some sleep eventually." Prince Kindle said as he levitated the offending letter to the mages. "I still have more letters to answer, and I trust the Royal Mages can handle the procedures for this one?"

"Yes, and if it's anything serious, we'll update you in the morning." the gray stallion said. "Goodnight your highness."

As soon as they showed up, the Royal Mages were gone. Prince Kindle took a moment to lean back in his chair.

"Surprised the mare wasn't acting like every other I've encountered this week." he commented.

"Royal Mages have romance policies that make Royal Guard seem lax in comparison." Iron commented.

It was about sunset when Rarity had finally stepped away from her work to make some supper for herself and Sweetie Belle. She had a number of her pre-ordered dresses started. At the rate she was going, she would be done a couple days before the Galloping Gala. She was grateful to be working again. Prince Kindle's gift of materials and supplies was gracious. That surprise trip to the royal spa was something she would brag about for ages to come. The two sisters chatted about their day while they ate. Eventually, it was time to brush up and get to bed.

"Alright Sweetie." Rarity said as they left the bathroom. "Time for our beauty sleep."

"Okay." Sweetie said quietly.

Rarity could see it in her sister's eyes. A week in the boutique, and they were both still having nightmares about the fire. Sweetie had it far worse. Continuous nightmares about losing her big sister. Princess Luna was doing the best she could, but trauma like that takes time to heal. Rarity trotted in front of her sister, and crouched down to be at eye-level.

"Sweetie." she said. "I Pinkie Promise you will be safe. The bad pony was punished, and cannot hurt us."

"W-What if another one comes and-?" Sweetie asked as she was cut off by a strong hug.

"We will be safe." Rarity said. "I will not allow those racist buffoons to take our home again."

"Thanks Rarity." Sweetie said as she returned the hug.

"How about we sleep in my bed tonight?" Rarity asked.

Right as Sweetie answered with excitement, there was a knock at the door. Rarity was confused, as she couldn't think of a soul that would be here this late. The two made their way downstairs. The two peeked under the closed sign to see it was no other than Rarity's friends. Fluttershy, Applejack, Rainbow Dash, and Pinkie Pie. The same four from this morning, but now bathed in the light of the rising moon.

"Why are your friends here so late?" Sweetie asked.

"I think I know why," she answered. "You head up to bed, and I will fill you in on all the juicy gossip after."

"Okay," Sweetie said as she left for the stairwell.

"Evening girls," Rarity said as she walked outside. "I assume you're here to talk about my day with Prince Kindle?"

"Ah told ya she overheard us this mornin'." Applejack said.

"Well that just makes this easy then," Rainbow said. "Did he tell you he liked you too?"

"He wasn't direct, but he did allude to it," Rarity answered.

"So he's in love with all five of us," Pinkie said. "That'll be a heck of a wedding."

"Well, we still don't know what his plan is," Fluttershy said. "Even if we did, I don't know if a herd marriage is still legal in Equestria."

"Ah'm sure his momma would change the law ta make it happen if it wasn't," Applejack said.

"I would say we consult Twilight, but I do not think that is a wise decision," Rarity interjected.

"Yeah." Rainbow said. "Her head would explode if she found out."

"Agreed." Rarity said. "That's why we need to think of a plan for the immediate future. I suggest we read up on laws around herding."

"How do you plan we do that?" Rainbow asked. "The only place with that stuff would be in the one place we're avoiding."

"We just ask with subtlety." Rarity answered.

Chapter 16

Sweat was pouring down Kindle's face. The sunrise was minutes away. The past hours had been more than tiring. As he levitated a short distance in the air from his Aunt Luna, he tried to catch his breath. He knew he was running out of time. He looked down towards the Royal Guard. All were smiling with excitement. The scientists and Twilight were scribbling away as usual. His aunt was on the last few pages of her book.

"Almost finished nephew." she said. "We are certain the guards are looking forward to their armor polishing should thee fail again."

"We most certainly are!" one of the guards shouted as the rest laughed.

Out of frustration, he shot a blast to his aunt. She simply leaned her head back as it whizzed past her face. Everything he knew about combat magic, was from her. Aerial combat was one of his weaker skills.

