

Ponyvania: Twilight of Sorrow

Part 1

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Centuries ago, the Dark Lord, Dracula, an evil vampire stallion, terrorised the magical land of Equestria, with the intent of conquering it as his own. Princess Celestia fought against the Dark Lord personally, assisted by a mysterious vampire hunter, Simon Belmont, who was believed to be Dracula's nemesis. The pair vanquished the vampire, but not before Dracula proclaimed that one day, he would return, as long as evil existed.

Centuries passed, and Dracula never returned. Over time, the citizens of Equestria lost all fear of the Dark Lord, believing that he would never make good on his threat. What they had not known, was that Dracula had been vanquished permanently elsewhere. Celestia knew this.

But it is believed that in the absence of a Dark Lord, the balance between good and evil is broken. Celestia suspected that, in order to rectify this, the universe acted accordingly, freeing Nightmare Moon from her prison, in order to serve as Dracula's replacement when no others were successful in doing so, or willing to. However, she was defeated before she could become the Dark Lord.

But as long as evil exists, it will try and find a new Dark Lord...

Soma Cruz slowly stirred, gaining consciousness. His entire body was numb with pain, even if it was quickly subsiding. His body felt... Wrong. There was just no other word to describe it. He was used to transforming into other creatures, but... Even this was bizarre compared to what he had experienced so far. He took deep breaths, as he opened his eyes. The limited amount of light coming into his eyes was of no comfort to him, though his eyes were already accommodated to the darkness around him. It would've been annoying to adjust to brighter lights, but he felt it would've been more comforting.

From his laying-down position, he could tell a few things. It was night time, due to the limited amount of light, and said light was composed of the moon's mystic rays, reflected down to the earth. Trees surrounded him, meaning he was also in a forest. And from what was in front of him, he was no longer human - far from it, apparently. In the place of hands and feet, he had hooves, like a horse. He had just gone through some kind of portal which had appeared out of nowhere. It must have transported him somewhere that was not Tokyo, and changed his form, too.

Soma attempted to right himself, aware of the potential problems he could have with his new form. Carefully, he got up onto two legs, and then all fours. Thankfully, the dirt terrain

around him was fairly flat, so he had ample room to practice. He took the opportunity to look at himself. He was now apparently a pony - a unicorn, to be precise, having figured this out while trying to get up. He was light-grey, with a white mane that was actually long enough to reach around to the sides of his head. Finally, he wore a black, long-sleeved shirt, as well as the white and blue long-coat, neither of these seemed to fit his frame properly. He decided that he would just have to put up with this new form, for now.

As he carefully stepped around, he looked at his surroundings. The forest around him was rather foreboding, but it seemed like it was just a spooky forest. It reminded him of the forest outside Celia's castle, except this forest didn't have snow. One thing did catch his eye, however. Another pony, like him. A female, rose-coloured pony with an orange-red mane with a pink ribbon on each side. She also wore a shirt with cream-coloured sleeves, and white and orange skirt. The girl was also trying to make sense of her surroundings, and her new body. Soma, however, recognized her immediately. "Mina?"

Mina Habuka looked at Soma with a perplexed look. "Soma... You too?!"

Soma trotted over to Mina, with a sigh of relief. In a situation like this, being separated from her was the last thing he wanted. "I don't know what that portal did to us, but... I don't think we should stay here."

Mina nodded back, with a frown on her face. Being worried about her new form had to wait. She was more scared about the fact that she had absolutely no idea where they were, and she had no intention of sticking around more than they needed to. "I know. Got any ideas on where to go?"

Soma scanned his surroundings. They were on a dirt road, it seemed, going in two clear directions. That was a good sign, at the very least.. "Well, we've got two directions we can pi-"

He stopped, as soon as he heard growling. He slowly turned around, looking towards the source of the noise. A Manticore was coming out from behind a tree, staring at the pair with a less than friendly intent. In fact, Soma was more than certain that the Manticore wanted to eat him and Mina. The main problem is, he had no weapons, or souls, for that matter. This made fighting the creature directly a less than ideal prospect.

He gulped, and then whispered to Mina. "Mina. Run. Now."

Mina didn't need to be told twice. She began to gallop in the opposite direction of the Manticore. She didn't have experience in even walking on all fours, but she had to get the hang of it quickly, otherwise, she was practically dead. Soma waited for her to get a good head's start, and then galloped after her. He was purposely allowing her to go ahead, so the Manticore would have less chance to catch her - catching Soma would allow Mina to escape handily.

