

## Chapter 7: In Which Something is Kept

Blueblood stirred gently in his sleep. He mumbled to himself, wordless sentences spoken to no pony. His legs twitched gently, and his brow creased. The prince was dreaming.

He was out in the field around his master's house. A iron collar was strapped around his neck, weighing his head down. He walked aimlessly around the field, pulling out weeds. His master watched him from high above on his balcony, stretching up into the sky until Blueblood could no longer see the top. Occasionally he would shout down commands, demanding that Blueblood do some inane task or another. Sometimes he was told that he had missed weeds. Other times he was told to dance for his master's amusement. Once he was simply ordered to hold still, and a small glass of water fell down from the great tower and struck him in the head. It didn't matter what it was; no matter what the command, no matter how humiliating or degrading, Blueblood did as he was told. New weeds always sprouted up whenever he pulled one, and his master always had new demands. The weeds stained his fur, colouring it a deep crimson. After working for ages, his entire coat was red. Still he worked, pulling up every weed he could find, obeying every command. The collar wore him down, and his body ached, but he worked. He would work forever.

On the corners of his vision, a figure stood. He couldn't make out the details of it. It stood stock straight and tall and was so white that it shone, even amongst the fur-staining weeds. Whenever Blueblood turned to look at it, it darted away. But it was always there, staring at him.

Blueblood continued to work, and the weeds grew higher around him. Their stems stretched into the air, reaching past his head. All he could see was a swaying world of plants. He pushed through them, blundering blindly for his master's tower, but he could not find it. Then, he saw a movement in the weeds. He headed for it, thinking it might be his master with another order for him. The weeds parted, and Blueblood saw that it was not his master, but the figure that had been watching him.

The figure was a stallion; a tall, proud unicorn with a pale blond mane. His features seemed twisted and distorted, as if he were melting. It peered at him strangely, an enormous, cruel grin plastered across its face. It spoke at him, but it didn't speak in words. All that came out of its throat were garbled noises, like a cooing mother, mixed with arrogant laughter, and crying. Blueblood found he could understand it, though.

*What are you?* It seemed to say, leaning in to look at Blueblood. Blueblood tried to answer, but the collar was tight around his throat, keeping him from speaking. The figure jiggled, like it was laughing, and leaned in again, tilting its head. Its grin widened, becoming impossibly large.

*You aren't better than me,* it said. It seemed to laugh again, and took a step toward Blueblood. He stepped back, but the figure followed him. *You aren't better than me,* it repeated. Its face was almost pressing against Blueblood's. He started to shake, and he turned and ran.

The figure pursued him through the weeds, calling that same garbled message after him. *You aren't better than me!* It seemed to laugh as it chased him. Blueblood looked over his shoulder at it. It was only walking, but it was managing to keep pace. It twisted its head left and right, and its smug smile stretched off its face. *You can't leave me,* it called out, *I'll catch up to you!* Blueblood squeezed his eyes shut, and kept running.

The field of weeds kept growing higher and higher. It seemed to stretch on forever as Blueblood pushed the plants down to run. The iron collar weighed him down, threatening to pull him down onto the ground. It seemed to get heavier with every step that he took. He stumbled through the weeds as the figure slung taunts and jeers at him. Suddenly, the weeds fell away. For a moment, Blueblood was relieved – until he realized that he had run over the bank of the river.

He plunged into the water, dragged down by the collar. He struggled against it, but it wouldn't come off. He was starting to run out of breath, air leaking out of his lungs as he fell deeper and deeper into the bottomless river. Its blue-green waters were getting darker, until there was nothing but blackness – except for the figure.

It had followed him into the river, becoming nebulous in the water. Even down here it shone. Its body stretched out in all directions, but that grin was still there in the centre. Even underwater, it spoke to him.

*I'll catch up to you*, it said. A long, spindly limb stretched out from its centre, reaching for Blueblood. It stretched, longer and longer, longer than any limb should ever be. *You can't leave me*, it said again. Its voice terrified Blueblood, and he tried to swim deeper into the river to escape it. It followed after him, its single limb stretching after him.

Blueblood's lungs were empty now, but he still swam further down. His legs were turning to stone, and he couldn't swim any longer. He twisted around, and saw the figure still stretching after him. It was almost upon him now, nothing but a sick, twisted grin, and a hoof reaching out to grab him. Blueblood trembled in the deep as the hoof took hold of his shoulder. It washed over him, oozing across his body like taffy. He wanted to cry out, but he couldn't speak. The figure washed over him, completely covering his body, and pulling him in. It wrapped itself around him, and the world went black.

Then, it was awash with light. Blueblood stood in a brilliant white world. Behind him was a golden throne fit for a god, inlaid with jewels and plush cushions. Ponies were chained to it, despondent and weak. The throne was at the top of a gigantic staircase, that seemed to stretch into the clouds below. There was nothing below them, save for white. From that same white great marble pillars erupted, framing the scene before Blueblood.

Crowds of ponies stood before Blueblood, prostrating themselves. A voice rang out over them, made of those same laughs and cries that the figure spoke in. This time, to his surprise, Blueblood recognized the voice as his own. He didn't mean to, but he was speaking.

