

Through The Eyes Of Another Pony

By CardsLafter

Chapter Twelve: You And I Need To Have A Chapter. Alone.

Okay, whew, what a chapter. It was a doozy, that's for sure. Having working internet feels like having running water again. Only more necessary. I hope to keep it, this time. Even with family mooching off of it. >:(C'est la vie, amirite?

Anyway, I'd like to apologize for the last chapter. At the time it seemed just fine, but after going back and rereading it, I can safely say that rushing does indeed ruin certain things. If only I had been more patient. Oh well, you guys will survive. I might not, but really, who cares about me! Everything will be just fine and dandy!

A new artist has hit the hall of fame using only two pencil images. His name is Mick. He's amazing. Trust me. I've had a few more artists show up and they're good in their own respective rights, but Mick's a gem. I look forward to inspiring more cool stuff out of him. >:3

Next up is a Storm Wing chapter, really. Lots of focus on the little guy, it's time we gave him a bit of spotlight. He could totally use one. You might not care that much about him, but I love him, I think he's great. Don't worry about this chapter being very rushed, it was actually done quite with a lot of love and care. A few of my proofreaders have called it my best/2nd best chapter, yet. I honestly think it's my best one. It'll be hard to top this bad boy, that's for sure.

Blargh, had an internet disconnect, nearly wasn't able to get the chapter out! :O Luckily, I'm awesome and fixed it!

Anyway, I have a question for the readers! If your favorite writers all went to a certain website and started posting original work for everypony to read for free, would you check it out? Keep in mind, it would have to be purely original, so yeah...

Times are good. Very good. Actually they're meh, but I am still very happy. All I need is somepony to give me a million bucks and I'll probably do nothing but write for the rest of my life. XD >.> No, you probably shouldn't give me a million dollars. o.o

Blargh, enough rambling! Let's roll the clip! Enjoy the amazing fan art! You guys will love the hell out of these, I have no doubt. Also, bust Wrek's chops for giving us nothing for this chapter. He's a bloody slacker! X3

First up! FIREWALL MADE IT INTO A VIDEO GAME! HOW AWESOME IS THAT SHIT?! He's the super secret final boss. When somepony told me about this, I thought he was full of crap/trolling. Then I felt totally stupid when I found out otherwise!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=03IP2LcC6ms>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XvG8zs25P7M>

By Chaos8r8ker!

ON TO THE FAN ART!

As always, best viewed through Google Chrome...

" YOU WANT IT? WELL, YOU CAN'T HAVE IT"
" AS SAFE AS FLYING A BRICK"
TROT GEAR
CARRIAGES and HAY

Celestia's

A S C A

(BAT WINGS NOT INCLUDED)

TM



IT'S SO GOOD! IT'S SO GOOD! That, kids, is what the A.S.C.A.™ looks like. Brought to you by [Mick!](#)



Jesus, Mick, I don't think you could have made him look any more badass if you tried. o.O More from [Mick!](#)



Bitches don't know about my awesome hat! >:D [SirCinnamon](#) everypony! Applause for his awesome!



Man, [IceStorm](#) is gettin' pretty good at this, ain't he? :D You'll recognize the scene when you see it! It's a good'n!
Notice Storm Wing's blind eye haze! X3

Also, Ice did another image you guys might want to check out! It's pretty good, if I say so, myself! My only beef with it is that... Well, actually we fought a lot about a lot of things concerning this image. He's a stubborn jerk and makes images too big for me to post them in here. So instead, you get a link. :3

<http://icestormboarder.deviantart.com/gallery/#/d4qsvzh>

Okay, kids! Recap time! WE WON! Sorta. See, Winter Sky had proven to be more awesome than we thought, and thanks to our combined efforts, we had freed Celestia, defeated the Shadow Ponies, and had drawn the Big Bad out of hiding. Problem was, we weren't fighting anymore. I know, that doesn't sound like a problem, but when the final boss reveals himself, you'd expect there would be this even MORE epic throwdown! Alas, as it stood, things were just at a standoff. ~~Harry Potter~~ David had turned up and Trixie had saved The Nightmare from destruction. Then Winter Sky decided to get all talkative of all things. Crazy, right? Yeah, it was. At the moment, though, Luna and I were solely focused on getting Storm Wing out of his Inmanipulon cocoon, lest he suffocate. The only thing that kept me from killing this human causing all our problems were the next words that came out of his mouth.

"Flora, please release the Sky Archon," David ordered softly, "After all, I don't want that on your conscience."

As Azure Flora lifted her hoof, Luna and I stepped back from the sheet engulfing Storm Wing. It popped open almost right away, making an audible groan as it released its prisoner inside. Storm gasped several times as he rolled off of the Inmanipulon, whereupon it broke down into dust and floated into her saddlebags.

"You okay, Storm?" I held out my hoof to help him up, but he was in a sour mood and slapped it away. "Ah. I'm guessing you aren't."

"No! I'm not!" He snapped loudly as he crawled to his hooves and glared at nothing in particular whilst he continued coughing fiercely. Somepony had a fragile ego, and I'm not going to say who, but his initials match up with South West.

"Storm, control your anger," Luna said with a relieved sigh as she dismissed the spell blocking out the sun. Slowly but surely, direct light made its way back to Equestria, illuminating the desert-like plains where we were staged. I set a hoof on her shoulder for comfort as Winter Sky brought attention back to the matter at hoof.

"David," Winter Sky was seething with barely contained rage, "Why?"

Turns out, humans are about two to three feet taller than an average pony. Winter sky is not an average pony. Thus, he had no problems meeting David's gaze. And David seemingly had no problem staring him right back, still sporting a very slight, very soft smile.

"That is a long answer that I really do not have time for, Sky," he answered with a sigh before pulling his glasses off and cleaning them on his sweater, "But since you were always a close friend, I will tell you, I do what I do for a good cause. I know you won't believe me, but it is."

"So..." I turned back to face Azure Flora, wide eyed. "What was all that crap about 'all humans

must go'?"

She merely shut her eyes and turned away, unwilling to look at me.

"A ruse," David replied with a sigh, "and a failed one at that. Bear her no grudge as it was not her choice."

"So, you *are* the one controlling them!" Luna snapped accusingly, her expression fading into a threatening snarl.

As if to answer her question, Starlight, Cookie, Azure Flora, and The Great and Powerful Trixie all walked around us to take their places behind David. None of them looked proud, nor did they look happy. After a minute or so, Trixie coughed out a sob before running up to David and grabbing the leg of his denim pants. With tears in her eyes, she stared up at him imploringly.

"Please, Master David! I don't want to do this anymore!" she pleaded, gently tugging to help garner his attention. Her usual arrogant demeanor wasn't even slightly manifested. No, Trixie simply looked distraught and helpless.

David looked down at her, and for a moment, that eerie smile faltered.

"Controlled?" Winter Sky looked at Trixie, then David, then finally at Azure Flora as his eyes widened in revulsion. "David... What... What have you done?"

"Just a moment, Sky," David softly implored as he knelt down by Trixie, gently wiping away her tears with a soft gesture of his hand, "Trixie, you agreed to this contract. You know as well as I, everything is sealed, and we cannot take it back."

"B-But you can stop!" She pointed out, seeming to take actual comfort in his touch, "We... We don't have to do this!"

"David..." Azure Flora stepped forward, setting a hoof on his arm with a look of concern, "We've lost the element of surprise and conspiracy. It's too late to carry out most of our plans. The Nightmare has fallen, Celestia is free, and our agents have been exposed. There's no longer any hope of victory through conquest."

"Hmmm." he began to smile just a tad, his eyes fluttering to the ground as he pondered to himself. "You're... right."

Those words came so pleasantly and almost happily. As if he were also glad that his efforts had not come to fruition. I didn't... doubt that he was agreeing with them, but I knew deep down it wouldn't be as simple as defeating the antagonist through a mere logical advantage. Luna and I traded glances for a second and I could tell, I wasn't the only one that wasn't feeling particularly

relieved.

“Indeed, I do not think that we have a chance at taking Equestria by force at this point.” He gently stroked Trixie’s mane as the two mares began to let hope rush to their eyes.

“Then we can stop?” Trixie smiled happily at him. “We don’t have to hurt Equestria anymore?”

“Exactly,” he confirmed with a nod before looking over to Azure Flora who smiled back at him. “Truth be told, if there was any other way to achieve my goal, I would have taken it.”

“Meaning you’ve found another way.” Storm Wing was staring down at the ground, likely more focusing on his other senses than anything.

“Ah, the son of Winter Sky.” David stood back up and walked over to the latest speaker, that ghost of a smile widening somewhat. “You look pretty good for a thousand years old. I’d say your father had something to do with that, but I think... you look a bit more like your mother.”

Storm Wing didn’t like David being so close, I could tell. When he crouched down to get a closer look at him, Storm backed away a step, baring his teeth somewhat. David chuckled a bit, amused by the ferocity of the small powerhouse pony before looking back at Azure Flora.

“What do you think, Azure?” he called back to her with a shrug. “I think your son looks just like you.”

“Son?” Azure Flora gasped, quickly making the connection, “S... Storm? S-Storm *Wing*?”

She rushed over almost immediately, nearly knocking Pinkie Pie and Applejack out of the way as she beelined for him. I had totally forgotten that she didn’t know Storm was her son.

“Y-You... You’re alive!” her voice was shrill with delight. As she approached, Storm Wing blinked in confusion before suddenly getting tackled by his mother who happily wrapped her forehooves around his neck. “I... I’m so sorry I attacked you! How are... How are you still alive?”

I was shocked to see Storm actually let her touch him before remembering that he couldn’t even see her, so she kinda had the element of surprise on her side. Surprised Storm Wing was surprised.

As far as the rest of us, we were completely focused on the two ponies. The tensions were high, but nopony knew what to do. It was an incredibly odd situation where a high stakes combat could break out at any second, which truthfully, I’m not certain we could have won. David was a wild card on his own, but he also had Starlight, Trixie, and Azure Flora with him. Not to mention we had several non-combatant ponies that could be used against us, all of which

were too confused to find the good sense to back away. Luna wandered my way, attracting David's attention for a moment before looking back at Storm Wing and Azure Flora.

"Please, forgive me! I couldn't care for you; understand that I did the only thing I could do!" Azure Flora begged, still clinging to her son's neck. At first, Storm Wing's expression was stern as steel, but his resolve was breaking under the affection of his long absent mother. I mean, what are you supposed to say to that? You would have to be pretty cold to emotionally stiff arm your mother and though Storm Wing was as dry as a summer drought in the Sahara desert, he still wasn't that frigid.

"Now, now, Azure, let's not overwhelm him," David murmured softly, smiling down at the pair as though he were pleased to see the reunion.

"This feels like one big distraction." Luna suddenly whispered in my ear before looking around with suspicion in her eyes.

I blinked, not having considered the notion before glancing about somewhat as well. Starlight, Trixie, and Cookie were all being quite still. Too still, in all actuality. I felt like I was missing something, but I couldn't place my finger on it (Or hoof, whatever you prefer). Other than Winter Sky approaching his family with a torn expression on his face, nopony was moving.

"What makes you say that?" I murmured back, keeping my voice low enough that David couldn't catch my words.

Luna suddenly seemed to have caught sight of something before shouting out, breaking the tension, "Because it *is* a distraction! Sky! Protect Celestia!"

We all cast our eyes to where Celestia had fallen and surely enough, The Nightmare, still too weak to leave its physical armor form, was dragging itself towards the yet-to-awaken sun princess. It somehow seemed that Winter Sky took off like a bullet before Luna had even finished her order and swept Celestia up in his grasp as he took to the skies mere moments before the weakened monster could take hold of her again. Luna turned and shot a silvery light at David as I let fire wash over me.

"Ah, it seems we're discovered, Flora. Say your goodbyes," David said with a nonchalant sigh, batting away Luna's attack with a wave of his hand before turning around. I made a move to dash for him but another of those thundering black portals opened up and swallowed him whole before shutting immediately. Before it did, though, he gave me a very intentional stare before invading my mind with his thoughts.

~You and I need to have a chat. Alone.~

"I'm sorry, Storm Wing, I didn't want things to be this way!" Flora begged her case to her son,

who had seized up in shock at how easily he had let himself be sidetracked. He shoved Flora away from him and ground his teeth together as though he were about to lash out at her. To his credit, though, he merely turned away and shook his head.

“Go. Just get away from me,” he snarled, unable to bring himself to attack her. She stared back at him sadly, her eyes tearing up before stepping back into her own portal that also closed just as quickly as it opened from behind. I hated watching that take place. Mostly because I knew that even though Azure Flora was bound to David’s will, both mother and son would still feel pain over what had happened.

We didn’t bother trying to arrest the others or anything; we simply let them escape through their own portals, The Nightmare included. It wasn’t like we would get there in time to stop them. With that, we picked up our wounded and took them back to Appleloosa. Failure to cinch the deal with our opposition sucked, but all in all, we were still feeling pretty good. Celestia was stirring by the time we had made our way back and even opened her eyes blearily a few times, giving us all an exhausted once-over before passing back out.

