

I AM DEMON



By Aquaman

[Image Source](#)

Cold.

The absence of heat. Darkness inside a cave. Water falling white, soft, crackling blue, loud. It is darkness that I see, the absence of heat that I feel. The ground around me is soft white, splattered. The limbs beneath me are blue, transparent. Words come to me as I reach for them, thought-speak, imprints of what they represent. Meanings. Explanations. Identities.

There is no word for me.

I am **Cold**.

More words, echoing, outside of me. Mouth-speak. There is still darkness—the absence of light—but I can see the creatures anyway. There are three of them: Yellow, Brown, and White. Colorful hair streams from their heads—*manes*. They stand on four spindly legs that end in rounded blocks—*hooves*.

I have a mane. I have hooves. Both blue. Both cold.

I am **Pony**.

“I-Is it over? Are they g-gone?”

Yellow is mouth-speaking. All six of his limbs shiver, four beneath him and two others on his back, oddly shaped, covered in feathers—*wings*. He is cold, but that is not his word. His body glows in the darkness, shimmers **Blue** with memory. More words—names, places, mouth-speak from him and others—reflect from his mind into mine.

He came here with Smart Cookie and Clover, with Commander Hurricane and Princess Platinum and Chancellor Puddinghead. They were hiding from the cold, fighting something. He didn't like it. He helped to stop it.

He is Pansy.

I am **They**.

“I... I think so.” Smart Cookie's mouth-voice is quiet—*whisper*. There were others like me before, larger, colder. I don't remember them. Smart Cookie does. Together with Pansy and Clover, she chased them away. When she thinks of them, her aura glows **Green** with thin shadows of **Pink**.

“Well, good riddance. It's a miracle we stopped them when we did. I don't think we could've lasted much longer out here.”

When I look at Clover, my mind empties. Her coat is white, her mane is striped green, but all I see of her—inside, outside, all around her body—is **Red**: flashing, roiling, burning bright like fire. It is not fire, though. Fire is crackling wood, blankets under the stars, naming constellations as he smiles down at you and compliments how well you've studied. Fire is heat. **Red** is not. **Red** is cold, like me. **Red** makes me feel awake, alive, ravenous. I want more **Red**. I want all the **Red** that Clover can give me.

I am **Hungry**.

I know the ponies are somewhere nearby, but all I can see is darkness marred by light, Clover's burning-cold **aura** reaching out to me. I move towards it, sink deeper into it. Her mind thought-speaks to mine, pouring it full of more words and expressions. She is a rope pulling me closer, her memory says, a fishhook reeling me in. I need to find her, but my body feels weak, insubstantial. I sift through Clover's essence, spread her thoughts out in front of me, search for the motions needed for movement--*walking*.

I feel the ground soften beneath my hooves, a flash of **Pink** ripple through me. I am overlarge hooves stumbling across wood, sinking into carpet, tottering into giant forelegs that laugh and hug and wonder how I ever got this heavy. Mouth-speak echoes, silent to my ears, loud in hers: *put one hoof in front of the other*. I lift one foreleg up, put it down in front of me. The ground shudders, cracks, does not give. I am moving. I am strong.

Clover and Pansy and Smart Cookie are gathering up the other three ponies in the cave with them: Princess Platinum, Commander Hurricane, Chancellor Puddinghead. Their auras are boring, useless to me. They twitch when their sides are nudged, mouth-mumble nonsense as they're pulled up off the ground. Even though they have hooves, the other ponies put them on their backs to carry. They must not know how to walk very well either.

The ponies leave the cave together, all at once. I try to follow—*one-hoof-in-front-of-the-other*—but I'm too slow. I see colors, but not shapes. I bump into the walls, trip over boulders, watch Clover's aura grow fainter in the distance. Soon I can't hear mouth-voices anymore, just air rushing past me—colorless—*wind*. I feel tightness in my belly, empty space in my chest. I cover my eyes—*where's the baby peekaboo!*—see my own aura glow through the darkness.

I am burning. I am **Orange**.

I open my mouth, try to speak, hear something slide out that is not words. It is mouth-wind, choking, icicles stabbing at my throat. Why do ponies do this? I glow brighter, stumble. Every aura but **Clover's** has disappeared. As I stand up again, she fades as well. Only absence-of-light remains. I can't see anything.

I am **Alone**.

Without the minds of the other ponies, I'm lost. No words fill the spaces that sight carves into my mind. No auras but **mine** shine through the blackness. All that remains is the residue of Clover's memories, the colored stains left in the places of our joining. I know how to walk, but she knows how to *watch where you're going, pumpkin*. She doesn't see auras at all. She blocks them out.

I look up and lay her mind over mine, create a filter through which my aura cannot pass. A blinding white gleam—*sunlight*—streams down on me, digs into my eyes and pounds inside my head. It hurts. I push past it, look straight ahead as shapes bloom inside what is no longer an empty void. The sun retreats, dulls, shines yellow after a while. The space around it—*sky*—is indigo, the ground beneath it white—cold water—*snow*.

Clover remembers this place, but all she left me are patches of what she saw. There was a storm. Pansy, Smart Cookie, all the others were with her. The sky was lumpy-gray, covered—cumulonimbus—*clouds*. Wind whistled through the trees, carried clumps of snow that blew her around, dug into her coat. It was very cold. I wish I could've been there to see it.

No, I *was* there to see it. There were dozens of me. I was galloping through the clouds, pawing at the snowflakes, howling against the wind. The ponies ran from me. I pursued them into the cave. They attacked me, drove me away with magic. A flaming heart, burning, melting me into nothing. If Clover remembers, then why can't I?

Melting. The snow is melting in the sun, trickling down branches and trunks, crystallizing again when it nears my hooves. Clover melted the others that were not me, but I'm still here. Where is here? Where do I go? What am I that is cold but doesn't shiver, that melts but doesn't die?

I ask Clover's mind for the answer, find only dregs left, blurry, soaked with slush. I know enough to see without her help now, but nothing else of her lingers anymore. I blink a few times, make my aura return. I am still **Orange**, but fading, soft around the edges. I have to find her again. I need to find out what I am.

The sky is empty when I look up. Before I can remember, the others were up there, on top of clouds as they chased after the ponies. They were Not-Me, but I am like them. Put-one-hoof-in-front-of-the-other. I reach out with my hoof, put it in the sky above me. A gray clump—not a blanket—barely bigger than I am—swirls out from the sole, sucks me inside it, lifts me up from the snow. It is freezing inside the cloud. When I pull myself further in, my head sticks out of the front. I am not walking anymore. I am high above the ground. I am like the others.

I am flying.

Trees dot the land below me, green icicles pointing the wrong way. I can see the depression in the snow where the cloud picked me up, the holes and tufts of powder where many hooves packed it down. The trail leads out through the trees, towards an ocean with green waves that crash back and forth, caught in winds I'm too far away to hear.

I know where Clover went. I know where to go now. I can't see my aura, but I can feel it.

I am **Yellow**.

• • •

In the sky there are no rocks to trip over, no legs that won't go where I tell them. The cloud cuts through the air as if it isn't there, slips between snowflakes that would otherwise blow into my eyes. I pass other clouds sometimes, fluffy-white, drifting. They disintegrate as I near them, shear off wisps that join the one I'm riding. After a while, my cloud is twice as big as before, still no slower for it.

I like flying a lot more than walking.

The trail the ponies left behind is easy to follow, even as the sunlight lessens the snow, rubs away the marks they left in it. There's only one clear path between the trees. Clover and the other ponies ran through it when they first came to the cave. Clover knows the way back now, although she was too **Blue** to realize it then. I don't have any other word for what I felt from her, what radiated through her memory when I watched it with her eyes. I know **Blue** was the color of her aura, but only because I felt from her the same things I felt from Pansy: heart pounding, lungs too small to breathe, running fast legs stretching *don't look back they're getting closer*.

Blue.

There *is* another word for it, there must be, but I need a pony's mind to thought-tell me first. As I fly above the trail, the sun sinks lower behind me, marks off the time the day takes to pass—*hours—seconds*. Ponies use those words to tell them, but which one is bigger? How many minutes make both of them? Why are so many words for time if time is singular, constant?

Mouth-speaking hurts, different words mean the same thing. **I don't understand ponies**. At least **I'm not one of them**.

Whatever the specific word for it is, a lot of time passes before I reach the green ocean, find out it's not an ocean at all once I'm close enough to see it. The ground is covered with millions of tiny green plants, like pine needles but flatter, a little thicker. A stripe of dirt cuts through them, stretches a little ways back into the forest, extends in a straight line in front of me as far as I can see. In the distance beyond it, something glows on the darkening horizon—not

an aura itself, but dotted all over with bursts of color that can't be anything else. That has to be where the ponies in the cave went, at least must be where other ponies are now. Maybe Clover is there. Maybe she's still **Red**.

I can't wait any longer to find out. I straighten my body out, set my sights on the distant glimmer, hold on as the cloud flashes forward at its fastest speed yet. The ground blurs into a featureless smear. The sky above me seems to narrow, bears down on top of me as the force of my passing tears a jagged white wake in it. Soon I'm close enough to see what lies past the horizon glow: stone towers that separated sky from earth, massive gray walls splattered white with dying sunlight.

The plants below me have changed from green to yellow. Stray auras begin to slide across my vision: some **Pinks**, some **Yellows**, a few **Greens** every so often. There are even a few on top of nearby clouds, the same shade as the high-sun sky—**Cyan**. None of them interest me. I'm not looking for auras anymore. I'm looking for a memory, a pony, a missing piece to complete my puzzle. I'm looking for—

There.