"Has thou considered an attempt of new tactics?" Aunt Luna asked. "Our experience is measured in centuries, but surely the great Son of Celestia can muster up the ability to take hold of a book."

"Something new..." he pondered to himself. "Something you wouldn't expect, even with centuries of experience."

He thought for a moment before looking back down at the guards. He saw his bodyguard Iron. Next to him, one of Aunt Luna's personal guardsmales. While Crescent was in the sky watching for potential intruders, Gibbous was on the ground. She was staring at Aunt Luna with the same awe he personally held for Iron. None of the other guards were looking anywhere near her, so only he saw it. Now, he had an idea. He looked back to his teacher.

"I think my solution lies in summoning-based teleportation." Kindle said.

"Well, thou is welcome to try and summon a subject thou deems worthy of assisting thee." she said without looking up as a page was turned. "However, we do not remember teaching thee such spells."

"I figured it out." he lied. "I won't summon just anybody. I will summon the greatest distraction of all: the closest pony that's truly in love with you."

"We look forward to it." Aunt Luna said, sensing a lie.

For show, Kindle made his hands glow brighter than usual. He added some sparks for good measure. The guards were quiet. He couldn't see, but he knew Gibbous was probably nervous as could be. He would have to privately apologize later for this. With a mighty clap of his hands, the energy came out a wave. In a flash, the small space between Aunt Luna and the book was taken up. Gibbous was now being levitated right in front of the princess she had guarded for years. Lips pressing. He was going for nose to nose, but it was close enough. Her closeness got her caught in the same levitation as the book. Poor Gibbous. She looked ready to faint, the dark gray of her face coat entirely red. Aunt Luna was wide-eyed in shock. Kindle saw his opportunity. He teleported over to his aunt and her guard, then snatched the book from her magical grasp.

"Ha!" Kindle shouted as he dropped to the ground. "How's that for new tactics? Looks like the guards will have to polish their own armor after all."

Silence. He looked back up to see his Aunt Luna and Gibbous were still in silent shock. It seems his tactic worked a little too well. His aunt was still levitating her personal guard. He quickly teleported over to Iron.

"Iron, I think it's time to leave." Kindle whispered into his ear.

"Agreed your highness." he whispered back.

"Alright darling, you can do this." Rarity told herself.

Rarity had psyched herself up the entire walk from the Carousel Boutique to the Golden Oaks Library. She wondered if she really had what it took to flirt with Spike like she was about to. It wasn't that she didn't want to, it was that she wasn't sure if he would understand later. It mattered little. All Rarity knew was that she had to get that book on the history of herding, as well as a book on herding law. It was very important for her to get those books. Thanks to Rainbow Dash's scouting, she knew that Twilight wouldn't be back for another hour or so. The train tended to take a long time. She took a deep breath and knocked on the door. After a moment of standing there, there was a muffled pitter-patter of dragon paws on the floor. The door opened and a small purple dragon had the biggest smile on his face.

"H-Hey Rarity." Spike said.

"Hello Spikey." she said in a sultry tone. "Won't you let me in?"

He nearly dove to get out of the doorway. She trotted in. The door was quickly closed. The library's floorspace was taken up by a countless myriad of equipment. She vaguely remembered that Twilight wanted to run some scientific tests on Prince Kindle.

"Is Twilight still in Canterlot?" she asked.

"Yeah." he answered. "She won't get back for another hour."

"Perhaps you can help me with something." she said with lidded eyes.

"Y-Yeah?" he asked.

"I need some books." she said. "A book on the history of herding, and a book on herding law."

"Right away!" Spike said as he darted off.

After a moment of crawling about the shelves, he came back with two books. He looked so excited.

"Hoffser's History of Herding, and his book on herding law." he said.

"Why thank you." Rarity said as she levitated the books. "Do you think we could keep this our little secret?"

"I mean, Twilight's gonna ask if she-." Spike was cut off when Rarity gave him a kiss on the forehead. He got a silly little grin as his cheeks went red. "I-I guess I can keep a secret for you, Rarity."