For the next several hours, it was all about helping the wounded, picking up the damage, and getting to the food line at that saloon to grab me a big fat mug of apple cider. I had seen enough. Too much, actually. I mean, you think it sounds silly, but when you narrowly skirt by death and loss en-masse a few times after having had ZERO true life threatening situations in your life, it shakes you the hell up. Luna’s healing spell had helped, but within the last week or so, I had been shot at, jumped off/got knocked off three high surfaces, gotten electrocuted, woken up out of nearly ten naps and STILL never got to have that stack of pancakes. It was getting to me. Not like it did when I cried on Luna, just... It was killing my ability to be fun and funny. So for the moment, I was content to sit there and slurp apple cider with nopony bothering me. Figured it wasn’t a pony that bothered me, in the end.

“Hey,” Spike said, pulling himself a chair over to sit in. I had to stand because I’m a pony, so I don’t get to sit down. Whatever!

“Where have you been, shorty?” I asked with a chuckle, holding back my irritation at being disturbed. Being somewhat drunk helped, but really, I was just kinda on the edge of tipsy. I had not had very much by that point.

“Braeburn sent me to protect the ponies at the Buffalo Tribe,” he responded with a proud smile.

I didn’t point out the obvious. We all know why Braeburn sent Spike with them, and it had nothing to do with his protective abilities.

“Thank Celestia you were there, Spike!” I said with a smirk, reaching over to muss his spines.

“I know!” He pulled away from my hoof, but smiled nonetheless before looking at my mug, his

curiosity piqued. "Whatcha drinkin'?" Never smelled anything like that. Almost smells like apples."

"It's a big boy drink, tyke." I shook my head. "Maybe in about, what... twelve years? Whenever you hit whatever is considered the prime of adulthood."

"That's centuries for dragons!" He seemed rather distraught by the thought.

I laughed as I offered him my best shrug, "Hey, long lifetime, long childhood. Seriously, I'd kill to be a kid for a few centuries. You'll be fine, Spike, trust me."

He gave me a strange look, not exactly certain with my assessment. "Why, how long do humans live?"

"Heh... A few decades. Most don't make it past seventy." I glanced over to see his reaction.

"Seventy decades? That's not so bad," he replied with a nod, scrunching his face up as he weighed the number.

"No, Spike. Seventy years," I clarified.

"Oh. Well, seventy years still feels like a very long time." He nodded again, still not too put out by the idea.

"Firewall." The voice of doom came up from behind me.

Honestly, I don't know these freakin' huge ponies get around so quietly, I seem to hear my hoof steps just fine, but Winter Sky made three larger-than-average sized ponies that were able to get around without making a single friggin' whisper of a sound. The point of all this is that if I weren't semi-tipsy from drinking already, I likely would have lost a few years off my lifespan. As it were, I merely swung my head around to face him. He was standing mere inches away, and I had to crane my head upward somewhat.

"Hey, buddy!" I cried happily, smiling up at him brightly, "Nice job, today. You're a hero! You deserve a drink!"

I held my mug out to him. He shook his head softly, declining my extra generous offer. I was sad at this. What was more saddening for me was that my drinking was over, because his next words were serious business.

"You and I need to have a chat," he said firmly, peering right into my soul. "Alone."

"Crap, this could be a while," I said to no one but myself before turning back to Spike, "Hey, do

me a favor?"

He raised a questioning eyebrow as he responded, "Uh. Depends?"

"Good answer!" I complimented him. That is always the correct answer when anybody uses those four stupid words together. Do me a favor? I'll favor your face! Yes, I'm entirely aware that I said them. You must think I'm crazy or something.

"Remember that campfire I was chillin' at last night? Could you get it goin' again?" I pleaded before finishing off my cider. That was delicious! Now is coward killing time!

"Eh, sure," he replied with a shrug, "Sounds easy enough."

With that taken care of, Winter Sky and I slipped out of the building with our heads held high and our vision only marginally blurred! It was getting pretty late in the day by this point and thus, the sun was starting to fall, which figured. Soon as I get used to daylight again, it's time for some more night. Blegh.

"Well, we're alone now. So, what's up?" I looked up at him as he kept walking past me for a few moments, eventually slowing to a stop.

"What are your motives with Luna?" he asked quite bluntly, staring out into the dimming horizon.

"Whoa. Personal questions." I began to chuckle. "Can't you just ask me what my cup size is or something? I could handle that."

"Be serious, or I'll make it serious." He swung his head my way, his scowl quite unfriendly.

"Feel free to make it serious, bucko. You're pushing into the lands of MYOB right now," I said as I smirked at him, inwardly annoyed, "You can hit me if it makes you feel better. In fact, why don't we go outside and settle this like men?"

"We... .. are outside?" I think he thought I was crazy. He's probably right. I mean, if we both had to cast a vote, it probably wouldn't be a split decision.

"Then why don't we go inside and settle this like women?" I love Brain Donors.

"Stop. Just stop it," he said shaking his head, "Seriously, I'm concerned."

"Did you forget the fact that Luna is older than you and is capable of taking care of herself?" I chuckled. "I mean, I know you've got this whole, 'I'm the Shield of Equestria' thing going on, which kinda annoys me, because I kinda wanted to take up the job but I guess you can have it... Anyway, I'm rambling! You want to protect stuff. Cool! I'm great with that. But you've got to

learn that some things don't need protecting and Luna's romantic life is one of them. Hell, I'm more scared than you are, to be honest! Ugh... Rambling again, sorry. Look, this isn't something you can make yourself privy to. You can be Superpony if you like, but you can't be big brother."

"I wouldn't make it my business if I felt a broken heart was the worst thing that could happen here," he stepped closer, looking down at me with those fearsome eyes. I kept my cool, though. I mean, my legs might have wanted to shake, but I was able to hold it off. Big pony and all that; pretty scary, okay?

"What, you think I might try to physically hurt her? Fat chance of that. Even if I had the faintest desire to truly hurt her, it's not like she couldn't beat me into a pulp," I chuckled, resisting the urge to swallow fearfully, "Look, man down your guns, Sky. I don't want to not like you just because you're trying to watch out for Luna when she doesn't even remotely need your help. That would suck. I've already got you stashed away in this awesome category and you need to stay there. I mean, you got Celestia back, even! I could kiss you, brony!"

"You do, and I will most definitely hit you." He leaned away from me a tad.

"You know... Storm Wing is just like you." I laughed, nodding happily.

"Stop trying to change the subject." His scowl turned into a glare. "You are a human. And what is putting me off about you is that David was just like you when he first came to Equestria."

That killed my chi. You couldn't have deflated me more with liposuction, a vacuum, and two vampires (Not the sparkling kind, please. I'll take the violent, murderous nosferatu for \$400, Alex!).

"He... really?" I gave him a somewhat skeptical look. "*Just* like me?"

"He was funny, he was loved by everypony, he was very intelligent, and he was incredibly flippant about authority. And every time he got serious, it was because somepony somewhere got hurt." He nodded solemnly. "He was confident, he was good-natured, he had a sense of justice about him, and he was strong-willed. I've spoken to many ponies about you. Princess Luna, Twilight Sparkle, my son, Lieutenant Silverheart, and several others during what little time I've been here. Every time you are mentioned, I could simply substitute David in place of Firewall and it would sound just like him. What is your real name, Firewall?"

"It's not David, if that's what you're gettin' at." I stepped back, shaking my head and cutting him a sideways glance. "Humans can be similar. Very similar. In fact, he could be a brony himself. We're kinda like-minded like that."

"From a thousand years ago? Surely not," he scoffed, not exactly buying the excuse. Hell, I

wasn't buying it either!

"Dude, now you're making an assumption. A big one." I magicked a cigarette out and lit it up, preparing to go into this for a while. Wanna know something silly? I never asked him how he knew about bronies. Silly, eh? "One thing I've learned about Equestria vs. Earth: If it works one way on one side, it more-than-likely doesn't work that way on the other side. Hell, your sun and moon push each other away like magnets! What makes you think the flow of time matches up!?"

I came up with that on the spot to get him off my case, but after thinking about it, that made a lot more sense than it should have.

"Fair enough," he said with a nod, "But not good enough. What's to keep you from turning into the next David?"

"Well, I certainly don't have plans to live for a thousand years." I rolled my eyes, taking a drag off my cigarette. "Seriously, though, I'm made of sterner stuff. I'm not going to just grab an ideal and run with it before considering the consequences. Hell, David may be doing something for the greater good, but if there's one thing that sets me apart from most people is that I don't believe that the ends justify the means. I mean, I know this old friend of yours really pulled a shitty maneuver and stabbed both you and Flora in the back. That ain't me. I've never even hit one of my friends in anger. Though... I would have totally decked Storm Wing a couple of times if he wasn't so damned fast. He's certainly hit me enough. I mean, there was that one time where I hoofed him in the back of the head for being stupid, but I don't count that, really."

"Storm... really trusts you. In truth, he... rebuked me when I advised him against befriending you. He seems to think you understand him and that he's not experienced that before. He would show you his back, even if his death meant your fondest wish, he told me," Winter Sky looked back out at the horizon. "Just like I would have done for David. And that bothers me. He trusts you... more than he trusts me."

I was so surprised by that. I mean, yeah, me and Storm Wing had gone from hating each other, to being okay with one another, to being straight-up friends, but I was all... touched and stuff. After thinking about it, though, I can say for certain, I could do the same were that situation reversed. 'Cause, y'know... I really depended on that son of a mare. It felt good to know that I had some really clear cut friends here.

"Well, duh. He doesn't know you. Yeah, you're daddy and all that, but really, chief... You haven't been there for him. And that's totally not your fault, don't get me wrong!" I waved a hoof disarmingly. "Just... I know you love your son and that this is convoluted and confusing for everypony involved. But technically, I've been around for Storm Wing longer than you have. And I've only been here little more than a week! I still don't know why he likes me! From what the other Sky Archons tell me, he's quite the grumpy bastard to be around! He's like the

one-eyed grouchy tom cat that bites and claws you when you pick him up! Honestly, though, he's the best kind of friend to have. Except for his temper. I mean, his temper is almost worse than mine, it just sets off a lot easier. Anyway, just give him some time and before you know, you'll be teaching him how to play baseball, watching professional wrestling, crushing beer cans on your head together... Just not right now."

"Beer cans? Wha-... Never mind. I'm not an idiot, Firewall, I am quite well aware of the situation," he said irritably, "There's no reason he should trust me so quickly. Even though... That doesn't change the fact that it still..."

"Hurts?" I offered.

"Yes," he replied with a sigh, "Especially when I see a lot of myself in him."

"Well, he's certainly inherited Flora's dainty size," I pointed out with a chuckle.

"That he did," he agreed with a mirthful snort before looking back at me, "You really are just like David. Always trying to make those around you laugh and smile."

"You know, I'm sure that would sound a lot less... insulting if he wasn't the bad guy here." Mixed feelings~!

"It's not an insult. A thousand years has obviously changed him, but he wasn't always this way," he promised me with a smirk. "Thanks to David, Equestria was able to flourish like never before. I see towns in places that had no life. I see young fillies that are so carefree and innocent that they don't run away from even me. That was the hardest part of becoming what I am. Everypony feared me. While piecing my memories together, I thought I was just that brave and the others were too scared. And while they may have been scared, it wasn't the fight that intimidated them... It was me. No pony wanted to become the next monster. Yet, today, a little white unicorn filly with a pink and purple mane..."

"Sweetie Belle?" I pursed my lips in a shrug-like fashion.

"I don't know her name." He shook his head. "But she hugged my leg and told me that she was sorry about what happened and that it will all be alright. That it would all turn out okay, eventually."

"And this baffles you?" I arched an eyebrow.

"Children used to run and scream when they saw me," he said dourly.

"After what I saw today, I can see why. You trashed Nightmare Sol like a champ! You made it look easy!" I laughed with a soft punch to his shoulder. "Trust me, buddy, you're scary, but I'd

rather you be fearsome than worthless. Listen, nopony's life is perfect. You work with what you got. Sure, you could be as small and harmless looking as your blind son, but really, you are you. Be happy with what you got, y'know? I'd rather be powerful and determined than meek and silly. Not that there's anything wrong with that, either, but I make do with what I got and so can you. Play with the cards you're given and stop lamenting on not having the cards you wanted."

He crooked his eyebrow and looked at me with a somewhat taken back attitude. "Are you always this philosophical?"

"Yeah! Here, lemme try another," I gave him a bright smile before stroking my non-existent beard, "Life is tragedy for pony that feel, and comedy for pony that think."

"Well, David wasn't much for philosophy, at least." He turned back to look at the setting sun. "Firewall, my gut tells me I can trust you, but my experiences tell me that I shouldn't. What would you do were you in my place?"

"Dude, if I had that answer, my name would be Winter Sky and I'd be a bit taller with super icy pegasus powers," I reminded him as I turned to leave, "Turns out, I'm a bit shorter with super fiery unicorn powers. So I guess the only pony that can answer that is the pony named Winter Sky."

"Speaking in riddles doesn't help," he said with an irritated sigh.

"Jesus, and here I thought I'd never get you back for doing it to me," I called back with a laugh, leaving him there to his thoughts. "Suffer well!"

