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o.o.O.o.o

“Silver? I heard you shout! Is everything okay?” Elusive called.

Sweetie and Silver looked at each other, eyes wide in confusion.

“I-” Sweetie stammered.

“We’re-” Silver sputtered. “I- What are you doing?”

“Me?!” Sweetie replied. “I just arrived! I’m not doing anything!”

There was another knock. Silver looked up and down Sweetie with wide eyes. “Quick! Hide!”

“Where?” Sweetie asked, starting to panic. “There’s nowhere to hide!”

“In the water! Quick!”

“No! I can’t hold my breath that long and-”

“Okay, I’m coming in!” the voice announced and the door knob started to turn.

Silver panicked and grabbed Sweetie, pushing her into the water and closing the curtain.

The door opened and Elusive walked in, eyebrow arched. “I thought I heard something, Silver,” he said, stopping and looking around the bathroom.

Silver smiled, poking his head through the curtains and grinning like an idiot while struggling to

keep Sweetie behind the curtain. "Uh, you did? W-well, yeah... I- I dropped the soap!"

Elusive stared at him incredulously. "You... dropped the soap and screamed like a little filly?"

"Y-yeah! Uh, Scooteroll once told me what happens to pretty-faced stallions in prison when they drop the soap and-"

Elusive started coughing as he shook his head in disbelief. "He what?! How did he hear- no, wait..." He took a deep breath and glared at his younger brother. "Silver..."

The colt smiled innocently. "Yes, Elusive?"

"Why are you keeping the shower curtain so tight around you?"

"Um... because I'm naked and I want to keep a sense of decency?"

Elusive gave him a look. "Silver, we're ponies. We're naked most of the time. And that doesn't explain why the curtain is moving so much."

Silver looked to the side, where the curtain was being pushed outwards by Sweetie's hooves as she tried desperately to get out of the water and the shower. "Uh... because... because of... the... uh, vapors?" he suggested lamely.

With a sigh, Elusive conjured up his magic and the curtain was pushed aside. "Are the other Crusaders in there with you? Now, I've told you before that you three can..." He stared. "Oh, my... Silver, is that a filly in the shower with you?"

Sweetie gasped for air and glared at Silver, using one of her hooves to push away the wet mane from her eyes. "The hay were you thinking?!"

"I don't know!" Silver exclaimed, looking back at her. "What did you expect me to do?"

"Something other than throwing me into the water like that!" Sweetie snapped. "Aw... now my mane is completely soaked!"

"Well, you just appeared in here! What was I supposed to think?! Besides, I don't even know you!" Silver retorted, shaking his head.

Elusive tried to hide a smile. "Well, she *does* look familiar. I wonder..." He took a couple of steps towards them, his magic flaring again to turn off the shower and levitate a pair of towels, which he wrapped around both youngsters.

Silver and Sweetie glared at each other from beneath the towels.

"Yeah... I think I do recognize you from somewhere..." Silver finally said. "Have you been to Ponyville before?"

"I live here!" Sweetie huffed.

"Well, I've never seen you before!"

"Well, I haven't seen you either!"

"Now, now, Sweetie, Silver," Elusive instructed calmly. "Just dry yourselves and we can talk a bit before bed time, okay?"

"Okay, Elusive..." Silver sighed as he started drying himself.

Sweetie, for her part, was staring at Elusive, towel forgotten. "Wait... how did you know my name?"

Elusive's smile grew as his eyes twinkled in excitement. "Oh, I *just* knew it! This is *the* BEST POSSIBLE THING!"

She stared at the grinning stallion in front of her, staring as those familiar words echoed in her brain. No pony else used those words except her sister. And this stallion... white, purple mane, blue eyes... was he actually...

"R... R-Rarity?"

Her eyes rolled back in her skull as everything faded to black.

o.O.o

Sweetie slowly became aware of two voices talking to each other right next to her. She groggily tried to shake her head, but the darkness seemed to cling to her. Eventually, as she became more aware of what was happening, she was able to slowly make out details.

"- but, she can't be me! She's all... soft-looking..." one voice, sounding slightly perturbed, said.

"Well, she's not you *exactly*. She's Rarity's sister, from the dimension where everypony's the opposite gender," another voice said. "Rarity told me about her; you two are really similar!"

"But... she's... a filly..."

Sweetie's eyes fluttered open and she squinted into the light. "Oww... my head..."

"Careful, dear, take it easy," Elusive said soothingly. "You passed out... maybe it was the dimensional jump?"

"That's silly," Sweetie replied. "I've never passed out while jumping dimensions before; furthermore, since I usually end up in another body, my theory is that there is really no exertion, magical or otherwise, on my part for each jump." She rubbed her head as she slowly started taking in her surroundings. "I guess, statistically speaking, I haven't jumped enough times to have a serious point of reference, but..." she trailed off when she noticed that Silver and Elusive were staring blankly at her. "What?"

"Are you sure that she's me in another universe?" Silver asked Elusive, who was staring at Sweetie, slack-jawed. "She sounds like an egg-head."

"Hey!" Sweetie glared at Silver. "You don't have to say it like *that!*"

Elusive closed his mouth with an audible snap and cleared his throat before speaking. "Um, hi, Sweetie Belle. I'm Elusive and this is Silver; you might feel a bit confused at the moment, but that is normal. You see, how can I put this?" He sighed. "This is not your home universe; over here, we are the opposite gender than in your own world."

Sweetie Belle giggled nervously. "I-it's okay... I overheard you two just a bit when I was waking up."

Elusive blinked. "Ah, I guess Rarity must have told you about us then... that's good!" He smiled, but then blinked and yawned, covering his mouth with his hoof. "I'm so sorry, I'm afraid I'm rather tired. But first, have you eaten anything, Sweetie? Are you hungry?"

"I'm okay, I ate just before leaving..." Sweetie frowned. "Although I'm not quite sure how that works if I'm in another body in a different dimension."

"I see," Elusive nodded, eyes drooping. "Well, you can take Silver's bed, he can sleep on the sofa-

"Hey!" Silver interrupted. "Why do I have to give her my bed?"

Elusive could barely keep himself awake, but he still managed to frown at his brother. "Because you're a gentlecolt, that's why." He yawned again. "We'll all go see Dusk tomorrow then maybe we can show Sweetie around before sending her home..."

Upon hearing that, Sweetie's heart beat harder. *Can they really send me home? Do I want to go home? But... what about Twilight?*

With one long, final yawn, Elusive tiredly made his way up the stairs into his room. It wasn't long before they heard him shut the door.

Silver sighed. "Well, follow me..."

The pair started up the stairs in silence. Silver glanced behind him and noticed the far-away look on Sweetie. *The more I look at her the more she looks like me! It's weird! She's... what I would look like as a filly!* he realized, eyebrow twitching.

When they reached his room and went in, he motioned towards the bed. "There it is, enjoy..." he stated simply, his words in a resigned tone. He turned around to leave, but was stopped by Sweetie's voice.

"Hey, Silver?"

"Yeah?" he asked, blinking tiredly as he turned to face her.

"I'm sorry I took your bed..." Sweetie said, jumping onto the bed. "Do you want to just sleep here? I think it's big enough," she offered.

The colt continued to stare a bit more, before he tentatively smiled. "Are... are you sure that'd be okay? I have to admit, I really hate sleeping on the sofa."

Sweetie nodded. "Yeah, I remember... and don't worry, I know I would hate it if somepony suddenly took over *my* bed!"

Silver grinned and jumped up on the bed, lying down. "Yeah, there's enough space!" he yawned and watched lazily as Sweetie's horn flashed with magic and the lights turned off while the door closed. "Sweetie?"

"Yeah?"

"Sorry I called you an egghead," he muttered, already drifting into sleep.

"It's okay," Sweetie answered, snuggling into the pillow. "I actually took it as a compliment."

There was a moment of silence.

"Silver?"

"Yeah?"

"What are the other crusaders like? Is Scootaloo cute?"

"Cute?" Silver blinked. "Are you talking about Scooteroll? I don't know about cute, he doesn't seem to get along with fillies..."

"That doesn't tell me much..."

"Well, what did you expect? I don't think he's cute, but you'll probably meet him tomorrow, and then you can tell me, okay?"

Sweetie nodded, yawning. "Okay... goodnight, Silver."

"Goodnight, Sweetie."

Soon both of them were asleep.

o.O.o

*\*knock-knock\**

*Rarity stared at the porcelain cup containing the already cold tea. A freezing breeze entered through the open window, leaving her shivering, but she chose to stay put, her eyes lost in thought.*

*Opalescence, looking more grayish than white, purred and rubbed herself against Rarity's side to no avail. Eventually, the cat stopped and looked sadly at its master. With a soft meow, she walked away, leaving Rarity on her own.*

*The wind blew again, the curtains flapped around as Rarity shivered once more.*

*"Rarity?" a soft voice called as the creaking sound of the door opening echoed through the silent house. "Are you here? Today's Spa Tuesday and..." Fluttershy stopped at the entrance to the kitchen. "Rarity... you're freezing!" she quickly galloped to the window and shut it tight. She went out of the room to come back with a thick blanket, which she draped over Rarity's shoulders.*

*Rarity's teeth slowed in their chattering, but it continued and her shivering didn't lessen at all. Worried, Fluttershy heated some water and made more tea, which she placed in front of Rarity. "Drink this, it will help."*

*Rarity, however just stared at the cup, until Fluttershy lifted her chin so that she could stare into her eyes. "Rarity! You will drink this tea now!"*

*Taken aback, the unicorn nodded and slowly sipped at the tea.*

*Fluttershy nodded as slowly a bit of rosiness returned to Rarity's cheeks. "What happened? How*

*long have you had that window open?"*

*"Uh?" Rarity shook her head, looking tiredly at Fluttershy. "Oh... I... I don't know dear, since this morning? After we left Applejack's house and Applebloom was bringing the drawings out of their clubhouse..."*

*"Rarity..." Fluttershy whispered in horror. "That... that was yesterday morning! Have you just been sitting here since then?"*

*Rarity slowly dropped down, taking a shaking sip of her tea.*

*"Has the window been open since then?"*

*Rarity nodded.*

*"Rarity... it snowed last night." Fluttershy went to stand next to her friend. "Come on, we need to get you in a warm bath... I'd better get Twi-" she stopped suddenly. "I- I mean... Nurse Redheart."*

*Rarity however, didn't seem to notice; she was barely able to stand.*

*"Wait... wait here..." Fluttershy said, guiding Rarity to the couch and helping her settle in it. "I'll go get help... I'll cook you a meal and... just... I'll be right back..." she galloped out as fast as she could.*

*Rarity didn't say anything at first. She just shivered under the heavy blanket.*

*"Sweetie..." she whispered.*

Silver drowsily opened his eyes, wondering what had woken him up. He looked to the side when he heard a whimper.

Sweetie turned, her face contorted in a frown as she whimpered again and curled up.

Silver slowly placed his hoof on her shoulder and sighed in relief when she relaxed and smiled, going back to peaceful sleep.