The Manticore immediately caught on, and roared, running after them. It was eager for a meal, and determined to not allow its prey to escape. Ponies, however, were fast creatures. Soma and Mina were no exception, as they galloped down the road, despite their issues with keeping their balance. With each twist and turn of the road, Soma was beginning to hope even more that they'd actually escape.

However, he thought too soon. A fallen tree blocked the way, forcing Mina to try and jump over it. Being her first try, she only made it half-way, and was struggling to get the rest of herself over the obstacle. Soma stopped in front of the fallen tree, looking back. The Manticore was gaining on them. There was no way he'd be able to get over before it could catch him.

Soma swallowed again, and then stood his ground. *'Okay... You can take him, Soma. You've fought monsters with your fists... Hooves are stronger than fists, right? I hope...'* He thought to himself, cringing.

The Manticore roared again, as it charged at Soma, and swung its claw at him, in a diagonal swipe. Soma dodged to the side, and turned around, bucking his hind legs hard at the creature's head, with as much force as he could muster. The Manticore was knocked back, both dizzy and injured, but not enough, as it proceeded to backhand Soma out of the way, and went straight for Mina.

Mina screamed in terror, as she tried desperately to climb over. The Manticore attempted to grab her hind legs, but it suddenly roared in pain, stopping, which allowed Mina to climb over.

The source of the Manticore's pain was clear. Soma had stabbed his horn right into the Manticore's side. And he was very, very angry. "I am NOT going to let you hurt Mina!"

However, he didn't notice that the horn was beginning to glow. Within moments, his entire body was encased in a white energy, his eyes glowing, and he lost control of himself in his fury, untapped power unleashing itself. The Manticore would've retaliated, had it not noticed that the fallen tree was beginning to float off the ground.

Then, the tree slammed straight into its head.

The resulting collision not only knocked the Manticore unconscious, the tree also crashed against the side of the road, now no longer an obstacle. No doubt, by the time it would wake it, it would be feeling like it had been hit by a freight train at full speed. Soma's energy faded, as he came to terms with what just happened. He felt drained. This was the first time he had ever done something like this, and it took a lot out of him. He was simply thankful that it *worked*. "Did... Did I just do that?!"

"SOMA! HELP!"

Soma's eyes darted towards Mina, who was being dragged away by two armored ponies, wearing full, purple armor, both of them wielding spears. Soma could sense that they were not of this world... Monsters, in the truest sense of the word. A third one glanced at Soma, as they went around a corner, and disappeared. Soma's eyes widened, as he immediately galloped down the road, and turned the corner.

Much to his shock and bewilderment, Mina was nowhere to be seen, nor were the kidnappers. Soma had never been more scared in his life. Mina had been captured by monsters, and he had no idea where they went. The limited amount of light and Soma's lack of tracking skill made trying to track the monsters using marks on the ground impossible. Out of desperation, Soma began to gallop down the road, crying out desperately. "Mina! MINA! MINNNNAAAAAAAAAA!"

After a while of desperate galloping, Soma felt completely exhausted, and his voice hoarse from yelling. Up ahead, he saw buildings. This was the point where he finally decided to stop and catch his breath... And collapsed immediately. Trying to stay conscious, he heard the sound of hooves coming towards him. He was certain that the armored ponies were coming to finish him off.

"Girls! I see somepony right up ahead!"

The female voice surprised him. It wasn't Mina, but the voice seemed concerned. He tried to keep his eyes open, as he saw a purple unicorn gallop towards him, stop right next to him, and nudged him. Her frown indicated to Soma that she was concerned about his current state. "Hey, are you okay?"

Soma took deep breaths, but he wasn't able to answer, barely able to say, "Mi.... Na... She..."

"Calm down, and try to relax." The unicorn replied, in a reassuring tone of voice. "Help is on the way."

Help had been the last thing Soma had expected, and if this unicorn was being honest with him... All things considered, Soma did not have much of a choice in the matter. He closed his eyes. He then heard more galloping, and it felt like more ponies stopped near him.

A female voice with a Texan accent spoke up. "Wowee, that don't look pretty."

Another female voice with a British accent noted, "Poor thing seems exhausted..."

"Twilight, you think we should help him? I mean... I don't like the look of that bloodstained horn." Another female voice raised her concerns.

A more excitable voice responded, "Don't worry, we can wash it off, and then we'll throw a PARTY because he's okay, and-"

"Not helping, Pinkie!"

"I think he just needs some rest..."

"Look, girls, let's just get him to the library. He'll be fine under my care. That blood-red moon I saw earlier... I think this colt may have some answers for us."

"Alrighty then, if you say so, Twilight..." The texan voice got closer. Something picked Soma up, and onto the back of one of the ponies. "Don't worry, fella, a good night's rest, and you'll be right as rain."