I left him to his thoughts. He needed to be alone and get that anxiety out of his system. He wasn't the kind to take well to pity, that much I could tell, thus I let him keep to himself. You know how you can tell when someone is in a bad mood. They just don't want to deal with stuff, but they do it anyway because they're strong like that? Yeah, I got that feeling from Winter Sky. Dude had a lot of stuff to be upset about and it was probably going to get worse before it got any better for him.

I made my way back to that campsite just on the edge of the orchard and was pleased to find Spike chilling out with a fire already roaring in the middle. He had brought some extra logs, so that was cool, too. More space for ponies to chill out on!

"You look comfy," I remarked as I approached, feeling a particularly chilled breeze rush on by. I moved closer to the fire and smiled at it, holding my fore-hooves up to it to warm up. I kept getting closer, wanting to get as much heat as possible without burning myself but, the burning myself part never actually happened.

Spike smiled happily, crossing one foot over the other as he shut his eyes, looking as chill as an ice cube. He had brought his own lean-back lawn chair to lie in, and all I could do was chuckle at him as I kept getting closer and closer to the fire. When my hoof actually touched one of the logs, I blinked. I felt really really warm, but it wasn't actually burning me. I pulled one of the logs out and tested other parts of my body to make sure I was completely fire-immune and sure enough, it was warm but it wasn't hot. That's when I decided to get stupid and stuck my face in the fire. Yeah, I know. I know. No, I didn't get burned, but that doesn't mean it wasn't an incredibly stupid and rash thing to try.

"Are you sticking your face in that fire?" I heard Spike call out, somewhat alarmed.

"Sure am!" I laughed from within the flames, "It doesn't hurt! I could probably lick some of these things and it wouldn't burn me."

"Dude, that's... I don't advise licking fire," he informed me with a chuckle, "But then again, I don't advise sticking my face into fire, either."

"Yeah, I guess," I sighed before pulling my head back out. I felt something brushing up against one of my back hooves and looked back to see what it was. I wish I hadn't. I wish I had just ignored it. I didn't though. For what I saw was huge. It had to be like... six inches in diameter, black as sin, hairy as a yeti, and sizing up my hoof for how it was going to devour me.

It was a spider. Oh. Sweet. Jesus.

"HOLY SHIT!" I screamed the way most men and women do when a spider that size touches them. I jumped onto one of the nearby logs and danced about like a little girl, making random noises, none of which sounded pleasant nor masculine.

"What are yo-WAH!" Spike followed my eyes and panicked in a similar way, scampering up the log and onto my back. The spider scuttled a little closer, quivering with anticipation for the meal it was about to make out of us.

"TAKE THE DRAGON, I'M TOO YOUNG!" I grabbed Spike off my back and held him out to the spider. "Dragons are tasty!"

"Wh-What?!" Spike gasped, looking back at me with rage, fear, and hatred. I would have felt bad, but I knew, deep down, he would do the same to me if he could. "You traitor!"

"Your sacrifice is appreciated, Spike!" I whimpered before aiming to chuck him at the monstrous arachnid. "You will be missed!"

"I will haunt you!" His oath held weight and I knew it, deep down. I deserved it, I know, but some things just had to be done.

"Is everything alright?" Fluttershy was descending from the sky, her visage comprised of worry and concern. "I... I heard screaming. I-Is everypony okay?"

We simply stared at her in a mixture of shame and ongoing panic as she tilted her head, baffled as to just what was so scary. She had not noticed the spider that was mere inches from her hoof. I felt sick. God, not Fluttershy. Anypony but Fluttershy.

"Fluttershy," Spike murmured, his eyes wide. "D-Don't panic... But... Slowly look down at... your front left hoof. Be careful to not provoke it."

"I should have just breathed fire at it! Why didn't I just breathe fire at it!?" I whined, now unable to take a shot with Fluttershy so close.

Fluttershy's eyes widened in fear as she realized she had flown into a dangerous situation but complied like a good pony, slowly lowering her gaze to her hoof. To no surprise of mine, she gasped at the sight of the spider. Rather than panic, though, she smiled at it and reached down to pick it up with a hoof. It quickly ran up her leg and found a place near her neck, no doubt in preparation to slay the kind pony.

"Noooo!! Fluttershy, your life is too valuable to sacrifice!" I shrieked in awe and disgust as I shook Spike at her like a maraca. The power of Spike compels you!

"I-I-I'm G-g-g-o-o-o-n-n-n-n-a b-b-b-e s-s-s-i-i-i-c-c-c-k!" Spike whimpered as he was rattled about.

"Oh, don't worry, Firewall, it's just a little tarantula." Fluttershy smiled comfortingly at me. She didn't comfort me. She was merely allowing the beast to lull her into a false sense of security as it snuggled threateningly into her hair.

"Fluttershy, turn back before it's too late!" I cried, feeling the contents of my stomach turn over as her hair was invaded by the eight-legged freak. "Just smoosh it!"

I showed her how by stamping at the log I was precariously perched upon, because I'm all helpful like that. She seemed shocked and distraught that I would suggest such a thing. Nonetheless, it would be best for Fluttershy to live hating me than die loving me. It had to be done.

"Like squish!" I showed her again.

"Never!" she retaliated, now glaring at me. "Why that's... that's just terrible! How could you say such a thing, Firewall?"

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Twilight and Pinkie Pie approaching, drawn to all the noise and odd gestures.

“What’s going on here?” Twilight asked slowly, staring at me like I was crazy. I was crazy alright. Crazy with fear and worry for the kindest, most cutest pony ever, “Firewall, stop shaking Spike like that.”

I complied without hesitation before glancing at Twilight. She arched an eyebrow before motioning for me to set Spike down by holding out a hoof and making a show of gently lowering it to the ground. I did as she commanded, in sync with her motions no less, with my eyes wide and fearful. Pinkie Pie made a point of staring at me intently, occasionally looking back at Fluttershy. There was something going on inside that pink brain of hers, to be sure. I was just too distracted with the crisis we had on hoof.

Finally Twilight Sparkle took an impatient breath and spoke again, “Now, what’s the matter?”

“Firewall thinks the spid...” Fluttershy started to explain before I interrupted her.

“It’s gonna eat Fluttershy!” I spoke shrilly, pointing at her accusingly. “She won’t listen! She’s crazy, Twilight!”

Twilight looked over at Fluttershy just as the spider popped back out of her hair. She was cool about it, though. She grimaced, but she didn’t panic. Twilight’s strong like that. I look up to her. Brave in the face of spiders, she is.

“Oh, Fluttershy, that’s gross.” Twilight scrunched her nose in slight disgust. I, on the other hand, whimpered pathetically, dancing on my hooves in horror.

“It’s not gross, Twilight,” Fluttershy politely pointed out, smiling at her, “it’s a creature just like anypony else. Just because it’s not as pretty as others doesn’t make it gross. It’s still... .. nice.”

Nice for Fluttershy meant HORRIFIC AND REVOLTING! Why couldn’t they see this!?

It skittered up to the top of her head and laid down, trying to deceive Twilight into thinking it wasn’t the foul abomination that it really was.

“I... suppose,” Twilight begrudgingly agreed, the corners of her mouth still skewed as though she were only mildly disturbed. “Just... go find it a home or something.”

“Oh, I will. He’s just cold right now, so I’ll let him warm up a bit,” Fluttershy stated happily as the fiend continued to snuggle up against her in an attempt to mask its true, diabolic nature. “That’s why he’s shivering so much, you see.”

"That's crazy talk!" I protested helplessly.

"Yeah, you'd be the expert on that." Twilight rolled her eyes as she turned to leave. "Try and behave, Firewall, and keep the screaming to a minimum."

Pinkie Pie suddenly got the nastiest sneer on her face that I had ever seen. I didn't know what it meant, but it couldn't have been good. It was downright murderous in its intent, though, that much was for sure.

"Can I hold him, Fluttershy?" Pinkie Pie gave an enthusiastic bounce as she approached the yellow pony.

"Augh!" Spike hid behind me again as the thought of more pony-spider contact sunk into his noggin.

"Pinkie, no! Not you, too!" I felt so outnumbered! Why could they not see the satanic creation for what it actually was! Even Spike knew of its devilish designs!

"You're worse about those things than Spike," Twilight gave a pitied laugh on my behalf, stopping to look back at us.

"No creature deserves more than four legs!" Spike protested angrily, waving a clawed fist for emphasis.

Twilight was still unimpressed. "You two are just overreacting. Really, it's kinda sad."

"You say that now, Twilight!" I rebuked her pity with an accusing hoof-pointing. "But when you're wrapped up in its malicious thread and it's turning you into a drinkable pony-slushie to save you as a snack for later, you'll be thinking, 'Oh, Firewall, if only I had listened!'"

She rolled her eyes again as Pinkie Pie coaxed the spider onto her hoof before setting it **RIGHT ON HER FACE.**

"Oh sweet virgin Mary, you are a FREAK!" I cried, my perception of reality twisting violently before me, "FREAKY PIE! AGGGH!!!"

"BLEAGH!" Pinkie Pie charged at me suddenly **WITH THE SPIDER ON HER FACE AND HER TONGUE HANGING OUT!** She was using it to bully me into submission! I had to escape! Therefore I picked Spike up and chucked him at that pink fool before turning and hightailing it.

"Hey!" Spike objected to his projectile treatment but was saved by Twilight's intervening magic. Why was everypony against me!?

I'm sure it didn't look very good for the public to see Luna's boyfriend (colt friend, whatever) run screaming from a little pink pony half his size wielding naught but a frizzy haircut and a gargantuan hellspawn on her face. I'm sure I lowered everypony's opinion of me that day as I did my damndest to outrun ~~Freaky Pie~~ (I've been told I'm not allowed to call her that anymore) Pinkie Pie with every trick in the book that I had. All to no avail, sadly enough.

Finally, I decided hiding was in order. I picked a building with Sky Archons guarding the entrance and stopped to speak to them as I entered. It turned out to be Whirlwind and Silverheart, oddly enough, not that it mattered.

"Hey!" I approached with a panicked look in my eye (totally justified panicked look, if you must know). "Silverheart! Save me!"

"Yeah, uhh... Stop." She held a wing out in front of the door.

"Oh, good, you'll actually attempt to stop ponies from coming inside." That was a relief. "There's a pink Earth Pony coming this way, she'll be here any second."

I heard that maniacal laughter in the distance and utterly lost all hope in life. I killed my fiery shield to put out the light as I quivered in fear.

"You runnin' from Pinkie?" Whirlwind suddenly burst out laughing, placing the happy laugh to the pony that owned it.

"Dude, I will totally owe you both a favor if you keep her from coming in here!" I said before immediately pushing past them. "I'll tell Storm Wing I hit you both in the face or something so you don't get in trouble."

They gave each other an unimpressed look before turning to me. At first, I thought they were going to just tell me no, but much to my relief, Silverheart explained what was on their minds, "Nah, just... tell him the truth. If he thinks we went down after a hoof to the face from... you... Well, let's just say he'd be pretty disappointed in us."

"Thank you!" I grabbed them both for a hug.

"Ack!" Whirlwind protested, not ready for the gratification, "Affection!"

Without further wasting precious time, I slipped into the large wooden building only to discover that this wasn't somepony's home. I mean, it was, but that wasn't what it was being used for. It was being used as a medical treatment facility, or so I could imagine from seeing both Nurse Redheart and Nurse Tendercare pinwheeling about. They had all sorts of medical toys and medicines that came in all states of matter lying about in an organized yet chaotic fashion.

When Tendercare caught sight of me, she was quickly overcome with anxiety and fear, as though my mere presence was giving her OCD fits.

“Oh dear~!” She shook her head. “Oh dear~! I'm sorry, but you can't be in here!”

“She needs her rest,” Nurse Redheart promised me with a stern, yet kind smile.

“Oh, I won't hu-Hey!” I was suddenly airborne and being carted away, sparkling with pretty pony magic. Nurse Tendercare had quite a horn I could tell, seeing as she wasn't even straining with flying my heavy plot back the way it came.

“Firewall?” I heard a voice from further into the building call out. It was Celestia. I suddenly forgot all about Pinkie Pie and her damn spider (may it burn in hell for eternity!) and ineffectively tried air-swimming over towards the source of the voice before giving up.

“Oh dear, she's awake!” Tendercare gasped as she looked back to the source of the noise.

“Celestia! Make the bad unicorn put me down~!” I whined loud enough for her to hear.

I heard a bit of tired laughter before getting an answer, “It's fine, Nurses, I'm sure a visitor won't hurt anything.”

They both glared at me as though I were just crapping all over their hard work, but they complied and let me go see her, but not before handing me a pair of sweet shades (It'll make sense in a minute)! You'd think there'd be an IV-drip with lots of bandages, and scrapes, and bruises, with a cast that had all her friends and family's names scrawled on it. Not for Celestia, though. She gets the easy way out. She gets a large room with mirrored walls and eight tiny... Well, I guess they were mini-stars or something, each decorating the four corners and four compass points. That's what the shades were for, I noted, suddenly grateful for the eyewear as I slipped them on. That would have burned my poor useless eyes right out.

“Damn, Celestia.” I slid the shades on with a smirk. “I think you'd win in a competitive sunbathing tournament.”