*None of you are good enough*, he said to the ponies before him. *I am greater than all of you. You shall all serve me. You shall serve my whims, and what you say means nothing.*

He felt his head turn, once again without his volition, surveying all of the ponies. There were earth ponies, pegasi and unicorns before him. None of them mixed; they were all grouped together. He swung his hoof at the pegasi, and demanded they dance for him. They did so, and he heard himself laugh. Then he swung his hoof at the earth ponies. He didn't command them, instead simply berating them. He called them weak, and worthless. Then, he turned to the unicorns, and he saw that not all of the ponies were separated. In the centre of the unicorns there was a single crimson earth pony. Blueblood walked towards the earth pony, who was cowering amongst the unicorns at the edge of the staircase. As he approached, Blueblood saw that the red pony was wearing an iron collar, and was dripping wet. He stood before the red

earth pony. He stood before himself, the red stallion cowering on the floor.

The red Blueblood looked up at him, fear clear in his wide eyes. Blueblood looked into them, and he saw himself. A white unicorn, horribly twisted and distorted. The only clear feature was his grin – arrogant, cruel and petty. He tried to stop himself, but he raised his hoof, and put it against the red Blueblood's forehead, right where his horn had been.

*You are not better than me*, he said, and pushed. The red Blueblood tumbled down the stairs, falling endlessly.

Blueblood's eyes snapped open.

As always, he felt that same painful awareness. By now he was able to ignore it though, and he lifted his head slowly, peering sleepily around the room. Light spilled through the window, falling across Blueblood's blanket in a broad line. Looking over his shoulder at the window, Blueblood confirmed what he had known the moment he awoke: his master was gone.

Blueblood stepped out of the bedroom, closing the door behind him. He noticed that the door to the balcony was opened just a crack, and he nudged it open further. Poking his head through, he found his master, leaning over the banister and staring out over the river.

It was a beautiful scene. The river gleamed in the morning light; its glare hurt Blueblood's eyes a bit, but he kept on looking. The light seemed to bounce all across the field, casting everything in a brilliant, clean white. In spite of the wilderness, or perhaps because of it, the world seemed pure. Blueblood walked out further onto the balcony, and his master looked over his shoulder.

"Red," he said simply, turning back to the scene. "Came to join me?" Blueblood lowered his head, and took another shuffling step forward.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"What for this time?" Brook asked. Blueblood looked down, pawing at the floor nervously.

"Sorry," he said, "for waking up late."

"It's hardly late," Brook said dismissively. "Sun only came up an hour ago. Plenty of time left for you to work."

"But," Blueblood said again, "If you wanted to, you could have woken me..." Brook was silent.

"Come here, Red," he said. Blueblood did as he was told, walking up beside the old unicorn. Brook didn't look at him, still staring out over the field. Blueblood sat beside him, following his gaze. Occasionally he would look back at his master, who still remained silent. Once again, he wore that curious, empty expression.

"I could have woken you," Brook said finally, "but I didn't." Blueblood blinked at him, expecting more, but the old unicorn had returned to staring. Blueblood stared too. He looked out over the river, over the forest in the distance, but he didn't really see. His mind was returning to his dream. Though the field bore only the vaguest resemblance to the one he had seen while he slept, it still reminded him of it. It reminded him of that strange white figure, grinning at him amidst the weeds. He shook his head, chasing the frightening thoughts away, and his master spoke again.

"It's good you slept in," he said, getting off of the banister. "There's a lot of work for you

to do. You'll need the energy. Let's get breakfast." Blueblood nodded, and Brook led him back into the house and down the stairs. He pulled a pair of buckets connected by a rope out of a cupboard, and gave it to Blueblood. "Fill these in the river," he instructed, "then bring them back here." Blueblood nodded, and slung them around his neck.

He trotted out the door, and down to the river. He hadn't been close to it before, but now that he was he saw that it was nothing like the river that flowed through the mainland. While that had been deep, and dark, this river seemed almost crystal clear in comparison. Its waters had a faint aqua hue, but he could clearly see the river bed, even in the middle. He took a few steps into the river, and watched the sand kick up in a cloud around his hooves.

He had expected the water to be chilly, but that was not the case. It was warm, nearly the perfect temperature. There were lakes and pools around Canterlot, but he had never gone swimming in any of them; mountain water was much too cold for him. He stooped down, letting the buckets around his neck fall into the river and be filled up. When he tried to stand up straight again, however, he found that it was not so easy. The rope dug into his back, weighed down by the heavy buckets of water. He made his way back to the house. He tried to walk steadily, but the weight of the buckets made his gait rough, and some of the water sloshed out of the buckets and onto him. They were still mostly full when he arrived back at the house, but not so full that anything spilled over.

"Bring them here," Brook called from one of the back rooms as Blueblood entered. He followed the voice and found his master in a small room containing a meager table, a few stools and a wood-burning stove, fire already burning. "Good," Brook said. "Pour one of the buckets into that pot."

Blueblood did as he was told, though not without some difficulty. It was hard to grip the bucket between two flat hooves and it often jostled in his grip, spilling water over the floor. He looked at his master shyly, who didn't seem to be paying attention. The old pony focused instead on the state of the fire. Blueblood finished filling the pot soon enough, and Brook turned around. He nodded impassively at the reasonably-full pot and, gripping the handle in his mouth, set it onto the stove. He opened a cupboard and pulled out a heavy sack. He looked between it and the pot for a moment, before sighing. His horn lit up slightly – if he hadn't been watching, Blueblood wouldn't have even seen it glow – and the sack lifted off the ground. It drifted effortlessly over the pot, and poured oats into the hot water. Brook put it back in its cupboard, and turned back to the pot.