Too tired to do much else, he yawned and lay down, closing his eyes.

o.O.o

Early the next morning, Elusive cheerfully knocked on Silver's door. "Silver! Wake up!"

He heard a groan from inside. "Five more minutes!"

Rolling his eyes and shaking his head in amusement, Elusive chuckled. "Fine, but be sure to make it only five; your friends will be here shortly!" He then turned around and took a couple of steps down the hall before stopping completely, a realization coming to mind as a frown crossed his face. *Wait... that didn't sound like Silver...*

He walked back up to the room and inside. He blinked as the memory of last night returned to him and the pieces fit together. "Oh, that's right... Sweetie is here." It didn't take long for him to notice a second ivory foal, passed out right next to her. Chuckling to himself, he left the room as he spoke. "Five minutes, you two! Remember that!"

The groans and mutters were answer enough for him as he went down to prepare breakfast.

It was barely a few minutes later when the stallion heard confused shouts coming from the room. *They must have forgotten that they were sleeping together*, he thought to himself, stifling a laugh.

Elusive levitated the last of the waffles and placed them upon a plate, levitating the whole pile towards the table while counting in his head. Right on cue, Sweetie and Silver ran down the stairs together, each of them sporting a similar expression of hunger. It was just... strange at times to think how similar and yet different things were between different worlds.

"Wow, waffles!" Silver salivated. "I love these! We should have them more often!"

"Waffles?" Sweetie asked, looking down at her plate. "I've never had waffles before."

"What?" Silver's eyes went wide. "You've never had waffles?! What do you have for breakfast then?"

"Pancakes?" Sweetie replied hesitantly as she levitated a fork and knife. "Spike even taught me Princess Celestia's favorite pancake recipe!"

Elusive chuckled. "Well, Spines is rumored to know Prince Solaris' favorite waffle recipe."

"But... never eaten a waffle?" Silver insisted. "That's just... wrong..."

Sweetie poured some syrup and took a bite of the waffle. She chewed on it for a few seconds, before her eyes lit in approval. "Hm, not bad..."

"I see that you are very proficient with your magic, dear," Elusive commented after a moment of watching. "Did Rarity teach you?"

Sweetie blinked, noticing for the first time that Silver was eating without the use of magic, while both her horn and Elusive's were shining as they used theirs to eat. "Oh... well, not exactly. Rarity asked Twilight to teach me, and that's how I learned!"

Elusive gave Silver a considering glance. "Hm... that doesn't sound like a bad idea; Dusk could probably spare some time to at least teach Silver some basic magic."

Silver gave them a horrified look. "More studying? Yuck! I'd much rather find my cutie mark!"

Sweetie looked down to her own blank flank. "Yeah, I hear you there."

Elusive smiled. "Well, I'm sure you two can try to find it later. First, I think we should talk to Dusk about when you can go home, Sweetie."

*I can go home!* Sweetie thought excitedly, a wide smile crossing her face. *I can finally see sis and my Scootaloo and Apple Bloom... I'll be able to study with Twilight and...* She stopped her thoughts as her smile disappeared. *But... Twilight and Spike will still be gone... or at least I think so... what am I going to do? Don't I need to rescue them before going home?*

Elusive noticed her frown. "Are you okay, Sweetie?"

"Uh, yeah... I- I'm okay," she stammered. "I was just thinking... do you think this 'Dusk' pony will be able to help me?"

Elusive raised an eyebrow. "Didn't Rarity tell you? Dusk is Twilight's counterpart."

"Oh..." Sweetie smiled sheepishly. "My... Rarity never said anything about counterparts..."

A pained expression briefly flitted across Elusive's face. "Oh..."

Sweetie blinked. "Was... was she supposed to? She went away recently, so..."

"N-no, it's okay," Elusive said, pushing away a strand of his mane. "I, I understand if- if she didn't feel like telling you... we didn't want to part ways so quickly and I-"

"Ooh Ooh! I just remembered something!" Silver exclaimed suddenly, jumping to his hooves. "I have to get ready, I'll be right back!"

Sweetie looked angrily at Silver as her counterpart disappeared upstairs. "He wasn't even paying attention!"

Elusive blinked and stood up as well, smiling a little. "He's sometimes like that... I have to get ready as well; I'll be back soon."

Sweetie sighed as she was left alone. Her horn shimmered as the dirty plates levitated one-by-one into the sink. She looked around the room. The decorations between her Carousel Boutique and this one were very similar. The color scheme, the positioning of things all similar... and yet... it had a masculine touch to it, although she couldn't put her hoof on exactly how. Were the curtains a bit darker? Was the furniture just a bit less rounded, and with slightly sharper edges? What was it?

Maybe the glasses? The plates... the table seemed a bit sturdier than the one she had back home. Could that be it?

The doorbell rang. Her musing interrupted, she leapt from the table and trotted into the main room, running on autopilot as she opened the door.

"Yes? Who is it?"

"Heya Silver!" came a pair of voices from the two colts seated in front of her.

She froze in place, eyes taking in the ponies standing right before her. A yellow earth pony, and an orange pegasus. Not usually an unfamiliar sight, if it weren't for the fact that there was something else clashing against her mind's eye... the fact that the yellow one was wearing a faded baseball cap and not a bow, and the obvious cue that these two were not simply Applebloom and Scootaloo... they were Applebloom and Scootaloo *as colts*.

"Hey, Silver!" Scooteroll said with a bright smile. "Ready to go crusading?"

"Oh, um, hey, Scoot... eroll," Sweetie said hesitantly.

Applebuck frowned as he looked at her. "Heeeeey... Silver, did Elusive do something to your hair again? You look a bit different."

Sweetie blinked, caught off-guard. "I do?"

Scooteroll looked at her closely. "Hey, yeah! You look... no offense Silver, but you look even more like a filly than usual."

Sweetie straightened up a bit. "Is that a problem?"

"Hey," Scooteroll backed up a bit. "I said 'no offense', right? Calm down, it's not like I'm actually calling you a filly or anything!"

"But... what's wrong with being a filly?" Sweetie asked, irritated. *I can tell that they're colts... can't they tell I really AM a filly?*

"Well... nothing," Applebuck admitted after a second. "Ah mean, my big sis is real strong and all and Ah guess she's cool... but, you know, fillies are... icky."

A delicate eyebrow went up. "Icky?" Sweetie repeated.

"What's gotten into you, Silver?" Scooteroll rolled his eyes in annoyance. "This isn't the time to talk about *fillies*. We should be getting our *cutie marks*!"

Sweetie glared at him with such intensity that he took a step back. "Talking about fillies is *not* a bad thing!" She slammed the door shut and stomped into the kitchen, brushing past a confused Silver.

"Is something wrong?" he asked.

She sniffed dismissively, "Colts," and went upstairs, presumably to get ready herself.

Silver blinked in confusion when he heard the doorbell. He trotted up to the door and opened it.

"Hey guys!"

Scooteroll and Applebuck both glared at him.

"What'd you do that for?!" Scooteroll asked, pushing Silver a bit with his hoof.

Silver brushed it away with a frown. "Do what?"

"Act like a prissy, little filly!" Scooteroll retorted, getting his face really close to Silver's, who glared back just as intensely.

"I'm not acting like a filly!" Silver shot back.

"Are too!"

"Am not!"

"Are too!"

Slowly, Applebuck's frown started to fade as a look of dawning comprehension seeped in, eyes widening in horror as he looked past Silver, seeing Elusive walking towards them in the company of... another Silver? No... his fears were confirmed as he glanced from one to the other and he remembered cousin 'Jay Jay'.

"You're whining like a filly! Stop it already!" Scooteroll snapped. He rolled his eyes and, raising his right hoof flaccidly, said, "Oh, fillies are the best, look at me! I am Silver and I look so much like a filly I act like one too!"

"Hey! I've never done anything like that!" Silver said angrily.

"Ah think maybe we should all calm down..." Applebuck ventured, trailing off as Scooteroll ignored him.

"Oh, I'm so delicate!" Scooteroll pranced from side to side in front of Silver, who was now fuming. "I like sweet things, the color pink, and to talk about jewelry! I am scared of spiders and am completely useless!"

When Applebuck saw Sweetie's expression, he took a couple of steps away from the prancing pegasus, making sure he was not in the way of whatever was going to happen.

"Listen, Silver," Scooteroll began, affecting his best Rainbow Blitz impression as he looked down at his unicorn friend. "You have to really stallion-up, y'know? Stuff like what just happened? So not cool."

Silver looked up at Scooteroll, eyebrows raised in surprise. The blue-white aura around the young pegasus seemed familiar to him, although he couldn't place it. "Scooteroll... you're-

"Fillies are *not* cool, okay? Just drop the whole being offended thing when we talk about them, and we can go on with our lives."

"Scooteroll! You're flying!" Silver finally shouted.

"I am?! I am!" Scooteroll tried flapping his wings. "Wait! Why am I not moving? Hey... I'm still flying without flapping? How does that work?"

Suddenly, he was pulled roughly into the Carousel Boutique and found himself upside down and staring into the angry eyes of Silver Belle. *Wait a second...* "You're not Silver!"

"No," Sweetie Belle growled. "I'm a filly! And I am going to show you *exactly* how useless I am!"

"Uh-oh..." Applebuck whispered, quickly stepping up. "Uh, miss... uh... Silver?"

"Sweetie," the filly corrected, without taking her eyes off the terrified Scooteroll.

"Uh, Miss Sweetie, Scooteroll was only being... um..."

"Himself?" Sweetie offered, stealing a glance at Apple Buck before returning her glare to

Scooteroll. "Well, let's see how afraid *he* is of spiders..."

Her horn flashed and a nearby rock turned into a horribly furry, black tarantula with red eyes and really big fangs that dripped venom as it looked hungrily at the hovering pegasus. It slowly moved towards Scooteroll, who started struggling violently to get away.

"H-hey! Wait! Let's talk about this! Come on!"

It was about then that the commotion at the door caught Elusive's attention. He stared in surprise at Sweetie as the filly held Scooteroll upside down against his will, and at the same time managing to cast two more spells. When he saw the real fear in Scooteroll's eyes, he knew he had to step in.

"Sweetie, that's quite enough," he said gently, putting his hoof between them.

Sweetie frowned. "No, he said only fillies would be scared of spiders. Let's see how he likes it when one bites him!"

"Sweetie Belle!" Elusive's voice was harsh. "I said that's enough. Look at him! That's enough!"

Sweetie blinked, glare softening as she looked at the terrified pegasus. Immediately she dispelled the illusion that had transfigured the rock into a spider. She carefully deposited the pegasus on the floor, where he scrambled away from the rock.

Elusive shook his head at Sweetie, who simply looked away, cheeks burning in shame, and turned to Scooteroll. "Are you okay, Scooteroll?"

The young pegasus took a couple of deep breaths before standing up, still a bit shaky.  
"Y-yeah..."