“Well, I like to give it my all,” she chuckled before beckoning me closer, “Come. You and I need to have a chat. Alone.”

The floor was adorned with comfy looking pillows that came in a variety of sizes. Big ones, small ones, some as big as your head! Thus I cantered on over and flopped down, letting out a relaxing sigh.

“Ahhh~!” I smiled up at her, “You know, you're not the first extra big pony to say that to me, today.”

"I'm not?" She gave a smile as Nurse Redheart arrived, bringing a tray of hospital food (gag me!) for Celestia. "Who else has said this?"

"Winter Sky," I mentioned offhand as she popped a carrot into her mouth.

I felt so bad when she choked on the carrot, her reaction distracting her so completely. I held out her glass of hospital orange juice (it's not real OJ! Hospitals have fake OJ! Okay, fine, this wasn't a hospital!), which she eagerly accepted and used to wash down the offending vegetable.

"Carrots are dangerous, Celestia," I said in a low, overly theatrical voice. "Do not test their Vitamin E."

"Of course, how foolish of me," she strained through a bit of laughter before shaking her head, "I thought I was dreaming but I suppose that isn't the case at all. He really is alive."

"Totally. Storm Wing, Luna, Twilight and I saved him," I began to explain. Naturally she wanted to hear everything leading up to that point, and everything afterwards concerning the original Sky Archon. She asked a few questions that I had no possible way of answering, mostly revolving around magical details, but for the most part, I was able to catch her up. I then told her of David and his Pact Ponies, which seemed to anger her more than anything. She made mention that her spell shouldn't have faded for any reason but I pointed out with her under the control of The Nightmare, it was likely they used her to help break it. She seemed skeptical, but admitted that it was possible. I was purposefully avoiding the big fat nasty elephant in the room, though it was mostly because I wanted to save that for last.

"And now for the part you're really not going to like," I announced with a grimace, earning a borderline fearful glance from her. "Winter Sky told us about... Well, everything. Actually, he told me, I just ran my big dumb mouth."

Her eyes slowly fell to the floor as she took one of the longest sighs I had ever seen.

"Everything," she echoed remorsefully, "meaning the truth. The first human."

"The mild case of death Winter Sky had contracted," I supplied. (He got better!)

"The Nightmare's creation," she continued.

"And altering the memories of all the ponies." I watched her wince at that last part. It wasn't something she was even remotely proud of. Can't say I blame her. I wasn't too proud of her, either.

She lowered her head and shut her eyes, whispering, "Luna knows."

"Yeah." I flapped my tail about awkwardly, not knowing what else to say or do.

"She was furious when she found out?" she asked, though her tone told me that she was looking for more of a confirmation than seeking an answer.

"Ummm... She kicked me in the eye," I said with a hopeful grin, trying to make her laugh. It didn't work, much to my dismay.

"She was angry, then." Celestia hung her head lowly, shutting her eyes and remaining silent for quite a while before speaking again. "Wait, why did she kick you in the eye?"

"Because I wouldn't go away!" I huffed irritably, crossing my hooves and looking away, "I was all vouching for you and trying to comfort her and she was all, 'Bam! I'm bein' pissy right now, so go away!' and so I did. She got really upset about it later and Storm got in my face about it. Still, we made up though and then we started getting all... Oh."

That I had not yet mentioned. It was an odd sensation, being suddenly aware that I was just about to tell Celestia that I was making time with her sister. I laughed a little hesitantly as I rubbed at the back of my neck, trying to think of a good way to change the subject. After opening my mouth and closing it a few times, unable to think of a way to approach the subject, Celestia became suspicious.

"We... what? ... Why are you acting like you're afraid to tell me something?" GOD DAMN YOU, SUN PRINCESS AND YOUR ABILITY TO PICK UP ON THESE THINGS!

"Shit, might as well get it out. I'm not going to lie and turn this into some huge pony soap opera," I gave a tired sigh before looking dead into Celestia's beautiful eyes (for once, I could see them both. This myth has been busted!), "Luna said we have to date. Me and her, that is."

"What?!" Celestia's eyes went wide with disbelief.

"I know, I tried to say no." I pouted at her, a bit unhappy with that reaction. "She was so stubborn, though!"

Technically, this was all true. I was trying to make it sound like her fault, and in all honesty, it kinda was. I don't think she would have taken 'No' for an answer, nor would I have lived through trying to give it to her.

"Firewall, this isn't the time for jokes!" Celestia's scowl caused me to cower and I panicked, throwing my hooves over my face defensively.

“Okay! I’m dating her willingly, but it was all her idea!” I whimpered from behind my fore-hooves.
“Don’t send me to the moon!”

“Y... You’re being serious!” Celestia’s tone alone told me she wasn’t sure if she was awake or still passed out and just dreaming.

“I can’t live on the moon!” I reminded her, “Also, there’s no atmosphere to keep the microwaves from baking me!”

“Firewall, shut up about the moon and look at me!” Her voice became even more stern, which was blowing my mind because I didn’t think that was possible.

I complied, looking up at her with a fearful pout. After a second of seeing me contain my panic, she started to get that I wasn’t just screwing around.

“You’re serious?” she asked, blinking repeatedly as though it would help somehow.

I nodded, still protectively holding my hooves over my head. Taking no chances here, people, Celestia has a temper. I don’t want to find out about the moon or that place she mentioned earlier that I knew nothing about.

“Oh, Luna, what is wrong with you?” Celestia facehoofed and shook her head, gently causing her mane to flare out before softly floating back down.

“I ask her that all the time!” I nodded emphatically, agreeing at just how crazy Luna could be at times.

Then we heard the door outside burst open, quickly accompanied by a thrilled tittering. I felt all warmth and happiness leave my body. The beast had returned for me.

“Oh dear, you can’t go in there!” I heard Nurse Tendercare call out, “R-Redheart! Stop her!”

“Mother of God.” My voice was quiet; inevitability of the situation had set in. I immediately jumped up and dove behind Celestia, “SHE’S COMING!”

“What? Firewall, what is the meaning of this?” Celestia looked back at me with confusion in her eyes. “Who is coming?”

“Sur-PRIIIIISE!” Pinkie Pie (THAT MONSTROSITY WAS STILL ON HER FACE!) entered the room with a laugh before cooing in awe, “Ooooooh~! It’s bright in here!”

With that, both Pinkie Pie and the spider whipped sunglasses out of nowhere and donned them.

“GET AWAY!” I picked up a pillow and threw it at Pinkie as hard as I could. To my amazement, my aim was true and it smacked her right in the face, dazing both her and the spider.

“Hey!” she cried out before letting a sinister smile creep its way onto her face, “You never told me it was time for a *Pillow Fight~!*”

The blood in my veins froze. I covered behind Celestia and whimpered. That smile on Pinkie Pie’s face was a little too happy, if you know what I mean.

“Protect me, Celestia.” I snuggled up to her, hoping her sheer proximity would save me.

“You can’t be in here!” Silverheart dove into the room in an attempt to catch Pinkie Pie, only to miss her by inches when the pink freak began happily leaping my way.

“SEND IT TO THE MOON, TIA!” I shrieked before jumping up and dashing for the other side of the room.

And from there things devolved into sheer chaos. I ran around the room, Pinkie Pie chased me with a pillow held in her mouth, Whirlwind and Silverheart chased her (ineffectively), the spider was nowhere to be seen (WHICH SCARED THE EVERLIVING SHIT OUT OF ME!), and Celestia just stared at us with a soft smile on her face. I think she was just happy to be back and amongst her crazy little ponies, but I couldn’t be sure; was a little busy running my ass off all over the place, you see, being that there was a large spider at large.

This carried on for a few minutes and it didn’t seem like anything was going to bring the madness to an end. Luckily, that wasn’t the case. Unluckily, Storm Wing was the one to end it. Loudly.

“EVERY ONE OF YOU GET OUT OF HERE, RIGHT NOW!!!”

I kid you not, he had to be going out of his way to one-up Winter Sky’s yell from before.

Silverheart and Whirlwind wasted no time doing exactly as they were ordered. Pinkie Pie blinked a few times before getting a frustrated scowl on her face and cutely stomping her way right out. Me? I was still afraid to walk over the pillows because the spider might jump out at me.

“Storm Wing, there’s no need to yell,” Celestia looked perturbed, cutting him a disappointed glance.

“Firewall!” He didn’t respond directly to her, but he did lower his voice considerably. “Out!”

I was slowly making my way for the door, but I was going the LONG way that avoided any crevices that could possibly be hiding a giant spider. You may all think I'm a pansy, but I totally fought off a Shadow Archon, so the excludes me from that category. I just have this psychological aversion to arachnids that I can't seem to fight off thanks to a childhood game called SimAnt.

"O-Okay," I stammered as I tentatively and slowly made my way out. Apparently I wasn't going quick enough since I got a tiny bolt to my cutie mark. I yelped, more shocked (no pun intended) than hurt. I remember asking myself what happened to that whole 'friendship' deal we had going on.

"Prince Storm Wing!" Celestia's voice raised about six decibels in volume and took on the most angry-mom-like tone one could imagine. This caused Storm to not only pale a tad, but he also crouched and let his ears fall flat to his head. Hell, even I froze up, not wanting to catch flak by proxy.

"Come here. Now." Her volume went back to her usual soft-speaking levels, however her tone only became more fierce.

Head hung low, Storm Wing slowly made his way in front of her before sitting down. Not kneeling, not bowing; no, he wasn't Captain Storm Wing right now. Right now he was her disobedient son.

"Storm Wing, I cannot reasonably express how disappointed I am with you. What, precisely, told you it was acceptable to harm your friend?" Celestia asked, staring down at him with every intention of playing the mom card on him.

"I... I'm sorry, Princess, I lost my temper," he timidly admitted, head still hung low.

"One does not lose control of their temper without losing control of their pride, Storm Wing. This is a lesson I've to constantly had to remind you of and I'm tired of having to do so." She snapped, her eyes narrowing considerably before she sighed and shook her head in retrospect. "Both of you can leave. Storm Wing, I expect you to explain yourself and earnestly apologize to Firewall. Do I make myself clear?"

Storm's visage hardened considerably as I finally made my way towards the exit. He eventually nodded and stood up to leave. I walked with him out of the building, chuckling softly as we exited past the two Sky Archons guarding the entrance.

"Sorry about the trouble, Storm," I chuckled, figuring I'd make it easier on him by taking the first step in apologies.

He completely ignored me, though, and quickly rounded on poor Silverheart and Whirlwind.

“Exactly WHAT part of ‘Do Not Let Anypony Through’ do you two *not* understand?!” He spat, his head jerking back and forth between them. They were stoic and kept a thousand yard stare going on.

“Woah, let’m be, Storm, it was my fault,” I moved to step in between him and the pegasi.

“Firewall, I do *not* need another reason to kick your flank right now!” he snarled, shoving his face mere inches from mine, “Get OUT of the way and let me address MY subordinates!”

I lost all my happy thoughts and glared at him. It had felt like the cold night air had considerably chilled even moreso.

“I got a better idea.” I sat down, letting him know I wasn’t going anywhere. I owed them one and I do my damndest to pay my debts back. “How about... No. You’re emotionally screwed up right now and the last thing you need to do is take it out on somepony that can’t do anything to defend themselves.”

“W... What?!” His temper was seriously starting to flare. I’d not seen him so upset before and it only made my case against him stronger. He began to visibly shake, picking up his hoof slowly before putting it back to the ground.

“You. Need to leave, Firewall. Right now.” His voice was very soft, almost pleading.

“Or what? You’re going to lose your temper again? Didn’t you just get your chops busted for that?” I went to press a button but apparently it was the wrong one. Storm took an honest-to-god swing at me, aiming to seriously deck me one. He never got the chance to connect though, having been blown away by what felt like the angriest air conditioner ever. The real culprit, however, was Winter Sky and not an irritated household appliance. Apparently that cold rush of air from before was actually him. That’s gotta suck, everyone knows when you’re close by simply because the temperature drops ten degrees when you’re about. Oh? What’s that? Continue with the story? Oh fine...

Whirlwind and Silverheart looked rather shaken, as though they knew things were about to get ugly and weren’t exactly sure what their part would be in it. I decided to exclude them from the equation.

“Um, Silverheart, Whirlwind. I think you guys need to leave.” I nodded my head behind me, giving them the out that they were desperate for.

“Stay where you are!” Storm Wing snapped as he got back to his feet.

“Lieutenants Silverheart and Whirlwind.” Winter Sky stepped up beside me and glanced their

way. "Take your leave. You should not be involved in this. I need to have a word with my son."

They looked rather torn for a second, glancing back and forth between each other, Winter Sky, and Storm Wing. They finally settled on good sense and took flight, leaving the three of us. Once they were gone, Winter Sky turned back to Storm Wing.

"What is so wrong that you feel the need to abuse your friend and ally, Storm Wing?" Winter Sky asked coldly, his glare intense.

"I already got this once from Princess Celestia, I don't need more from you!" Storm kept his distance, his wings upraised as the occasional spark off his body illuminated his surroundings.