"Come here, Red," he said idly. Blueblood joined him at the small stove, staring at the pot. "You know how to make oatmeal?" Brook asked. Blueblood shook his head.

"No, master," he said. Brook raised an eyebrow at him, but gestured toward the pot with his bad hoof.

"You'll learn," he said. "Just boil the oats in water until it starts to thicken. Think you can manage that?" Blueblood nodded, and Brook did so as well. "Good," he said. "Then you'll do that every morning. Get two buckets of water from the river, and use one to make oatmeal."

"What's the other one for?" Blueblood asked.

"Washing up," Brook told him. He dipped his hooves in the second bucket, washing them in demonstration. He scrubbed his bad hoof carefully, gently rubbing the dirt out of it. Blueblood watched him for a moment, before the green unicorn nodded towards the stove. "Watch the

meal," he said, "don't let it burn."

"Right," Blueblood said, turning back to the pot. "Sorry." He watched the pot bubble on the stove, stirring it occasionally with a wooden spoon that Brook had given him. After a while the mixture started to turn into a sort of paste as the oats blended with the water, and Blueblood took the pot off the stove. He almost scalded his mouth, and he dropped the pot onto the table, splattering the oatmeal.

"Sorry," he said sheepishly. Brook shrugged.

"There are bowls in the cupboard," he said, "and spoons. Get two out."

"R-right," Blueblood said, trotting over to the cupboard. He found the spoons and bowls as Brook had told him – oddly, there were more than two. There were five bowls and spoons, as well as five forks, knives, plates and cups. He found this odd, but ignored it. He took the bowls and spoons in his mouth, bringing them to the table. He set them down, and ladled the pastey oatmeal into them. He was about to sit down to eat, when Brook coughed.

"Wash up," the old pony said. Blueblood grimaced, and walked to the bucket of water. He scrubbed his hooves, and returned to the table. Brook peered at his now-spotless hooves, and nodded. "Good," he said. "Go ahead and eat."

Brook took hold of the spoon in his good hoof. With a time-honed skill that Blueblood wouldn't have expected of the unicorn – or any unicorn, for that matter – he ate his breakfast. Blueblood tried to do the same, but he has not used to using utensils with hooves. He fumbled with the spoon, unable to keep hold of it without any digits. Eventually, he resorted to sticking his face into the bowl.

*Just another thing to get used to, he told himself, probably better for a slave to eat like this anyways...*

He tried to convince himself that he wasn't Blueblood once again, but in truth his heart wasn't really in it. His mind kept going back to his dream. He didn't understand why. It was just a dream, after all, but something about it bothered him. Maybe it was the figure's strange, oversized smile that made him uncomfortable, or the way it sucked him in. Maybe it was all those ponies that had bowed before the figure. Whatever it was, he had trouble focusing on anything else. It seemed to be autopilot that got him through his meal, as he was done before he knew it. His master wash finished as well, staring idly at him.

"Done?" he asked. Blueblood nodded slowly.

"Yes," he said. Brook nodded as well, and stood up from the table.

"Wash up," he said. "And wash the bowls and pots. Then meet me outside." Without waiting for a reply he limped past Blueblood, and out of the house. Blueblood did as he was told, washing the excess oatmeal off the bowls and his face, and then followed after his master.

Brook was standing around the side of the house, staring at the shed. Blueblood walked up slowly, and Brook peered over his shoulder at the white stallion.

"We need to get this shed opened, Red," he said. "Tear down the vines." Blueblood nodded slowly and trotted up to the old structure. He bit one of the vines surrounding it, trying to tear it off. The old unicorn watched him impassively as he pulled and struggled to tear the vines. They eventually came loose in a single tangle, and Blueblood tumbled onto his back with the mass of plants still clutched in his mouth. Brook paused for a moment to stare at him, now draped in a net of vines.

“Can you get up?” he asked. Blueblood struggled under the vines, but eventually found his way upright.

“Y-yes,” he said, his head low, “yes, sorry.” he trotted back to the shed, shaking off one of the vines that had wrapped around his hoof, and returned to clearing the shed.

With the one mass of vines gone, the rest of the job was much easier. The other weeds and plants tore off in Blueblood’s mouth, and there were some where he had to do little more than bite down on them to tear them away. In the end the shed was bare and leaning dangerously to one side. Blueblood reached out gently, prodding open the door. The entire structure gave a whining creak, and shuddered visibly. Blueblood grimaced, but pushed the door open more. For a moment, it seemed fine. The door swung cleanly on the hinges, nothing to stop or slow its path – except for the wall of the shed.

The door struck the inside wall, and the shed shuddered again. It leaned even further and a loud groan was heard, like the shed was sighing. Both Brook and Blueblood leaped back as the shed came crashing down, its boards breaking and splintering. A few of the larger things in the shed stuck through the mass, but most of it was lost in a pile of old, rotted wood. Brook sighed, and Blueblood’s head sunk.

“Sorry, master,” he said. Brook prodded one of the planks, which splintered easily.

“It’s not your fault,” he said. “This shed was old. The vines held it up, but it wanted to fall.” He shifted a few pieces of lumber around, and shook his head. “We’ll need a new one,” he said. “That means new wood.”

“Would you like me to get some, master?” Blueblood asked. Brook shook his head.

“Later,” he said. “You need to get to work. First, clear all this. You need what’s under there.”