Stones piled on stones—highest room in the tallest—*tower*—cast a long shadow over the smaller structures below. At the edge of my vision, at the fringe of my mind, there are more auras than ever before. Ponies gazing up, squinting, darkening into **Blue**. They don't know what I am. I still don't know either. I don't care. Far above them, inside the tower, a lone **aura** burns for me. Welcoming. Familiar.

My consciousness and Clover's slot together like clockwork cogs, two parts of a much greater whole. When I approach the tower, her aura **changes**. She is aware of me. She feels our connection too. There is a gap in the stones—*too wonderful a view to keep the drapes drawn all day my dear—window*. I fit through it with ease, but my cloud piles up outside, falls apart. Without anything to support me, I fall faster than I expected to. Warm ice—sand heated in bubbles—*glass*—falls around me, shatters on my back. When I stop moving, I look at Clover. She is upside-down, wide-eyed, **Yellow**. I am on my back, lopsided, **even brighter**.

I am smiling.

She is not.

“AAAAAAAHHHHH!”

Red, exploding, so powerful it makes my legs weak. Clover's horn flashes pink. The table next to me evaporates in a burst of black smoke. Chips of wood pelt the walls, stick to my coat in icy brown chunks. When I stand up, Clover screams again.

“Getoutgetoutgetooooout!”

The second blast from her horn hits me square in the chest. It tickles as it passes through me, deliciously cold, strong enough to leave a crater in the wall behind me. **Red** is flowing out of her, pooling in my belly, freezing me to the core. It’s a hundred times better than flying, a million times better than words or thought-speak or any other aura I’ve felt. I leap forward, try to soak in more. Clover grabs me in midair, pulls me even closer, fills me with so much **Red** I’m not sure I can hold it all. Her magic snaps my legs out from my body, squeezes tight around my neck. Her horn is sunlight, blinding, pulsing with energy.

“Evil awful unnatural monstrous little—”

Clover clenches her teeth together, bulges her eyes out of her head. My own mouth hangs open. My own eyes are half-lidded. I’m so dizzy I can barely see her anymore. I want her to explode again, fill me up **Red** until I pop like a party balloon, but she never does. A thumping noise reaches my ears, gentle, repeating. A hoof, knocking against wood.

Clover turns around, lets my head loll to the side. A **noise** escapes my throat, soft, low-pitched. She’s not quite **Red** anymore, though her **face** is still flushed. A new aura shines in the doorway behind her, an equally odd blend of **Yellow** and **Pink**.

“Don’t mind me, my dear. Just borrowing a textbook. Carry on with your wanton acts of destruction.”

The pony standing behind her is a stallion—stone-coated—snow-haired—*Star Swirl the Bearded*. He is much older than Pansy, but when he mouth-speaks he sounds younger, even more **Pink**. I try to breach his mind with mine, but something pushes me back, a gentle nudge in my head like a hoof steering my eyes away from something I know better than to look at. Star Swirl is smiling at Clover, pointing his eyes at me.

How did he know I would do that?

I know many things, little one. More than my apprentice may think.

“Don’t just stand there, Master! *Help me!*” Clover mouth-shouts, **Red** seeping between her teeth. If I reached for it I could just barely catch a taste, but I can’t concentrate enough to try. Star Swirl just thought-spoke to me. He can understand me.

I feel for a way into his mind again. This time I move slower, more carefully. The moment I reach the verge of his thoughts, he guides me away again, back into my own head. A single image—memory?—comes attached: a gray stallion, beardless, setting a pawed animal with floppy ears—*puppy*—down on a pile of soiled papers.

There's a time and place for everything, little one. Now is not the time, and my mind is not the place.

“Help with what, my dear? I can assure you, you’ve done quite a spectacular job dismantling that alchemy table without any assistance from me. I’ve been meaning to replace the blasted thing for ages.”

It takes a moment before I realize that Star Swirl’s voice is outside my head again. Once I do figure it out, I hardly mind the change. He’s mouth-speaking to Clover again, making **Red** pour off her in sheets peppered with tiny flecks of **Orange**. **Orange** doesn’t feel quite as good as **Red**. It’s thinner, grainy, less filling. Still, it’s a nice touch. When I stick out my tongue to catch a few bits, Clover rewards me with an extra-strong **flare**.

“Not with *that!*” She jerks one hoof off the ground, points it at me. “With *this!* With... *it!*”

Star Swirl looks back at me, strokes his hoof over his beard. “Hmm,” he throat-hums. “*It, indeed.*”

“I don’t even know how it got in here. I swear we got all of them back in that cave...” Clover’s chest **glows**, flint against steel, sparks. In her mind she sees Not-Me diving towards her, dissolving into steam as her magic blasts through them. “This doesn’t make any *sense!*”

“Oh, now you *know* what I’d say to that kind of talk.” Star Swirl looks at me again. *When you think things through, either everything makes sense or nothing does. Clover always forgets that. Maybe you’ll help her remember.*

Help her remember. I can do that. She’s remembering him say that right now, a hundred-thousand-million different times, **pressing her lips together** at the thought. Mine **bend upwards** again. I’m good at helping Star Swirl. Especially if there’s **Red** involved.

“Fine,” Clover mouth-speaks. She tries to scrub the **Orange** off each of her words before it leaves her throat, but I can still see it after she’s done. “Then if you’d be so kind, *you* explain why and, while we’re at it, *how* in the ever-widening world of Equestria there’s a fun-sized little *Windigo in my sunforsaken bedroom!*”

Lightning strike. New page in a book. Math problem, scribbled answer, solved. I was so focused on **Clover** that I forgot about **myself**, about the question I’ve had since I first was. Clover’s mouth just gave me the answer. Her mind explains to me how it feels, how I’m buzzing like a honeybee in springtime. I know what I am now. I am brighter-than-Yellow. I am **Gold**.

I am **Windigo**.

"I presume through the window, as far as 'how' is concerned," Star Swirl mouth-says. Clover's aura forms a **cloud** over her cheeks, covers both her eyes when she **looks** at Star Swirl. I have to filter her **aura** out completely just to see what they really look like, hardened and crystal-blue. "As for there being a 'why'... now *that* is an intriguing proposition."

"Any time you'd care to expound upon it, I'm all ears," Clover mouth-**grumbles**. I look up towards her ears, but they're still the same size they were before. I'll **never figure out** how pony words work.

"Jog my memory, then," Star Swirl mouth-says. "To the best of equine knowledge, what is a windigo's purpose?"

Clover mouth-**answers** him fast, still looking at me. "Destruction. Torment. Anguish and despair."

"A little less prosaic, if you would."

Clover **sighs**, glances back towards him for a moment. "They feed off the emotions of sentient creatures, primarily those related to anger and hatred. Everything they touch freezes solid, and everypony they come across becomes a parasitic obsession, one that can only be broken by immense magical force or the mortal expiration of the equine host."

Obsession. Reading a book by moonlight. A stallion chasing a mare down the street. Star Swirl, beard soaked in coffee, snoring atop an incomplete star map.

I'm not obsessed. I'm just hungry.

"What do ponies think of them?" Star-Swirl mouth-asks next.

"They're characterized as malevolent spirits in folktales, and classified as dangerous magical anomalies by the Platinum Court." Clover's throat bobs—*swallowing*. When she continues, her mouth-voice sounds different, a bit **duller**.

"For the past several years, they've continually encroached further into our land, bringing with them an endless blizzard that's caused widespread famine and pushed diplomatic tensions between the tribes to the breaking point. Our entire way of life was almost destroyed, and were it not for the peace treaty being drafted as we speak, it would have been."

Star Swirl smiles. **Pink** and **Gold** gleam from his lips. "To hear the Princess tell it, you deserve quite a bit of credit for that."

"Spare me, Master," Clover mouth-**growls**. "What are you playing at?"

“I doubt I’ll know until the game’s over.” More **Orange** from Clover, **Pink** from Star Swirl. He seems to be enjoy being **Pink**. It just feels odd to me, all bubbly and light like I’m floating away from the floor. I don’t like it nearly as much as **Red**. “In any case, what do *you* think of windigos, Clover?”

Clover flashes back **Red** when she looks at me, but this time there’s something more to it. A whisper behind somepony’s back, the far-off clang of swords. A new aura, darker than **Red**, stronger than anything else I’ve felt or can imagine ever feeling.

“I think they’re monsters,” she throat-**growls**. “And I don’t think I understand why you keep stalling me from getting rid of this one.”

Star Swirl **hums**, a quiet noise, **Yellow** behind an **Orange haze**. Clover called me Monster. Monster is teeth gnashing, claws ripping flesh, screams in darkness that will soon be complete. I like the thought of Monster, but I don’t think Monster is me. I have hooves, not claws, plus I have never bitten anything. I work my teeth up and down, wonder if I could. Clover is too far away to try right now. Maybe later.

“In that case, we’ve come back to the core of the matter,” Star Swirl mouth-says. “Namely, why is this windigo here?”

“Because I missed it when I killed the rest of them...” Clover throat-**whispers**. Star Swirl’s lips **twitch**. His **aura** doesn’t change.

“I mean why is it *here*? In *this* room?”

Clover’s horn is glowing when Star Swirl mouth-speaks. Once he finishes, it dies down again, lowers me a bit closer to the ground. Another mouth-noise escapes me, **higher-pitched**. The thought of killing me made her **darker Red** than ever. Was that what happened to Not-Me? Is that what being killed feels like? In Clover’s head it’s a horrible thing: blood freezing, bodies growing cold, **Red** all over. I like being cold, though. I like **Red** even more. Anything with both those things together can’t be *that* bad.

“The most recent royal census listed over eight thousand unicorns living in or around Platinum Castle. The other two tribes surely boast comparable numbers themselves.” I can hear Star Swirl thinking, echoes in a black void, too distant and muffled to understand. “Windigos feed on emotions, and this one seems no exception. Yet with a countryside and castle both full of thinking, feeling ponies to choose from, what you call a unthinking, unfeeling monster bypassed them all. It came here instead.”

