“Go on, introduce yourself to the class.”  Cheerilee smiled reassuringly at the new filly, who didn’t really look like she needed the support.  She was an earth pony with fluffy white fur, a long blonde mane and large blue eyes, and she lacked a foal’s usual puppy fat.  Sweetie’s gaze wandered down to her flank, taking note of the enviable body she saw en route.  It was the kind look that her sister would kill for; soft, fluffy fur covering a flawlessly smooth body with neither the harshness of hard muscle and bone nor the layer of fat that most foals had.  She sighed ruefully; a cutie mark showed in bold colour.  It was a love heart in pink, overlaid by a black object that Sweetie didn’t recognise.

  There was a pause for several seconds as the filly’s eyes wandered back and forth across the room.  “I am Aryanne,” each slow word seemed almost to drip with arrogance.  The haughty tone completely changed Sweetie Belle’s perception of her.  Now she saw the upturned muzzle, the quiet half-smile showed itself to be a sneer, and the rigidly correct stance spoke of pride rather than the desire to make a good first impression.

  “Looks like Diamond Tiara’s got some competition,” Apple Bloom whispered to her.  She nodded glumly in agreement.  It had been bad enough when they outnumbered the stuck up fillies, who knew how awful their meanness would get now?

  “My father commands a heavy-armour unit of the Royal Guard on the border with the Republic of Stalliongrad.  He is one of the most decorated officers in the military.  For the first years of my schooling I was taught by tutors and the officers, but it was decided that I must be sent to join the social élite in the capital, and learn the sophistication that my place requires.  As the only school in Canterlot, however, is the School of Magic, I must stay here until I am old enough to leave.”  The Crusaders were practically gagging by the end of her introduction.  She had, indeed, made a good impression on the pink heiress.  The school bitch was grinning wider than Pinkie in a party.

  “Alright then, Aryanne, just go and sit next to somepony so they can help you get used to your new school and we’ll get started.  It doesn’t matter where.”  Without hesitation the pale filly came and sat next to Sweetie Belle.

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The sneery filly made no attempt to start a conversation herself, but was willing to talk whenever Sweetie tried.  So the day went on, with the pair at a slight distance but without problems.  Sweetie was glad, at least, that she didn’t seem to feel the need to constantly belittle her “inferiors”.  When the time for their break came and they went outside, she was surprised to find that the newcomer stayed firmly by her side.  Given the looks of unease and distaste that were being shot off in every other direction, it looked like she had decided that the unicorn filly was the only one who wasn’t actually revolting.  “So, er, what do you do for fun?”  Sweetie tried again to start a real conversation.

  “Reading, writing, drawing, music, sports.”  The list was quite uninformative, and didn’t lead to any obvious response.

  “Oh.”

  “And you?”

  Sweetie looked up in surprise, “Oh, well, I do all kinds of things.  Me and my friends haven’t got our cutie marks, you see, so we do all kinds of stuff to see whether it’s our special talent or not!”

  “Your friends?”

  The unicorn started nodding hard, glad to have finally made a connection, “Yeah.  Apple Bloom and Scootaloo.  They’ll come over and say hi when they see us.  Hey, there’s Apple Bloom now!”  She waved over the foals playing all around them.  An enormous pink bow seemed to see her, and started bobbing its way closer through the chaos.  The pair stood watching it in silence until it reached them, revealing a yellow earth pony tied to its bottom by her red mane.  Apple Bloom looked slightly suspicious as she approached, as if expecting Aryanne to start being sarcastic and condescending to her as soon as she came within range.

  “So, uh, you two seem to be getting on well.  No trouble from those two?”

  “None.  We haven’t seen them at all.  I was just telling Aryanne about the Cutie Mark Crusaders, so have you seen Scoots since class?  I’ve hardly spoken to her at all, the last couple of days, and she’s been acting really weird half the times that I have.  Do you think she might be sick?”

  “Nah, she’s been pretty much fine most of the time.  It’s just unlucky, you always seem to see her when she’s hitting a bad patch.  She’s been as healthy as anypony the rest of the time,” Apple Bloom explained, although her face creased a little as she thought about the improbable timing involved.  She quickly dropped the conversation as its subject joined their little group.

  “Hey, guys, I was thinking about it in class and I’ve got the best one yet: Cutie Mark Crusader Fireworks Makers!”

  “That’s a great idea,” Sweetie Belle squeaked, “and if that doesn’t work then we can do whatever Aryanne does!  I don’t even understand her cutie mark, so we can’t have tried it already, and she’ll be able to help us with it.”  The blonde filly smiled and nodded to her new friend, eliciting a chorus of happy exclamations.

  Scootaloo’s wings shot out from her sides in happiness as she reared up and shouted, “Cutie Mark Crusader Heart Crossers, Yay!”  When she came back down and opened her eyes, she saw Aryanne staring at her in shock.  “What?”

  “Her…  Her wings.”

  “Oh, they’re not as bad as they look,” the Pegasus grinned sheepishly, “Rainbow Dash says that I’ll be able to fly someday, and she’s always right.  She says that it’s not common, but that with lots of work and some magical fixing, I’ll be able to fly as well as almost anypony in the end.”  A twitch started up on Aryanne’s top lip, giving her a flickering sneer, and she took two slow steps backwards.  Now Scootaloo’s face softened into a look of hurt.  “What?  They’ll be fine.  They’ve just grown wrong, but by the time I’m an adult they’ll be right again and they’ll work.  I will be able to fly.  I WILL!”  Aryanne leant further away from the sobbing filly, disgust and disbelief written clearly across her face.  Scootaloo turned and bolted, closely pursued by the other two Crusaders.