Blueblood stepped closer to the pile of wood, shoving the broken planks aside. It was easy, but there was a lot of wood to go through, it seemed. After a minute of shoveling, Brook told him to stop.

“There,” he said, pointing a piece of metal sticking through the rubble. “That’s what you need.” His horn lit up, and the piece of metal started to rise through the rubble. As it rose, Blueblood saw that it was not a small tool like he had imagined. The metal formed a large, curved “V” shape coming to a sharp point in the front. It was connected to a pair of wooden bars with a heavy collar attached.

“What is it?” Blueblood asked. Brook held the device in mid-air, staring at his slave.

“You’ve never seen a plough before?” he asked. Blueblood looked between his master and the plough.

“No,” he said slowly. Brook blinked at him, but didn’t comment. Instead, he levitated the plough and walked around the house. Blueblood followed him, and the pair circled around to the patch of rough soil. Brook set the plough down, the metal v pointed into the ground. “Come here,” he said without looking at Blueblood. Blueblood did as he was told and Brook took a hold of him. He steered the stallion in front of the plough, and dropped the collar around his neck.

“You use a plough to till the soil,” Brook said. “Walk.”

Blueblood looked back at Brook, who stared at him expectantly. He gestured for Blueblood to move. The stallion nodded, and started to walk, only to stop dead when he reached the end of the rope connecting him to the plough. He tried again, pulling against the

rope this time. The plough twitched, but the earth didn't give way. He looked back at Brook, who had raised an eyebrow at him. Despite this clue, the unicorn's expression was as indecipherable as ever. Blueblood looked forward again, and shook his head. He took a step back, then pushed forward as hard as he could. This time, he felt the plough behind him budge, just slightly.

Encouraged by this meager success, he strained against the ropes. Little by little he felt the plough behind him shudder into life, dragging through the dirt. He grunted loudly, head down and heaving hard, and the plough started to move faster. Soon, he was able to take a step forward. Then another. Before long, he was trudging slowly through the field, the plough dragging behind him. Brook limped along beside him silently, watching him work. It took him a while – he wasn't sure how long exactly, though it felt like ages – but he eventually reached the far end of the small patch. He stopped, beaming at his master. Despite his heavy breathing, he was proud of what he had done, however meager. Blueblood wouldn't have been able to do that, he thought to himself, but Red had. Brook nodded to him.

“Good,” he said. “That's one row done. “I'll turn it around for you.”

“Why?” Blueblood asked. “How many are there left to do?” Brook levitated the plough out of the ground, setting it behind Blueblood once again.

“Fifteen should do,” he said. “Maybe twenty.” Blueblood stared at him blankly. Brook stared back for a moment, before nodding at the plough. “Well, get moving,” he said. Blueblood fought the urge to sigh, and pulled against the ropes again.

It took hours, but Blueblood finally managed to plough the entire patch of land beside the house. The earth was soft and brown, squishing under the two ponies' hooves. Brook took the yoke off of Blueblood's neck, and the two ambled away from it. Blueblood's legs ached miserably, but he didn't say anything. He was stumbling a bit though, and it did not escape Brook's notice.

“Sit here,” he said. Blueblood did as he was told, letting his weary legs rest. Brook sat beside him staring out at the river. The two were silent, save for Blueblood's occasional grunts as he shifted around to keep from hurting his legs. In the end he flopped onto his side, splaying his legs out across the grass. Brook peered sidelong at him, but his gaze soon returned to the river, not saying a word. Blueblood closed his eyes, feeling the breeze wash over him gently. The ache in his legs began to numb, and he felt it becoming difficult to open his eyes again. He could hear his master breathing rhythmically beside him. He felt peaceful. The midday sun warmed him, and he felt his mind lull softly.

Then, in a flash, he saw the figure from his dream again, his arrogant grin too wide for his face. Blueblood's eyes snapped open, and he jerked violently.

His master was still sitting beside him, but the sun seemed to have moved along in the sky. He blinked, looking around. He saw that the rubble of the shed had been cleared in the distance, piled neatly, and that there was an axe sitting beside Brook. He shied away from the axe for a moment, before realizing what had happened. He lowered his head ashamedly, and started to apologize.

“No sense in working you to death,” Brook cut him off. “Everypony needs a break.” Blueblood nodded silently. He was still ashamed that he had fallen asleep. He berated himself mentally.

*That isn't good, he thought, It isn't what a good slave would do... it's something that Blueblood would do! And I'm not Blueblood... right?* He shook his head softly, chasing his doubts away.

"What did you dream about?" Brook asked. Blueblood blinked at him. "You were twitching," Brook said by way of explanation, "what did you dream about?"

"I... don't know," Blueblood lied. "I don't remember." The grinning figure still made him uncomfortable; afraid, even. He didn't even want to remember it, much less talk about it. So he put it out of his mind, and stood up on shaky legs. Brook stood as well, gathering the axe with his bad hoof.

"We'll rebuild that shed," he said. "We need a place to keep the plough out of the rain. We need to gather wood."

"Alright." Blueblood nodded. He followed Brook out to the edge of the forest, when Brook stopped him in front of a large tree.