Every word from Star Swirl’s mouth peels slices of **Red** off of Clover’s **aura**, replaces them with strips of **Cyan**. I stretch out with my hooves, try to catch the pieces, can’t reach them in time. They splatter against the floor, vanish into the cracks between the stones.

“What are you say... are you saying it *followed* me?” Clover mouth-**says**.

“Yes! *Now* we’re getting somewhere!” Star Swirl mouth-**shouts**. I can feel it steaming off him, infecting me. I am **Yellow** too. I am **restless**. “And not just followed: *pursued*. It’s been over eight hours since you and the Princess returned, and only now has this little one found its way to you. Now why do you suppose *that* is?”

“I don’t...” Clover rubs a hoof against her eye, throat-**growls**. “I don’t know why it *pursued* me. *It* doesn’t know why it pursued me. It’s a *beast*, a wild animal looking for a meal. Whatever made it think I was worth stalking home is just coincidence—”

“Oh, I *abhor* that word!” Star Swirl is **pacing** around the room, **waving his forehoof** back and forth in front of his chest. “Lazy word! Used by lazy ponies! Don’t be lazy, Clover, *think!* We’ve eliminated impossibilities. We’ve laid out all the parts and pieces left behind, Now all that’s left is to put them together.”

“*What is there to put together?* It’s a predator and all of us are the prey!” Clover is **Red**-screaming, squeezing her eyes shut, tightening her magic like a vice around my neck. Her mind told me breathing was important back in the cave. Now I don’t seem to need it. I think that’s a good thing. It was hard to remember to keep doing it all this time. “That’s all there is to it! This thing’s the problem, and I’m the solution!”

As Clover yells, Star Swirl is quiet, shaking his head. “A problem is never truly solved until you know its source. We know why the windigo’s here now, but I spoke too soon before. We don’t know how it was there *then*, close enough in that cave to bond with you in this way. The Friendfyre spell destroys every windigo within its blast radius. If it’s properly cast, a sole exception like this little one here is impossible. Once we eliminate that option, what else is left?”

“It...”

Clover’s aura changes in a blink of her eyes. She’s not fully **Green** or **Blue**, somewhere **halfway in between**. “It wasn’t there until after the spell was cast,” she **Turquoise**-mutters. “It didn’t *exist* until after the spell was cast.”

“And what makes windigos come to exist?”

Clover is silent for a long time. I hear her thought-speak her answer long before she says it aloud. “You think it was me,” she whisper-sighs. “You think I hate windigos so much that... that I created one myself.”

Star Swirl’s chest is a mess of colors, **Yellow** and **Gold** encircled by **White**, like a miniature sun without any heat. I’ve never seen **White** before. It makes my chest squirm, my

legs rubbery. It feels like I shouldn't be feeling it. When I turn away, I can feel Star Swirl looking at me.

You'll understand someday, little one. For her sake, I hope you both do.

"I wouldn't call it a conclusion," he mouth-says. He's looking at Clover now. She's looking at the ground below me. "It'd take a magician of immense power and mental fortitude to manage something like that alone, and moreover there's plenty more we can do to look into the matter in the meantime."

Star Swirl blinks his eyes, pushes out a sigh. "But since you asked... yes. That's what I think."

Clover's magical grip loosens, lets go of me in midair. I fall before I can catch myself, land hard on my rump. It doesn't hurt, just shocks me, makes me lose my connection to her mind for a moment. Her head hasn't moved by the time I look up again. Now she's staring down at me. Something is shifting inside her, changing, coming to a head.

Even separated from her I can feel it, rumblings at the start of an earthquake, wind picking up before a storm. I'm in the middle of standing back up when it hits me all at once, blinding, titanic. We are swirling chaos, endless night, blood-rivers soaking scorched earth. We are eternity crusted on bleached bones, infinity compressed into two halves, one soul. We are sightless. We are darker-than-dark.

We are **Black**.

It blots out the room behind her, oozes from every inch of her coat. Each pulse of her heart sends sprays of it showering off her, not just at me but everywhere. I am frozen, struck dumb, spellbound. I can think of nothing else but her, Clover, Master, *Goddess*. Her eyes bore into me, hollow me out, wipe my mind of any thoughts but here, now, her.

This is not **Red**. This is not just a word, just an imprint of something physical. This is **Hate**. This is loathing, disgust, *ecstasy*. This is what I was meant for. This is what Clover—my master—my *creator*—can provide for me.

Because she **Hates** me.

I think I **Hate** her too.

"So what am I supposed to do?" Clover mouth-whispers.

Nothing. Don't change. Just like this. Forever, please.

“Well, what anypony does in a situation like this,” Star Swirl mouth-replies. “Give it a name.”

Stop talking, Star Swirl. My name is Windigo. I know that. Clover knows that. Clover is staring at you now, opening her mouth. Her **Hate** is receding, pulling away from me, being painted over all shades of **Blue**. Stop it! Get your own!

“Wha... what are you... you want me to *keep it?*” she mouth-sputters. “Why in... flaming Tartarus would I want to *keep it?* Why would I even want it *near me?*”

Because Star Swirl won’t be here and he won’t hog all the **Hate** and I can do whatever you want and whatever it takes to keep it all for me till the sun burns out. Don’t answer that, Star Swirl.

“I can’t imagine you would.” Damn you, Star Swirl. Damn you and your **Pink** face—your eye-smile—your *smirk*. “Be that as it may, I’d wager you don’t have much of a choice in the matter by now.”

Never mind, Star Swirl. I forgive you. Clover’s looking at me again with narrowed eyes, with pure **Hate** writhing inside her. “Wait, it... oh, stars,” she mouth-says. Her eyes are a bit **wider** now. “Oh, stars above, *no*. Don’t tell me that. Don’t tell me *because* I hate this thing... it’s not gonna leave.”

“Unless it manages to find somepony else who hates it more,” Star Swirl mouth-tells her, shrugging, still **smirking**. “Which is, in the interest of being both cordial and succinct... unlikely.”

“AAAAAARGH!”

When Clover is done **screaming**, she slumps flat on the ground, clamps her forehooves over her head. I walk closer to her, stand within inches of her nose, can’t help but bask for a moment. When I stretch my hand out to nudge her back up, she jerks her head away, **yells** again.

“*Don’t touch me, you filthy little...*”

Clover **sees** the look on my face, **realizes** something. “That just made things worse, didn’t it?”

I lean forward on my hooves, shiver as a burst of **Hate** rolls down my spine. Clover mouth-moans. “This is a nightmare. This is my actual, literal nightmare.”

“Oh, it’s not so bad.” Star Swirl sidles up to her side, pats the back of her head with his hoof. “It may feed off hatred and despair, but it’s far from hateful itself, nor does it seem to bear

any ill will towards you. After all, it was only born today, and it has you to thank for that. Goodness, it may even think of you as a mother!”

Clover mouth-**moans** again, **louder**. *Mother*. Mother is childbirth, weaning, nursing to health. Mother is hot breakfasts on chilly mornings, warm hugs on cold nights. Mother is the one who protects you, guides you, cares for you when you’re sick. Mother is Love.

Clover created me, but I was not born from her. She taught me everything I know, but she is not warm, does not Love me. She is cold, **Black**. She **Hates** me.

She is not Mother. I wouldn’t want her to be.

“Or... perhaps not,” Star Swirl mouth-mumbles. He twists his lips, pats Clover’s head again. “In any case, you wouldn’t be the first mortal pony to find themselves in the company of spirits. In fact, many powerful magicians have taken on dæmons as assistants or... even companions!”

Clover moves one hoof, peers out at me from behind the other, meets my eyes as I meet hers. For a breath of a moment, our minds coalesce. What was that word Star Swirl used? I’ve never heard it before. Clover knows it, but in her thought-speak it sounds different:

Demon.

Shade of the night. Bowels of the earth. No sun, no heat, no mortal life. Demon is what keeps children in bed at sunset, adults off the road at night. Demon is punishment for murderers, penance for thieves, a hundred scary stories whispered by a thousand sleepless ponies. Demon is chaos. Demon is a chill down your spine. Demon is **Fear**.

I like Demon. I like it a *lot*.

“I’m not gonna name it,” Clover mouth-says. “I won’t kill it for your sake, Master, but I’m not keeping it either. I’ll find a non-lethal way to get rid of it, and until then we’ll just... I’ll survive. Try not to... *indulge* it too much.”

She sighs, stands up, brushes herself off. Little rivulets of **Hate** laced her words together, just enough for dessert. She’s holding it back now, trying to remain calm, but for now I don’t mind. I’m sure there’ll be more later.

“I’ll leave you to it, then,” Star Swirl mouth-says. He **blinks one eye** at her—*winks*—then turns to me. He **lifts one hoof**—a wave. *Pleasure meeting you, Demon. Go easy on her, if you would.*

I look down at my own hoof, lift it up in the same gesture. Star Swirl is the oddest pony I've ever met. I don't **Hate** him like Clover **Hates** me, but I guess he's all right.

Clover and I watch Star Swirl turn on his hoof, start off towards the door again. He hums as he trots, **Pink** as I've ever seen him. When he reaches the doorway, he stops, knocks his hoof against his head.

"Oh, fiddlesticks, before I forget..." he mouth-**says**. "Two things. First of all, in light of this early morning's events, Princess Platinum has issued a royal decree declaring you official magical liaison to the crown and hero to the ponies of all three unified tribes. They've also decided you'll be known as 'Clover the Clever' henceforth and forevermore, in light of your arcane brilliance and tenacity in repelling the windigo hordes. Not what you'd have preferred, I'm sure, but yours truly ended up with 'the Bearded', so count your blessings. Anyhoo, there'll be a ceremony or somesuch thing tomorrow evening at sundown, so keep a gown clean for that, I suppose."