Soma couldn't help but smile, his heart warmed by their kindness. "Thank... You..."

He then at that point finally lost consciousness.

*My Little Pony
My Little Pony
Ah aah ah aah
(My Little Pony)
I used to wonder what friendship could be
(My Little Pony)
Until you all shared its magic with me
Big adventure
Tons of fun
A beautiful heart
Faithful and strong
Sharing kindness
It's an easy feat
And magic makes it all complete
You have My Little Ponies
Do you know you're all my very best friends?*

Soma slowly awoke, groggy and his head still hurting from the collision from the night before. Despite his blurred vision, he could make out the small pillow his head was resting on. He also knew he was covered by blankets just from touch alone. He had to use touch to compensate until his vision cleared, which didn't take long at all. He could make out around him

a room, he was no longer outside. Looking around a bit allowed him to conclude that it was a bedroom, belonging to... Twilight? Yes, that was her name. 'Twilight' must have made a makeshift bed for him...

The main thing that caught Soma's eye, were the numerous shelves holding books. Twilight had an entire library at her disposal. The shape of the room seemed organic, no sign of modern construction, instead the room seemed as if it was carved out of one giant piece of wood, as if the entire house was carved out of the inside of a giant tree, which he suspected was indeed the case. It was a refreshing change from the forest. Considering he was more or less a complete stranger, it was awfully nice of Twilight to let him stay here and rest. Kinda like Mina...

Mina. Soma's eyes opened wide in a flash, as he bolted upright, which almost caused him to lose balance from his inexperience with having hooves instead of regular human feet. Light was shining through the windows. He must have been out the entire night... And Twilight didn't know that Mina could be in grave danger, for all they knew. He had to find her, and fast. Sure, running out without saying a word to the kind pony who allowed him to stay for the night would be rather rude, but-

"Ah, looks like you're up already." Soma's attention was drawn by the purple unicorn entering the bedroom with a smile. Now that he wasn't completely exhausted, Soma could get a much better look at her. Her hairstyle and colours reminded him of an anime character, he just couldn't remember whom. However, he was fairly certain, by pony standards, she was rather attractive. *'Wait, did I just think that?! Bad, bad Soma! You're not supposed to be turned on by horses!'* Soma had, figuratively speaking, slapped himself mentally.

His expression of distress, however, did not escape her notice. "Is there something wrong?"

Soma took a deep breath, and decided to just simply explain. Perhaps she might be reasonable and let him go find Mina? He would might as well try. "Yes, there is. I'm sorry to leave so soon, but I have to find my friend... Her name is Mina Hakuba. She was there with me when we got sucked into the portal that teleported us into that forest, she is in grave danger! She was kidnapped by monsters!"

Twilight frowned in response. She had been wondering who he meant when he mentioned Mina. No wonder he was distressed. However, she had a rather clear head, and she knew this was a bad idea for a few reasons... "Are you familiar with the Everfree Forest?"

"No, bu-"

"Then you should calm down. Going off by yourself without a clue as to where to go won't help. She could be anywhere in the Everfree Forest, by now. If you want to find your

friend, then you'll need help. Going off alone into the forest is way too dangerous," Twilight responded. As far as she was concerned, Soma was acting irrationally. She knew the Everfree Forest somewhat from her repeated trips through there. In fact, she was certain that she and her friends knew the forest better than anypony else in Ponyville. There was one who knew it even better, however.

Soma bit his lip, thinking it over. Twilight seemed smart, and she knew this place way better than he did... Heck, he barely knew anything about this land. Going along with her advice was probably a safe bet. He barely survived an encounter with a Manticore, after all. "I guess you're right... I'm just scared of what might happen."

"I understand completely. We'll find her, I promise. Come on. We've already prepared breakfast, while Spike is out doing errands. Once we find Mina... We have a *lot* to talk about." Twilight smiled, as she turned around, with a grin. She then stopped in place, a look of astonishment on her face, remembering something, and looked back at the colt. "Oh, great, where's my manners? I'm Twilight Sparkle. And you are?"

The unicorn colt realised that he had forgotten to introduce himself, as well. "Soma. Soma Cruz."

Twilight smiled, as she trotted out. "Nice to meet you, Soma! As I said... We've got a *lot* to talk about."

Soma felt a large drop of sweat run down the side of his forehead. What had he gotten himself into...?

He then felt a rumbling from his stomach. He hadn't eaten yet. Though, he had to wonder what he was going to eat, considering he was a pony. As he walked out, he was surprised to see a plate on the table... With toast and jam. Certainly not what he expected, really, considering what ponies usually ate, to his knowledge. Twilight was waiting for him, with-

"IT'S THE NEW PONNNNNNNNNYYYYY!"