"This will do," he said. He handed Blueblood the axe, and gestured to the tree. "Chop it down," he said. Blueblood gulped, and took up the axe. He held it clumsily between his hooves, and he tottered unsteadily on his back hooves as he tried to stand. He fell backwards at first, but he got back up. With a few unsteady swings he managed to make a chip in the thin tree's side. After a few more swings he gradually firmed his grip on the axe, and swung with more confidence. He found a good stance, and a steady rhythm. He swung, again and again, driving the axe through the trunk. It thudded, vibrating in his hooves with every strike. Before long his hooves had gone numb. He was hardly able to hold the axe, but he didn't need to. The tree swayed precariously, finally tipping over and crashing down into the woods.. At Brook's instruction, he slowly dragged the tree out into the field where Brook ordered he set about chopping its trunk into logs. It was easier this time, now that he had learned to swing the axe properly. It took a long time, but he eventually managed to make a sizable pile of logs. Brook levitated them, and told Blueblood to follow him to the shed.

"Some of the boards we can reuse," he said, gesturing to a pile of planks. Unlike the rest, which were old and rotted, these looked fresh. Blueblood pressed a hoof against one to test it. It felt sturdy enough. "Most," Brook continued, "are rotted through. We can turn the wood you cut into more boards. The nails are all still good, we can use them."

"How do we start?" Blueblood asked. Brook levitated the axe over to a small log that stood upright. The axe spun in mid-air, slamming into the log and shearing it in half with a snap. One half of it fell away, but the axe spun around again before the second half could fall. The result was a thick plank of wood.

"You keep giving me logs," he said, "I'll cut them. I'll tell you when we've got enough." Blueblood nodded, and trotted to a stack of logs nearby. He grabbed one off the top, fumbling with it between his hooves. He eventually managed to set it upright, and Brook swiftly chopped a plank out of it. Blueblood grabbed the plank and put it aside, setting down another log to be chopped. It was slow going at first; Blueblood had trouble grasping the logs between his hooves, and even more trouble setting them standing up. Brook never spoke, focusing on his work. The axe spun swiftly and precisely, hacking through the wood in an instant. It always cut along the grain of the wood, no matter which way Blueblood set the log.

Eventually, Blueblood began to pick up his pace. Through practice, he became more



accustomed to working with his hooves. In all the time since he had lost his horn, he had never once tried to use them for any work. He tried not to think of the time when he had his horn – that was Blueblood's time, and no matter what he felt about it he would not be Blueblood any longer – but he knew that back then he had used his hooves even less, if that was possible. He had always prided himself on having manual dexterity above ordinary ponies. He had been proud of what his magic allowed him to do. Now, though, he had no magic to help him. As they neared the bottom of the pile of logs his hooves moved more dexterously. He and Brook had developed a rhythm: place, cut, move the plank. Though he still fumbled occasionally, Blueblood was able to place the logs almost as fast as Brook could cut them. He shoved another plank aside and reached for a new log, only to find that none found his grasp.

He turned around, looking at the place where the log pile had been. There was nothing there, save for a few pieces of logs that had been knocked over by Brook's axe. He looked to his other side, seeing the large stack of planks. Then he looked to Brook, who rested his axe on his shoulder. A slight smile played across his lips – Blueblood thought it might have been the first he had ever seen from the unicorn.

"We've got enough now," he said. "Good work, Red." He put his axe on the ground, and took a plank in his bad hoof. He limped to the round ground where the shed had been, and beckoned for Blueblood to come closer.

"The shed will have two layers," he said, "to keep it steady. The first thing we need to do is drive the planks into the ground." He set the edge of his plank on the ground, balancing it carefully, then put his weight on it. The plank sunk into the ground halfway, and Brook stepped off. "Set yours right up against mine," he said. Blueblood grabbed a plank off the pile of old lumber, but Brook shook his head. "Those are too weak for the base," he said. "Take one of the new ones." Blueblood nodded, and took the new plank. He imitated Brook, driving his plank into the soft ground. Brook inspected it, and nodded.

"Good," he said. "Do that for about... ten planks." Blueblood did as he was told, driving the planks into the ground. When he was finished, his master instructed him in setting down the rest of the shed's perimeter. In the end, while it had no door to speak of, it seemed like it would be a good-sized shed. Brook took another plank and set it along the ground, inside the perimeter. He drove a pair of nails through it, connecting it to the outside plank.

"You line these up," he said, "and I'll nail them together. You can use the old planks now." Blueblood nodded. One by one he set the planks up, and Brook nailed them together. They started to build up, higher and higher.

As they gradually reached up, something began to bother Blueblood. "Master?" he said slowly. Brook looked around the half-built shed at him, a pair of nails hanging in mid-air.

"Yes?" he asked shortly. Blueblood lowered his head.

"Well," he said quietly, "I just... why are we using the old wood?" Brook blinked at him.

"The wood is good," he said. "Why wouldn't we?"

"Because," Blueblood said, shrinking away. "The old shed broke. The wood... it can't be any good, if it broke, right? That's why we're making a new one. The old one was bad, so we need a new one." Brook stared at him for a while. While they had been working a sort of life had come over his face, if only just. It was draining away now, though, and his face returned to that strange, impassive expression as he regarded the slave. Eventually, he spoke.

"The shed was broken," he said. "But the wood is still good."

"But it broke," Blueblood said again. "Isn't that what you do with broken things? Replace them?"

"Sometimes," Brook conceded, a hint of sadness in his voice. "Not always. Just because something is broken, doesn't mean it's worthless. No matter how badly something is broken, there's always something worth saving." He circled around the shed, and told Blueblood to hold out his hoof. He put the nails on the stallion's hoof.