"Perfect." Clover smiles as if she's **one thing**, lights up inside as **another**. **I don't get it**. "And the second thing?"

"The second thing... oh, yes!" This time, Star-Swirl **winks** at me. "Windigos gather information and communicate through a form of emotional synesthetic telepathy. So in other words... Demon here can read minds. Do prepare for that."

"Demon can... wait, *what?*"

Star Swirl is gone before Clover finishes yelling after him. I watch him through the floor for a moment, follow his **aura** as it descends in a spiral towards the bottom of the tower. Clover distracts me soon after. Her aura is flaring again, **Black** as before. I knew it'd be back. I knew she still had it in her.

"I hate you," she mouth-**tells** me. I look up, meet her eyes with mine, smile.

"Monster," she throat-growls. She stalks away across the room. I follow her, bounce along between the **Black** hoofprints she leaves on the floor. I am not Monster. I am Windigo. I am Demon. Clover is wrong about my name. Aside from that, she's absolutely right: as far as I'm concerned, everything is perfect.

...

I am six days, five hours, and twenty-three minutes old when I see Not-Demon for the first time.

It's not like the other windigos I don't remember, the ones I called Not-Me before. It doesn't fly inside roiling black clouds, **Fury**-howl at any pony who passes by. It doesn't do much of anything. It just stares, cocks its head when I do, turns around when I look away. I don't think Not-Demon is very smart. Still, it's the first thing I've ever seen with my own eyes that looks exactly like me.

Not-Demon lives inside a slab of glass framed in gold, set into the back wall inside Clover's wardrobe. Usually she leaves her wardrobe closed. Today it's open. Her gown from the ceremony dangles from the top of the door. It's wrinkled, spotted, collecting ice crystals along the hem where it nearly brushes my mane.

I've grown taller since I first came here. I'm not sure why. Clover thought-says that pony foals grow fast once they're born, but I'm not a pony or a foal, nor—I've come to decide—a windigo really. The others were windigos, the ones before me. They looked like me, but they were different sizes, all bigger, taller. Not-Demon looks like me too, is identical in height and width and every other way, but it is not the same as me. I am different. I have a name.

I am Demon.

When I raise my hoof, Not-Demon raises its. It does that every time, mimics every motion I make. Next, though, I try something new. Instead of lowering my hoof, I push it forward. I want to touch Not-Demon. I want to know if it's cold like me too.

My hoof reaches the glass, bumps against it. Fog spreads from the contact, crystallizes, covers up Not-Demon's entire foreleg. The glass groans, crackles, pops. Jagged lines spring up from nowhere, a spiderweb frozen in ice. Not-Demon's face is sliced across its snout, each half offset a bit. It doesn't seem to feel any pain. It rubs his nose to make sure, at the exact same time I rub mine.

"Stars above, what'd you do now... oh. Excellent. That wasn't expensive at all. Saves me the trouble of wrapping it up, I guess. Thanks a bundle, you little hellspawn."

It feels like it's me who's been cut in half. I can sense Clover behind me—sip from the fountain of **Hate** spilling off her cheeks—but in front of me there's a Not-Clover too, right next to Not-Demon. I swivel in place, look up at Clover, whip back around to the glass. Not-Clover's jaw is clenched too. When she sighs in the glass, I hear it **come out** from Clover's mouth behind me.

"It's a *mirror*, idiot," she mouth-says. "That's not you in there, it's just your reflection. That's all I use it for..." Her eyes close, leak out **more** of her aura. "Or, actually, let me rephrase that: that's all I *did* use it for. Until you broke it. Because of course you did."

Clover shakes her head, mouth-mutters something I can't hear. In the glass—*mirror*—Not-Clover walks back towards the trunk laid open behind me, nudges an emerald pendant off its rim, presses her forehead against the wall above it. Clover has been putting things inside the trunk all day—*packing*. She has been **Orange** all day too.

I know what **Orange** means now. I know what lots of different auras mean. They have words too, just like things pony eyes can see. I learned **Black** first—**Hate**—because it's my favorite, the one Clover glows with the most. She likes **Orange** a lot too—**Frustration**. When it's dimmer, it's **Disappointment**. When I break things, sometimes it gets brighter.

It took most of the week—tomorrow will be my first full one with Clover—for me to learn all the words for auras. Clover's mind isn't as easy to join with anymore. After I met Star Swirl five days and twenty-one hours ago, her mind became like his, blocked off, hard to hear properly. Where the barrier around his mind is gentle, hers is brute force, a brick wall encased in **Red**-hot steel.

She isn't as good at it as Star Swirl is, though. Sometimes I can get past her, slip in through cracks in the mortar of her wall. That's how I learned all the other auras. That's how I learned about **Anger** and **Surprise**, **Pride** and **Shame** and **Confusion**. What Pansy felt after the other windigos before me were gone was **Fear**. What Smart Cookie felt was **Relief**, mixed with a bit of **Happiness**—Star Swirl's favorite. Sometimes I see ponies outside with auras that mix several colors together, like rainbows swirling in soap bubbles. When other ponies see me, they mostly just have **Fear**. **Fear** isn't as nice as **Anger**, but it's pretty close.

The windigo in the glass—*reflection*—doesn't have an aura. That's how I know for sure it's Not-Demon. I am **Orange-Yellow**—**Curious**. It means **Frustrated** and **Excited** mashed together, thinking about a problem, two solutes forming a solution. I have never seen a mirror before. It's probably a good thing that Clover mouth-told me what they were. I can still hear her thought-speak sometimes, but that doesn't mean it's easy.

I can't see Not-Demon very well anymore. The glass is obscured, ice crystals criss-crossing cracks. In the background, a shadow looms over the threshold. Somepony's coming up the stairs, walking without sound. I can't tell who yet. The mirror doesn't show his aura. Not-Clover glances over her shoulder, **tightens** her jaw, **smiles**.

"Hey, Al. Fancy seeing you up here."

I turn around, see **Purple** rippling in the doorway. Alfalfa—Clover calls him Al—waves as he walks in, stumbles up the last step. His mane is yellow, his coat and horn tan. Wheat growing in a dried-out field. He's Star Swirl's other apprentice. He's **smiling**, showing all his teeth.

"Yeah, it's a... a hike, yeah." He glances at me, shudders with **Fear** for a moment, flashes back **Purple** when Clover cocks her head. He's the only **Purple** pony I've ever seen. It's

one of the few auras I haven't figured out yet. Clover and Star Swirl don't seem to ever have it. Alfalfa only has it when he's around Clover. His mind is much easier to hear than Clover's, but still **Confusing**, still mostly images without words.

Purple is something between **Scared** and **Happy**, between Clover casting a spell and lying on her bed. **Purple** is bodies pressed together, lungs struggling for air, her eyes rolling back into her head. **Purple** is euphoria. **Purple** is heat.

I don't understand it at all.

"So are you just working out, or..." Clover's mouth-voice gets higher as she trails off. Working out means exercise, muscles aching with exertion. Alfalfa doesn't remember jogging or doing pushups today, but he *is* sweating a little.

"Ha! Heh-heh..." Alfalfa mouth-laughs like he can't breathe. **Purple** seems to cause him pain like that a lot. "N-no, not right now. Just, ah... y-you need any help packing?"

Clover smiles, but she's not **Happy**. She does that a lot, makes her **face** not match her **aura**. I don't understand that either. "That's... very sweet of you, Al, but I'm fine," she mouth-says. She turns toward me, **crumples** her brow. With me, her **face** always matches her **aura**. "The Master of Chaos over here is about all I can handle."

Master. Ruler. Controller. Clover is my Master, but she calls me Master too sometimes. Star Swirl is Master of Clover is Master of Demon is Master of Chaos. Lots of words have more than one meaning like that. I don't know why. I just don't think about it much anymore.

"Geez, it's still here?" Alfalfa doesn't look at me when he mouth-speaks, **stares** instead at the mark on Clover's flank. It's a four-leaf clover, green, means she's **lucky**. I know Alfalfa remembers it. He still looks at it until Clover turns back to him. Alfalfa does a lot of things that don't make sense. "I thought you were gonna... did you not find a way to make it leave?"

Clover shrugs, **sighs**. "Nope. Just wasted the whole week trying. And with Pansy and Smart Cookie already over in Equestria, I don't even have enough conduits to try the Friendfyre spell again." Clover **glares** at me again. Alfalfa is still trying to **remember** her flank. "Course, it'd probably just break that too. Breaking my stuff's kind of its specialty."

"Oh... wow," Alfalfa mouth-mumbles. "That's, uh... sorry to hear that. You sure you don't want any help? I mean, I could look around too. O-Or maybe Star Swirl and I, w-we could be conduits..."

"No!"

Alfalfa jerks back, coughs, twinkles **Fearful** for a second. Clover's mouth-**shout** surprised me too. She flashed **Red** so fast I heard it before I saw it, felt it **wrapped around** the word she sent blasting across the room. "Sorry," she mouth-**mutters** after, eyes shut, quiet. "Just... it's not that simple. The Friendfyre spell is a last resort, and for good reason. The conduits can't just be anypony. They have to have the same single-minded goal, share a bond powerful enough to focus the spell on a single target. Without that, it's liable to..."

There it is again. I've only felt it a few times, but each encounter is carved into my memory, branded on the lining of my belly. It's the end of the road, the beginning before the end, the tunnel at the end of the light. The **Source**. Something inside Clover's memory, so deep down I didn't feel it even when she left her mind open to me.