There was an awkward silence for all ponies present. Applebuck and Silver exchanged nervous glances while the elder stallion turned from Scooteroll towards his 'sister'. "Sweetie... I realize that since you're new here, something like this was bound to happen. Nonetheless, without your sister here to do so, I feel it's my place to say... don't you have something to say to the poor pony here?"

Sweetie sighed. "I'm sorry, Scooteroll. I shouldn't have done that..."

Scooteroll looked a bit embarrassed. "It's- It's okay. I wasn't *really* afraid..." he cringed when Elusive raised an eyebrow. "But... I guess I shouldn't have said bad things about fillies either. I didn't even KNOW you were... gosh, you look just like Silver."

"That's cause she IS Silver, ain't she Mister 'Lusive?" the Applebuck piped up, looking up at the

suitmaker. "This is just like that thing a while ago wit' Cousin JayJay, isn't it?"

Elusive smiled and nodded in confirmation.

Sweetie smiled. "Well... I'll forgive you, if you forgive me?"

Scooteroll nervously grinned back and bumped a shaking hoof with her. "Deal."

Silver snapped his mouth shut. "How did you do all that?! I thought we were basically the same! I can't even levitate a feather yet!"

Sweetie gave him a level look. "Study, study, study..."

The three colts recoiled as if a cow had licked their faces. "Ugh..." Silver shook his head. "Maybe I don't want to know..."

"Maybe I *should* talk to Dusk," Elusive said, a hint of a smile playing on his mouth. "I'm sure he'd be happy to take you on as an apprentice, and, if you can advance this much, well..."

Silver quickly shook his head. "Never mind!"

Elusive chuckled. "We still have to go, or at least Sweetie and I do. Would you three like to come as well?"

Applebuck looked at the others and then back to Elusive. "Do we have to study if we go?"

"No," Elusive assured as he took the lead. "Knowing Dusk, he'll be busy planning something for tonight. But we do have to talk about Sweetie now... if I remember correctly, the dimension-hopping spell took some work, so you three can take Sweetie with you while you go crusading."

"But Sweetie's a-" Scooteroll found his mouth covered by a hoof.

"A- a good choice to bring along! Yes!" Applebuck said with an exaggerated smile.

Sweetie giggled and rolled her eyes. "Colts."

o.O.o

"Why did you need 'Memoirs of a 12th Generation Seamstress' again, Dusk?" Spines asked.

Dusk rolled his eyes. "I've told you before, this has to be *exact*ly like the original! When other ponies recognize me, I don't want them to say 'Oh, it's missing the hat!' or 'Hey, Dusk, they

didn't have Nylon six hundred years ago!"

Spines blinked. "What *is* Nylon?"

"I don't know!" Dusk snapped. "I just know they didn't have it six hundred years ago, okay?!"

Spines cringed. "Touchy!" She left the book next to Dusk and was about to walk into the kitchen when she heard a knock at the door. A glance told her that Dusk was not going to even *attempt* to open it so, with a sigh, she walked up to it and opened it. "I'm sorry, but this is *not* the best time to go in there and- and-" Little hearts appeared in her eyes. "Aaaaaannnd Elusive! How nice of you to stop by! Please, come in, come in!"

"Good morning, Spines!" Elusive greeted with a wink that seemed to melt the dragoness where she stood. "Where is Dusk this fine morning?"

"He's working on his project and-" She looked at the Crusaders and the filly. "And..." She frowned. "Does that filly look a lot like Silver? Or is it just me?" She gasped, looking at the suit maker in horror. "Elusive! You have a daughter?!"

The sound of a chair scraping on wooden floor followed by a scream of pain and a thud that echoed in the library as Dusk tried to jump out of the chair at the same time he pushed it back at the same time he levitated the newest book he was reading at the same time he inadvertently set three more down on top of his tail.

The group watched with morbid fascination as the studious unicorn collapsed in a heap of books, furniture and pony.

"Oh, my!" Elusive gasped, quickly using his magic to levitate the books and chair off his friend. "Are you okay, Dusk?"

The Crusaders had rushed to watch closely, and Sweetie couldn't help but also stand to the side and watch as Dusk slowly stood and shook his head.

Her breath caught in her throat. His purple mane shook ever so slightly as he turned those wonderfully violet eyes in her direction.

Sweetie smiled shyly. Intellectually, she knew that this stallion was essentially her mentor, Twilight Sparkle. At the same time... she could feel her little heart pounding away like it never had before. She could see how intelligent this stallion was. *He has to be! He lives in a library!* She felt herself blush ever so slightly as he raised an eyebrow at her and smiled. *Such a nice smile... I could look at it forever... and he's talking to me! What should I say? What should I answer? Wait... what did he ask?*

"I- I'm sorry, what was that?" Sweetie stammered.

"I asked what your name was," Dusk repeated himself calmly. "You do resemble Silver a lot and..." His eyes widened. "Wait... are you from another dimension?"

"Wow..." Sweetie gushed. "Dusk... you're so smart! It usually takes me an hour or two of explaining!" She batted her eyes at him. "Please... say more..."

"Uh... right," Dusk said uncomfortably as Elusive and Spines watched in amusement. "Elusive, how is this possible?"

Elusive smiled. "Well, Dusk my friend, this is why we're here. Surely you of all ponies should have an idea as to why Sweetie Belle here would suddenly appear in my home."

Dusk sighed. "If I know Twilight, she probably tried studying something about interdimensional travel again and-"

"Wow..." Sweetie interrupted, almost hovering in place as her smile grew and her eyelids lowered invitingly. "Dusk... you know *so much*... just one glance and you knew *everything* about me... I'd like to study with you for a little while and learn *more*..."

Dusk took a nervous step back. "Um... aha... lu-look at the time! I... ah... I- I have to..." He turned to Elusive. "Um... help?"

Elusive couldn't help but laugh at his friend's obvious panic. "I'm sorry, Dusk. I shouldn't laugh but..." He covered his mouth for a moment. "This... this is just precious!"

Silver stared at Sweetie, completely horrified.

Applebuck chuckled and elbowed him. "Heh... Ah didn't know you liked the stu- stooody... the smart types!"

"Studios?" Silver asked.

"What are you? A dictionary?" Scooteroll asked, raising an eyebrow.

"What's your problem?" Silver glared at Scooteroll.

"No, what's *your* problem?" Scooteroll retorted, getting in Silver's face.

"Boys," Dusk started, "I don't think this is-"

"Don't mind them..." Sweetie said, smiling at him. "They're just colts... why don't we talk about

something more interesting? Like... Time Diffusion theory? Or maybe Spell Matrices? I have some experience with those..."

Despite himself, Dusk looked interested. "Really? I haven't had much time to study the more complicated Matrices, just second tier and those are-"

"Dull and simple," Sweetie completed for him. "I know, I happen to have an item with me that has no less than forty-two nodes for the Matrix to work with... thirty of which were added *later*, without destroying the functional sequence..."

Dusk gasped. "That's- that's possible?! But everything I've read indicates that you can only double the amount of nodes at the most... any more would completely overwhelm the spell matrix!"

The three Crusaders had stopped fighting and, along with Spines and Elusive, had were openly gawking at Dusk and Sweetie.

"But you're not looking at it the right way; that's only if you try to simply add more functions rather than redirect the spell fluctuation from say N1 to N7, therefore bypassing-" Sweetie explained.

"A-anyway..." Elusive interrupted. "We were hoping that you could help Sweetie return home? I know you're busy tonight, but I'm sure Rarity is worried and-"

Both Sweetie and Dusk glared at him in annoyance at having their discussion disrupted. But then Dusk sighed. "I am pretty busy with preparations for tonight..." He glanced at his research.

"Hey! Maybe I can help!" Sweetie grinned hopefully.

"Uh, no thank you," Dusk said, smiling sheepishly. "This is a personal project and I want it to be a surprise for everypony."

"Oh..." Sweetie looked a bit dejected.

"But don't worry. I know the spell pretty well by now and we can cast it tomorrow!" Dusk assured with a smile. "And tonight, if you're up for it, we can talk magical theory."

Sweetie smiled. "I would like that."

"That reminds me..." Elusive looked at Sweetie as he walked around her, eyeing her critically. "Yes, yes... that will definitely... I haven't tried my hoof at one of those yet, but I think..."

"What is it?" Silver asked.

"I'm just thinking of what I can make for Sweetie to wear tonight, brother..." Elusive smiled. "I-dee-aaa~! I'll get to work on it right away, since she'll be spending the night. We wouldn't want her to miss any of the festivities!"

Scooteroll looked at Applebuck and leaned in close to whisper, "I think we should all get out of here before Sweetie and Dusk smother us with theory."

Applebuck nodded. "Well, we were going to go try the manticore thing... and Sweetie also needs her Cutie Mark... and she's a Crusader... Plus she knows magic, maybe if she helps..."

A spark came to Scooteroll's eyes. "Exactly. Let's scam!"

"Well!" Applebuck interrupted Elusive as he was about to explain what exactly he was planning on making. "Ah think we should give Sweetie Belle a tour and maybe see if we can earn our... uh... d-daisy plantin' Cutie Marks."

"Daisy plan-" Silver found Scooteroll's hoof covering his muzzle.

"Yeah! Cutie Mark Crusaders Daisy Planters! Wooo!" Scooteroll waved his free hoof in the air.

"Right!" Applebuck nodded. "And Sweetie should come with us, because she also is a Crusader and she probably would like to earn hers as well, right?"

Elusive and Dusk chuckled. "Well then, Sweetie, why don't you go with Silver, Scooteroll and Applebuck? I'm sure you'll have a good time!"

Sweetie looked at Dusk, then at the books. "But... but the books-"

"Will still be here tomorrow," Elusive assured the student, herding the filly and the three colts out. "Don't worry, you'll have time to study with Dusk later on."

"I'll see you all later tonight!" Dusk called after them.

"See you later!" Sweetie yelled back as the door closed behind them.

They all stood outside the library for a moment before Elusive smiled. "Okay, I have work to do. You four enjoy yourselves and don't get into trouble!"

"We won't..." Silver groaned. "Not if we're planting daisies."

Elusive chuckled and walked away, leaving the four alone.

"That was very well done, Silver!" Scooteroll said.

"Yeah. Ah almost believed you!" Applebuck added, playfully punching Silver on the shoulder.

Silver blinked. "Wait, what?"

Scooteroll facehoofed. "You... you didn't think we were *really* going to plant daisies, did you?"

Silver blinked again as he thought about it. Then his eyes lit up as a smile played on his lips. "Ooooh, I get it!"

Sweetie shook her head ashamedly. "Was I really like that?"

Applebuck gave her a straight, deadpan look that would have made Applejack proud. "Most likely? Yes."

o.O.o

"So, what *are* we really doing then?" Sweetie asked as she walked behind the three crusaders, stopping from time to time to stare at familiar ponies that were, well... male instead of female.

"Well, Ah figured that, since you can use magic, we can change our plans and do something more interestin'!"

"Like what, exactly?" Sweetie pressed, raising an eyebrow.