"Such a gentlestallion." she said. "I must be off. Tata!"

Twilight was vibrating with enough excitement to rival Pinkie Pie on coffee the whole train ride home. A few passengers thought it was odd, but she paid them no mind. Today was the day! Prince Kindle, the ponyborn human son of Celestia. He was spending an entire day with her, and had to follow her every command. She had spent the past five days planning and preparing. With help from Inquiring Mind, she had more than enough supplies from Canterlot University's primatology department. All of their equipment she would need to run every possible test on Kindle. She happily trotted off the train, all the way to her home. She was bouncing with excitement as she approached the library.

"Today's the dayyyyyyyyyyy!" she shouted as she walked in. "Is everything ready Spike?"

"Just like you wanted Twilight." Spike said from the couch. "I still don't know what half this stuff does though."

"Inquiring Mind gave me every piece of equipment primatologists use for measuring any aspect of humans." she began. "Every facet of Kinde will be gauged today. I even have some tests for his magic I came up with. Oh I haven't been this excited since I joined the Pink-Haired Human Believers."

"Surprised this place isn't crawling with your science friends." Spike said.

"Well, Inquiring and the others are still busy." she said. "They have two ponies-turned-humans thanks to Kindle, and they're studying those two all they can. Now I need to get ready for this, so you're in charge of handling anypony-. I mean anybody that comes in for books."

Twilight was beaming as she milled about her home. She had to make sure every instrument was ready. This was her only chance to study Kindle the way every primatologist dreamed of. Just a few weeks ago, she was meeting up with the Pink-Haired Human Believers on late nights. Just to look over blurry photos and talk about a creature they treated as legend. Now here she was, about to study the human of legend. She wondered if the Royal Mages that studied Nebel felt the same excitement she did. She was going to examine the ponyborn human with the same scrutiny they did for the first magic-wielding human.

"What if a bunch of mares find out he's here?" Spike asked.

"You're right Spike, I almost forgot." Twilight said. "His so-called admirers need to be dealt with, and I have just the thing."

Kindle sat there as the machine he was next to beeped erratically. All he was doing was putting some magic into a crystal that had wires hooked up to it. Twilight had been blabbing about the machine's purpose for a few minutes. It was something about getting a more exact read on his magical signature. His mind was elsewhere. Day court had flown by, but it was this morning's training that was stuck in his head.

"Anyways." Twilight continued. "Getting a more exact understanding of your magic might help us understand how close you are to Nebel's magic. For all we know, you could be the missing link to finally unlocking magic in all humans. Maybe I could ask Inquiring about-."

"I love you Prince Kindle!" a muffled voice quickly cut Twilight off.

Twilight grumbled as her horn glowed. Another curtain covered another window. Her 'brilliant plan' of putting up a closed sign for no discernible reason failed quickly. Now the Golden Oaks Library was surrounded by Kindle's fans.

"Marry me your highness!" a mare shouted.

reacting to the letter

Luna remembered how often her older sister was regarded as kind and patient. No matter the situation. No matter how tense. She was always the one keeping a cool head. Never using her power to force things to go her way. Even when dealing with Nightmare Moon, she never let anger cloud her judgement. Becoming a mother, has tested that resolve. When Kindle failed to appear for breakfast, his room was checked. A letter was found on the bed.

Dear Mom,

I left to face Queen Chrysalis, and save Thorax's fiancé. After all that Thorax did for me, I owe him. I know you wanted to send the Elements of Harmony, but I can't afford to wait. I can't let Chrysalis win.

Sincerely,

Prince Kindle

The last time Luna saw that mix of concern and anger in one's eyes, was with their own mother. 'Tia had already barked to a guard to summon the Elements of Harmony immediately. Ken was trying his best to calm her. It was unknown if he was making any progress. One thing was for sure.

No pony wanted to be Kindle when his mother got to him.

stopping at a village

Looking back on it, fighting all those changelings wasn't the best idea for Kindle. The Trottinghill maneuver dispatched them sure, but it was a bit exhausting. Maybe Iron was right about his naivety.