"See those?" he asked. "Those came from this shed too. But they're still good. No rust, and plenty strong. You see? Even though the shed was broken, there are still parts of it that can be salvaged. You don't have to throw out the whole thing."

Blueblood stared at the nails in his hoof. Brook nodded at him, and said. "Always remember. Nothing is ever so broken that something from it can't be saved. No matter how bad it is, you never just replace something."

The words hit Blueblood like a punch in the stomach. He sat down, still staring at the nails in his hoof. He didn't understand what he felt, or why he was feeling it. All he knew was that he felt. He felt an intense tightness in his chest, like worry. He felt somehow empty, like there was something that was missing. He didn't know what it was, though.

*Maybe I miss home?* he thought idly. He blinked and shook his head. *No!* he thought, *I can't miss home! I am home! I have no other home! I'm not Blueblood! Not anymore! Never again!* He shook his head, and he began to tremble slightly. For some reason, some reason he couldn't understand, he remembered the figure from his dream.

"Red," Brook said, shaking Blueblood from his daydreams. The white stallion blinked at his master, who was levitating another pair of nails. "Let's get back to work. I want this shed done tonight."

"R-right," Blueblood said. He tucked the nails into his mane, and joined Brook in working.

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Blueblood was silent for the rest of the night. He and Brook finished building the shed without incident and moved the plough inside, and a few other tools. It seemed that they finished just in time. Clouds began to form overhead as the sun set, and the two stallions barely made it inside before the downpour began. Blueblood cooked a meager meal at Brook's instruction, and then returned to the bedroom. Brook did little to stop him; he spoke as little as his slave that evening. Blueblood didn't know when exactly Brook went to bed himself; he had fallen asleep long before. All he knew is that when his eyes opened blearily the next morning, Brook was still sleeping.

The old pony snored gently on his mattress, face towards the door. Blueblood crept downstairs, careful not to wake him, and got ready to make breakfast.

Blueblood's sleep had not been a restful one. He had been plagued by visions – not proper dreams or nightmares, just images. Snatches of sounds, and pictures. Among them the figure from his dream the previous night featured prominently – staring, staring at him with that its enormous, twisted grin. It shook in that odd imitation of a laugh it had, and taunted Blueblood. *You aren't better than me*, it had said, over and over. Blueblood tried hard to shake

the image out of his mind, and set about his work.

After he finished preparing the oatmeal, Blueblood crept back upstairs and woke his master. The pair ate their meal in silence, as they had done the evening before. When they were done, Brook took him outside and around the back of the house.

"You're going to plough this," he said. Blueblood looked at him, and Brook waved his bad hoof at the land. "The small plot of land you ploughed yesterday is enough to feed me, for a while," he continued. "But not for you. So you're going to plough enough land to keep us both fed for the whole year."

"How much land is that?" Blueblood asked quietly. Brook waved his hoof again.

"From the back of my house to that stump should do," he said. He gestured to the gigantic stump Blueblood had seen when he first came to the house. It was a long ways away from the house; the resulting plot would be several times the size of the small farm he had ploughed yesterday."

"Y-you want me to do it today?" he asked slowly, peering at his master. Brook didn't look back at him, but shook his head gently.

"No," he said. "You'll work until you're done. That won't be done today." He left Blueblood staring at the land, and went to the shed. He returned carrying the plough above his head, and set it down behind his slave. Once again he slipped the yoke over Blueblood's neck, and nodded to him. "Get to work," he said. "I'll be on the balcony if you need me."

"Right," Blueblood said, but Brook had already left. Blueblood watched him limp away for a while, before he turned to his work.

As he had the previous day he threw himself against the ropes that connected him to the plough. It was much harder to drag the plough through solid ground, though. He tugged and strained for a long time, but the plough finally started to trail after him. It cut through the thick, wet ground, slowly following behind Blueblood. As he strained, he found his mind wandering. There was little for him to focus on as he pulled the steel wedge through the ground, so all he could do was think. Once again the figure from his dream was on his mind. He didn't understand it. He didn't know what it was, or why he was so afraid of it. He didn't understand the things that it said to him. He tried to write them off as just the simple ramblings of the subconscious, but he couldn't shake the cold, empty feeling that he had when he thought of what it said. *You aren't better than me. You can't leave me. I will catch up to you.* He shuddered and pulled harder, his head down.

Try as he might, though, he couldn't escape the cold feeling in his gut. He thought of what Brook had said to him when they were building the shed, but that just made him feel worse. It made him feel sick. Worst of all, it made him think of Canterlot.

If anything was worth keeping, it was his memories of home. He thought about his family – about his auntie Celestia, who used to fly him over the city when he was a foal, and sneak him cookies when she thought his mother wasn't looking. He thought about auntie Luna, and how he had tried to talk to her when she came home, but she had never liked to speak to him. He thought of his mother, and his heart ached. He remembered returning to her after a long day with his tutors when he was little, worming his way into her warm embrace and sitting there. He remembered playing with her in the palace's courtyard. The sick, empty feeling in his chest only got worse the more he thought of her.

"It doesn't matter," he said aloud, "It doesn't matter anymore. It's better this way." He squeezed his eyes shut, and pushed as hard as he could with the plough. "Equestria can have a better prince now," he told himself, "and I can be a good slave. I don't have to be Blueblood. I'm not Blueblood! I'm not! I'm not!" He threw all his weight against the ropes, practically running with the plough behind him. He told himself, over and over, that he was Red. He told himself that he was not Blueblood. He couldn't handle being Blueblood, couldn't handle all that Blueblood had done. He didn't want the guilt anymore, he didn't want to be worthless. So he ran.