A single, very pink pony bolted towards Soma, stopping on a dime right in front of him, and looking very excited, touching her nose with his. "You're alright! Thank goodness! You look much better now that you've gotten a good night's rest! You like parties? I'm Pinkie Pie, and I LOVE par-"

"Where should I hold the party? Sugarcube Corner? Here? Applejack's barn? My place? Decisions, decisions...!"

Soma was taken by surprise by words he was hearing from her that wasn't coming from her mouth... In fact, it was like she was saying two entirely different lines at the

same time. Considering how fast she was talking, Soma had a feeling this was something Pinkie Pie could possibly achieve on her own.

"Pinkie, leave the poor colt alone, he barely ain't even left the bedroom." Pinkie was dragged back by an orange pony, with a cowboy hat and a blonde mane, with the Texan accent. She came over to greet Soma, shaking his hoof in a manner so fast Soma was taken by surprise. Soma's only experience with Americans was his friend Hammer, and this pony seemed a lot different. "Sorry 'bout dat, Pinkie 'ere gets really excited when a new pony turns up in town. I'm Applejack. Yer feeling alright, sugarcube?"

"Wow, he's good-looking colt! Not as big as Mac, but I guess looks can be deceiving!"

Before Soma could even answer, a blue pegasus with a rainbow mane suddenly came flying up to him, staring at him accusingly, shoving her hoof against his chest. The fact that this one wasn't acting so friendly worried Soma considerably, but it did make him notice that there seemed to be three varieties of ponies - regular, unicorn, and pegasus. "This isn't the time to act all friendly, Applejack! I wanna know why his horn had blood on it!"

"He looks so cool with that mane and that longcoat... I totally need a longcoat! It would look so cool, flapping in the wind..."

"Rainbow Dash, be more careful next time, you'll ruin his longcoat with your dirty hooves! It's a very lovely longcoat, by the way. Doesn't look very fitting, but I'd love to know who made it!" Just before Soma was able to answer Rainbow Dash, a British-sounding accent drew his attention. The unicorn with azure eyes who addressed him was an azureish-grey, though her mane was an indigo colour, and very well-groomed. She was examining his coat, lifting it up in places, but soon stopped, when she realised what she was doing, quite embarrassed. "Oh, where are my manners? I am Rarity, Ponyville's fashionista! If you need a better-fitting coat, darling, don't hesitate to ask!"

"And then there's the mane, his eyes, everything about him... Oh, my! He's such a handsome colt! Maybe I've found my prince at last?"

Soma shook his head for a moment, and then looked at each of the four ponies who had, in the space of a minute, introduced themselves to him. It didn't help that they were all girls. Three out of four seemed friendly, but the fourth was awfully suspicious of him. He immediately took the opportunity to move over to the table, and took a bite out of the toast to calm his nerves. Once after he swallowed, he spoke. "Um... Hello. I'm Soma Cruz..."

"Hello..."

Soma heard the near-whisper, and looked towards the source. He hadn't even seen the yellow-coloured pegasus with the pink mane until now. She looked practically delicate... Like a

beautiful flower. So graceful, and fragile. With a voice, appearance and her body language, one would think that only the worst of the worst would not have second thoughts about hurting her.

“I'm Fluttershy.”

Soma concluded that Fluttershy's name was highly appropriate. In fact, as far as Soma was concerned she seemed very... *'What was that word again... Cute? Moe? Do they even have the word 'moe' here? This isn't Japan...'* He thought to himself. However, it occurred to him that he had heard voices from the other ponies, even though their mouths weren't moving... As if he was reading their thoughts. But why wasn't he hearing Fluttershy's voice in his head?

“HEY! Answer the question, NOW!” Rainbow Dash snapped, annoyed that Soma had barely even spoken.

“Dash, quit it!” Twilight snapped back. Rainbow Dash's behaviour certainly was getting on her nerves, and she knew it wasn't helping Soma, either.

Soma groaned, hoping to actually dodge the question. “I... I stabbed a Manticore with it in self-defense!”

There was an awkward pause. The other ponies looked at each other, with looks of concern. Rainbow Dash immediately stopped giving him accusing looks, but Fluttershy cringed. She didn't seem happy that a Manticore was hurt, even if Soma was only trying to avoid getting killed by it. Rarity broke the silence. “Dear, why in Celestia's name would you do that, when you can simply use your magic to throw things at it from a safe distance?”

Soma recalled being able to somehow throw that tree at the Manticore using magic, which he had never been able to do before, even with souls at his disposal. “Huh... So that's what I did back there...”