"Cutie Mark Crusaders Manticore Catchers! Yay!" the three colts bellowed at the same time.

"Manticore Catchers?" Sweetie blinked.

The three colts stopped and looked at her.

"You don't think it's a good idea?" Silver asked.

"Well, she's been acting more like Dusk so-" Scooteroll started to say.

"That's awesome!" Sweetie gushed. "We wanted to do it last time, but Applejack caught us on the way to the forest and-"

"Wait..." Applebuck said. "Where 'xactly did cousin Jay Jay see you?"

"Right as we crossed the bridge," Sweetie began. "She heard us talking about-"

"Growing daisies," Scooteroll interrupted.

"What?" Sweetie and Silver blinked.

"Y-yeah," Applebuck added. "We can gain our... uh, farmer... or florist Cutie Marks that way..."

Silver frowned. "But why would we want--"

"Ah'm glad ta hear *some* common sense comin' out of your mouths!" A male voice broke in.

Sweetie looked up to stare at the speaker. And up. And up.

He looked... well, like Applejack, as she had suspected, only... bigger and stronger... and he had a yoke around his neck. *Just like Big Macintosh*, she realized. *Except... not quite as big? He's really close though!*

Applejack raised an eyebrow as the filly stared at him. "Now, Ah know Ah haven't met you before, but Ah don't think starin' like that's polite."

Sweetie started and lowered her head, smiling sheepishly. "I'm sorry! You just reminded me so much of Applejack and--"

"Applejack?" Applejack asked. His eyes narrowed slightly, taking in the small unicorn filly... and the unicorn colt seated right next to her. "Hey, now that Ah think about it... you actually look a lot like Silver here."

"That's cause she's Rarity's sister!" Applebuck explained happily. "She's somehow gone and ended up over here!"

Applejack's eyebrows shot up. "Well, Ah'll be. Did Twilight cast that spell again? Ah swear, she an' Dusk have no common sense sometimes."

"Um, well, no..." Sweetie chuckled slightly. "It wasn't Twilight's fault... but Dusk thinks he can send me home tomorrow. I'm staying with Elusive and Silver in the meantime."

Applejack sighed and glared at his brother. "Applebuck, you best keep an eye on her, and you too, Scooteroll and Silver. You know how we feel about those mares and how we ought to be doin' right by 'em." When the three colts nodded, he smiled. "Well, if Dusk knows and Elusive is putting you up for the night, Ah guess that's okay. So, Ah heard you four were goin' to be planting some daisies to earn your cutie marks?"

"Yes... that's the plan," Scooteroll said, smiling so honestly it was hard to believe him.

Applejack raised an eyebrow. "Well... that's a mite less... uh, drastic than your last few tries." He coughed. "An'... well... Ah hope you find your callin's... even if it *is* plantin' daisies."

"Where are you going, Applejack?" Scooteroll asked as the apple farmer started walking past them.

"Ah'm goin' to meet with the Mayor. He's havin' some trouble with supplies for tonight, or so Ah hear." He chuckled. "Ah'm sure there won't be any problems, but the ol' man needs to be told so. You four enjoy yourselves, y'hear?"

"Will do!" Silver saluted.

The group watched in silence as Applejack trotted away into the distance. As he departed, he could be heard muttering "If it ain't one thing, it's another. Next thing ah know, it'll be Applebuck's 'cousin' showin' up..."

"Wow, that was close," Applebuck sighed. "It's a good thing ya'll told us what happened in your world, Sweetie!"

"Oh, so that's what it was all about!" Silver said.

"Well, duh~" Scooteroll rolled his eyes. "At least now we can get our real Cutie Marks!"

"Instead of fake ones?" Sweetie quipped.

Scooteroll glared at her. "You know what I mean. Who would want a Cutie Mark that meant your destiny was planting *daisies*?"

All four shuddered.

"I see your point," Sweetie agreed.

Applebuck nodded. "That would be pathetic. Ah mean, of all the cool things you can have as a Cutie Mark, daisies is, well..."

"Sad? Deplorable? Heartbreaking? Inadequate? Lamentable? Pitiable? Worthless?" Silver offered.

"Wow, I *do* sound like a dictionary..." Sweetie mumbled.

"Ahem!"

The four looked up. A stallion with a magenta coat, green mane and two daisies on his Cutie

Mark turned to glare at the group before sniffing dismissively and walking away, offended.

“Should we... apologize?” Sweetie asked.

“Nah, he *must* be used to the abuse by now,” Scooteroll said. “Let’s get going.”

o.O.o

The sun was slowly falling towards the horizon by the time Silver and Sweetie strolled back into the Carousel Boutique.

“And how was your day?” Elusive asked.

“It was great!” Silver replied.

“Oh?” Elusive looked at them with interest, making both cringe a bit and shuffle self-consciously. “Did you do anything special?”

“Um... we showed Sweetie around and took her to the club house...”

“Oh, yes, it was very interesting! It’s almost identical to the Ponyville I come from!” Sweetie added. “Although I wonder... is Sugarcube Corner the same?”

“Well, you could go check...” Silver offered after a moment. “I, uh, have some stuff to do for tonight...” He scratched at the floor with his hoof, looking down. “And, uh, you know the way, right?”

Sweetie nodded. “Sure! Okay, I’ll get going; should I bring anything back for you guys?”

“I think we’re fine, dear,” Elusive said, glancing at Silver. “Be sure to say hi to Berry Bubble for me!”

She faltered in her steps for a second, brain working to make the connection, before turning back. “Okay!” Sweetie smiled to the two, as she walked out of the door.

As soon as she was out of the door, Elusive turned to look at Silver inquisitively. “I can tell when you are trying to avoid somepony, Silver. What are you up to?”

Silver cringed. “Well... I- I have something... for Sweetie...”

Elusive’s eyebrow arched. “Really...?”

o.O.o

Sweetie hummed to herself as she trotted down Ponyville towards Sugarcube Corner. *This is so weird*, she thought as she passed a male version of Carrot Top. *Everypony is different, and yet... the same! I never really thought how different my life would have been if I had been a colt... but I never would have guessed that I would be basically the same...* She sighed. *If I hadn't been sent through different worlds... Silver is nice but he seems...* She grimaced... *foalish... now I feel old...*

She suddenly hit something soft. Or rather, somepony. With a mutual cry of surprise, both fell back.

"Hey, watch where you're going!" a female voice said.

"Sorry!" Sweetie shook her head as she stood up, extending a hoof to help the other filly up. "I was just distracted!"

"I guess it's fine..." the filly said, gratefully accepting Sweetie's hoof.

The filly she helped up had a grayish-blue coat and a burnt-orange mane. She was a bit on the heavier side and she reminded her of...

Her face took on a look of unabashed shock as she blurted out "Snips?!"

"Sugar... my name is Sugar," the filly replied, giving Sweetie an odd look. "Do I remind you of somepony else?"

Sweetie nodded. "U-uhm, yeah. Somepony from... way back. Sorry about that."

"Sugar, there you are!" another female voice called. They both looked up to see a taller, skinnier filly trotting happily up to them. "So, are we getting some muffins or cupcakes today?" She had a turquoise mane and a yellowish coat.

"Spice!" Sugar smiled. "Yes, I hear that Berry Bubble has a new recipe! Can't wait to see what he baked this time!" She looked at Sweetie. "Would you like to come with?"

"Um, sure. I was going there anyway." Sweetie nodded, still a little baffled by what she was seeing. She shook her head, clearing the shock out of her system before facing them again. "My name is Sweetie Belle, nice to meet you!"

"Nice to meet you, Sweetie Belle!" Sugar and Spice chorused as they started walking towards Sugarcube Corner.

"So, I haven't seen you around here before," Sugar said after a moment. "Did you just move?"

"Hm... I don't know..." Spice muttered, looking closely at Sweetie. "She *does* reminds me of somepony... that mane... that coat..."

*I knew this would happen sooner or later.* she thought to herself, sweating slightly under their curious gazes. *Everypony I've met so far knew about this genderswap business, but these two... What was it that Applebuck said? He said that Applejack was his... 'cousin', right?*

"I, um... I'm Silver's cousin!" Sweetie interjected, smiling weakly. "I came to visit for a couple of days."

It wasn't the most creative cover, but it was enough to sate the fillies' curiosity, their heads nodding in understanding. "Oooh, and you came in time for Nightmare Night!" Sugar bounced excitedly. "It's the most amazing night, like, ever!"

Sweetie grinned. "Yes, I love Nightmare Night!"

Spice nodded knowingly. "And we have the best pranksters! Between Rainbow Blitz and Berry Bubble, there's going to be a lot of fun scares!"

"I can imagine," Sweetie giggled. "Silver and the others are all really excited about tonight!"

The two fillies exchanged glances, then looked at Sweetie. "You mean the Crusaders?"

Sweetie nodded. "Yeah, Silver, Scooteroll and Applebuck."

"So... are you *interested* in any of them?" Sugar asked, eyes glinting.

Sweetie blinked and then blushed furiously. "What? No! I can't date other crusaders!"

That stopped the other two. "Wait, *you're* a crusader? I thought it was an only-colts club," Spice said.

"We-well..." Sweetie stammered. "It's really up to them, but I think it really has to do with finding your Cutie Mark... why would you crusade for it if you already have it?"

Both fillies nodded. "That makes sense," Sugar ceded. "Most of the other colts and fillies already have theirs."

"Well, Estella doesn't," Spice pointed out. "Maybe she could join the Crusaders."

"But... why would you want to hang around a group of colts? No offense, Sweetie, but well, colts are... colts, you know? Rough and tumble, don't play nice? Like, nasty stuff like snails?"

Sweetie chuckled. "Well, crusading is fun, but it might not be for everypony."

The three shared a laugh as they finally reached Sugarcube Corner. Before any of them could enter however, the upper part of the door opened in a confetti-coated blast, revealing a pink stallion with puffy hair, blue eyes and a really bright smile looked out at the laughing fillies.

"Heya everypony! Guess what?! My newest recipe, the Banana-PB-Blueberry muffin is complete! Would you fillies like a sample!?"

Sweetie's eyes flashed, the memorable taste of those muffins almost tangible upon her tongue. "Oh, I love those!" she gushed, bouncing in place. "Can I have two?"

Berry Bubble looked at her, uncomprehending at first. "But, how would you know how they taste like..."

The pink stallion trailed off, her eyes slowly becoming wider, his pupils shrinking as he proceeded to speak in a very quiet voice. "You're a new pony in Ponyville."

"She's Silver Belle's cousin!" Sugar piped up, face in a smile. "She's visiting for Nightmare Night tonight!"

The white filly froze in place, realizing that if Berry DID know who she was... was he going to blurt it out in front of these two fillies who had no idea? "W-well..." she began. "Y'see, I- I..."

"And since you're a new pony in ponyville..." he continued, eyes still riveted on her, the two unicorns on either side of her giving each other confused glances. "Do you know what this calls for?"