It's where all her **Hate** comes from, what floats closer to the surface every time she looks at me. It beckons me, envelops my mind, teases my insides with promises her normal **Hate** doesn't keep. I can't let it keep escaping me. Someday I'll find out what it is. Someday she'll forget to keep it hidden.

"It's too powerful," Clover mouth-says. "I don't want to risk it again."

"Well, what other option do you have?" Alfalfa levels his eyes on Clover's, glows **something other than Purple** for the first time today. "I mean, you do want to get rid of it, right?"

"Al..." Clover's mouth-voice is tense, comes out quickly. A **warning**.

"Then you've gotta at least *try*, right? What if it gets bored with you and attacks somepony? What if you can't stop it and somepony else gets kill—"

"Enough, Alfalfa!"

Clover is **Red** again, stretched tight all over with the effort of keeping it contained. Alfalfa has gone too far. He **knows** it, **ducks** his head, **bites** his lip.

"We are not discussing this anymore," she throat-**hisses**. "The windigo is my responsibility, and I will deal with it myself. Should I ever, for *any* reason, need *your* help with it, I will ask you for it. Got it?"

Alfalfa **swallows**, nods. Clover stomps over to the wardrobe, stops to glare at the mirror. She yanks the gown off the door with her magic, shakes off the ice crystals, turns back around. Alfalfa hasn't moved.

"Do you need something else?" she mouth-says, face sagging, colorless.

You can do this. Alfalfa is thought-speaking to himself, projecting it all through the room as if no one can hear it. I suppose *no pony* can. **Just spit it out.**

“That’s not the only reason I came up here,” he mouth-spits out. “There’s something else I wanted you to... wanted to talk to you about.”

Clover spends a long time **looking** at Alfalfa. Before she answers him, she glances at me. “I’m all ears,” she mouth-says. *I’m listening*, she means. Ponies like to play with words like that, bend them into places they aren’t supposed to fit. I’ve learned a lot of them by listening to Clover mouth-speak. *I’m all ears* was one of the first.

“I-It’s nothing important.” Alfalfa is **Purple** again, tongue-stuttering. “It’s just... well, you seem like you’re under a lot of stress lately.”

What gave it away? Clover thought-mutters. Alfalfa can’t hear her, but she makes sure I can.

“A-And I came up here to check on you because I’m...” Alfalfa **licks** his lips, **clears** his throat. “Well, we’re really all worried about you. I mean, you’ve barely come out of your room since your medal ceremony, and that was five days ago!”

Clover shuts her eyes. I let mine drift towards the ceiling. I **remember** the ceremony, four days and twenty-two hours ago. It was the first time I’ve seen the rest of the castle outside Clover’s bedroom. She told me to stay in her room, wait for her to come back. I’m glad I didn’t. Instead I flew out the window, caught up to her in the courtyard, followed her into a room twice the size of the cave I was made in filled with stallions, mares, colts, fillies, more auras than I could begin to count.

Most were **Cyan** or **Yellow**, ordinary, boring. A few ponies **screamed**. One mare fell over—**fainted**. The rest, though, were **Black**, filled with **Hate** the second they saw me, Clover most of all. I stood right by her side as the Princess stood near the far wall, pinned a shiny gold medal on her chest with a purple cloud of magic. It was a blast, even though nothing actually exploded. It’s just another one of Clover’s expressions. It means I really **enjoyed** the ceremony, mostly because Clover has **Hated** me twice as much since.

“Your point being?” Clover mouth-asks Alfalfa.

“My poi... w-well, I just thought you might like some, uh... y’know, some **company**,” Alfalfa mouth-**replies**. **Purple** is **filling him up** now, tainting the words out of his mouth. Surely Clover notices. Surely it’s not just me. “Or at least, an excuse to **get out of this room** for once. I mean, this is kind of our last **night** here, ever. We probably won’t come back once **we’re settled** in Equestria, so... just thought you might want to take a last look around with m... **with me**. See the sights, y’know, just... **enjoy it** while it lasts.”

Clover's lips are parted, **hanging open**. I'm not sure what she was expecting. It wasn't what just came out of Alfalfa's mouth. "I... that's it?" she mouth-**asks**. "Just a walk around? One last grand tour?"

Alfalfa clicks his teeth together. His **Purple implodes** on itself, a foxglove flower wilting from a frost. "Yep," he mouth-says. He's filling with **Shame**, grinning to hide it. "If you're free."

Clover starts to mouth-speak, chews on her lip instead. She's staring at me again, **Hate** mixing with **Relief**, a lump of coal in a field of green grass. "That's... I mean, I'd *like* to. Honestly, I really would, but..."

"But it would follow you, yeah. I didn't... didn't think about that." Alfalfa's looking at me now too. His **Hate** isn't quite as strong as Clover's, but it fills him out more completely, smothers every other thought in his head. I edge closer to him, watch my Master to see if she minds. Clover doesn't say anything for a few seconds. Her thoughts reverberate from behind her wall, whispers rippling through a pool of water.

"Wait," she mouth-**tells** him. "Wait, wait a second, there's... okay. Okay, I think this can work. Meet me downstairs in half an hour."

Half of an hour. Thirty minutes. One thousand and eight hundred seconds. I know exactly how long that is, but I don't know why she wants to wait until then. Alfalfa is here now. I'm ready to go. I want to see the castle. I want to find out what a grand tour is.

"Meet you... uh..." Alfalfa mouth-**says**. He's a bit **Purple** again too.

"I promise I'll be there," Clover mouth-**says**. She's pressing her forehooves into his chest, pushing him back towards the door. "I have an idea, and I need to be alone for it to work. Just trust me. Thirty minutes."

"Thirty minutes," Alfalfa mouth-**repeats**. He's standing on the other side of the threshold now. "I'll wait for y—"

The door slams, cuts him off. Clover leans against it, presses her ear into the wood, listens for something. After a few seconds, I hear Alfalfa walking away, muffled hooves against stone. Clover steps back, deep-**sighs**, looks at me.

"Thank the stars he's gone," she mouth-says. "I thought he'd never leave. Stallions, right?"

I'm **Confused**. Clover's **words** don't match her **aura**. She knows I can hear her thinking, see what's reflecting off the fringes of her mind. She's lying to me anyway. It doesn't make sense.

"Boy, all that talking wore me out." Clover sits down, stretches her forelegs out over her head. Her yawn is fake, colorless. I cock my head. She winks at me. "I could use a nap."

Nap. Short sleep. It's not even sunset yet. Clover trots over to her bed, smooths the blanket out, lies down on top of it. "Night, hellspawn," she mouth-**says**, eyes closed, hooves folded over her chest. I'm sure she's still making this up. There's something else going on here. I can hear her breathing slow, though, see her hooves sag lower down towards her belly. Her mind is quieting down. Her aura is dimming.

She's going to sleep. She can't fake that. I've never seen her fake it before. When Clover sleeps, I do too. Already my eyes are heavy, filling with sand. I get my hooves under me, stumble over to Clover's bed, lie down on the floor next to her head. Clover shivers, doesn't wake up.

I close my eyes, let my own mind settle down. Clover lied about Alfalfa, told the truth about sleeping. Alfalfa **Hates** me, feels **Purple** towards Clover. I don't understand it. Then again, I don't understand most things about ponies. As long as Clover's near me, I have a way of figuring them out.

As long as I'm near Clover, nothing else is important.

• • •

Cold.

Air whistling, cutting, crisp. Darkness all around me. The absence of life. I open my eyes, look out the window. The moon is out, full, bright like a frozen star. I feel cold. I feel nothing.

No.

I roll onto my stomach, turn my head. I'm tall enough to see the whole bed, the crumpled pillow, the depression in the sheets. Empty. Clover isn't there.

No *no* **NO NO**.

My vision blurs, narrows into flashes of shapes without colors. I'm standing up, staring at the wall that Clover's sleeping form should obscure. I'm at the window, hanging halfway out over the sill. I'm outside, buried inside a thundercloud, rending the air apart as I bolt through it. Clover

is gone. A part of *me* is gone. I'm drifting through the air, directionless, a boat without an anchor. Shapes jump out in front of my face, bang against my shoulders. I have to concentrate to see them. I have to ransack my mind to remember how.

I am **Scared**.

Something **happened** to her. Something—enemy—**monster**—came for her, took her away from me. I **should have** stopped it, protected her, stayed right by her side. The moon is out now. Middle of the night. Have to fix this. Need to find her.

I *will* find her.

I start at the tower, spiral down the outer wall, move so fast the stones sprout ice streaks where I fly too close. No auras. Empty. I reach the street below, skim my hooves along the cobblestones, paint them white with frost. I haven't been down here since the ceremony. Nothing looks the same. There are no dim spots of light dancing inside houses, sitting behind carts, ducking into alleyways when they see me coming. No pony is here. No pony is **Black**. No pony is Clover.

Where is she?

I throat-growl, point my hooves up. The cloud shoots higher, gives me altitude, fills my belly with rocks. From this height I can see the whole city, dyed black-and-white by moonlight, a map spread out on Clover's table. Platinum Castle is dark, cleaned out. Conducting rods surround its grounds, stand speared upright twenty feet apart. Star Swirl will teleport it to Equestria tomorrow. He's been meditating for three days, gathering his strength. No pony else remains inside. No pony else remains *anywhere*. Almost everyone has already moved out, gone to Equestria, settled down in New Platinum. Everyone except Star Swirl. Except Clover.

Except Alfalfa.

My focus wanes for a moment. The world blinks out of sight, goes dark but for the few feeble auras still sleeping in the houses below. In front of me, almost as high as me, two glow brighter than the others. One mare, one stallion. One **Pink**...

... one **Purple**.

I grit my teeth, force pony-sight back into my mind. On the far side of the castle, there's a light on top of another tower, a torch throwing shadows across the parapets. It burns orange, **matches my aura**.