“Hang on! Let's start from the top, ya hear?” Applejack spoke up. It seemed, to her, that it would be best if Soma told his full story. “Soma. Would ya kindly tell us what happened last night?”

“I... I'll try.” Soma nodded, the unpleasant occurrences of the previous night coming back into his head.

Soma began to elaborate on the events of the previous night, from waking up in Everfree Forest, to encountering the ponies that were right in front of him as he spoke. Reactions varied wildly, from Fluttershy hiding under a table from the mention of a Mina getting kidnapped by monsters, Rainbow Dash and Applejack actually impressed by the lengths Soma went to protect Mina, Twilight realising that Soma had lost control of his magic during the encounter (and decided that she should teach him how to use his unicorn magic properly), Rarity fainting a couple of times, and Pinkie Pie... Well, she was eating popcorn the whole time. No pony was

sure where she got it, nor did they want to ask.

Twilight raised an eyebrow. There had been one thing that had been on her mind the entire time. "Hang on. Where did you say you came from, again?"

"Tokyo, in Japan." Soma replied.

"Tokyo? Japan? Never heard of either." Rarity was deep in thought, but then smiled cheerfully. "If you do not know where you are, dear... Well, allow me to welcome you to Ponyville, in the land of Equestria!"

"Never heard of either. And before I went through the portal... I was a human being, not a pony." Soma replied. Something was not right about this. Talking ponies, and land called Equestria... It was almost as if he wasn't on Earth at all. Then it hit him like a sack of bricks. "Wait. I think I know what happened. That portal must've transported me and Mina to another world, and transformed us into ponies!"

Cue jaw drops from the other ponies. Except for Rarity, who fainted (again), and Pinkie Pie, who was looking very, very excited. "Oh my gosh, if you're from another world, then you must've travelled through space, and then that means you're an astronaut!"

Twilight proceeded to face-hoof. She was used to Pinkie's strangeness, but this was just too silly for her to handle. "Pinkie, I think he means it in the 'alternate universe' sense."

"Oh, so we're in a different kind of sci-fi plot, then? Okie-dokie-wokie!" Pinkie Pie replied cheerfully, bouncing up and down, no less excited than she was before. Soma's eyes narrowed. He was now highly unsure if Pinkie Pie was simply naive and childlike, or clinically insane. Quite possibly both. If it was the latter, he was thankful that it seemed to be the harmless kind of insanity. Not that it made him feel any less weird around Pinkie.

Applejack bit her lip, looking somewhat nervous. "I dunno, ya'll... I kind find this really hard to take in. I mean, being from another world is one thing, but also not being a pony before..."

Rainbow Dash remarked, somewhat unfazed by all this, "Hey, stranger things have happened."

Soma interrupted their conversation. As far as he was concerned, there were much more pressing matters on his mind. "Look, as much as I'd like to talk about it right now, I want to go out there and find Mina. She's-"

"I heard you the first time, Soma - in Everfree Forest, and in grave danger." Twilight replied, looking in his eyes. "But you're not going alone."

"EVERFREE FOREST?!" Applejack gasped. "Oh, great, don't tell me we gotta go back in THERE again! I can't stand the place!"

Soma cocked his head to the side, out of confusion, and a hint of curiosity. "What's so bad about Everfree Forest? Aside from the Manticore, I mean."

"You really are new here, aren't ya?" Rainbow Dash chuckled. "Still... Everfree Forest... It's creepy! Things just... Happen! The clouds move on their own..."

"The plants grow..." Applejack added.

"And the animals take care of themselves!" Fluttershy was actually talking in a normal volume now.

Soma blinked. That's it? "So? That's normal."

The other ponies, plus Spike, just stared at him, like he was mad. Soma had the feeling that he just said something really awkward. Rarity asked, "What sort of awful place do you come from, anyway?"

"Um... In my world... Um..." Soma didn't know how to describe it... Considering he didn't know much about Equestria to compare it to. "I get the impression that ponies here do pretty much everything."

"Oh, yes. We facilitate the changing of seasons and the weather, take care of animals... Basically, without us ponies, nature wouldn't work." Twilight replied. "I guess to us... Nature working on its own without our intervention just isn't natural. You, on the other hand..."

Soma got the point. "I see... Is there anything else about the forest that I should be concerned about?"

"Well, it's home to all sorts of strange creatures, including ursas, parasprites, manticores, hydras, cockatrices..." Twilight was going to continue, but Soma's horrified expression told her she shouldn't say another word about that. "Okay, judging by your expression, I have a feeling that you're really anxious to get moving."