"Apparently you do, because it didn't seem to change anything." His voice, while somewhat raised in volume, was rather calm. "You told me mere hours ago that this was your closest friend and that you would trust your back to him no matter the situation. Yet, here you are, lashing out at him."

"I don't answer to you!" he replied, stomping a hoof that sent a gout of lightning about him, "I don't care what the past says, you're not my father!"

I grimaced a tad, a little shaken from such a direct and harsh rebuttal. I looked to Winter Sky and while he wasn't outwardly showing any reaction, he was still remaining silent for longer than was necessary.

"Storm. Shit, man, just chill out, you're out of control." I murmured, giving him a pitying glance. He was hurting and was letting his emotions drive him to do and say things that he normally wouldn't do.

"No! No, I'm not! Nothing has changed about me! Everything *around* me is changing!" he yelled, stomping a second time

"Nothing has changed," Winter Sky pointed out as he began to approach his son, "Nothing beyond the truth coming to light. I can imagine if it's affecting you half as much as it affected me, then you're probably unsettled and upset. You are becoming emotionally compromised and reacting in ways that I can only hope you normally wouldn't. And I don't care how you view me, I am your father and though you are already an adult, you are still behaving like a child."

"S-Shut up!" Storm Wing took a step back, baring his teeth threateningly as Winter Sky approached.

"You know, David used to tell me that military leaders back on Earth could become emotionally affected by events. When this happened, they would have to voluntarily step down from their command until they could recover," he spoke softly as he continued to approach, "And I never

understood why. It sounded like an admission of incompetence and weakness, but after seeing you in combat today, I know you are neither of those things. Which is why I understand now.

“It’s got to be unsettling. The mother and father that you never knew coming from the past, the false history written by your adoptive mother, and David forcing your true mother against you. I don’t know what to think anymore and in a way, that was only a few weeks ago for me. You’ve had a thousand years to accustom yourself to this. I can only imagine that it’s even harder. In fact, I know it must be harder.”

“You know nothing!” Storm Wing yelled in anger, shaking his head as he shut his eyes.

Before either of us could respond, Storm Wing took off in a streak of lightning. I watched him veer off, more than a little sad to see things go unresolved. I sighed before turning away and looking back at the big frosty pony.

“You tried, Winter,” I said, offering the only comfort that I could.

“As did you,” he replied, lowering his head somewhat.

We didn’t say anything else because there wasn’t much else to say. I began to head back to the ol’ dependable food line to have another drink, not really wanting to deal with this crap bouncing around in my head. I had wasted my victory day on emotional backlash and now it was nighttime. Great. It just wasn’t how envisioned things should be going, but really, nothing ever does go your way. Wise man once said, ‘If you want to hear God laugh, tell Him your plans.’ Well, that statement is a whole lot more true than I would like for it to be.

I didn’t get far before getting stopped again, but for once, I wasn’t unhappy about an interruption, since it came from Luna. She floated down from the roof of a nearby building, landing beside me and giving me a concerned stare. She didn’t say anything, but it was obvious that we both had something on both our minds and we both knew it and we both knew that we both knew it and... Right. I decided to hug her, feeling considerably uplifted when she returned the gesture. While her actions were kind and caring, the words she spoke next were blunt and straightforward.

“You and I need to have a chat. Alone.” She stared at me impassively as we broke apart.

I scoffed, pushing my mane back with a hoof before replying, “Do you know how many times I’ve heard that today? No, seriously. Guess.”

She smirked before taunting me with a wing shrug, “I dunno. Three?”

“Wrong! You make FOUR! David, Winter Sky, Celestia, and now you!” I counted off with a sad chuckle.

“Well, you earned this one.” She turned and led me back towards the Town Hall. With night and day restored, almost everypony was indoors, getting ready for bed. That was actually fortuitous seeing as how we never really stopped talking on the way there.

“Uh huh.” I deflated a tad. Aftermath sucks, in my opinion. It’s not at all relaxing.

“What was that with Storm Wing?” She glanced my way with a frown.

“You saw that?” I met her gaze, not entirely cool with the eavesdropping, but meh. I’ve had worse.

“I could tell Celestia was awake, and I was going to go speak to her. But when I arrived, I saw you two walking out and in seriously bad moods. So I decided to watch from afar. Why did you feel the need to antagonize Storm Wing?” She nodded, still looking up at me.

I would have shrugged if I wasn’t actively walking, but I don’t get awesome wings that allow me to do that. “Dude’s got problems. I mean, did you not see how he brushed off Winter Sky?”

“Well, Sky needs some brushing off,” she remarked, facing front again, “This entire situation has really got to him. He’s not the same pony he used to be.”

“Yeah, maybe.” I mulled that around with a sigh. “Still, Storm’s out of control and that’s family he’s harshin’ on. Sure, Sky may be abrasive, but he’s had a bad millennium.”

“Firewall, I think I set the bar for bad millennium.” Luna totally spiked my argument into the ground! Why can’t I win some!? “He’s just being impulsive and angsty. He can get over being out of the game for a while.”

“I dunno. If I had to spend a week or two just watching everything I love slowly slipping into the hole, I’d be in a bad mood, too. I mean, David’s got control of his wife. And what makes it worse; she did it for him.”

“I don’t care!” Luna looked back at me with a look of incredulity. “At least she has a modicum of free will! My sister and I didn’t even get that!”

“Look, I’m not trying to say it wasn’t horrible what happened to you and Tia. I’m not,” I pointed out, reminding her that I was still on her side, “That shit wasn’t cool and I have every intention of seeing David and his monster pay for it, either by my hand or somebody else’s.”

She blinked, nodding before replying, “There’s a ‘but’ in there.”

“But,” I confirmed, “Some people take things harder than others. You guys have each other and

all the ponies in Equestria that love you and adore you. You have me, Twilight, Rarity, Fluttershy, Dash, AJ, Pinkie Pie and the list just goes on! Sky? He just had Flora. And now he doesn't even have that. From what I've been told, everypony thought that Sky was a pony that let himself be turned into a monster. I don't care what paradise you come from, that sort of treatment is going to change you."

"Okay, fine. I'll give you that." She nodded after a moment. "Sky's had it rough. What's your point?"

"He tried to confront and help out the only other pony that might possibly give a damn about him, and he got his heart kicked into the dirt for trying." I answered with a grimace before recalling Storm Wing's words. "I mean, you saw it, right? 'You are not my father!' That's gotta suck."

"I agree, it was very cruel," Luna said with a sigh before stepping a little closer to me as we walked, the cold night air hitting us with another gust, "But have you stopped to consider how Storm Wing might feel?"

"Storm Wing is literally older than his father." I shook my head, not buying that in the least. "He should be mature enough to deal with an awkward situation."

Luna blinked, taken aback somewhat by my words. "Wow, you... really do know absolutely nothing about him, after all."

"I know he's blind in more ways than one, that's for sure," I commented as we finally made it into the Town Hall. It was already closed for the night, but Luna has handy dandy unlocking spells that care nothing for the operating hours of any government facility!

"Did you know that you're the first friend he's had in several centuries?" She said as we walked in, shutting the door behind me.

"Que?"

"Mmmhmm." She made her way over to a bench and stretched out onto it with a cute yawn.

I gave her a confused gaze. "How would you know that?"

"Firewall." She leveled a bored stare my way that made me feel a tad silly. "He's my nephew by proxy, pretty much."

"This is one screwy family tree." I rubbed my forehead with a hoof. "Elaborate, then."

"Celestia raised him," she responded, confirming what I already knew, "When I returned to

Canterlot, she happily told me about him. About how he used to swing sticks around, pretending he was one of Celestia's guard. How he would get in fights with school yard bullies that picked on other ponies. How he went to learn from the Zebras how to see without his eyes."

"Okay." I cantered over to her, sitting in front of the bench and tilting my head as I looked at her. "I know you're leading me up to something."

"How he grew into a fine gentlecolt growing up on the stories of his noble and glorious father," she continued, "How much he hated not being able to wear the same armor because of size difference. How he finally became a Sky Archon and regretted it when he began having to watch his friends grow old and pass on."

"Oh." I had never stopped to think about the repercussions of immortality. I just assumed that he was always a grouchy bastard. And we know what they say about assuming~!

"Yeah. 'Oh' is right." She nodded slowly to emphasize her point on how I wasn't thinking about Storm all that much.

I stuck my tongue out at her because I was behind on that. "So why does he like me so much?"

She stuck her tongue right back at me! The *audacity!* "Probably because you were the first pony who can relate to him and see things in shades of gray rather than black and white like everypony else. I mean, sure, Celestia and I are in that boat, too, but there's a big difference between family and friends."

"How does that work?" I tilted my head the other way.

She sighed impatiently. Like it was somehow my fault that I couldn't read her mind. How dare I, right? Women. "What do you know about Storm Wing? Where did you learn about any of this, I mean."

"Winter Sky told me what he knew, or rather I should say, what little he knew," I explained.

"Then you don't know about how Celestia has been trying to get him to see that he's not Winter Sky," she remarked before wing shrugging. Again.

"I'm all ears." No, actually I'm all pony, but it's a form of expression, you see.

"For the past thousand years, Storm Wing has focused solely on being his father. That's not how ponies are designed. Storm Wing, deep down, doesn't want to fight, but his sense of duty prevents him from leaving his never-ending task. Celestia has been trying to get him to see that, but he's too stubborn to back down. One does not simply tell a pony to stop what they're

doing and try something new.”

Answers lead to more questions. Questions I was all too happy to ask, “How did he get his Cutie Mark, then? And why is it a Wonderbolt insignia?”

“I’ve... no clue, really. I assume he got it before becoming the second Archon.” She reasoned before getting back on subject, “I tried talking to him, but he’s not going to step down unless he’s forced to. I know it sounded extreme, but that’s kinda why I goaded him into challenging me when we first made it to Appleloosa. He backed down though and... I really should have just done it anyway, but I didn’t have the nerve. I mean, he’s made his life centered around it, you know?”

“I don’t think he would have accepted it at that.” I responded with a shrug of my own, “Besides, that’s kinda not too different, you forcing him to step down when all I did was get on his case and tell him to get his emotions in check. Why’s this so different?”

“I suppose it’s not too dissimilar, but Storm Wing made a choice that he didn’t fully understand. And for over nine hundred years he’s been shutting everypony out except Tia. I was just happy to see him not break down after we lost her, but before we even get her back, suddenly he finds both his mother and his father still live. Then he gets to meet them and not only does his mother try to suffocate him, but his father, whom he has looked up to since day one, turns out to be an ass.”

I totally felt a wave of nausea hit me when she said the word ‘Ass.’ I wasn’t ready for that at all.

I had to voice my concerns, “Ponies shouldn’t cuss.”

“Be serious!” She walloped me in the shoulder with a wing. Why am I always beaten on, you might ask? Because I’m a nice guy. And nice guys finish last after receiving their beatings.

“Ow! Okay! Damn it, fine!” I whined, glaring at her for the abuse, “Serious! I get it. And you’re right. Storm’s got a good reason to be just as shaken up. But look at them! They’re only making it worse by being near one another! Storm’s getting edgier and Sky might die of a broken heart at any second!”

“I know, I know! It frustrates me, too, okay?” she groaned sadly, facehoofing before glancing back at my spiteful glare, “Look, I don’t want to get into another fight.”

All the rage building up deflated right out of me in an instant. “Me neither. I hated that.”

“I just... Perhaps we should drop it?” she suggested.

I grimaced a tad, frowning as I considered the option before shaking my head, declining. “I don’t

want this to go unresolved though, you know?”

“Well, Applebloom has to wait for her Cutie Mark.” She hopped off the bench and made for the exit. “You can wait for things to simmer for a bit. Let’s get something to eat.”

“Still...” I followed her, my stomach emphatically agreeing with the notion of food.

“Still’ nothing. No more. Let’s talk about something else,” she said as she opened the door, closing it behind us with an audible click.

I turned my head her way, open to suggestions on the matter. “Like?”

After thinking for a bit, she smiled and looked back. “Like what do you think of Winter Sky?”

“I think he’s got issues and is borderline fanatical about Celestia.” It was the truth and nothing but the truth so help me Celestia.

“Really?” Her expression belied to the fact that she wasn’t of that opinion at all, “Why?”

I was a little surprised, actually. She was sorta the one that got the worst of his treatment so far, “Dude, he totally jumped down your throat for voicing an opposing opinion.”

“What?” she blinked before throwing her head back and laughing at me. This was nothing new. “That’s not what that was about. Firewall, you’re an idiot sometimes.”

“You love it.” I winked at her.

“Shut up,” she flicked my flank with her tail, smiling brightly at me, “He wasn’t getting all ‘Celestia is infallible’ on me. He was telling me to be smart. And he was right.”

“He was?” I flicked her back.

“Mmmhmm,” she replied as she flicked at me again. To her dismay, I blocked with my own tail, “If you remember, he never condoned what Celestia did. He was telling me to not cause trouble by letting my bitterness linger. Yes, I’m still mad at her. And I’ve no doubt that Winter Sky disapproves of her actions as well. But she made a decision and me digging it back up would only lead to problems. There’s no going back and fixing it by this point. As I told him then and as I’m telling you now, what’s done is done.”