There.

There are four towers attached to Platinum Castle, one on each corner, all flat on top. This one lies opposite the one Clover and I live in. I fly overtop the castle to reach it, see only the backs of heads at first, stop in midair to make sure. Green mane, white coat, sitting next to tan and straw-yellow. Clover's looking at the stars. She doesn't see me yet.

"... Swirl didn't teach me until two whole days after it showed up." She's mouth-speaking, waving her hoof each time her voice rises. "I kind of screamed at him about it, actually, swore I'd run away and blow up the castle behind me if the damned thing wouldn't back off and let me sleep. Once he lent me a few scrolls for meditation, though, I couldn't believe how easy it was. Little beast just goes out like a lamp the second my mind calms down."

Her guard is down, her wall lowered. She's talking about me. She thinks I can't hear her.

"So that's how you got rid of it?" Alfalfa **Surprise**-asks. "You just made it think you were asleep?"

Clover smiles. Her throat **vibrates**, holds back a laugh. "Yep. Well, I guess you're making it sound simpler than it was. Nearly broke my neck sneaking out to meet you. Turns out stairs get a lot more complicated after you've hypnotized yourself."

Her mouth-voice cuts through me like a heated knife. Hypnotized. Sneaking out. Little beast. Clover **did** lie to me. She **tricked** me, made me think she was sleeping, met Alfalfa up here instead. He's staring at her now, sitting inches away from her. His breath ruffles her mane, sends **Purple** tendrils creeping down the back of her neck. I have never seen it this bright, felt it coming off him this strong. It makes my chest itch, my hooves tremble. I want to attack him, push him away, make him leave Clover alone.

Why?

Why does Alfalfa **glow** like that around Clover? Why does seeing it make me want to jump down between them, protect her from him? Why **should** I protect her? She lied to me. She left me behind, tore us apart, took half of me with her. Did she think I would never find her again? Did she mean for this to last forever?

Impossible. Clover would never abandon me. Clover **Hates** me. **Hate** is the strongest aura, the best feeling there is to be felt. If Clover wanted me to leave, she wouldn't **Hate** me so much. Star Swirl said as much before. Maybe Clover would lie to me. Star Swirl wouldn't. Star Swirl understands me, thought-speaks to me, calls me by my name.

I am Demon. Clover is my Master. I will protect her. I will not let her abandon me.

... I will wait. Just long enough to know she's safe. Just long enough to find out what **Purple** is.

While I was thinking, Clover and Alfalfa were mouth-speaking, **laughing**. Whatever I wasn't meant to hear, I didn't. I listen more closely now, wait for the lull in their conversation to end. Clover lung-**sighs**, is the first to turn away from the stars again. Alfalfa meets her eyes, leans **a bit closer**.

"You know something, Al? I'm really glad you came by tonight." Clover **grins**, looks back up. Al **doesn't**. "I needed something like this. This was... this was fun."

Alfalfa leans back, stretches his foreleg out. He's a breath away from Clover's shoulders, so close that I can feel his **body heat** through her. "I'm glad I came by too," he throat-**whispers**. "I should've done it sooner."

"Nah, don't worry about it." Clover is still star-gazing, still **Pink**-smiling. She doesn't feel his proximity, his **heat**. How does she not feel it? "It's half my fault anyway. Just wanted to say thanks. For being a good friend."

Now, Alfalfa thought-whispers. He is swathed in flames, all **Purple**. *Do it now*.

"**You're welcome**," he throat-murmurs. Clover **twitches** her brow, turns towards him. She **watches** as he closes his eyes, opens his mouth, anchors his foreleg around her neck.

Just before his lips press into hers, she **leans away from him**.

"Uh... Al?" she mouth-asks. "What are you doing?"

I lean forward, grit my teeth. Alfalfa is staring at Clover, hang-jawed, **Turquoise**. My cloud is fifty feet from his head. "What d'you mean, what am I... you..."

Clover lifts her hoof to her mouth, notices—*finally*—what I could see all day. "Oh... *wow*. Oh, stars above, I... Al, listen, I-I'm sorry. I didn't know."

"Are you serious..." Alfalfa throat-whispers. He's looking at the ground, not at her. Something is building inside him, congealing, **darkening**.

"Look, Al, I know this... stars, this is awkward, but I swear it's nothing personal, I just—"

"Are you *serious*?" Alfalfa's mouth-voice cracks, claws at the back of his throat. His words are choked with vines of **Shame**, laced with blood-**Red** thorns. Clover feels them too. She straightens up, faces him as he jumps to his hooves.

"Excuse me?" she mouth-says. Her tongue is **Orange**, **blushing Red**.

I am forty feet away.

“What did I ever do to you, huh?” Alfalfa **screws** up his eyes, **shakes** his head. “No, you know what, what *didn't* I do for you? I did all the chores you didn't like doing, I stayed up every night to help you with your research, I read through every scroll and spellbook under the damn sun just so you wouldn't worry about Star Swirl quizzing us... stars above, I get sick whenever you do, because I'm so busy taking care of you I don't have time to take care of myself!”

“Al, I'm grateful for all of that. You *know* I am,” Clover mouth-says, measured out, **not-quite-colorless**. She's moving, edging back towards the stairs that lead into the tower. “Why are you acting like this?”

Alfalfa lurches forward, closes the gap Clover managed to open. His laugh sounds like a donkey's bray, painful, **Indignant**. “And then *this* week, you... I'm the only pony in the kingdom who'll even *talk* to you after this week! Everypony else is terrified of you, thinks you've lost your mind. You know there's a rumor that *you're* the one who brought the windigos here in the first place? That you're communicating with them, ordering them around with some mysterious black magic? You know who's the only pony in or out of Equestria who tells those idiots they're wrong?”

“Alfalfa, you're overreacting,” Clover mouth-says. ***I don't need you to take care of me***, she thought-growls instead. I am thirty feet away. I could reach them in less than a second, one-sixtieth of a minute.

“No, you're *underreacting!*” Alfalfa throat-**yells**. He's even closer to her, hoof raised, hovering in front of her chest. The cloud writhes beneath me, bunches up behind my hind legs. “I do *everything* for you, and you never see it! To you, I might as well not even exist!”

Alfalfa's mind is a **fountain**, a cracked cup running over. His thoughts **spill out** everywhere, splatter across my mind: Clover on her knees, **weeping** into her hooves, **begging** him to forgive her. He knows this Clover well, **thinks about her** all the time. He doesn't know the real Clover at all.

“Oh, *grow up!*” **Red** tints her vision, charges her words with **force** that stops Alfalfa dead. “We're not in a fairy tale, Alfalfa! I'm not a damsel in distress waiting for some gallant, pigheaded knight to break me out of my tower, and I sure as *hellfire* am not gonna sleep with you just because you act like a decent equine being around me!”

“Then *don't* sleep with me!” **Fear** has mixed with **Purple** inside him, created a new aura dark as the night sky—**Desperation**. “Don't love me, don't ever speak to me again after tonight. Just kiss me. Just one time, pretend that I exist.”

Clover crinkles her nose, glares pure jet-**Black—Disgust**. “Goodnight, Alfalfa,” she mouth-**spits**. She shuts her eyes, turns to leave.

“Don’t walk away from me...” Alfalfa throat-**growls**. Clover doesn’t stop. He nose-**snorts**, stomps towards her. “Clover, don’t you *dare* walk away from m—”

I don’t slow down before I hit the top of the tower. The impact rattles the entire structure, carves inch-deep fissures in the stones beneath my hooves. Spears of ice flash-freeze the floor around me, spray pebbles of hail into Alfalfa’s face. A rush of **Red** opens my lungs, pushes out a mouth-**roar** so loud it makes my own ears ring. Alfalfa falls on his rump, scrabbles back against the parapet, bleeds **Blue** all over the ground as he cowers behind reedy hooves. Saplings in the path of an avalanche. He couldn’t stop me if he tried. Only one pony can stop me now—

“*Demon, no!*”

My Master mouth-**screams** at me, orders me back. I don’t want to listen. I want to rip him apart, encase his heart in ice, pack his lungs full of powder-snow. I **could** do it. I **should** do it.

I don’t. For some reason, Clover doesn’t want me to. Alfalfa notices, **Green-smiles-Orange**, shakes his head.

“Unbelievable,” he mouth-mutters. “All those times I stuck up for you, all those ponies I argued with... and they were right. You really *are* as far gone as they say.”

“Alfalfa, shut *up*,” Clover mouth-**growls**. “I’m not controlling it, I don’t know what it’s gonna—”

“Oh, **please**.” He’s standing now, still pressed against the parapet but leaning forward a bit. “Clover the Clever, savior of the realm, the most powerful magical sorceress in recorded history, *out of control*? The mare who sits cooped up in her tower all day doing stars know what, who found herself so enthralled with the creatures that nearly wiped out our species that she took one home and kept it as a pet?” He **Hate-smiles**, crinkles his nose like Clover did—**sneers**. “Named it *Demon*?”

Clover’s jaw quivers, hooves scuff at the ground. For the second time in my life, I see my Master’s aura turn **Blue**. “I... I didn’t name it *Demon*,” she mouth-says. Her eyes are pointed at neither me nor Alfalfa, hung up between us, out of focus. “It calls *itself* that, it won’t shut up about it. I-I didn’t know what else to do...”

“You know, I get it,” Alfalfa mouth-says, wheezes out like a persistent cough. “I finally get it. You’re paranoid, antisocial, emotionally distant, frigid as an icebox... of course you’d be friends with a windigo. You practically already *are* one.”

Shock ripples through Clover’s body, leaves behind a chasm that dwarfs it, drains every other color out of her. “Don’t you dare,” she -whispers. “Don’t you dare...”