Soma nodded, with a stern look on his face. "Then I'll need a weapon. The monsters that took Mina... Aren't of this world. Or mine, for that matter."

Twilight turned her head towards Fluttershy. "You okay with that, Fluttershy?"

The shy pegasus nodded, speaking up. "If it's that unnatural... It might be for the best. I

still don't like the idea of using weapons, though..."

The purple unicorn looked back at Soma. "Right, then... I've got a few weapons in the basement under lock and key, just in case they're ever needed for *some* reason. What's your personal preference?"

Everfree Forest was certainly an odd place compared to Ponyville. As Twilight had said, unlike the outside world, nature within the forest simply worked on its own without any kind of intervention. While Soma found this to be absolutely normal, the other thing was, it was still a rather spooky forest, even in the daylight. Not a good sign. The good thing was, he had a longsword at his side, and taken a crash course in unicorn magic so he could actually use it. Having an actual weapon he could utilize made him feel a lot more confident about his chances of survival.

"Sorry we have to go through Everfree Forest on your first day in Ponyville, Soma!" Pinkie said, in a dissonantly cheery tone, walking along like it was a walk in the park. Soma didn't answer her, he was more concerned with finding Mina, calling out her name at regular intervals. It was getting them nowhere, however, and Soma was concerned that he may end up drawing unwanted attention to themselves.

"Sheesh... We could look anywhere in the forest and not find a thing..." Rainbow Dash spoke up, as she looked around. While she wasn't exactly comfortable about being in the forest, she wasn't as concerned as the other ponies. Of course, she had an ego the size of a small planet, as far as Soma could tell. "Heck, she could be in one place, and then move to another before we can even check."

"Why don't we ask Zecora?" Twilight suggested, having remembered that there was one zebra living in the forest, and one that could well have spotted Mina and her captors.

Soma looked at her, unfamiliar with the name. "Zecora? Who?"

"Zecora is a zebra who lives in the forest, darling. Before we got to know her, everyone in Ponyville thought she was an evil enchantress! It was quite awkward to find out the truth..." Rarity explained, as they changed direction, heading towards Zecora's house.

Before Soma could say another word, he saw something on the path ahead. It looked like a pony, but... On closer inspection... It was a pony skeleton. Standing upright. Its head suddenly turned towards the group, causing the girls to freak out in horror, and the skeleton raised a hoof, throwing a bone at them. Soma, however, was familiar with this kind of monster, and easily side-stepped the bone. "Calm down! I can easily deal with-"

“Hi-YAH!” Applejack suddenly rushed forward, and kicked the skeleton in the skull, with her hind legs, with all the force she could muster. The skull was sent flying, and the rest of the skeleton simply collapsed to the ground. Applejack grinned, as she kicked the pile of bones a few times. “That’s it? That wasn’t so tough!”

Then, Soma saw a red sphere fly towards him. He felt his body absorb the familiar monster soul. Well, as far as monster souls go, this one wasn’t a bad starter. At least he had a side-arm, of sorts, now.

“Soma... What did you just absorb?” Soma’s eyes widened, looking at Twilight, who had asked him that question. She shouldn’t have been able to see it, as far as he was concerned, but she apparently wasn’t the only one, as the other girls looked at her.

“I dunno what it was, but it came from that skeleton, it was so cool! It looked like one of the things on Soma’s cutie mark!” Pinkie Pie grinned, trotting over to the pile of bones and poking them somewhat.

Soma frowned, realising that he now really should explain his ‘power’. He was also wondering what the heck a cutie mark was. “I guess I owe you guys an-”

Suddenly, the group of ponies found themselves surrounded by more moving skeletons, as well as a several of the armored ponies that had kidnapped Mina, all wielding spears, their heads completely obscured by helmets. It was clear that all of them were monsters, unnatural beings in their own right. Soma moved his front legs forward, concentrating, and drawing the longsword from his side with telekinesis. “Okay, looks like we’ve got more trouble. The skeletons aren’t gonna give you much trouble as long as you avoid the bones they throw, but the ‘guards’, you have to be careful of-”

Then a large log crashed into one of the armored monsters, destroying it, and allowing, this time a blue sphere, to be absorbed by Soma. He looked at Twilight, whose horn was glowing. He found that rather impressive. “Whoa, nice.”

“Hey, magic’s my specialty! Worry about yourself, Soma!” Twilight replied, as she began chucking more things at the monsters.