She trembled a little, briefly forgetting what it was that Pinkie usually did on such an occasion. "A... a-a... a p-pa-"

"Aaaaa PARTY~!!" he finished exuberantly, leaping into the air, his earlier quiet and suspicious mood now nowhere to be seen. "Oh, this is just PERFECT, and right in time for Nightmare Night too! Nice to meet you, Silver Bell's cousin Sweetie Belle! Oh, I can't wait to get everything together now; I had already been planning this super-spectacular punch bowl, but since you're visiting it's going to have to be at least SIX times as super-spectacular! Oh, oh, and I can't forget the pumpkin pies and pumpkin muffins and the pumpkin pops, and pin-the-tail-on-the-pumpkin! Wait, do pumpkins have tails?"

The rambling took her off-guard for a second, before she let out a sigh of relief. *I guess he really doesn't know after all. That's good. I wouldn't want to scare off these two new... friends, that I've made.* She chanced a glance back towards the two, who were simply regarding the pink pony with looks of confusion.

Shaking her head, she turned back to the colt, and spoke again. "W-well, I think I'd be crazy to turn down a... Berry Bubble party, right?"

The named colt let out a giggle, a odd sound coming from a stallion like him. "You bet your lucky horseshoes! It's going to be the biggest and best Nightmare Night party yet!"

"U-uhm," Attention was turned towards Spice, who had her nose in the air, desperately catching the wafting scents coming from the bakery door. "If we're done saying hi, uhm, can we try those Banana-Fojamma-whatchamacallit muffins now?"

"Well, sure thing, girls! Come on in!" Berry Bubble stepped back and opened the door, letting the three fillies into the store.

While Berry Bubble went to get the aforementioned pastries, they sat down on a table. "So, Sweetie Belle, what are your plans for tonight?" Sugar asked. "Spice, me and Estella are going as a group to get candy. You're welcome to join us!"

"Well, I promised the other Crusaders to meet with them later on, but..." Sweetie looked at them. The two fillies were giving her imploring looks, and even though she could still see Snips and Snails sitting there...

*I wonder what it's like, hanging out with other ponies? I haven't had much of a chance since we started the Crusaders. Before I finally became friends with Twilight, it seemed like my only friends were Scootaloo and Applebloom... it couldn't hurt to befriend some new fillies.*

Sweetie smiled. "You know... I think we can hang out for a while..."

The two fillies grinned happily. "Okay, so, uhm... how about we ask questions to get to know each other better?" Spice suggested.

"Sure!" Sweetie said, looking at the pair. "Who wants to start?"

"Oh, me! Me!" Berry Bubble exclaimed, jumping up and down right next to Sweetie.

Sweetie Belle shot out of her seat with a yelp and landed on the floor with an 'oof'. She glared at Berry Bubble. "Why won't you all stop doing that?!"

The pink pony smiled slowly. "Because it's fun! My turn! Is it true that you have a crush on Dusk?!"

Sweetie's eyes went wide as Sugar and Spice started giggling.

"Well?" Sugar asked.

"Why did I agree to this?" Sweetie sighed as she slumped back into her seat.

The minutes whiled away, as the fillies and the stallion played, laughter was heard resounding through Sugarcube corner. A peaceful, normal afternoon like any other in Ponyville. At least, up until the point when Berry asked:

"Did you bring Pinkie Pie with you?"

o.O.o

"I'm back!" Sweetie called, walking into the Carousel Boutique with a slightly disgruntled look. "And I'm never going to go back to the Sugarcube Corner without a back-up plan on how to get out!"

Elusive peeked out of the work room. "Sweetie! Good, come over here, I have something for you!"

Blinking confusedly, Sweetie walked into Elusive's work room and stopped in surprise. Next to a grinning Elusive, displayed on a small ponyquin, was something she had not been expecting, in this or any of the other worlds she had visited previously. A small dress.

It was mostly white with some soft pink inlays. It wasn't too frilly, but the gown was decorated with little gems and pearls. The saddle was designed to hug her figure, and had been integrated into the dress itself. It had two small fake pegasi wings attached to it, each feather treated with a hint of glitter so that they would shimmer if looked at from the right angle.

Sweetie walked around the dress, taking note of the golden thread that highlighted the careful folds and frills. The front of the dress had a clasp with a deep-purple gem encased in a gold frame. It stood alone, drawing attention to itself, but also, somehow, complementing a tiara studded with gems of purple, pink and white which rested on the top of the filly-sized ponyquin's head.

"This... it's..." Sweetie was at a loss for words. She slowly tore her eyes away from the gem and looked at the whole dress. "It's beautiful!"

"Thank you!" Elusive grinned, eagerly levitating the finished product. "Let's try it on and make sure it fits you just right!"

Sweetie closed her eyes and let Elusive slide the dress on her. As she would have expected from her sister, Elusive's calculations were spot-on. It felt very comfortable, and was completely lightweight. Looking at herself in the mirror, Sweetie almost couldn't tell if the wings were real or

not.

“Elusive, this is amazing... I’ve never had anything like this!” She shook her head slowly. “This is more a dress for a Gala than a costume!”

Elusive blinked. “Really? I would have thought Rarity would have made something similar for you... oh well, you can at least use it for the next Gala if you go.”

Sweetie sighed. “Rarity fell ill last time. She had started something, but she wasn’t able to finish it. She promised to make it up to me for the next Nightmare Night.”

“Well, since she’s not around, take this as a gift from me,” Elusive said with a smile. “I’m sure she’ll love it when she gets to see it!”

“I think she will,” Sweetie replied, smiling back. She gave him a long, thankful look, before something formed in her expression. A sense of trepidation.

Slowly, she took a step towards the stallion, as she asked in a very small voice. “Elusive... I-I... would it be weird, if I wanted to call you... big brother?”

The dressmaker started, his own eyes a little widened in surprise. He bit his lip as he thought, taking in the gaze of the filly in front of him, before he had an answer.

“I... I- I don’t see why not, Sweetie. When your sister visited us, she told Silver that as far as she was concerned... he was also her own little brother as well. And if she can make that choice in her heart of hearts...” His expression softened, as he lowered his head level with his alternate sibling. “Then I don’t see why I cannot do the same.”

She gave him grateful smile, before quickly coming over and enveloping his hoof in a hug, her eyes shut tight. “Thank you... thank you, big brother. For everything.”

He simply returned her smile, only a slight sense of uneasiness upon him as he raised a hoof and lightly stroked the filly’s mane. “You’re very welcome, little sister... though I shouldn’t be the only one to-”

“Wow...”

Sweetie and Elusive disentangled from each other, before turning to see Silver step into the room. His mane was combed back and he was dressed in a fine cut uniform. Like Sweetie’s costume, it was white with purple, and had golden buttons and cuffs. It gave him a very distinguished look, especially with the purple sash crossing his chest and the fake golden medal adorning the left side of his chest.

“Swe- Sweetie, you look... amazing,” Silver said, eyes wide.

Sweetie blushed. “Um, thanks, Silver, you look really nice too!”

Elusive smiled. “And to think that this dress wouldn’t have been complete without Silver’s help!”

Silver’s eyes widened as he turned to look at his brother. “Elusive! You said you wouldn’t tell!”

“What? How?” Sweetie asked, looking between the two with confusion.

“Well, Silver is the one that gave me that purple gem. He said he wanted you to have it.” Elusive explained.

Silver scratched the floor with his hoof self-consciously. “I... I found it at the HEDGE... after Rarity and the others went back home. I thought it could help me get my Cutie Mark somehow, so I saved it for later... when I heard what Elusive wanted to make for you...” He trailed off, not looking at her.

“Thank you, Silver...” Sweetie said, trotting up to him. For the briefest of moments, she considered what it was she was about to do, before diving in and giving him a light peck on the cheek.

Silver’s eyes went wide, then he smiled a bit before shaking his head and stepping back. “H-hey, no kisses! I- I just thought you should have it!”

Elusive chuckled. “Okay, you two, you’d better go if you want to get an early start. You don’t want to miss all the candy!”

Sweetie blinked. “Oh, that’s right! I promised to Sugar and Spice to collect candy for a while.”

Silver cringed. “Really? But what about-”

“Don’t worry!” Sweetie smiled. “I’ll make sure to meet you guys at the library in an hour, okay?”

“Aw but...” Silver sighed. “Okay, we’ll meet you there... I don’t know if Scooteroll and Applebuck are even ready yet...”

“A prince should always take care of the princess, Silver,” Elusive admonished after a moment. “Why don’t you escort Sweetie to where she is meeting Sugar and Spice?”

Silver and Sweetie exchanged glances. “Um, sure,” Silver said, fidgeting a little.

Sweetie smiled. “Thank you, Silver! Come on, let’s go!”

The pair slowly walked out, chatting away as Elusive shook his head in amusement. "Ah, to be young again..." He sighed longingly.

o.O.o

Silver glanced at Sweetie as they walked down the street in search of Sugar and Spice. She was looking around at the town decorations with a slightly nostalgic smile.

"Um... Sweetie? Are you enjoying yourself in this universe?" he asked. "I mean, what if Dusk can't send you home? Would you like to stay with us?"

Sweetie sighed. "I don't know... every world I visit I ask myself the same thing."

"Wait," Silver stopped. "*Every* world?"

Sweetie slowed down and looked back at him with a small smile. "Well, yes, Silver... I've been to a couple of other worlds after..." She looked away. "... after the incident." Sweetie finished.

*She does sound a bit too different from me, Silver thought. I always figured that if I met Sweetie, she'd be a lot like me... and she is, but she also seems almost... grown up.*

"It's not a nice story to begin with, but I have made new friends in each world..." Sweetie trailed off for a moment before glancing back at Silver, eyes shining with excitement. "I even made friends with Nightmare Moon once!"

"Nightmare-?" Silver blinked, before catching himself. "O-oh, you mean Anarchy Apollo, don't you?"

"That's right," she replied. "I went to this universe where she was powerful enough to defeat Princess Celestia (that's your Prince Solaris) but she was actually not that bad. Scootaloo actually declared a prank war on her."

Silver stared. "Wow, that Scootaloo must be braver than Scooteroll. I don't think he'd have it in him to start a prank war with Anarchy Apollo."

Sweetie chuckled. "And there was this world where Twilight had fallen in love with The Great and Powerful Trixie... did you know the Trixie from my world almost got me killed? So when I saw this *other* Trixie, I attacked her!"

*The Great and Powerful- she can't mean... The Great and Powerful Presto?!* Silver's expression went blank.

"Silver?" Sweetie waved her hoof in front of his eyes. "Are you okay?"

"No..." he gulped. "No... I'm not... I just imagined Dusk with The Great and Powerful Presto... I-I need to sit down." He unceremoniously dropped to his haunches.

Sweetie patted his shoulder. "I know, it's weird to imagine, but you should have seen Twilight and Trixie together... they were so cute!"

Silver sighed and chuckled. "I guess I can imagine that... somehow... it's just-"

"Crazy?" Sweetie finished for him. "Yeah... but it's another world and everypony is either slightly or very different than in the other universe."