“And even now, you still won’t let me talk.” Alfalfa steps to the side, glances towards the stairs. He’s about to escape. I can still stop him. All I need is Clover’s word, gesture, permission. She says . “That’s the real reason you don’t have any friends, Clover. It’s not because you’re intimidating or hard to talk to. It’s because you don’t *want* us to be your friends. You think you’re too good for us, too special to be associated with common ponies. All you did was use Smart Cookie and Pansy to get what you wanted, and then it was right back into Cloverland, where everything’s all about you again.”

I’m still waiting for an order, still watching Clover for any sign of one. She doesn’t look like she wants to give it to me. **She doesn’t look like my Master at all.** She looks like Alfalfa’s thought-vision of her: shoulders **hunched**, chin **trembling**, eyes red and inside.

“Someday you’re gonna regret acting like that,” Alfalfa mouth-says. “And someday *real soon*, you’re gonna regret acting like that with me.”

He stands silent for a moment, walks over to the stairs, descends out of sight. Clover doesn’t run after him, doesn’t order me forward, doesn’t say a word. I step closer to her, keep one eye on Alfalfa’s **Black** aura descending. Her lips shudder, crack apart. She stares at her hooves, mouth-whispers something.

“Get away from me...”

I don’t listen, take another step forward, ignore the **hole in her chest** until suddenly it’s a **VOID**, a gaping that pushes away instead of pulling in.

“GET AWAY FROM ME!”

Clover is red-faced, on her hooves, throat-screaming so loud that her next words crack like dry parchment. I’m not looking at her. I’m looking inside her. Beneath her **Hate**, there is **Anger**. Beneath her **Anger**, there is **Fear**. Beneath her **Fear**, there is the **Source**, pulsating, intoxicating. It’s never felt this strong before, this close to the surface.

“I don’t *care* if you like me! I don’t *care* if you think I’m your mother! I don’t *want* to be your mother! I *never* wanted you! I never wanted *any of this!*”

She **still** has her guard down. She **hasn't remembered** to put up her wall. After everything she's done to me, everything I've been through tonight, **I deserve to see it**. I deserve to finally know what the **Source** of all this is.

"If I ever see you again... if you ever come *near* me again, I will *destroy* you. I will burn this entire continent to the ground if I have to. And I will hunt down every single one of your wretched kind until you are wiped from existence and nopony even remembers what you... what... w-what are you doing?"

I'm **pushing back**, Clover. I'm not creeping around the edge of your wall, sneaking in through the cracks. I'm **tearing open** new ones, **shattering** the brick, **melting through** the steel. I want to know what you've been hiding from me.

"Don't... gonna kill you, you hear me, rip you apart like... stop it. *Stop it!*"

It's coming together in front of me, forming into shapes and colors. Memories. I'm so close. A few more inches. A little more pressure.

Demon, plea-

Thunderclap. Cold water down my back. **Connection**. The wall has collapsed. I'm inside her memory...

*... I am **Furious**, stomping through a field of wildflowers, running away. Voices echo from the house behind me, call my name, threaten to lock me inside for a week. There's a storm coming, they tell me, please come back inside. I walk faster. They're just Scared because they're earth ponies, **stupid** because they think I'm still a baby who doesn't know any better. I am a unicorn. I am a better magician than anypony for miles.*

I am invincible.

*Lightning strike. Rain soaking into my mane. I ignore it. I don't want to go back. I don't care if they're my parents. I **Hate** them. I **Hate** them because they don't trust me, **Hate** them because they never let me play outside like the other fillies, **Hate** them because they're so Terrified of magic they don't even let me leave the house alone. They're ignorant. I'm blind, gritting my teeth so hard I see white. Little flakes fluttering down instead of raindrops, sticking to my face, blending into my coat.*

*I shiver with cold, with sudden **clarity**. It's the middle of summer. It shouldn't be snowing.*

There's only one reason it could be snowing.

I turn around, numb, **Horrorified**. Too late. The Demons are already here. Three of them, circling around the house, baying at the blanketed sun. They've been spotted recently in the Outer Territories, miles away. Never here. Never this far south before.

I start to run, kick up petals, trip over hidden ridges. My legs are aching, **too short**. My knees are cracked, **leaking red**. One Demon peels off, dives down towards the house, smashes through the roof. I hear wind roaring, ice crackling, lungs heaving for breath.

Screaming.

Snow piles up in my mane, melts against my body. I can feel something happening, can't think about it, just fight past it. I'm twenty feet from the house when I'm forced to my knees, laid out flat by the power coursing through me. Pink flames swirl between my legs, lift me off the ground, coalesce into a tight cocoon around my body. I am forbidden magic. I am the spell my parents refused to let me attempt. I am the only thing that can defeat the Demons.

I am **Friendfyre**.

For a moment, it works. For a moment, the Demons shy away, scream in agony. I pour every bit of energy I have left into the spell, cross a line I never knew to look for. Too much power. Too bright fire. My horn shudders, pulses, cracks apart.

EXPLODES.

I'm knocked unconscious—the memory splits down the middle, skips ahead. I wake up sore all over, spitting out dirt, freezing cold. The house is gone, a wood skeleton flash-burned black. I limp towards it, shove my shoulder against the door, fall through as cinders sizzle on my back. The pain keeps me lucid, from passing out, from looking away.

They are the only things left standing, the only things still with color. Half blue, half black. Hind legs still frozen solid. Forelegs smoking, peeled back by heat down to soot-caked bone. Chests shorn of fur, smoldering. Faces—their faces—twisted, mangled, burned away, ashes. My hooves kick up gray clouds, tufts of green mane. Just like mine. My throat fills with bile, spews it out onto my hooves, leaves a **hole** in my stomach that widens with every passing second.

My voice croaks, cries out for them, begs for something I already know is impossible. Anything to make this all go away. Anything to undo what I've done.

What I've done.

The hole sucks the energy from my legs, the light from my aura. There is no color for what I am, no word for what I feel. This is _____, unbeing, a bottomless pit I shouldn't still

be alive to fall into. This is the horror that I did this, the knowledge that it can't be undone, the agony of realizing it's my fault it happened, it's my fault they're dead, it's my fault

my fault

MY FAULT

I am screaming, I am evil, I am a murderer.

I am—

My head smacks against the parapet, drives a spike of pain through my mind. Clover has shoved me away from her, away from her memory. Her _____ clings to me like wet sand, grinds into my skin, saps at my own aura. I can't move, can't think, can't bear to feel it any longer. It's all-consuming. It's darker-than-Black. It *hurts*.

I break off from Clover entirely, feel the world go fuzzy, manage to look up at her face. Her eyes are ice, melting. Inside them, Not-Demon stares back at me.

"You're a monster," she _____-whispers. Her horn shimmers, surrounds her with light. I hear a spell-chime, a sob, nothing. Clover is gone. She's teleported away. I can't feel her anywhere close to me.

I am alone.

• • •

I don't go straight back to Clover's tower after she vanishes. I fly around the castle for a while—maybe hours—lethargic, without any idea of where I'm going. Thinking. Remembering. Trying to decide whether I should look for Clover, whether I should come down to land, whether I should stay awake at all.

I am not a monster.

None of this would've happened if she hadn't **lied to me**. I wouldn't have been so curious about the **Source** if she hadn't tried so hard to hide it from me. I wouldn't have forced my way into her mind if I'd known what was **festering** at its core, eating away at her from the inside out. All I wanted to do was be with her. All I wanted was to know my Master like she knows me.

I am **not** a monster.

How could I have known how much pain my presence caused her, how sick her **Hate** made her? I thought **Hate** was sacred, profound, the most wonderful thing a pony could give to me. I never felt it as they do, as a cancer sapping the life from their blood, as where something and everything should be. This was just a misunderstanding, just **Frustration**, just the **heat of the moment**. This wasn't my fault.

I didn't want to be a monster.

Clover's tower is still empty when I return to it. Her bedsheets are rumped, cold, just as they were before I left. Her trunk still sits open against the wall. If she's been back here since I last saw her, it wasn't for long. Just enough to grab a few things, small trinkets somepony else wouldn't think to look for. An overcoat, meant to hang on the hook behind the door. A bag of apothecary supplies, missing from the rectangular gap in the dust layer beneath her desk. A small emerald pendant I have never seen her wear, that I last saw caked in soot, flattened against a skinless throat, glistening in the light of embers dying under snowfall.

I stand over my spot next to her bed, fall onto my side, close my eyes. It's too hard to keep standing, too hard to see where I'm walking. If Clover still **Hates** me, she won't come back. If Clover doesn't **Hate** me, she won't be in pain anymore. I don't know what to do. I don't know what she wants me to do.

I don't know who I am anymore.

Demon.

I am Demon.

Demon, wake up.

I am my Master's Demon.

Demon, Clover needs you!

Clover is mine. I am hers. No matter what I am or was, that is what I will always be.

... I need you, Demon. I need you to help me again.

I open my eyes, think of Clover, watch shapes blossom back into view. Sunlight streams through the window, sets dust motes ablaze, stings as it inches closer to my outstretched hoof. Star Swirl is standing over me, as close as he can bear, frost gathering at the ends of his whiskers. He nose-sighs, eye-smiles.

“Thought I’d find you up here,” he mouth-says, hoarse, **exhausted**. For the first time since I’ve known him, he sounds as old as he looks. “She’s just past the northern gate, half a mile or so out by now. If you hurry, you can reach her in a few minutes. He’s...”

Star Swirl closes his eyes, clenches his teeth. I have never seen him filled with **Shame** before. He’s probably never seen me like that either. “I can’t go,” he mouth-murmurs. “The transportation spell’s culmination is too close at hand. Delaying it now would set us back weeks, maybe destroy the castle, maybe send it to the wrong place entirely. The Princess won’t accept that risk, even for Clover’s sake. I’ve been ordered to stay here and finish the job.”