Though one couldn't deny how liberating it felt to fight all of them. It was as if his old fears had melted away. Now he was a bit tired. Iron had been with him long enough to notice before the others.

"I can walk just fine Iron." Kindle grumbled.

"You need to preserve your energy, your highness." he said. "This issue wouldn't have arisen if you had let us fight alongside you."

"Yeah, but then I wouldn't have given those changelings a terrifying story to tell about me." the prince retorted. "Besides, it wasn't that many."

"I apologize your highness, but that is not correct." Rarity said. "There were far more than we had ever fought against ourselves."

"That was like when Canterlot got invaded." Rainbow said. "You fought every single one by yourself! Who does that?"

"The son of Princess Celestia." he answered. "Despite being half human, I still possess the magic of an alicorn."

"The human village is just up ahead." Pharynx said. "We should walk around."

"Queen Chrysalis tell scary stories about the Elements of Harmony too?" Kindle asked.

"There's scary stories about us?" Pinkie asked.

"No fault of your own." the prince said. "Descendants of former slaves, plus the queen wanting a shield around her, equals ponies being scary to humans around here. Well, most ponies."

"The local Hand in Hoof chapter helped build a lot of the human villages." Rarity said. "I believe Lyra was here before the territories divided. She said the humans liked her."

"Ah swear that necklace has got ta be magic." Applejack said. "Hoomins trust it as soon as they see it."

"That's just conditioning." Kindle said as the group began to divert around the village.

"Watch out!" a young boy shouted.

New Scene

working and talking

"We belong together Prince Kindle!" a blue mare shouted.

"No, not her! I'm a much better bride!" a red mare shouted.

As the two mares began to argue, Kindle was grateful that Fluttershy's cottage had a small bridge as its only entrance. It made Iron's job far easier. Applejack lending help made it even easier. It meant he could focus on getting food to all the animals.

"Getting the feed to each animal usually takes me a little while." Fluttershy said. "With your magic, we'll be done far quicker."

"That's great." Kindle said as the bags of feed as big as him floated about. "What's after this?"

"A trip to the human village." she answered. "With the fall season, humans tend to get sick."

"I remember." he said. "Though I guess it makes sense now why I was the only one that never got sick."

"I think Prince Kindle's over here!" a voice shouted to interrupt their conversation.

off to the human village

"Why do you insist on making my job so difficult your highness?" Iron asked.

"Respecting the wishes of Hand in Hoof is not difficult." Kindle said. "They just don't want us flying or teleporting into the village."

"Must we walk the whole way?" he asked.

"Is a prince not allowed to be among his subjects?" the prince asked. "Besides, it'll give us a chance to gauge how the public is handling the Search of Suitors."

getting ready to deliver

Kindle and Iron stumbled through the doors. With a wave of his hand, the doors to Sugarcube Corner were slammed shut, and held shut with magic. Mr. Cake saw them, and came from around the counter. Both dropped to the ground to catch their breath.

"Are you two alright?" he asked.

"We're fine." Kindle said. "It might've been my fault."

"Given that casually walking through the crowd of single and desperate mares was your idea, I would be inclined to agree." Iron said.

"Well now we're inside, so I'll count it as a victory." the prince said.

mother and son morning chat

"The book was in my hands!" Kindle shouted as his bodyguard landed in the courtyard.

"Just like every other time your highness." Iron said.

"Glad you're enjoying yourself." he grumbled as he dismounted.

"Oh I am." the pegasus said. "I also look forward to my armor getting polished. I believe the guards have been dirtying their armor in preperation."

The prince grumbled once more as the two entered the castle. There was enough time before day court that a quick bath, and quicker breakfast could be had. Today would be the first day court with his royal decree in place. He wondered how it would hold.

"Ah, there you are Kindle." his mother said as they turned a corner.

"Morning your highness." Iron said.

"Morning Mom." Kindle said.

"Ready for your day?" she asked.

"Just about." he said. "Daily training with Aunt Luna is wrapped up, now I just need a quick bath and breakfast before day court. With the royal decree I made yesterday, it should be a short day court."

"Raven told me about your decree." she said. "Disallowing day court to be used for Search of Suitor purposes is probably the best course of action for now."