Silver looked at her as if seeing her for the first time. "Sweetie... you and I are not very similar."

"I... I've seen some things..." Sweetie whispered. "I wish I hadn't..." Her eyes watered a bit. "Did Elusive ever give you a large white ball?"

"I think so... I think I still have it somewhere," Sweepie replied, thinking back to where he kept his toys. "Why?"

"Take good care of it, okay?" Sweetie said. "It's more important than you might think."

Silver could only nod as he stood up. "Sweetie... I'm sorry."

Sweetie smiled and hugged Silver. "It's okay... thanks for caring."

"Hey, it's Sweetie!" a voice eagerly shouted.

Sweetie and Silver both looked in the direction of the call and saw Sugar, Spice and Estella approaching.

The fact that Estella had still chosen to dress up as a pirate almost made Sweetie laugh with amusement.

Silver, however, choked and started coughing when he saw that Sugar had dressed up as Dusk, dyeing her coat purple and drawing a fake cutie mark, while Spice had chosen to disguise herself as The Great and Powerful Presto, cape, hat and blue coat paint. "Why?" he coughed. "Why would you dress up as... as them?!"

"Aw, don't you like it?" Sugar asked, hugging Spice close. "I think we look cute!"

"But... wha- ah..." He shook his head. "I must learn a magic spell to remove this memory..." He

looked at Sweetie, who was giggling behind her hoof. "I blame you for this!"

Sweetie batted her eyes at him. "Surely Prince Charming isn't going to stay angry with his princess, is he?"

Thoroughly unprepared for this sudden, flirtatious maneuver, Silver did the only thing any young colt in his position could do... he melted.

o.O.o

"Wow, this is amazing!" Sugar exclaimed, looking around at all the decorations. There were banners that proclaimed establishments had changed their name to something more sinister. Pumpkins had been carved into evil-looking faces and depictions of Anarchy Apollo's profile.

"We know," Silver said. "We've been walking around for almost an hour now, we've seen it and been impressed."

Sugar and Spice giggled. "Colts!" they chorused.

Silver rolled his eyes.

"... and I've always wanted to see how Nightmare Night was celebrated! My home town is so far away from Canterlot that it was only observed as a curiosity. Some ponies would carve a couple of pumpkins, but nothing to this scale!" Estella said, trotting next to Sweetie.

"Well, I'm sure you'll see what the spirit of Nightmare Night is really about!" Sweetie said. "Many ponies here have some sort of story to share about Nigh- Anarchy Apollo."

"Geez, you sound like Dusk sometimes, Sweetie," Scooteroll teased, walking up to them in a wolf costume.

Sweetie raised an eyebrow.

"He's right, y'know," Applebuck chuckled. "No offense, Sweetie but y'all really do."

Sweetie huffed. "Well, I'll take it as a compliment."

"Did you guys already get candy?" Spice asked.

"Yeah!" Scooteroll grinned, showing off a bagful of treats. "Gotta love how much candy everypony is willing to fork out for free!"

"Hm, I think we should head to the library now," Sweetie suggested. "It's about time..."

Sugar, Spice and Estella blinked and looked at each other. "Time for what?" Estella asked.

"Um, for Dusk to come out!" Sweetie said. "He's been working on his costume all day!"

"Oh..." Sugar said. "Well, if you really want to go see your coltfriend..."

"Dusk is **not** my coltfriend!" Sweetie blushed. "He's just a really handsome and smart pony whom I respect a lot."

"Read: whom I really like." Spice giggled.

"Are we all going to the library then?" asked a rather large white chicken that had somehow seamlessly integrated himself into the group.

"Yes, I think- aaaah!" Sweetie jumped on top of Silver, who stumbled, trying to keep upright while holding her. A quick glance at the avian's pink face told her all she needed to know. "Berry Bubble! Don't do that!"

"Do what?" the pink pony asked, before chuckling and trotting on ahead. "C'mon, everypony! Let's get Dusk out of that dusty library!"

"The Library's not dusty..." Sweetie muttered as she slid back down to the floor.

The group followed Berry Bubble through Ponyville until they were at the library door. "Dusk! Come on out! You're gonna miss the whole party, you silly pony!"

The door to the library opened and out stepped Dusk in an intricately-designed cape and wizard's hat. Somehow his mane had extended all the way to his tail and was tied into a long ponytail with intermingled golden rings.

"Hey, everypony!" he grinned. "Can you guess who I'm dressed as?"

The group exchanged glances.

"Um... Star Swirl?" Sweetie asked. *Is that what the pony is called here? Oh please Celestia let me be righ-*

"That's right, Sweetie!" Dusk nodded at her, twisting so that his new pony tail draped over his shoulders. "Star Swirl the Long Maned. I even got the rings exactly where she had them!"

"He really went all-out," Applebuck whispered to Scooteroll, who nodded.

“Too bad nopony else really knows what he’s talking about...” Scooteroll laughed.

“Wow,” Sweetie said, taking a close look at the rings and noticing the runes etched into them. “So, Star Swirl enchanted the golden rings in her mane to cast different protective spells and the silver ones would rotate a magic-feeding sequence that would keep them all ongoing at the same time? That’s brilliant!” Sweetie gushed to an equally excited Dusk.

“Then again, when eggheads get together...” Scooteroll deadpanned and elbowed Silver. “Right, Silver?”

But Silver did not reply as he glared at Dusk.

“Uh, Silver?” Applebuck shook his hoof in front of his friend’s eyes, snapping him out of his trance. “Y’alright?”

“Um... yeah, sure...” Silver muttered, his eyes going back to Sweetie and Dusk.

“Aww come on, don’t be so glum, brony,” said a purple dragoness, coming up next to the group. It took the young colt a couple of glances to realize that said dragoness was Spines, dressed up as... a dragon. “I think I know what’s goin’ on in that head of yours...”

He sighed. “Is it that obvious?” he asked, before looking back towards his other self, still chatting away with the elder stallion.

Dusk chuckled at something Sweetie had said and then turned to face the others. “Oh, I’m sorry, here...” his horn lit up and candy floated into the open bags of several colts and fillies.

“Enough chitchat!” Berry Bubble squawked like a chicken, getting into his role. “Let’s find candy!”

Dusk arched an eyebrow. “Berry Bubble, aren’t you a little old for that?”

“Too old for free candy?!” Berry Bubble clucked. “Never!” he declared.

It was then that a lightning bolt hit Berry Bubble in the flank. He gave a very convincing squawk and ran away screaming, followed by Sugar, Spice, Estella and several other fillies and colts.

Dusk and Spines glared at up at a nearby black cloud, whose sole occupant was laughing at the prank he’d just pulled, his costume obviously a rip-off of some dark aerobatic team’s uniform, though his multihued mane and tail did nothing to conceal his identity.

“Blitz,” the unicorn admonished. “That wasn’t very nice.”

"It's just a prank, Dusk, chill out," Rainbow Blitz replied with a mischievous smile.

Dusk shook his head and rolled his eyes.

"Ooh! There's another group!" Blitz said, grinning wickedly as he sped away.

Dusk sighed, but brightened up when he saw a tall and straw-bound scarecrow walking towards them, signature hat upon his head. He ignored the distant sound of a lightning bolt scaring other ponies. "Happy Nightmare Night, Applejack!"

Applejack nodded, noticing the group. "Howdy, ya'll! Nice costumes!" He stopped to appreciate Dusk's hoofwork. "With that mane, I reckon you're some sorta country music singer."

Dusk growled as the others started laughing.

"It's okay, Dusk, country music isn't that bad," Sweetie consoled.

"Your costume an' Silver's are amazing, Sweetie," Applejack complimented. "The work of Lucy, Ah assume?"

"Eeeyup," Silver smiled.

It was then that they heard cheering and applause break out around the square. The group looked over as the Mayor, dressed in a clown outfit, ascended a platform constructed in the middle of town. Sensing the speech to come, the lot of them quickly turned their full attention to the stage.

"Thank you, everypony, and welcome to the Nightmare Night festival!" he proclaimed in a deep profundo basso. The cheering was instantaneous, giving him cause to hold a hoof out and wait with a smile for them to die down again.

"Now all the little ponies who have been out collecting sweets should follow our friend Zircon to hear..." his voice took on an even deeper and creepier pitch. "... the legend of *Anarchy Apollooooo~!*"

Spines snorted. "Spooky voice might work better if he wasn't dressed like that."

Dusk chuckled as the group followed all the colts and fillies out of town to gather around a tall zebra stallion, done up in a swamp doctor's outfit complete with stovepipe hat, standing next to a statue of Anarchy Apollo.

"Follow me and very soon you'll hear the tale of Anarchy Apollo..." Zircon said, raising his voice as his haunting intonation captivated his young audience. "Listen close, my little dears, and I'll

tell you where you got your fears: of Nightmare Night, so dark and scary. Of Anarchy Apollo, who makes you wary.” He blew into his hoof and a cloud of green powder transformed into an image of an evil-looking pony with serrated teeth.

“Every year, we put on a disguise, to save ourselves, from his searching eyes.” Zircon rhymed, another green cloud creating a full-bodied green alicorn who flew around the gathered ponies.

Sugar and Spice screamed in horror.

“But Anarchy Apollo wants just one thing: to gobble up ponies in one quick swing!” The green alicorn opened his mouth and crashed down on top of Berry Bubble and Estella, both of which screamed and held each other, trembling.

“Hunggrily, he soars the sky.” The green alicorn flew over them again, seemingly in search of somepony. “If he sees nopony, he passes by. So if he comes and all is clear, Equestria is safe another year!” Zircon finished.

“Um, mister Zircon?” Estella asked. “If we wear costumes to hide from Anarchy Apollo so he won't gobble us up, how come we still need to give him some of our candy?”

Zircon smiled. “A perfect question, my little friend. For Anarchy Apollo you must not offend. Fill up his belly with a treat or two, so he won't return to come eat *you*!”

Berry Bubble screamed and ran over to the statue of Anarchy Apollo. “Everypony! Just dump some candy and get out of here!” he cried out, emptying his bag.

It was then that lightning crisscrossed the sky thrice. Everypony paused and turned their heads skyward, watching the clouds broil and churn, before disgorging a chariot pulled by bat-winged ponies, carrying a cloaked figure within.

“It's Anarchy Apollo!” Berry Bubble shouted in horror. “Everypony, run!”

Dusk, Spines and the Crusaders jumped out of the way of the literal stampede that ran away from the statue.

“Wait! It's just Prince Artemis!” Dusk shouted, but was ignored in the chaos. He turned to look at the others. “Come on! Let's find out what's happening!”

They arrived to find that the chariot had landed in the middle of Ponyville, the locals fearfully watching the cloaked figure that stepped off. With a nod, the figure sent the chariot away and turned to look at the gathered ponies.

The cloak disintegrated into bats as a tall, dark-blue form stepped forth. With his silver raiment

and helmeted crown atop his head, Dusk easily recognized him as none other than the prince of the night, Prince Artemis.