He ran from his past. He ran, as much as he could, through the field, dragging the plough through the earth behind him. He didn't watch where he was going. Suddenly he felt the line behind him jerk and tumble, and he heard an awful, metallic scraping noise. The sudden shock threw him to the ground, and he felt the plough jump out of the earth. He had suffered a few scrapes from his tumble, but he was no worse for the wear. When he turned around, however, he saw that the same could not be said for the plough.

The metal wedge lay on its side on the field, thrown up by a rock wedged in the roots of the enormous stump. Its edge had a great dent, and a gash ran along the left side, tearing the plough open. Blueblood stared at it, open-mouthed. Even he, with no knowledge of farming experience, could tell. The plough was broken.

"Oh, no," he moaned. He walked slowly over to the remains of the plough, and looked at it carefully. The wood was cracked, but not broken. The metal was fairly thin – he might be able to bend it back into place, he thought. After all, he had broken it in the first place. He pressed his hoof against the thin edge of metal that had been torn up, and pushed as hard as he could. It bent, just slightly, and he smiled weakly. He pushed again, trying to press it back into place. As he pressed though, the edge bit into his hoof.

"Ah!" he cried in pain, pulling his hoof back. A thin red line ran across it, a small trickle of blood coming out. He stared at the blood, and at the plough. "Gotta fix it," he concluded quietly, and started to push again. The metal bit into his hoof, cutting deeper, but he ignored the pain. He pushed against the torn metal, hammering it with his hoof and moving it back into place bit by bit. Soon, the edge had been pushed back down. The two edges still didn't meet, and there was still an ugly cut between them. Blueblood sat down, and moaned again. He felt like he was going to cry.

"Great," he said to himself. "Just great. This is another thing Blueblood screwed up!" He pounded on the plough, cursing the stallion he used to be.

"Worthless!" he cried. "Worthless! There's nothing good about him! I'm not him anymore! I'm not! I'm Red now, and this is why! He never did anything good, he just broke things, just like this!" He put his head in his hooves, still cursing himself. "Worthless," he whispered, "stupid, selfish, and worthless..." He heard a familiar shuffling gait, and looked up.

His master was trotting towards him across the field. Perhaps he had heard the commotion, or perhaps he simply wanted to check on Blueblood's progress. Either way, fear gripped Blueblood's heart. Brook would see what he had done to the plough, and he would be furious. He would probably beat Blueblood, or take his food away. He vaguely recalled the other slaves on the boat talking about what their masters had done to punish them, and his mind filled with all sort of elaborate terrors. Flogging, or cutting him with a knife, or throwing him down the stairs. Brook was a unicorn, and Blueblood would never be able to fight back against his magic.

He could only imagine what the old pony had in store for him. He tensed up, visibly shaking as his master walked up to him.

"What happened?" Brook asked.

"I-I... I broke the plough," Blueblood said quietly. Brook inspected the tool, and looked at the trail it had left. It had sliced through the ground neatly, even cutting through some of the stump's roots. There had been a large rock trapped in the roots, though. The plough must have struck it, and been dragged along a hard edge as Blueblood ran past. Brook hummed, scratching the beard that ran along his chin.

"Hm," he said simply. "Hm." Blueblood shrunk away, shaking like a leaf. Brook took a step towards him, and the white unicorn cowered before his master.

"Please," he said weakly, "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry... please don't hurt me, master. I-I, I won't do it again, I'm so sorry, please..."

"Hush," Brook said softly. Blueblood squeezed his eyes shut as Brook reached out to him. Images of Iron flashed through his mind, and he quaked in terror. He tried to fight them down, telling himself that it wasn't Iron, and this had nothing to do with the earth pony. It was he, Red, who had made this mistake, and it was Brook who was going to punish him for it. It didn't help much, but he kept himself from crying out.

He felt the heavy yoke slip off his shoulders.

"How's your neck?" Brook asked. Blueblood slowly opened his eyes, and saw the old pony holding the yoke in his front hooves. "You must have fallen."

"W-what?" Blueblood asked slowly. Brook reached out, and Blueblood flinched away. The old pony put his bad hoof on Blueblood's neck, rubbing it gently.

"Are you hurt?" he asked. Blueblood stared at him. The old soldier looked almost concerned. Blueblood didn't understand what he meant.

"I..." he said, "I'm fine. I'm not hurt."

"Good," Brook said. He turned back to the plough, and Blueblood slowly stood up.

"Master... I'm sorry," he repeated. Brook didn't look at him.

"It's alright," he said. "It wasn't personal. It was an accident."

"But... I broke the plough," he said, "It's the only one we have..."

"It's not bad," Brook said, still not looking at the stallion, "It'll be fine." Blueblood blinked at him. He didn't – couldn't – understand what the old pony was talking about.

"It's... broken," Blueblood said. "We need a new one."

"Who says?" Brook asked. He almost seemed to laugh. He turned around, facing his slave. "This one is fine."

"But it's broken," Blueblood said again. "We can't use it. It won't work."

"Yes, I know. You've said that." Brook looked between the plough and the slave, and told him. "We can fix it."

"But, it's so badly broken," he said, "It's torn open."