He goes silent, looks back up at me. I don’t need him to ask again. His question **repeats itself** in his eyes, sags **Turquoise** from his cheeks. I stand up, shake some feeling into my legs, step up into the window.

“Demon?”

I rejoin Star Swirl, expect his usual resistance, feel nothing instead. For the time it takes to mouth-tell me what he’s thinking, he lets me see him as he sees me. As I now see Clover.

“I’ve made too many mistakes with her. Please don’t be my worst one yet.”

He’s **Afraid** I’ll hurt her again. He’s **Afraid** he’s pushed her too far, forced her into a situation she’s not strong enough to face alone. I know what he’s talking about. He’s right. I have hurt her. She can’t face this alone.

I won’t now. *She* won’t now. A cloud blooms into being as I step outside, turns me around to face Star Swirl. I stare him down, nod my head—**blink one eye**. **Relief** isn’t as powerful or as potent as **Hate**, but seeing it **flood** out of Star Swirl’s face feels a whole lot better.

Star Swirl was right about me and Clover, wrong about something else. It doesn’t take me a few minutes to reach the northern gate in the castle’s walls. It takes me one-half of a moment to aim, the other half to fire, a few *seconds* to blaze across the sky like a bolt from a five-story crossbow. I hear their voices before I see their faces, but I don’t need to see them to know who’s talking. Even after last night, Alfalfa still doesn’t bother to guard his mind at all, doesn’t even think about anything other than what he’s about to say next.

... did I tell you, Clover? Remind me what I told you last night. You’re so smart, I’m sure you remember...

Half a mile from the gate, Star Swirl. Three more seconds. I can see him now, a black dot in the distance, a little prick of a pin.

... **even one smart comment for me? Shame. Guess you're not so cocky without your little friend Demon to protect you...**

There are two other stallions with him, each gripping one of my Master's forelegs in their own, neither aware that I'm coming straight for them. Clover is bruised, panting, soaked **Red** all the way to her bones—but alive. How lucky Alfalfa is for that. He will regret thinking I was gone. He will regret **real soon** thinking I've forgotten about him.

“... going to be mine one way or the other. You had your chance at the easy way last night. Now...”

Now I'm gonna show you the hard way, Al.

Clover notices me at the last second, dives to the ground, pulls the stallion closest to me down with her. The second one never sees me coming, drops his jaw, spits teeth when I slam into him. His ribs groan with strain, crack in half as he's bowled off his hooves. I break his fall with a sheet of ice, freeze him solid from the neck down before he even lands. Immediate cold pressure for broken bones. Clover taught me that four days ago. I'm nothing if not considerate.

I spin around in midair, skid to a halt with icicles clawing at my hooves. Alfalfa is in **Shock**, staring at me with his mouth open, not even watching as Clover twists out of her captor's grip, kicks the rucksack off a walking staff lying nearby, drives it up under the stallion's chin with pink magic blazing along its length. He crumples like a rag doll, leaves us alone with Alfalfa. I look to Clover, meet her eyes, glance towards Alfalfa's **quivering** form.

She lowers her staff, **Gold**-smirks, nods. Alfalfa tries to mouth-speak, doesn't have time. I'm on him in a blink of Clover's eyes, staring down at his limp body pinned between my forehooves. I am not a monster. I am *all* monsters put together. I am **Nightmare**.

I am **starving**.

Alfalfa's **Fear** collides with his **Anger** and **Hate**, forms a heavenly cocktail that makes me want more with every drop I taste. I drink straight from his **aura**, siphon off his energy, add it to my own. To kill him like this—defeated, defenseless—would be easy, as simple as waiting for the light around his heart to sputter out. It would be justified. It would be exactly what Clover gave me permission to do.

It would be monstrous.

I catch Clover's attention, make sure she's watching before I cut myself off. Alfalfa shudders as I step away from him. His fur is crusted over with ice. His skin is blue, pale with weakness and **Terror**. I stare after him as he stumbles to his hooves, limps away with his tail between his legs. Clover stares at me.

“Why did you stop?” she mouth-**asks**. “Y-You could’ve just...”

I know I could have. I knew I shouldn’t.

“B-But...”

I am not a monster, Clover.

Clover empties her lungs, slumps onto her haunches, rubs her hoof hard against her temple. There’s nothing left for her to be **Angry** about. Her eyes are rimmed red now, shining a soft **Blue**. I take one step towards her, wait until she nods again before moving any further. When I sit down by her side, she doesn’t move away, hugs herself with her forelegs instead.

“I’m sorry...” she mouth-**whispers**.

You don’t have to be **Sorry**, Clover.

“Yes, I do.” Thunder rumbles in her eyes, flashes **Red** in a storm of **Black**. “Yes, I *do*. I’ve been nothing but awful to you since the day you... the day I created you. All I did was hate you for something you didn’t do.”

Hate made me strong, Clover. I never thought about what **Hate** did to you.

Clover throat-**laughs**. The noise is hollow, like wind echoing in a cave. “I don’t even know why you saved me just now. Stars know, I didn’t deserve it.”

I am not a monster, Clover.

“Yeah, I know. I’m sorry I—”

Neither are you.

Clover **bites her tongue** mid-word, **turns away from me**. I can still see the twitch in her jaw, the gleam of **Black** wetness in her eyes. “It’s not that simple.”

You didn’t mean to hurt anyone.

“It doesn’t matter what I meant to do!” Clover mouth-yells. Her eyes are squeezed shut, still **leaking**. Her voice pitches higher, cracks **louder** with every word. “All that matters is what I did. I killed them. They’re dead because of me.”

I didn't mean to hurt you either. I didn't know I *could* hurt you. I was too young to know any better, more powerful than I thought. You were no different.

Clover shakes her head again, throws droplets off her eyelashes that freeze against my coat. "I still brought them there. They felt my hatred and followed back to the house. That's the only reason it ever happened."

You never let go of that **Hate**. You let it build up inside you for years, poison every thought you had. When it peaked in that cave, all it did was create me. One pony is not enough for three windigos. It wasn't your fault.

"Why are you doing this?" Clover **Black**-whispers. It's not me she's talking to. It's not me she **Hates**. "I've killed dozens of windigos. I've tried to kill *you*. Why are you still here? How can you even stand the sight of me?"

I forgive you.

"You... don't..."

I forgive you, Clover.

"*Don't...*"

She grits her teeth, tightens every muscle in her body, tries to hold herself together like she always has. **It's not enough anymore**. Her wall dissolves, washes out in the tide that's finally risen too high. I approach her slowly, let her feel me coming, take on as much of her as I can bear. It nauseates me, feels like acid flowing through my body, but it's pain she no longer has to feel, weight she no longer has to carry on her own.

Outside, I hear her sobbing. Inside, I watch the rest of her life flash in front of us. Townsponies **pull her away** from the burned-out house. Star Swirl takes her in, teaches her how to **use her magic safely**. Princess Platinum declares her a squire, **takes her along** to find new land for the unicorns to settle. Smart Cookie and Pansy **stand with her** in the cave, lend her their strength, channel her **Friendfyre** through their bodies. I feel her **Anger**, her **Pride**, her **Frustration**, her **Fear**. I drain the **Hate** out of her, let it linger on my tongue before swallowing it down. In retrospect, its taste is not worth its price.

When Clover's mind is empty, something new refills it. Her aura is milky **White**, not quite as bright as Star Swirl's was a week ago but still new, still growing. A monster would leave now, find somepony else to provide them the **Hate** my Master no longer feels. The thought of doing so never crosses my mind. When Clover realizes this, her aura **doubles in size**.

“We’ll have to find *something* else for you, though,” she mouth-says after a few seconds. “If you really plan on sticking around.”

My brow **creases**. I hadn’t really thought about that before. For a moment, both of us are **Orange**.

“Unless...”

Clover is thinking about Alfalfa, remembering what I did to him. Her idea covers him up as it develops in her mind: the two of us traveling all over Equestria, helping **Happy** ponies, bringing **Hateful** ones to justice. She would have an **identity**, some purpose to her life beyond politics and princesses. I would have an **outlet**, a way to nourish myself that wouldn’t hurt anypony innocent. We would be **together**.

I like her idea. I like it a *lot*.

“So what should I call you, then?” she mouth-asks.

I am Demon.

Clover **shakes her head**, mouth-replies fast. “You’re not a demon.”

I shake my head too, duck back inside hers for a moment, send a barrage of my own memories her way. I gaze up **in awe** of her as she **glares** down at me. I **follow** in her footsteps as she **paces** around her room. I **wink** at Star Swirl, seek her out, save her from **herself**.

Clover **smiles**. She understands.

My name is Demon, and Clover is my Master.

“Well, Demon, we better get moving,” she mouth-says. “Star Swirl’s spell has to be almost ready by now. If we miss the teleportation, it’s a three-day walk from here to New—”

A colossal pulse knocks the words from her mouth, sends us both stumbling. A blinding-bright flash paints the sky purple, covers the horizon where Platinum Castle used to stand. When the light fades, the skyline is empty. Clover and I stare at it for a second, at each other next.

“... Platinum,” Clover mouth-**finishes**. “**Horseapples**.”

I’ve never heard Clover use that word before. I search her mind for its meaning, blink at her, flush with **Confusion**. Why would she be talking about *that* right now? Clover doesn’t answer me. Clover just **bites her lip**, bursts out **laughing**.

“Come on, Demon,” she mouth-says between giggles. “No rest for the wicked.”

I don’t understand what’s funny. I don’t understand why laughter makes Clover White. I’ll never understand ponies.

I think I’m starting to like them, though. At the very least, there’s one by my side who likes me.

THE END