Soma nodded. He had used magic abilities before from souls... So... He took a deep breath, focusing. His horn immediately glowed, as he caught a thrown bone telekinetically in midair, and threw it back at the skeleton that threw it. It was easier than he thought. He decided to utilise the soul he had just gotten, summoning a spear in midair, and using telekinesis to move it around, along with the sword he had, he began slashing and stabbing at the skeletons near him. The girls were fending off the opponents in their own way, Twilight and Rarity using their magic, Rainbow Dash and Applejack were using their strength and speed to overpower their attackers, and Pinkie Pie was doing her own random thing, tricking her foes and tripping

them when they were open. Where that anvil came from that crushed one of the 'guards', was anyone's guess. Which left...

Soma looked in Fluttershy's direction. Unfortunately, the poor pegasus was too scared to fight, and was backing up against a tree, as one of the armored monsters approached her with the spear in his mouth. Soma immediately broke into a gallop, as the monster brought back the spear, and Fluttershy closed her eyes...

STAB!

Fluttershy opened her eyes, realising that she wasn't hurt. In front of her, was Soma... With a spear through his left shoulder. The pegasus looked at him in shock. "S-Soma...!"

Soma grunted with pain, as he moved his right back leg back, and it touched Fluttershy's leg.

"Soma... He got himself hurt saving my life... I wish I could be brave like he is..."

Soma chuckled, painfully. So he could read someone's thoughts through their soul just by touching them... That's what it was. He would have to think about it more another time, however. "I'm fine, Fluttershy. Just a flesh wound..."

Fluttershy, however, would have no word of it, and came out from behind Soma, approaching the monster, and immediately gave it her signature stare, a very clear frown on her face. Her piercing gaze went through the dark eye-slit in the monster's helmet. "How **DARE** you! **Nobody. Hurts. My. Friends. GOT IT?**"

The armored creature actually backed off out of fear, removing the spear. However, this gave Soma the opportunity to strike, driving his spear and sword through the monster's helmet, destroying it. "Thanks, Fluttershy."

The timid pegasus smiled slightly. "It was nothing."

A quick look-around allowed the pair to discern that their friends had taken care of the rest of the rabble, leaving just a bunch of bones that quickly faded away. Twilight rushed over to Soma, examining his wound. Her eyes widened out of concern. "You're hurt! We need to get this fixed up, right away!"

"I've had worse, Twilight, don't worry." Soma tried to re-assure her (and he wasn't wrong), but it seemed Twilight would not accept that kind of talk. But before they could break into an argument...

"Soma?"

The ponies looked in the direction of the voice. Two particular ponies were approaching - a zebra that the girls would recognize as Zecora, and the owner of the voice... Mina.

Soma's eyes widened, and ignored the pain in his shoulder, as he galloped over to the earth pony. "Mina?!"

The girl smiled back. "Yeah, it's me."

Soma immediately nuzzled her, a massive weight on his heart lifting, and he closed his eyes. "I was so worried! I thought something might've..."

"I was fine! Okay, sure, I got myself kidnapped, but Zecora rescued me, and she let me stay for the night!" Mina giggled, nuzzling Soma back.

Zecora couldn't help but smile. "Ah, young love. As beautiful as the flight of a white dove..."

Soma and Mina's immediate reaction was to stop nuzzling, and look away from each other with blushes on their faces. Fluttershy giggled. "They just can't hide it."

Rarity smiled. "Well, dearies, all's well that ends well! I suggest we see to Soma's foreleg..."

"And then... We need to throw..." Pinkie Pie's grin was slowly widening, until it reached its peak, and she declared, "A PARTY!"

Pinkie Pie's welcoming party for both Soma and Mina was held in Twilight's home, and as usual, she had invited the entire town. Soma's shoulder had been bandaged up and the wound was no longer bleeding, so that was good. However, he was overwhelmed by the sheer turnout. That being said, he was having the time of his life, as was Mina. While it technically wasn't a victory party, it might as well have been as far as Soma was concerned, which was a change of pace.

He and Mina even finally met Spike, who seemed like a friendly little dragon, and despite his size, he easily stood out amongst the other inhabitants of Ponyville, if only because he wasn't a pony. Spike smiled, as he looked up at the colt. "Nice to meet ya, Soma, Mina! I'm Spike, Twilight's number-one assistant!"

"R-Right. I wasn't expecting to meet a..." Soma looked at Spike, with an almost quizzical look. "Baby dragon? I've seen many creatures, but I've never seen a dragon, let alone a baby

dragon...”

Mina, however, had wide eyes, and looked absolutely excited. “Aw, you look absolutely ADORABLE! Kawaii!”

This didn’t really surprise Spike, who grinned. Though, he had *no* idea what that last word meant, nor did he know that it was basically redundant. “You should’ve seen Fluttershy when she first saw me. Ya know, I would’ve thought having a guy around the house would’ve changed Twilight’s attitude a little. Aside from moi, of course. She’s a total bookworm.”