“GREETINGS, PONIES OF PONYVILLE!” he boomed, the air shaking with his voice. “We have come to celebrate with you this joyous night of festivities and frolicking!”

“He- he really needs help with his dialogue,” Scooteroll deadpanned.

“Hush now,” Dusk scolded as he left them behind to approach the Prince. “Prince Artemis, I am-”

“Star Swirl the Long Maned,” Artemis recognized. “‘Tis a very detailed costume.”

Dusk smiled. “Why, thank you! I’m glad that you recognized it! I thought only Sweetie would have-” He stopped when the Prince raised a hoof.

“Not to worry, my good Dusk. We have come to have a good time despite the dark warnings.”

“Dark... warnings?” Dusk blinked. “I’m... afraid I don’t know which warnings you’re talking about.”

Artemis looked at Dusk in surprise. “We thought a unicorn as well versed in legends as yourself would be informed of this important legend. It was said that on Nightmare Night, the evil spirit which brought forth Anarchy Apollo would return and possess me during the full moon.”

Dusk chuckled nervously.

“‘Tis a good thing that we remembered to raise a gibbous moon tonight to avoid such... confrontations.”

Dusk frowned. “But... I saw the moon earlier and...”

It was then that the clouds parted and the light of the full moon shone directly on Prince Artemis. Dusk jumped back as the Prince groaned and cried in pain, covering his head with his hooves as dark mist surrounded him.

“What’s happening?!” the Mayor asked, panicking.

“I don’t know!” Dusk replied as the wind picked up. “But Prince Artemis was saying-” He stopped, eyes widening. “Oh, no! Everypony, it’s-”

A blast of magic whipped Dusk’s mane around as a cruel laughter rose from where the Prince had knelt and a misty mane grew to encompass Artemis.

Only, it wasn't the prince. With a coat as black as the night, mane waving like nebulae and wearing a dark blue set of spiked armor was a figure that Dusk had hoped never to see again.

"Hello, foals," Anarchy Apollo laughed. "Did you miss me?"

"It's Anarchy Apollo!" Berry Bubble shouted. "Everypony, run!"

"Not so fast!" the nightmarish alicorn shouted, his horn flaring. "You shall not run when I, your ruler, have just returned! You will worship me!"

"You won't rule over us, Anarchy Apollo!" Applejack shouted. "We'll get the Elements of Harmony and send you away again!"

Anarchy Apollo's eyes flashed malevolently. "It won't be that easy this time, little pony! For now, I will have new Lieutenants to fight for me!"

Dusk's eyes widened as a bolt of dark purple energy shot out from Anarchy Apollo's horn, flashing towards him.

"Dusk!" Rainbow Blitz was suddenly there, pushing Dusk out of the way. The pegasus cried out as the energy meant for the unicorn surrounded him. His mane turned a dull gray as his patched up Shadowbolt costume became a real uniform.

"I welcome you, Dark Blitz, to my army!" Anarchy Apollo chuckled darkly, waving a hoof at the newly-turned pony. Slowly, Blitz got to his hooves, before turning towards the rest of the group, his expression cold and unreadable.

"Spines!" Dusk shouted. "Quick, I'll distract him, but you have to tell Prince Solaris what's happening here!"

"Okay!" the little dragoness shouted as she sprinted away towards the library.

"But one is not enough... I need more!" Anarchy Apollo grinned as his magic shot out again.

Dusk was ready to dodge, but this time the magic went right by him. He followed it with his eyes and gasped in horror as the magic struck Sweetie Belle and the Crusaders.

A bright flash blinded all ponies present and when it faded they could only stare in fright and dismay at what had happened.

Scooteroll had been turned into an orange-tinged winged timber wolf, with a pegasus shaped medallion strapped on his chest. Its bramble-made wings made crackling noises as they twitched and stretched, making some pegasi cringe.

Applebuck truly looked like he had died and been stitched back together, his pupils and irises had disappeared altogether and his body was encased in a tough dark-grey hide.

Silver's costume had been replaced by black, intricately adorned armor, similar to that of the Royal Guards; it shone in the moonlight, silver inlays reflecting the soft light as his now-red eyes scanned the multitude of ponies around them. The medallion he was wearing had turned silver and was embedded into the breastplate opposite an effigy of Anarchy Apollo on the other side.

Sweetie's tiara had grown to encompass the sides of her face. It was a deep, dark purple with silver inlays that looked almost like bat wings. Her white dress had been changed into a metallic armor the same shade as her helm, with silver wings etched into the breastplate and leg guards. The fantasy wings on her back had turned black and flapped a couple of times... they seemed to be real now, and they were armored as well, from scapulars to alula with a thinner version of her armor. Her irises had turned into an amber-yellow and her pupils seemed draconic, much like Anarchy Apollo's.

With another flash, Blitz and the Crusaders were standing side by side with Anarchy Apollo.

"Applebuck!" Applejack shouted, looking at his brother in fright.

"This is horrible!" the Mayor shouted.

"Go, my Lieutenants!" Anarchy Apollo hollered. "Cause mayhem! Cause chaos and mischief!"

"Not so fast, Anarchy Apollo!" Dusk yelled, standing tall as Berry Bubble, Applejack, Elusive, and a trembling Butterscotch valiantly stood in front of the Nightmarish alicorn. "We won't let you do that!"

"And how do you plan on stopping me when I have him on my side?" Anarchy Apollo asked mockingly, pointing with a hoof at Dark Blitz.

"Um..." Dusk gulped.

"Give me back mah brother!" Applejack shouted, galloping towards them, with the intent to buck Anarchy Apollo right in the face. He stopped when he realized he was floating in the air, courtesy of Sweetie's magic.

"Tut-tut..." Sweetie said, her voice deeper and a nasty sneer decorating her face.

"Sweetie!" Dusk called. "You can't be working for him!"

"Give it up, foal. Without the Elements you don't stand a chance!" Anarchy Apollo laughed.

"We have the power of Friendship!" Dusk stated valiantly.

Evil Silver glared at Dusk when Evil Sweetie involuntarily swooned, but Anarchy Apollo just cackled. "And is your friendship enough to fight these five?" he asked, moving his hoof and encompassing the Crusaders and Blitz.

When Dusk bit his lip and didn't answer, Anarchy Apollo laughed. "I thought as much."

"Very well, then I shall-"

"Do nothing!" came a deep, authoritative voice as a flash of light materialized in the midst of the showdown. It faded away to reveal a tall white alicorn stallion, mane and tail possessing warm hues, the crown upon his head marking him easily as-

"Prince Solaris!" Dusk sighed in relief. "I'm so glad you're here!"

Sweetie frowned and glared at Celestia's counterpart.

"Ah, so you've finally arrived, brother!" Anarchy Apollo sneered.

"I am not *your* brother, Anarchy Apollo. Release Artemis or I will stop you and your thralls right now." Solaris stated coldly.

"No!" Dusk said suddenly. "You can't!"

Prince Solaris blinked. "Why not?"

"Because his 'thralls' are Rainbow Blitz, the Crusaders and Sweetie Belle!" informed Applejack worriedly.

"What?!" Prince Solaris turned to look in horror at Anarchy Apollo. "How could you do such a thing?! It isn't possible!"

"I will do anything so that my demands are met!" Anarchy Apollo declared.

Prince Solaris gritted his teeth. "Well then, what are these demands?!"

Several ponies looked at each other worriedly. The stallion of the night glowered at his brother, before tossing his head back in a mighty shout.

"I demand... that the amount of chocolates given to me as sacrifice during Nightmare Night be increased by twenty percent!"

“Never!!” Prince Solaris reared back. “You will never have eternal ni-” he choked as his brain registered what he had been told. “Wait... what?”

“I said that I want the amount of chocolates given as a sacrifice during Nightmare Night be increased by twenty percent! No returns.”

“But...” Solaris shook his head. “That’s-”

“Are you not going to abide by our terms?!” Anarchy Apollo asked furiously, eyes flashing. “Truly, you do not know who you are dealing with, Solaris!”

Solaris stepped back. “This is nonsense, Anarchy Apollo! There’s no reason for that! Is this a trick?”

Anarchy Apollo rolled his eyes and his horn lit with magic. With a ‘poof’ a scroll appeared floating between them. “If you’ll look at these statistics, you’ll see that the sacrifice has been declining steadily over the last 400 years,” he huffed. “As it is, I’m letting you off easy.”

Solaris frowned as he looked at the paper. Snatching it with his own magic, he examined it closely.

Dusk blinked, staring at the surreal showdown going on not twelve hoofsteps away. At length, he finally found the words he was looking for. “Wait... are we really doing this?”

After reading twice, Solaris slowly lowered the parchment. “You’ve kept tabs?”

“What did you expect me to do for a thousand years in the moon? Carve moon rocks to look like you and blow them up afterwards?” Anarchy Apollo asked with a derisive snort.

Solaris sighed. “Honestly, what do you have to say for yourself?”

Anarchy Apollo grinned. “Happy Nightmare Night, brother,” he laughed, hoofing Solaris in the shoulder.

Applejack frowned. “Now, wait just one apple-pickin’ minute... are y’all sayin’ what ah *think* you’re saying?” He looked down as his undead brother grinned at him.

“Happy Nightmare Night, bro!” Applebuck said, his smile widening.

“Had you guys going for a while, didn’t we?” Rainbow Blitz gloated, flying in small circles over Berry Bubble and Butterscotch before landing and bro-hoofing Scooteroll.

“Sorry I scared you girls,” Sweetie said, smiling sheepishly at Sugar and Spice. “But I had to keep up the act!”

“It’s... It’s okay, Sweetie...” Spice replied after a moment. “You looked pretty scary in that armor though...”

“It’s awesome, isn’t it?!” Sweetie squeaked.

“And that voice...” Sugar shivered. “Where did you get that from?”

Sweetie cringed. “Well... from Anarchy Apollo... sort of...”

“My, don’t you look like a handsome devil!” Elusive chuckled as he trotted up to his brother. “I can see that the Prince took my design into account! How delightful!”

Solaris shook his head. “I understand the appeal of the prank, brother, and I approve... but really? Transforming cloth into armor? And giving a filly the armor of Hades?”

“It’s just an imitation, brother,” Artemis laughed. “One I couldn’t resist.”

“So...” the Mayor walked carefully up to them. “Does this mean that we can carry on? Everypony’s safe?”

Solaris chuckled. “That’s right.”

“Citizens of Ponyville!” Artemis, still disguised as Anarchy Apollo, spoke up. “Happy Nightmare Night! Don’t forget to enjoy the festivities!”

The cheers were deafening.

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The celebrations continued well into the night, until most ponies were completely exhausted. The tired group decided to rest a bit before everypony went home.

“But, what ah want to know is... how’d y’all plan this?” Applejack asked as the two Princes, the Cutie Mark Crusaders, Sweetie Belle and the others walked into the library.

“Well... that’s a bit of a story...” Applebuck said after a moment.

Solaris smiled. “I think we all want to hear this one, Applebuck. Last I heard from Artemis this morning, he wanted to cancel Nightmare Night altogether!”