"I'm glad you agree." he said. "The less stress, the better. I better get going if I want to wrap everything up before meeting with Pinkie Pie. She wants me helping with deliveries all day."

"Well, I won't keep you." his mother said. "See you tonight."

"Bye Mom!" Kindle said he walked away.

planning a day with the prince

annoying adoration

Kindle rubbed his temples as he walked down the hall. He was finally finished with day court. Ten AM. About as bad as he figured it would be. Although the musical number some of the mares had put

together was a bit much. While his royal decree had stopped the more blatant attempts to abuse day court as a chance to woo him, the craftier mares were not deterred. They somehow cobbled together a play about him falling in love with a Ponyville mare, in the span of a few days. Supposedly, they wanted to show him one of the musical numbers, as well as get his blessing to do the play. He gave it to them in the hopes it would make them go away. As they left, arguments of who would play the leading mare began to surface among themselves. He pushed the thought away as he tried to focus on something else.

"Maybe I can bully Blueblood into doing day court for awhile." he said.

"Bold of you to presume your mother would allow you to let him run day court again after your last stunt." Iron said.

"Good point." Kindle said. "Hey Raven?"

"Yes, your highness?" she asked.

"Any chance the laws allows me to make day court your problem?" he asked.

"One has to be royalty to manage day court I'm afraid." Raven answered.

"Mon amour?" a french accent called out. "Is that you?"

A chill went down Kindle's spine as he looked towards the source of the voice. A tall, slender unicorn. A night sky blue dress to compliment her grayish-pink coat and a long black mane. The mare stared him down with a vixenish smile. Lidded eyes of seduction filled him with silent screaming. He felt like a mouse being stared down by a hungry cat as she got closer. The worst part? Iron wouldn't be able to so much as touch her without causing an international incident. So if she got flirty, he was on his own.

"Raven?" he whispered. "I thought I told you to warn me when she was here?"

"You were supposed to be gone before she arrived." she whispered. "Day court took longer than I thought."

"Get my mother immediately!" he whispered harshly. "The last thing I want is to be left at the mercy of this horny old-."

"I thought that was you, mon amour." the french mare said.

"Duchess Vieille Fleur!" Kindle said with feigned excitement as Raven trotted away. "I didn't know you would be here today!"

"Well, I was only in town to visit my niece, Fleur de Lis, as well as some political dealings with you wonderful mother." Vieille said. "Although with the Search of Suitors going on, I thought I would visit my préféré petit humain. Finally give us a chance to know each other better."

"Oh..." Kindle nervously said. "You know about the Search of Suitors."

"I follow all news about you quite closely, mon amour." she said. "The opportunity to be your wife is something I could not let pass me by. I think my age gives me more than enough experience at being a good lover."

Vieille began to circle him. The cat and mouse analogy was becoming more and more accurate. He felt like she would pounce at any moment. Between her letters and current conversation, it quite a literal concern. If she dragged him onto her airship, things he'd rather not think about would happen. The space between them got smaller with each step.

"Perhaps we could skip the foreplay, and run off to my airship?" she whispered into his ear. "I'm sure nopony would mind two members of royalty having a little fun of the rutting variety for a few hours. Wouldn't you agree?"

"I...uh...well..." Kindle failed to find any words to help him.

"Seems my beauty has taken your tongue." she whispered into his ear. "Perhaps I should levitate you into my airship right now."

two pegasi chat

As the sun set, Rainbow finished off the last of her supper. She tossed the dirty bowl with the rest of the dishes in her sink. She would get to them eventually. In retrospect, she could've had Prince Kindle do them. Oh well. It was about time for bed. A quiet knock from the front door caught her attention. She was never one to get visitors this late. She trotted over to the door, and opened it.

"Fluttershy?" Rainbow asked.

"Hi Rainbow." she answered quietly.

"You're never in Cloudsdale this late." Rainbow said. "What's up?"

"I thought I would check on you and ask how your day went with Prince Kindle." Fluttershy answered.