“Huh.” I remarked as I blocked another tail attack from Luna, “You’re pretty smart, you know that?”

“I said I’d be smart enough for both of us, didn’t I?” she recalled with a determined grin, finally

getting past my tail with hers and flicking me again, “Hah!”

I had already forseen this and had flicked her back before her tail even pulled back, “Good, I don't like to think.”

“Ah!” she kept snapping her tail about, her frustration leading to her own downfall. “It shows.”

“It doesn't show that bad,” I replied nonchalantly, blocking her wild strikes with relative ease, “See?”

“Well... Only when you're awake.” She totally CHEATED by grabbing my tail with her magic and rapidly striking one, two, three times.

“We're done here.” I was fed up with cheaters. I aimed for the food line and started cantering, foolishly turning my back to her.

“Noooo~!” Without any warning whatsoever, she jumped on my back and hugged my neck, causing me to stumble about before steadying us both. What is it with the girls wanting to ride me so much (Giggity!). Maybe it was just Equestria. In Soviet Equestria, pony rides you~!

“Oh Jesus, it's got me!” I cried, frantically running around and yelling in fear, “Somepony help! This pony is forcing herself onto me! I already said no!”

No pony came to my aid, but Luna was definitely not cool with the unspoken game of shame. An unspoken game of shame is where you do shameful acts in public, embarrassing the hell out of yourself and your friend/family/significant other. They are random and lead to some of the most humiliating experiences in life. Why do I play this game? Because I always win. I couldn't care less what people think about me, thus, it's always my opponents who end up feeling like complete idiots.

“That's not funny!” Her voice was quiet, yet demanding. Still, she didn't let go of me, thus I had no choice but to continue. “Now stop before you cause a scene!”

That was the wrong thing to say.

“I'm not comfortable being hoofed there!” I cranked up the volume and made an even bigger show out of it all, “Somepony, quickly! She keeps telling me to just let it happen!”

“Firewall, you moron!” She started to swat me in the back of the head, truly panicking now.

“HELP! I'm telling Celestia!” I theatrically whimpered, “That's my bathing suit area!”

“S-Stop it!” She admitted defeat by jumping off my back. “Okay, I let you go, now stop causing

such a racket, you foal!”

I nearly doubled over laughing at her. I kid you not, I turned her purple face bright red as she kept swinging her head around to see if anypony had come out to investigate the noise. Unfortunately, none had, but I probably would have killed myself laughing if they had, so it was likely for the best. When her natural color returned, she began to glare at me with super hate. It was burning a hole in my skin!

“Oh? What's this?” I slipped up to her with a smug cheshire smile, “An effective counter to your trolling? Is it Christmas already?”

It only made her glare at me even harder. I neglected to tell her that if she didn't stop, her face was going to get stuck that way. “You wipe that stupid grin off your face or I'll show you an uncomfortable hoofing.”

“That's what she said!” I began to giggle uncontrollably again.

“You're a twit.” She turned away and started walking, leaving me to my amusement. I wasn't done though. No, she trolled me one too many times past what was necessary for me to drop it at that.

I caught up to her, still chuckling as I pointed out the irony of the situation, “You do this crap to me all the time! Especially the part where I'm fed up with it and you don't stop. So now...”

I tackled her to the ground and started tickling her. I'm not going to describe how it works beyond... Well, just think of how you might tickle a pony. It works just like that, most likely.

“Firewall, get off me!” she cried, flailing as she was resisting the urge to laugh. I could see the signs though. She was violently jerking from every poke and her breath was starting to stagger. “Sto-ha! Stop!”

“Negative, Ghost rider,” I announced, relentlessly letting into her, pouncing on her everytime she started to get away.

“You... S-Stop!” she began to kick and shriek with her laughter now, truly losing the battle in the dirt, “Hahaha!!! Q-Q-Quiddit!”

“I bring you a pain that you have never imagined!” I roared mercilessly. Victory was mine! MINE!

“Ahahahaha!! S... Stop! I'm gonnaHaha!! I'm gonna kill you!” Her threats were hollow and we both knew it. Finally, she gave up, her admission of defeat a sweet sweet sound, “I... Okay, you w-HA! You win! YOU WIN!”

I instantly let her go, smiling like a moron as she slowly got to her feet and gently rubbed her ribs with her wings. I swung my head back and forth, happy to have harassed her into submission for once. It finally made sense why she did it so much. It felt great!

“Jerk,” she spat irritably.

“BWAHAHAHAHAHA!!!” I fell over laughing. Seriously, I was getting a cramp I was laughing so hard. Why hadn’t I done this sooner!? I could suffer this pain all day long if it meant getting to do this to Luna all the time. I don’t think it was even possible for that to get old. Maybe for her, but let’s be honest, that wouldn’t stop her were our situations reversed!

She didn’t think it was so funny. “You shut up!”

“Oooohhh... It hurts so good.” I wiped at my eyes with a hoof as I ever so gently stood back up, “Hehe... I remember this going the other way last time. Revenge is sweet~!”

“Ugh, not my finest moment,” she complained as she looked herself over, “I’m filthy.”

“I could have told you that.” Insert big arrogant jerk smile right here, coming right off my face.

Her glare was powerless to stop me! “I thought I told you to shut up.”

“I think I said something like that, too!” That caused me to laugh a bit more, though it was bittersweet thanks to the ache in my gut from having laughed so much already.

With that, she reached a wing up to wrap around the back of my neck and yank me down towards her. Without asking or even taking me out to dinner, she kissed me. I’m not sure why other girlfriends in the past never tried this tactic to get me to shut up, but it works amazingly well. I mean, my brain shut down in record time and was all GLEEEEE~!

“There. That shut you up.” She huffed as though it were nothing, but there was this huge blush splayed along her cheeks and nose. I smiled like a dreamy idiot and simply nuzzled at her, causing her to grin as she returned it with one of her own. D’awwww~...

“C’mon, Tia’s starting to feel better, let’s go see her,” she said out of nowhere, turning back towards the apple orchard.

“How do you know that?” I blinked, trotting a bit to catch up.

She smiled at me, “In your own words: It’s magic. I ain’t got to explain s-...”

I interrupted her before she could say it. Even with that close call, I still kinda felt queasy.

“There's seriously something wrong with pony-cussing.”

“Damn?” she tested the waters, mostly to troll me.

My stomach turned. “Lunaaaa~!”

“Heehee. I'll keep that in mind!” she murmured with a chuckle before checking herself again, sighing softly, “Well, let's get cleaned up first. *Then* we go see Tia.”

We went and washed up (Separately, if you must know. This isn't Ponies After Dark, yanno.) before grabbing a quick snack from the food line. Turns out, Celestia and the Mane Six were chilling out at my beloved campfire. Celestia looked much better, which was kinda surprising after having seen the beating she had taken. I queried about what was going on that made my campfire so tempting at such a late hour, but nopony really had any answer to give other than they saw Spike setting it up and figured something was going on.

It was a lot of small talk with everypony acting somewhat tense due to aftermath jitters, so Luna decided to help ease things up a bit. She left and returned shortly with a box full of mugs and a barrel full of cider which warmed my heart to no end. I happily served everypony (even Celestia had some!) while Twilight sorta manipulated the logs to make them more comfortable to sit/lay on, using a bit of magic. It was still pretty quiet for the first half hour or so, but before long, they had all relaxed and things were suddenly on the right track. Jokes were being tossed around, ponies let out adorable burps, and everything was right in the world. That is, until we got into the Meta topic... Yes, that's right. They brought it up. Brace yourselves, you have no idea just how crazy things were about to get.

“So I hear you... watch us from your world, and that's how you know us so well.” Rarity was trying to sound somewhat uninterested but it was equivalent to telling a pro football player offhand that you knew he liked to wear thongs. It's just not going to be a gentle blow, I'm sorry.

“Nice, Twilight. Let that out of the bag, why don'cha?” I gave her an impatient stare.

Applejack laughed a bit as Twilight gave me the most confused stare. “Actually, it was Fluttershy, darlin'.”

Fluttershy began to panic as though she had been caught strangling a bunny, “I'm s-sorry! I didn't know I w-wasn't supposed to!”

“Oh, well it's okay if Fluttershy did it. Good job, Fluttershy!” I said quickly, almost entirely for the sole purpose of preserving Fluttershy's calm. I breathed a sigh of relief as she settled down somewhat.

Twilight didn't like that one bit. “Excuse me? I get a glare if I do it, but Fluttershy gets a pat on

the head?"

Apparently, double-standards are just unfair and to be quite frank, they are. But this wasn't a double-standard. It was a Flutterdouble standard. Those are completely different. I'm still floored that she wasn't aware of that. It's like... the most obvious thing ever, right?

"Yup. She's Fluttershy. She does no wrong." In the words of Pinkie Pie... Well, duh!

"Hahaha!" RD chuckled with a wink at her childhood friend, "Well, I guess that's a tradeoff for being a pegasus afraid of heights."

Fluttershy did blush a tad, but she still smiled, able to take more of a joke, it would have seemed. Nonetheless, I had to back her up. Fluttershy needs protectin', yo!

"Don't sweat it, Fluttershy, I used to be scared of heights, too. Now it's just spiders." Hey, everyone is afraid of heights at least once.

"Spiders are... .. nice." She said with a grateful smile, happy to have my support.

"And that is why she can do no wrong." I held a hoof out towards her as if to make an exemplary role out of her. "Nobody can hate a pony that has absolutely zero hate within her. Even when she's wrong about spiders."

"So everyone likes Fluttershy?"

"Eh, I'm sure there are some people that want to be special unique snowflakes that have to hate the popular thing, but yeah, for the most part."

"What about me, huh? Who *couldn't* like me, am I right?" Rainbow Dash made a show of posing like a stunt show's main star, hopping up on two legs as she flexed. Truer words have never been spoken, Dash, Truer words have never been spoken.

"Ya'll toot that horn any harder, Dash, and yer gonna pass out," AJ warned with a begrudged smile.

"Actually, all you guys are loved." I nodded to emphasize my words. "Seriously. Even Luna, and she only had two lines in the entire show."

"Even though Tia was appearing in every other showing." Luna said with an irritated sigh. U JELLY WOONA?

Celestia fanned herself with a wing, pretending to show off a degree of self-admiration that we all knew didn't exist. "Well, I suppose there's no stopping greatness, after all."

"Wait, 'show?' You mean to say we're paraded as a play?" Rarity was very intrigued by this.

"Sorta, only... .. Ugh. Too hard to explain." I began thinking it over before giving up and simply taking what was offered, "Yes, it's like a thirty minute play every week. Only we record it and watch it over and over. You guys are pretty adorable and hilarious, after all."

"That's so neat! Are they watching right now, huh!? Huh!? Huh!? HI, EVERYPONY!" Pinkie Pie is waving at you all. Be polite and wave back, just be careful not to cut yourself on the broken fourth wall. It's sharp.

"I hope they're not watching." I don't know if I'd be allowed in the show, even if I was being recorded. "I'd have so much hatemail from jealous bronies. I think some of the crazy ones might actually try to hunt me down."

"I'm Pinkie Pie!" She really was trying too hard.

"Stop that, Pinkie, you might bridge the worlds or something," I warned her with a roll of my eyes, "Which would make a lot of people angry or happy. But yeah, everypony here has their own place in the fandom. Though some of you wouldn't like the fan interpretations."

"Oh, this Ah gotta hear." I was actually somewhat surprised to see that Applejack cared what humans thought of her.

"AJ, yours is usually the most sensible representation." I admitted with an appreciative smile, "Best case you're shown as the model citizen and community driving force. Worst, eh... People sometimes see you as a dumb stubborn hick."

"Hah!" AJ smiled brightly, proving to be a pretty good sport about it all, "Ah tend to be kinda dumb sometimes. S'fair, I reckon."

Luna quickly downed what was left of her cider and began laughing before calling out to her sister, "Oh, Tia, guess how you're sometimes represented! Go on, guess!"

Celestia shrugged, seeming mostly uninterested in the culture of humanity, "Luna, I honestly haven't the slightest idea. There's no possible way I could guess."

"The especially cruel and self-serving tyrant!" I think it's official by this point, that Luna needed to be tagged and documented as a habitual troll. Someone needs to stop that pony... .. Well, don't look at me, I'm just a unicorn!

Then I got to see her Royal Majesty of Equestria do something a princess should never do. As Luna's words sunk in, she had been taking a drink of her cider. The result? The most

marvelous and genuine spit take I had ever seen in my entire life. Best part? It was her that did it. It would have just been funny if Twilight or Rarity did it, but seeing her Royalness blast an amber spray of fluid out of her mouth blew my mind on so many levels. To make a long story short, I was awestruck.

After coughing a couple of times, she looked at *ME* in righteous indignation. “W-What!? She's making fun of me, isn't she?!”

“Dude, that was an honest-to-god spit take.” I totally deflected. I wasn't going to be made a target. It's just wasn't in the cards that day. “I've never seen one in real life. Not a real one, anyway. Celestia, you're my hero.”

“Answer the question, Firewall!” She didn't like where this was going.

Further deflection was needed, so I let my eyes glaze over as I put on the most mystified voice I could, “My word, your mane is so radiant and stunning... I can't even think of anything else except cider. More cider, anypony?”