Soma took a bite out of a cupcake on the table next to them. It immediately occurred to him that he wasn’t going to be able to eat meat for a while. This was not a problem for him, however. He was already considering the possibility of a vegetable-based ramen dish. “You guys live in a library. I kinda figured that out already. I’m more concerned about my current state. Before I came here, well... We weren’t ponies..”

“Not ponies? What are you talking about?” Spike blinked.

Soma tried to reach into one of his coat’s pockets, but it wasn’t easy, considering his new body. Spike decided to help, reaching into the pocket and taking out a photograph, showing six humans. Though Spike had never seen a human being before, he could hazard a guess as to who Soma was – the white-haired teenager at the front with the rather familiar coat. Next to him, was a girl with red hair, and a cute outfit. “You look like a hairless ape in this... But Mina looks cute.”

Mina giggled at the compliment. “Thank you!”

Soma nodded. “Before we got sucked into that portal, I used to be a human being. Mina’s the caretaker of the Habuka shrine, she and I have been friends since we were kids. We live in a country called ‘Japan’.”

Spike couldn’t help but blink. “Japan? Weird name, if you ask me.”

“Hey, other nationalities tend to see it as a weird country.” Soma shrugged. “Genetically, humans are related to apes, yes. I kinda envy you, what with you having opposable thumbs and fingers. You never realise how much you take things for granted until you lose them, huh?”

“You have no idea.” Spike grinned, placing the photo down on the table. Then he realised something, as he came around to Soma’s side, lifting the longcoat. “That’s right... I haven’t seen your cutie mark yet.”

Soma blinked. Cutie mark? He looked at his flank, and saw what looked like some sort of tattoo on his side, with three spheres, which would be moving in a circular formation, if their

trails were of any indication. All three glowed. The first one was red, the second was blue, and the third was yellow. Soma recognised them as souls. "What's a cutie mark?"

Spike realised that Soma wouldn't have a clue, and mentally slapped himself. "Ah, right... Every pony, at some point, gets their cutie mark from discovering their special talent. You saw Twilight's, hers is magic. What's your talent, though?"

Soma took a deep breath. "That, is something I'm gonna have to explain in a second."

Spike then took a look under Mina's skirt, revealing her cutie mark was that of a Shinto shrine, though the fact that he looked under Mina's skirt made Mina blush madly, and kick Spike away. "EW! PERVERT!"

Soma groaned at Mina's overreaction. "Mina, ponies don't normally wear clothes. He wasn't trying to be perverted."

Mina laughed sheepishly, as she looked at Spike, who had landed in the punch. "Uh... Sorry, Spike!" Then she froze up. "Oh, God, I feel so exposed...! Someone get me a pair of panties! Quick!"

Cue instant face-hoof on Soma's part.

Soma soon gathered all six of his new pony friends (and Spike, who was also a new friend, as goes without saying) off to the side during the party, to explain his special ability. "Alright, I guess you guys deserve an explanation. What you saw was my 'Power of Dominance'. I have the ability to 'dominate' the souls of monsters and use their powers."

"Speaking of which... What are those monsters? Where did they come from?" Twilight raised an eyebrow.

"I... I don't know. They're from the underworld, that's for certain. But why they're appearing... I have no idea." Soma frowned. "But I have to thank you guys... If it wasn't for you, I wouldn't have found Mina so quickly."

Twilight smiled. "You're welcome."

"Hey, I'm always around to lend a helping hand!" Pinkie Pie replied cheerfully, bouncing in place in her usual energetic manner.

"No problem! Rainbow Dash is always there to save the day!" Rainbow Dash was being her cocky, boasting self as usual.

"Hey, how could I not help a nice-looking colt like you, Soma?" Applejack tipped her hat

as she replied.

“Darling, it would be unforgivable of me not to help reunite a colt with the love of his life!” Rarity’s response didn’t help Soma’s embarrassment from having to constantly deny that he and Mina were a couple.

“You jumped in front of me to save my life... Um... Only a real friend would do that... I guess it’s only natural I would return the favor...” Fluttershy spoke softly, though also with earnest.

Mina looked at Soma, smiling. “With friends like these... I guess we can stick around for a while, until we can figure out how we can get home.”

Soma smiled back. “I agree. I guess it’s a change of pace from Tokyo.” *And hopefully... I won’t have to worry about someone trying to make me the Dark Lord again...* He thought to himself.

However... Despite his hopes, Soma should’ve figured, that, from his luck so far, things weren’t going to be that simple.

To Be Continued