"It was awesome!" she said. "We relaxed most of the day. Spitfire somehow found out he was here. She tried to flirt, and had him a stuttering mess. I had to save the guy. He also helped me deal with your brother Zephyr. By the way, there might be a rumor tomorrow that I'm his suitor."

"Spitfire's encounter was the word around town." Fluttershy said. "Rumors of Prince Kindle having a thing for muscular pegasi."

"He does." Rainbow said. "He told me himself."

Chapter 1 - Kindle gets captured

Chapter 2 - Kindle finally meets his mother

Chapter 3 - 5 years later

Chapter 4 - A date, a flight, and a fire

Chapter 5 - After the fire

Chapter 6 - Kidnapped and revealed

Chapter 7 - Kindle's first day as a public prince
Chapter 8 - Discord rises
Chapter 9 - Kindle goes to northern changeling kingdom
Chapter 10 - Kindle goes to southern changeling kingdom
Chapter 11 - A day spent with Applejack
Chapter 12 - A day spent with Fluttershy
Chapter 13 - A day spent with Pinkie Pie
Chapter 14 - A day spent with Rainbow Dash
Chapter 15 - A day spent with Rarity
Chapter 16 - A day spent with Twilight Sparkle

Chapter ? - Therapy session with Uncle Discord
Chapter ? - The King of Saddle Arabia has his daughters try to court Kindle
Chapter ? - The Galloping Gala
Chapter ? - Cousin Sparky's birthday party
Chapter ? - Kindle's family deals with the Search of Suitors
Chapter ? - Cadence goes on a 'love mission' to get Kindle and Iron together after she learns they love each other without the other knowing
Chapter ? - Kindle and Iron spend a day together as a couple
Chapter ? - Kindle is struck by an arrow while the Royal Family attends the Wonderbolts final show before winter. The first assassination attempt
Chapter ? - A new guard is assigned to Kindle(maybe Gibbous)
Chapter ? - Kindle hides in the castle a whole month due to assassination trauma
Chapter ? - Kindle and Iron go public with their relationship
Chapter ? - Equestria reels from learning the son of Celestia is gay
Chapter ? - Kindle goes out for his 21st birthday, and drunkenly admits his reason for disliking Twilight
Chapter ? - Black Rose Assassin is hired by the Evil Sisters. Kindle meets his newest stalker, the prince of Denfield
Chapter ? - Another therapy with Uncle Discord
Chapter ? - Kindle gets shrunk by the Black Rose Assassin
Chapter ? - Kindle tries to survive while shrunk in the winter
Chapter ? - Kindle spends time in a necklace cage while still shrunk
Chapter ? - Kindle sits down with Iron's parents and discuss him being in a relationship with their son
Chapter ? - Iron sits down with the Royal Family about being in a relationship with Kindle
Chapter ? - Kindle is abducted by his stalker, the prince of Denfield
Chapter ? - Kindle leads the charge on stopping the production of Shrink Powder
Chapter ? - Kindle's parents get married
Chapter ? - Hearth's Warming
Chapter ? - Sombra attacks Kindle while his parents are on their honeymoon
Chapter ? - Kindle and Sombra rematch
Chapter ? - Evil Sisters revealed on Nightmare Night
Chapter ? - The search for the Evil Sisters begins

Chapter ? - Iron and Kindle go on their first official date

Chapter ? - Tirek attacks Twilight and is stopped by Kindle

Chapter ? - Kindle finds out why his training has taught him so few spells

Chapter ? - Kindle tries to run the kingdom while his mother and aunt are in comas

Chapter ? - Final fight between Kindle and the Evil Sisters

Chapter ? - Kindle and Iron get married

Epilogue - Prince Kindle and Princess Twilight have a conversation while getting ready for their coronation as rulers of Equestria

Items to rework into outline

- King of Saddle Arabia and Prince of Germaneigh leading the work on undoing emancipation of humans

- This can be revealed at the Galloping Gala

- Sparky's birthday party

- Day after Galloping Gala

- Getting the young humans into the Ponyville school

- Mention during HiH meeting

- Kindle dealing with the trauma of assassination attempts

- Chapter after first attempt

- Kindle teleporting an entire train

- Could be something to pull him out of hiding in the castle