I was not going to be the target of that question.

“Yes, please.” Rarity held up her hoof, smiling beautifully as Celestia gave up and attempted to take a second drink from her glass.

“Don't let it bother you, Princess,” Twilight laughed a tad as I cantered over to bring Rarity her requested beverage, “Apparently, humans also speculate upon any possible romantic relationships we might have with other ponies and have the tendency to... speculate crossings with... each other. As in, like... everypony here.”

Then the amazing happened yet a second time. Celestia did a second spit take, still managing to appear lovely and regal whilst doing so. I would have been blown away a second time, but I happened to have been walking right in front of her the second time as I handed Rarity her cider.

“Oh, Firewall!” Celestia blushed, embarrassed at covering me in her alcoholic mouthwash, “I am so sorry!”

“No, it's a hint.” Normally, I would have been irritated, but having just got her back, I was going to let it slide. “You want me to take a shower, I get it.”

Rainbow Dash nearly died choking on her cider as she laughed. Pinkie was right there with her, having fallen off her log and guffawing uncontrollably. I gave Celestia a look as she covered her mouth to avoid laughing at my expense. Applejack and Fluttershy weren't as amused, but they still grinned a tad as Rarity and Twilight tag teamed a few spells to try and help clean me off.

They may have dried off my coat, but my pride was still dripping wet! I went back to my spot beside Luna who gave me a sniff.

“Mmm. You smell tasty,” she made a display of om-nom-noming at my ear, causing me to lean away from her.

“Apples make everything better!” Pinkie Pie chirped as she hopped back onto her log.

“Eeeeexactly,” AJ agreed with a wink, “It’ll sure hide that foul smellin’ smoke away.”

“Ponies got jokes, I see.” I shook my head, rolling my eyes despite the smirk finding its way on my face.

Fluttershy looked very ponderous, pursing her mouth as she stared into her cider before giving it a cute sip. She finally worked up the courage to speak after letting whatever idea she had rolling around take root.

“Why would humans dream up such things?” She tilted her head and gave me the FlutterSpock eyebrow.

“Humans are about as creative as a Draconequus, Fluttershy,” Luna explained with a wing shrug, leaning onto me with a smirk, “They think it’s funny.”

“Or cute. Or sometimes we just want something to focus on,” I gave a nod, “I mean, what’s not to love about you guys?”

“Indeed~!” Rarity displayed a half-hearted attempt at a model shot, putting her hoof under her chin and giving her best ‘Come Hither’ eyes.

“So... What’s your favorite pairing, Firewall?” Luna slapped at me with her tail.

Celestia turned my way with a curious smirk. “Oh, this should be good.”

I refused to be cowed! I would not be trolled! Consequences be damned, I had the leg up on Luna today and I wasn’t going to give in!

“Oh, well... I have no straight up favorite, since I’ve read quite a few. The best are usually AppleDash or Twixie. Though, I did read an amazing RariTia,” I answered casually before finishing off my cider and pouring myself a second one, “Oh, and there was a really sweet and adorable FlutterPie comic that I saw once. It was a real popular one, too.”

They all looked at me like I had just let one rip and had blamed it on one of them (actually, I think their expressions were much more disgusted than that). Well, all of them except Luna and

Pinkie Pie, actually, both of whom were laughing after observing the reactions from the others.

“You really weren't joking, Twilight. Well, I can see why David was so adamantly refusing to tell me about his world,” Celestia said with a strained sigh as though her mind was suffering from backlash.

“Me... And Applejack?!” Dash didn't seem very amicable to the idea in the slightest. “But she's so... ... Farmy!”

“And what in the hay is that supposed to mean?” The insult seemed to bother AJ more than the musings of some alien race, “Ya got a problem with farmin'?”

“Twixie?” Twilight was trying to put it together, and unfortunately for her sake, it did not take her long. She slowly turned about three shades greener before suddenly throwing back the rest of her cider.

Rarity simply seemed to be trying to force such an idea out of her brain. I guess that's not what she had in mind when she wanted to marry into royalty. I think she was casting a Brain Bleach spell on herself or something.

Fluttershy, on the other hand was just having difficulties trying to process my words. She wasn't disgusted or appalled; she was simply trying to figure out the thought process of the humans.

“That doesn't make much sense,” she murmured quietly before giggling and giving us a rare Flutterjoke! “I mean, Pinkie and I haven't even held hooves.” (They do hold hooves! AHA! I KNEW IT! *Hair deflate!*)

Instantly, Pinkie Pie was before Fluttershy, kneeling like a gentlecolt with one hoof stretched out to her and the other thrown back dramatically. She coughed to clear her throat and took on the most haughty and silly Prince Charming voice she could adopt.

“Oh, Fluttershy~!” she cried out as I facehoofed, knowing where this was going, “At last, I am free to confess my feelings. Feelings so deep they dwarf the mighty ocean~!”

Rainbow Dash laughed at the show as Twilight magicked up a violin and began playing an unnecessarily romantic tune. (So now she can play the violin, too? What *can't* you do, Twilight?!) Even Celestia got in on it and shone a spotlight on the pair as Fluttershy went along with the joke, having imbibed just enough to be less inhibited.

“Oh, Pinkie. Are you saying what I think you are?” Fluttershy held a hoof to her forehead, her voice as dramatic as her co-actor's.

“Oh brother.” Applejack gave a roll of the eyes but was unable to avoid grinning.

"I think I've read this already," Luna laughed as I watched ponies make fun of bronies.

"Tis so, Fair Fluttershy!" Pinkie took Fluttershy's hoof within her own and failed to suppress a titter before continuing, "My love for thee is blah blah blah, something romantic! Take not my heart to break, for you alone could destroy it!"

"I've not drank enough apple cider for this," I chuckled sadly, "This fan fic would get scorned to the depths of hell by the pre-readers on Equestria Daily."

"But Pinkie Pie!" Fluttershy struggled to not giggle. "What would the others say? Ponies would talk!"

"Let them talk!" Pinkie hugged Fluttershy's neck before turning and throwing her arm out to the sky and audience, "The world is about us, Lady Shy! No pony sha'nt not... err. They won't get in our way!"

"Oh, Pinkie Pie!" Fluttershy had to turn her head away to laugh without breaking character.

"I think I'm going to cry." Rarity took a bit of the stage, pretending to dab at emotional tears that she didn't really have. "I'm moved in ways that make me feel... ill."

"Oh, Fluttershy!" Pinkie dramatically smooshed her face against Fluttershy's cheek, planting a big silly kiss on the yellow pegasi. "MMMMWAH!"

"Bravo!" Luna cheered happily as the two finally couldn't take it anymore and began laughing like a pair of hyenas.

"I think we have a new Bridleway play to send in." Twilight let her violin disappear with a snicker.

"Oh, for certain," Celestia agreed with a regal laugh, sighing happily, "It would sell out every time."

I know, it's mind blowing. Pony parodies about humanity's pony parodies.

PONYPARODYCEPTION! In all seriousness, though, seeing them taking everything so nonchalantly made me feel so much better. I was hiding all this from them and really, there just didn't seem to be any danger or reason behind it. They were creatures that laughed, cried, loved, hated, lived, and died just like humans. So what if they were candy-colored and could use magic? I was candy-colored (sorta) and could use magic, too. Did that make me less human? I don't think it did. Did it make me more awesome? Buck yeah.

"I've not done this in quite some time." Celestia gave a wistful sigh. "Just sitting with ponies I care about and talking about silly things just for the sake of having a good time. I don't get the

chance often.”

“You wanted to manage everything, don't forget that.” Luna gave her a wink as if to say 'I told you so.'

Celestia nodded as she took another drink of her cider. “I know. I don't regret my decision. Well, not all the time, anyway.”

“It's okay if you want to push some stuff my way,” Luna offered with a smile, “I likely understand a lot more about a lot of things than you now, thanks to Firewall and my uncontrollable curiosity.”

“That... is true, I suppose.” Celestia gave a ponderous stare off into the night sky.

“So what about me, Sir Firewall?” Rarity dazzled me with her smile. “Am I as popular as the others.”

“Definitely,” I answered with a nod, “I mean, at first nobody liked you, but when you proved that you don't only sparkle like a diamond but are as tough as one... Well, you just grew on us all. You guys all have amazing depth and are pure as can be, so naturally, you melted my heart right away, and I'm not even slightly unique in that department. It's not like any of you are actually unliked. It's just a person-by-person basis on which pony they like most. Like, my personal favorite is Dash, but I've always wondered if, deep down, I didn't love Rarity even more.”

“I'm liking the sound of this world more and more,” Rarity commented as she styled her mane, casting her gaze about inquisitively, “I wonder if we are being watched. Hmm.”

“Ah wouldn't worry about it,” Applejack said with another swig, “If they like watchin' us, then Ah'm sure they'd rather we be ourselves rather than try an' cater to 'em.”

Oh, AJ. You will never be a dumb hick in my eyes. You are not a silly pony.

“I wouldn't get too cozy with humans, Rarity.” Luna warned her, smirking deviously. Troll Alert~! SOUND THE [PINKIE ALARM!](#) “Some of them do pretty strange things like visit Equestria and turn into fire breathing unicorns.”

“Yeah, but those are the awesome kind!” Rainbow Dash had totally just vouched for me. I could have squee'd if I was by myself. As it were, though, I kept my squee to myself. Yeah, I know, I was finally getting it under control!

“And some are like David,” Rarity commented with a nod, seeming to understand her completely, “I am quite well aware, Pr-... Ahem... Luna.”

Celestia noticed the Rarity's intentional act of not using Luna's title, but she didn't make a thing out of it.

"I meant others will do things such as... compare you to a marshmallow!" Luna grinned broadly as Rarity blinked in confusion.

"Wow, you totally went there." I had forgotten all about that, and getting it out of left field caused me to start chuckling despite myself.

"What? You mean she's being serious?!" Rarity gasped as Twilight and Fluttershy took on pensive stares, not getting the joke. Pinkie understood it right away and began laughing maniacally, gasping for breath as she flailed.

"I don't... get it?" Fluttershy stated, scratching the side of her head with a hoof.

"Oh my!" Celestia covered her hoof with her mouth, blinking in shock before withholding her laughter. "Let me... Let me enlighten you."

With that, she summoned up a big tasty marshmallow to which Pinkie Pie immediately jumped up and executed a beautiful dive-chomp, devouring the airborne treat in an instant.

"Pinkie Pie, you ruin everything!" I exclaimed as we all fell into a chorus of lulz.

Her gooey white grin told me she was okay with that.

"Let's try again." Celestia summoned another one, only barely able to keep her face straight as she floated it over to Rarity, "Lady Rarity, please raise your hoof."

"Oh my goodness!" Twilight finally caught on, choking down her laughter as best she could. She wasn't very good at it.

Rarity did as she was told, still left out of the loop. When Celestia floated the edible puff next to Rarity's hoof though, everypony else finally caught up. There was no denying that her hoof looked exactly like the object floating beside it. Her face turned red; like, beet red. She didn't like this development and instinctively slapped the marshmallow away, sending it airborne into Pinkie Pie's mouth as we all got our laughing out. Poor Rarity. She was not prepared for such a shock, it seemed.

"Humans are back to being strange and insufferable," she huffed in a matter-of-fact tone, "Present company excluded."

"Well, thanks for t-..." I began to say before getting interrupted by a thunderous crash not ten feet behind me. I jumped with fright, accidentally throwing most of my cider on Luna who looked

at me with the most sour expression she could manage. We call that a silver lining, kiddos. Nonetheless, that stupid jackpony still scared me and everypony else with his arrival. I was still mad at him, too, so I was twice as unhappy about his arrival! Screw Captain Storm Wing!

“Storm Wing,” Celestia rubbed her forehead with a hoof, “I won’t tell you again. You will learn to land in a subtle and quiet fashion or you will learn to not land at all.”

“Forgive me, Princess.” He seemed a tad surprised to see her, and quickly bowed behind her after approaching, “I am glad to see you are feeling better.”

“Thank you, Captain Storm Wing,” she replied without looking back, shutting her eyes as though she were mentally preparing herself, “I assume you are here to give a report?”

“Yes, your highness,” he confirmed before lifting his head, “Appleloosa has been secured and the Pact Ponies have been imprisoned for the time being. I saw to it that they were made comfortable, nonetheless.”

“Pact Ponies?” I looked at Luna, rather confused.

Luna nodded, not even looking my way, “An order I gave to Storm before I sent him to check on Celestia. I’ll tell you later.”

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is what it’s like to be out of the loop!

“Very good.” Celestia turned her head to face him somewhat, “Is there anything else?”

“No, Princess,” he replied, “I merely did my usual rounds and set up a night shift from the Sky Archons who have recovered enough to return to active duty, though I do not expect they will be seeing any opposition tonight.”

“Well, they must be tired. If you feel nothing will happen overnight, then I think all Sky Archons should get some rest. That includes you, Captain,” Celestia murmured curtly before turning back to her drink, “We should be fine tonight.”

Storm didn’t like the sound of that in the least. He opened his mouth to protest, but shut it instead and lowered his head.