"Didn't I tell you, Red?" Brook asked, sighing. "Nothing is ever too broken. Something can always be salvaged." The words hit Blueblood every bit as hard as they had the last night.

"But how!?" he objected. "Look at it! How can we fix that?"

"It won't be easy," Brook said.

"Then why bother?" Blueblood cried. "Why not just replace it? Or, or, if we want to salvage it, just melt it down and start again?" Brook looked at him a bit sadly, and shook his head. He was silent for a while, but eventually he spoke.

"This is different from a shed, Red," he said. "A shed is just wood. You can get wood anywhere. Some things are harder to come by. Here, look at this." He turned around, beckoning Blueblood to take a closer look at the busted plough. "What do you see here, Red?" Blueblood looked between the plough and Brook, the sick feeling rising in his stomach.

"I see..." he said, "I see a broken plough. It's got a gouge in it. It's worthless."

"That's wrong," Brook told him. "It's broken, yes. But it isn't worthless. Everything has worth. The metal is still good. The wood is still strong."

"But why is it so important to fix it? If the metal is still good, why not just smelt it into another? Why can't we just start over?"

"Starting over takes a long time," Brook said. "We'd have to melt the metal, then forge it again. Some things don't just come along every day."

"But... but..." Blueblood felt his chest begin to ache, without knowing why. Brook continued speaking, rubbing his hoof over the old metal.

"I'm not saying it will be easier," he told the stallion. "It won't be. It'll take a lot of work to fix it. But it's worth it."

"How?" Blueblood asked. "How is it worth it? What's so special about it that we can't just start over?"

"It's one of those things you can't make easily, so we need to take care of it. Even when they're broken, they're still worth a lot. All their parts, everything somepony went through to make them. We have to make sure they last. By repairing them, and with a bit of help, we can even make them better than they were before." Blueblood swallowed hard. He felt like someone had out his gut, and replaced it with ice.

"Those things are the most important things of all," Brook said quietly. "So we can't just make another one. It won't be the same... things like ploughs. Things like books, and houses... and ponies."

"What?" Blueblood asked, blinking. Brook didn't look at him. He just kept running his bad hoof across the plough, back and forth.

"A plough is like a pony. Even when a pony is broken, you can't just throw it out. We have to try to fix it. It's worth a lot, even then. No matter how bad it seems, a pony is never worthless, Red." Blueblood just stared. He swallowed hard.

"Why?" he asked. "Why are you telling me this?" Brook sighed.

"I don't know what happened to you, Red," he said. He looked away from the stallion, and paused for a moment. "It doesn't really matter. But you were broken, weren't you?"

"I-I..." Blueblood said. He wanted desperately to lie, and say that he was alright. But he couldn't. Not anymore. "I was."

"It doesn't matter how badly broken you were," Brook said. "You can't just be a new pony. I know you want to sometimes, Red. But you can't. You just have to deal with being broken."

Blueblood had begun to shake again. He was terrified, but it was a new kind of fear, one he didn't understand.

"I... no!" he said. "I'm not broken! I'm fine! There's nothing wrong with me!" Brook didn't turn around, but he shook his head. Blueblood spoke again, trying to convince him. "I was broken before, but I'm not anymore! Blue... the old me, he was broken! But Red isn't broken! Red is fine! I started over, I can do it! There's no reason why I can't, I'm doing fine." A strange sort of pain wracked through his body. His heart hollow, and cold. This time, Brook turned around. There was even less of a hint of an expression on his face than usual.

"You are who you are, Red," he said simply. "No amount of wishing can change that. You're still broken."

"No I'm not!" Blueblood screamed. "I'm not broken! I'm fine! I'm better now! He... he was stupid! He was stupid, and he was selfish, but I'm not! I'm good! I can be a good slave, I can do what you tell me to! I can follow orders, I can make you happy! Please, please just let me be a good slave!" he begged. The pain was intense, and incredible. His chest felt as if somepony was trying to rip him apart from the inside out. "I won't be stupid anymore, or selfish, or, or worthless, I promise! I won't be worthless anymore." He shouted miserably, repeating himself. "I don't want to be worthless!"

"You aren't," Brook said quietly. "You are worth something."

"I don't want to be the old me," Blueblood whimpered, "I don't want to..."

"I know, Red." Brook sighed, and put his bad hoof on the stallion's shoulder. "I know it hurts. But you're broken. But remember: no matter what you did, you will never be worthless. And there will always be something worth saving. That's why you can't start over. No matter how much you want to." He closed his eyes, and turned away. Blueblood still lay on the ground, sobbing. The image of the figure from his dream came again. He couldn't leave it. It caught up to him.

*He's... he's right,* Blueblood realized *I never changed. I was never a new pony. Just the same stupid, selfish Blueblood. The same idiot pony, just trying to hide from how awful I was. Gods... I couldn't even take responsibility for how bad I am...* He looked up into his master's empty expression sadly. The pain had passed now, but he still felt hollow.

"I'm sorry," he said quietly. "You're right. I... I'm broken. I'm stupid, and selfish, and I'm broken." Brook nodded slowly.

"Head inside," he said. "You'll be cleaning the house until I've fixed the plow."

"Okay," Blueblood said quietly. He stood slowly, and walked past his master. He looked over his shoulder once, but the old pony hadn't moved at all. He had sat down, and seemed to be staring into space. Blueblood turned back, and headed inside.

*I'm still the same Blueblood,* he thought sadly, *Still stupid. Still selfish. Still broken.*