“Yes, your maj-...” he began to say before my loud, deliberate coughing interrupted him.

He glanced my way (You see why I have troubles believing he’s blind? HE STILL LOOKS AROUND!) with a scarcely suppressed glare before seeing my motions. I was shaking my head, mouthing the word ‘No’ to him. I didn’t think that was a good idea either and he needed to take a stand for the right thing for once. I mean, the one time I had seen him disobey Celestia

before that was give me hell that I didn't earn and now something that he needs to get solid about, he falls down. I just wanted to scream, 'Dude, you missed! Twice!'

"What are you doing?" Luna whispered to me as I smiled innocently at her.

Storm Wing got the message and gave a slight nod before lifting his head proudly and clearing his throat. "Actually... Princess, I do not think that is a good idea."

"Questioning my orders, Captain?" Celestia immediately responded, not even looking back at him.

He stood his ground and even dug his hooves in a tad, "Yes, Princess. This is what the Sky Archons are for. Allowing them rest that they do not absolutely need in these dangerous times is a waste of their abilities."

Celestia blinked before smiling softly and looking back at him. She then cocked her head, silently asking him to come around before her, which he did so without a moment's hesitation.

"I think I prefer my idea more, Storm Wing," she continued to smile as she spoke, "Perhaps you should do as I order and trust in my judgment."

"Princess." He shut his eyes, either frustrated that she was antagonizing him or irritated with her stubbornness. "Please, allow me to do my job. Leaving us unprotected at night with an unpredictable foe at large is..."

"Is what?" She took another sip of her drink.

I was confident that she was just trying to get Storm Wing to grow a pair and start really stepping up to the plate, but everypony else was deathly silent, as though they were waiting for an explosion to go off.

"It's... It's just foolish and reckless!" He looked ashamed, as though he didn't want to say what he felt, but from what I've been told, Celestia is a damn good lie detector.

"I see," she murmured softly before finishing her beverage and losing her smile, "And what do you plan to do if I order you to do so anyway?"

"Then I would have to disobey and simply take night watch myself," he answered her, facing her gaze head on, "I can't take the chance, your highness. I have no excuse to give."

"I see. If that is the case, then I think a change is in order. Take off your armor." Her words were soft, but the implications were brutal. I didn't like where this was going.

“W... What?” Storm took a step back, his stern visage crumbling to shock.

“Remove your armor, Storm Wing,” she ordered, not even blinking as the words left her mouth.

Storm obeyed, after a few moments of hesitation. It was hard to watch. See, you can get that armor on and off (most of it anyway) by yourself, but it involves a lot of embarrassing twisting and turning and fumbling at clasps you can't see. Basically, it takes twice as long and you look incredibly stupid while doing so. At first he was angry, and threw every piece at her feet, enraged at such treatment but it wasn't long before it was sinking in that he was losing his life's purpose. This understanding eventually sucked the wind out of his sails and he suddenly wasn't so quick to yank and throw about his armor. He lost his fury and it spiraled into pain as he had only his helmet on, unable to undo the braid. Celestia allowed him a modicum of pity with a bit of magic, untying his braid so that he could pull off the helmet. As he did, though, I saw a tear roll down his face which he quickly wiped away. His long mane fell down past his neck; halfway to the ground as it tore free from the helmet. He turned his head away from Celestia and coughed softly, failing to mask the shrill sob that escaped his throat. I wanted so hard to believe that what was likely about to happen was not going to happen and that Celestia was just trolling him (and us by proxy). I mean, sure, I was still mad at him, but that didn't mean I wanted to see him in pain.

“Tia, stop it,” Luna ordered, glaring daggers right at her sister.

“Hush,” I whispered to her. Luna wasn't caught up to speed on everything that had happened, so while my heart was going out to Storm Wing, I was going to trust Celestia's judgment. Harsh as it seemed, maybe it was what he needed.

“Do you have anything else to say before I pass leadership on to Winter Sky?” Celestia ignored her, flooring us all with that sentence. I stared as my heartstrings pretty much snapped in two upon watching Storm Wing's head fall and fresh tears began flowing. For several seconds, he said not a word.

“I just... I just wanted to protect you.” His throat was dry and without any warning whatsoever, a second sob escaped along with several more tears. “Princess, please understand...”

“Then, if that is all: Storm Wing, you are hereby relieved of your command as a Captain, your authority as a Sky Archon, and are expelled from the division altogether,” Celestia stared down at him, her face set in stone.

“Princess!” Twilight's plea was comprised of only one word, but she was saying a lot more along with it. Things like 'what the hell are you doing?' 'This is a huge overreaction, is it not?'

I watched as my friend fell to his knees and began to gently weep, covering his face with one hoof as he braced himself up with the other. I felt my own vision blur before snapping my head

to face Celestia. I felt some of my anger slowly direct it's way to her, but at the same time, I'd been taking a lot of flak from Storm today. So even though it makes me sound like a bad friend, I didn't feel this overwhelming urge to back him up.

I caught sight of Rarity doing her best to not cry right along with Storm Wing. It was obvious that she was utterly mortified at having to watch this horrible event take place but for once, Rarity withheld any theatrical urges that she might have had. She wasn't the only one affected; even Pinkie Pie couldn't find something to laugh about. Lafter was trying to think of more reasons why I shouldn't get up and start dogcussing Celestia's face in, but Stoic was reminding me that he had brought this upon himself in the first place. Besides, what was I to do? Hit her? Make things worse? As much as it pained me, and it was indeed killing me to watch my friend's heart shatter, all I could reasonably do was watch it happen.

"P-Please, Prin... Princess," he begged in a croaked and strained voice as he lifted his head to her, "What did... What did I do wrong?"

"You have changed, Storm Wing. And not for the better." Her vision hardened considerably. Judging purely by how upset she looked, this had obviously been on her mind for a long time. "I remember a thousand years ago when you would never have touched your friends in malice. Yet today, I watched you raise your voice and your magic against Firewall. Then again, not even an hour later, so I'm told by Winter Sky! I could not believe my ears when he told me what had happened. I have never been so ashamed of you, Storm Wing."

And now I felt doubly responsible for what was going on. I mean, yeah, Storm Wing really had something like this coming all day long, but I dunno. It just seemed a little too much. What was a big surprise was how everypony was totally blown away at the revelation that I had been today's butt monkey. I'm not sure why, it's not like that was anything new.

"I... I was j-just trying to... to protect you." His voice was hoarse from straining so much; namely his efforts directed towards not break down sobbing.

"Protect me? Storm Wing, I am an alicorn that has seen several dozen millennia pass by!" She stood up from her perch on the log and glared all the more intensely at him. "I do not need protection from Firewall, Pinkie Pie, or a spider she put on her face!"

Everypony glanced at the blushing Pinkie Pie. That was the first and last time I've ever seen that pony even slightly flustered.

"I just... I don't want anything to happen," he coughed, sniffing somewhat, "I don't w-want... I don't want to see you get hurt again."

"It hurts me more to see you like this, Storm!" she cried out, shaking her head in frustration, "I can't bear to see you change into something you aren't! Your protection is not what I want. It's

never been what I wanted. It's never even been what you wanted, either. Look at your cutie mark! It's not a shield. It's not a weapon. Being a Sky Archon isn't what makes you happy and it isn't what makes me happy. If you have to protect me to be with me, and protecting me makes us both unhappy, then I would rather you leave me be, Storm."

He finally dropped his head as he could no longer hold back his tears and cries. A thousand years of age and before Celestia, he was but a child. I thought on that for a moment before it all suddenly made sense to me. Storm wasn't just a child, before her. He was her child. To Celestia, it did not matter whether he was ten days old or ten thousand years old, she had still taken him in as her own. And no matter how hard Storm Wing tried to think of her as his Princess, whom he felt he needed to protect, she would always be his mother. This wasn't a Princess dressing down her Captain. It was a mother berating her son. Harshly, too!

"I'm s-so... So sorry," he gasped between ragged breaths, "I'll d-do anything... D.. Don't send m-me... away from your s-side. I... I c-can't... I... I l-love you. Mother..."

Celestia's stern expression melted away as she let out a shaky breath. She looked at the mug that was trembling within the grip of her magic and gently set it to the side before she dropped it as a result from her loss of composure.

"Princess, um... Perhaps you could see... that possibly things... well, you see... It's just, perhaps you might agree that you are overreacting... um... just a little?" Fluttershy bravely stood up with misty eyes, wiping at them before approaching and hugging Storm Wing's neck. I honestly expected him to push her away as emotionally wrecked as he was, but to my surprise, he actually leaned somewhat against her.

When Fluttershy inhaled to carry on vouching for Storm Wing's case, Celestia held up a wing to silence her. Luna actually got up, intending to leave so as to not further witness what was taking place, but I hopped up and gave her a nudge, earning myself an extra-mean, extra-tearful glare from her. I shook my head and nodded at Celestia as she swept aside all the armor in front of her with a brush of her other wing before stepping closer. She gave Fluttershy a soft smile, motioning for her to step back, to which the yellow pegasus hesitantly complied. Then, kneeling down along with him, Celestia slowly pulled her wings about him and hugged tightly, causing him to jerk his head up in surprise whilst blinking in confusion. We all went utterly silent at the scene. No more tears were being shed; no more words were being said.

"Send you away?" her voice had lost its edge and was slowly replaced with chagrin, "Is that what you think I want?"

"You... You said..." he stammered, never fully getting the sentence out.

"I sent you away when I allowed you to become a Sky Archon," Celestia whispered softly, draping her neck down over the back of his, "Because I thought that was what you wanted. All I

ever wanted is for you to be happy. Storm Wing, when was the last time you were happy?"

His eyes were wide with shock as the reality sunk in what had just happened. Celestia's now freed tears gently rolled down onto him as she continued to embrace him

"I... I don't... know." His tears were drying up as his voice began to make a return.

"I do," Celestia replied softly, slowly running the tip of her wing along his mane, "I remember when the Wonderbolts were first formed; when you first got your cutie mark. You were a shoe-in at the try outs and I was so happy for you. But you didn't join them and... you never told me why."

Dash's jaw hit the ground like a sledgehammer! Or it would have if it could reach the ground. Apparently, Storm Wing came very close to being a founding member of the Wonderbolts and this turn of events was not setting well with her perception of reality. Still, amusing reactions on the side weren't helping to ease the awkwardness of the situation. I felt as though this was personal and that it should be done in private, yet neither Celestia nor Storm Wing seemed to be particularly bothered by that. In fact, looking back now, I remember loads of times where ponies had shown plenty of affection and the only one that felt awkward about it was me, really.

"I... I barely remember my first century," Storm Wing admitted with a soft gulp, "But I... remember feeling scared about leaving; like a whisper at the back of my neck. That dangers would come while I was away. And that I needed to protect you."

Celestia sighed softly before speaking again, "Are you still afraid, Storm Wing?"

I watched as he mulled this about for a bit, hesitating before responding, "More than ever. But I can't... let my fears control me."

"Then stop being what you aren't, Storm Wing." Celestia stood back up smiling brightly after pausing to rub at her eyes. Then, without any warning, her horn began to glow and a small silver crown with a blue sapphire winged inlay in its design appeared on Storm Wing's head as his hair was pulled back into its original braid. I was too busy being dumbfounded to comment on just how girly it looked, but there you have it. Pretty pretty Storm Wing.

"And start being the prince you were meant to be," she said with a comforting smile before glancing my way pointedly, "Speaking of which, I think I know a good place for you to start."

Storm Wing's head lowered again as he realized what she was getting at. Without much delay, though, he turned and flew over to me. He held out his hoof to me without saying anything and I decided that wasn't good enough. I know, I'm a jerk. However, I did take my empty cup and placed it over his hoof with a smile.

"It fits!" I proclaimed as I threw my hooves in the air. His response was to blink in confusion before getting the message and letting out a sigh.

"I'm sorry, Firewall," he said, his tone and expression both quite earnest, "You're the first real friend I've had in a long time and... I've not treated you like one even though you did your best to treat me as a friend should."

"No problem," I said with a smile, taking magical hold of his hoof after removing the mug I had placed on it, "Hey, you remember that day I said something about bromance?"

"Don't y-..." He started to threaten me before getting yanked into an awesome brohug. He was hesitant to comply but he eventually got around to gently patting on my back to let me know he cared.

"Awww~!" I heard Twilight gush at us.

"Okay, that's enough," he pulled away, but I held fast.

"No, wait... Just a little longer," I whispered in a sultry voice, rousing an uplifting roar of laughter from everypony else.

He broke away from me in record time before giving me a glare that eventually degenerated into a smirk.

"You're a freak," he said quite plainly.

"You enjoyed that too much," Luna protested, her expression wreathed in faux anger, "You don't even hug me that tightly."

"Well, you're not as pretty as Storm Wing!" I stuck my tongue out at her before continuing. "Just look at that hair! He's so dainty and cute!"

"I hate you," he seethed, chuckling despite himself.

"Screw you, too, Prince Storm Wing." I winked back with a grin.

[Chapter Eleven](#)

[Chapter Thirteen](#)

If you waved at Pinkie Pie, you have to post about it in the comments. No excuses. None. Also, no sneak peak this time. Trying something new. :3