The crusaders looked at each other. "Well..." Silver sighed. "It went like this..."

o.O.o

*The Everfree Forest seemed the same no matter what dimension Sweetie was in. Dark, foreboding... Leaves seemed to move where there was no breeze; just like any previous visit, she found out that if she stood in certain areas she could see her own breath while the cold would disappear altogether just a step away.*

*It was an unnatural place, as if it had been ripped out of some dark imagination and stuck in the middle of Equestria as a blight to all those who would unwittingly wander into it.*

*"Well, here we are..." Applebuck announced, looking towards the dark forest with trepidation. "Are we sure we want to do this?"*

*Scooteroll nodded. "Yeah! We'll get our Cutie Marks for sure!"*

*"Besides, we have it all planned, remember?" Silver said. "We spent the whole last week drawing maps and planning how to capture it!"*

*"Well... I remember seeing one close to the Castle..." Sweetie recounted after a moment. "It looked pretty big... and mean."*

*The three colts looked at her in awe.*

*"Y-you've been to the castle?" Scooteroll asked. "That's amazing!"*

*"Why did you go there?" Silver asked.*

*"Well... I- I got Scootaloo really mad at me and... and I ran away into the forest."*

*Scooteroll looked slightly perturbed. "Uh... Scootaloo? Is that... I mean... is she...?"*

*"You?" Sweetie smiled. "Yep! She was my first friend in Ponyville!"*

*"Hey, just like us, buddy!" Scooteroll grinned and hoofed Silver on the shoulder.*

*"Ouch."*

*Applebuck rolled his eyes. "So, do you think you can find your way back?"*

*"Uh..." Sweetie looked at the three colts. "I- I guess... although, Twilight wasn't very happy that I had gone into the Everfree by myself..."*

Scooteroll rolled his eyes. "They never are, but they already have their cutie marks! Come on, you know the way, you know magic, and, if we're anything like your friends in your world, you know we can take it!"

Sweetie nodded. "Well, I am a Crusader! And that means we all get our Cutie Marks! Or die trying!"

Applebuck blinked. "Well, Ah'm not sure Ah want to die for it but... Ah'll risk a limb or two."

"Good enough!" Scooteroll grinned. "Are we all ready then?"

The others looked at each other and nodded resolutely. "Let's go!"

Sweetie nodded and started walking. Applebuck fell behind her while Scooteroll and Silver flanked them.

Remembering the path that Zecora had shown her, Sweetie carefully led them deeper and deeper into the Everfree Forest. Slowly the sunlight diminished until it was barely enough to allow them to see where they were going.

Applebuck jumped when the wind shook some dead leaves, making a rustling sound. "Ah... Ah'm okay..."

"I hope we don't see any timber wolves." Silver said after a moment. "They're supposed to be dangerous..."

Scooteroll rolled his eyes. "Everything in here is supposed to be dangerous."

"Which is why we're sticking to the road... right?" Silver said after a moment.

"Hey... do you guys hear something?" Sweetie asked suddenly.

"Hey, don't try to scare us!" Scooteroll said after a moment of silence. "That's not cool."

Sweetie raised an eyebrow, but then turned her head. "There it is again!"

The four Crusaders quieted down, and after a moment they could all hear something indeed. It sounded like somepony. Somepony muttering.

"Citizens of Ponyville! We have graced your tiny village with our presence, so that you- no, no, no... maybe something less formal?" The voice paused. "Hi, Ponyvillians! No! That doesn't work. They are my subjects! I can't talk to them like that... no, it has to be something more..."

*imposing... perhaps I should use the Royal Canterlot Voice?"*

*The group exchanged puzzled glances before slowly walking up to where the voice was coming from.*

*They hid behind some bushes and carefully looked out. In front of them, an alicorn with midnight blue coat and wavy, star-speckled mane stood facing away from them as he paced around, speaking aloud to himself.*

*Silver stared at the others in awe. "It's Prince Artemis!" he whispered excitedly. "I haven't seen him since the Summer Sun Celebration!"*

*"I have to project strength," the alicorn was saying, "but also understanding. I have to let them know that they can stop celebrating that awful holiday!"*

*Sweetie's eyes widened in surprise. "Wait. Tonight's Nightmare Night?!"*

*Her shout alerted Prince Artemis to their presence. He turned around and faced the group. "THOU SHALT REVEAL THINESELVES!"*

*"Geez, does he really have to shout like that?" Scooteroll winced as he led the others out of the bushes.*

*"The Royal Canterlot Voice was the appropriate method of addressing subjects about one thousand years ago," Sweetie Belle explained. "When Lun- I mean, Prince Artemis, was sent to the Moon, he never lived through the changes that made the Royal Canterlot Voice obsolete. He wouldn't speak with that voice to his... brother."*

*"THAT IS CORRECT!" Prince Artemis announced. "THOU KNOWEST THINE HISTORY QUITE WELL, YOUNG FILLY! WHAT IS THY NAME?"*

*"Sweetie Belle, your highness, and I regret to inform you, but the use of the Canterlot Royal Voice was discontinued 800 years ago when your sis- I mean, brother, changed his approach to the court."*

*"THOU MEANS THAT WE NEED NOT PROJECT OUR VOICE ANYMORE?"*

*"Um, yeah." Sweetie grimaced, shaking her head to clear away the ringing in her ears. "It is considered impolite to shout, even at your lessers, and it usually gives the impression that you are angry."*

*"WE SEE!" Prince Artemis heralded. "IT DOES MAKE SENSE. WHENEVER WE WATCH SOLARIS HOLD COURT, HE SIMPLY SPEAKS IN A NORMAL TONE OF VOICE."*

*"Yes, and what I'm trying to say is that-"*

*"THAT WE SHOULD TALK IN A MORE NORMAL VOLUME?" Prince Artemis proclaimed in askance. "WE APPRECIATE THE INFORMATION, YOUNG FILLY, AND-"*

*"IN THE NAME OF SOLARIS, STOP SHOUTING!" Applebuck hollered, interrupting the Prince.*

*"... we will try to keep our voice to a lower volume," Artemis finished meekly.*

*"Why are you talking like that?" Scooteroll asked. "There's only one of you."*

*Artemis raised an eyebrow. "Are we to assume that the royal 'we' is no longer in practice as well?"*

*The crusaders exchanged glances. "Uh... no, not really. We've never heard Prince Solaris speak like that."*

*Artemis frowned. "Dammit, Solaris, you told me that's how we should talk!"*

*Sweetie giggled. "So, what are you doing here, your highness?"*

*Artemis sighed. "WE- ahem... I... came here to deal with this much maligned night once and for all, and put our subjects to rest from their fears of Anarchy Apollo and finally be done with the barbaric... tradition... that is 'Nightmare Night'."*

*Sweetie's eyes went wide. She facehoofed at her own forgetfulness. "I can't believe I didn't remember that Applejack stopped us from hunting Manticores on Nightmare Night!"*

*Applebuck gave her an odd look. "Are you tellin' me you didn't notice? They were settin' up a banner and everythin'!"*

*"Hey, give her a break, she's just arrived in this world!" Silver retorted, stepping up next to Sweetie.*

*"Calm down, Silver," Scooteroll said. "We're not trying to give her a hard time!" He looked at Sweetie nervously. "We wouldn't want that..."*

*Prince Artemis frowned. "What do you mean she just arrived in this world?"*

*"I uh... I'm actually from another world, your highness," Sweetie explained. "I arrived here last night and just today Dusk promised to help get me home."*

*Scooteroll watched from the corner of his eye as Silver silently repeated the word 'Dusk', a look of slight disgust playing across his feature. He raised an eyebrow, but before he could ask, Prince Artemis spoke.*

*"Ah, then you have come from the other world where we are all gender inverted... I believe my counterpart is Princess Luna."*

*"That's right!" Sweetie exclaimed, awed. "It's amazing how everypony here seems to know so much about inter-dimensional travel! Even Nightmare Moon was surprised when she found out! But all of you seem to be able to just guess things right!"*

*"Wait... Nightmare Moon?" Prince Artemis asked.*

*Sweetie gasped. "So you're really trying to stop Nightmare Night from happening ever again?!"*

*All conversation ceased as the Crusaders turned to look at the Prince, who cleared his throat, uncomfortable under the scrutiny of the young ponies. "Um... yes, that would be correct."*

*"But you can't!" Silver exclaimed.*

*"That's the worst idea I've ever heard!" Scooteroll added.*

*"Yeah! It's almost as bad as Scooteroll's usual ideas!" Applebuck nodded, earning himself a prompt hoof to the shoulder.*

*"My plans are not bad!" Scooteroll snapped. "They are awesome!"*

*"They usually fail," Silver shot back.*

*"I don't see you coming up with any ideas!" Scooteroll growled, glaring at Silver.*

*"Hey! No idea is still better than a bad idea!" Silver retorted.*

*"Says you!" Scooteroll got just in front of Silver and pushed.*

*"Hey! Don't push him!" Applebuck defended, pushing Scooteroll.*

*"Why, you!" Scooteroll snarled as he jumped on top of the other two. They soon became a whirlwind of limbs and dust as they fought with each other.*

*"I can't believe I was ever like that..." Sweetie groaned, putting a hoof against the side of her head and massaging away a headache.*

*"You seem a lot calmer than they are," Artemis commented, after a moment of watching the trio roll around.*

*Sweetie shook her head. "About this thing with Nightmare Night..."*

*"Yeah! You can't cancel it! We won't be able to prank the others!" Scooteroll exclaimed, jumping out of the struggle.*

*Sweetie blinked. "Prank who?"*

*"Anypony, duh!" Scooteroll rolled his eyes.*

*"But Nightmare Night is a barbaric and archaic practice!" Prince Artemis exclaimed, drawing the Crusader's attention. "Ponies living in fear of Anarchy Apollo consuming their souls, sacrificing candy to mitigate the vengeful spirit... it's baffling and pointless now that I am free!" Prince Artemis stomped his hoof on the soft ground of the forest. "Thus, I have devised a plan which will make the ponies of Ponyville realize that they should not fear me! I will-"*

*"Arrive in the middle of the celebration in a chariot pulled by the Night Guard, and announce your presence to all ponies using the Canterlot Royal Voice to assure them that you will not harm them after your cape turns into a cloud of bats?" Sweetie finished for him.*

*"I-" He blinked. "Well, yes, that is exactly what I was planning!"*

*Sweetie shook her head. "Prince, you have to trust us, that is not a good idea! Everypony loves Nightmare Night! And yes, it's scary, but that's because it's supposed to be scary!"*

*"Yeah! We all love pulling spooky pranks!" Scooteroll agreed, "And everypony has a good laugh!"*

*"Ah once pretended to be a crate of bad apples that'd been possessed by Anarchy Apollo and chased Red Gala around the farm for a full ten minutes!" Applebuck offered.*

*"And I made a haunted house for Elusive with some of his fabrics! I've never heard him scream like that!"*

*Sweetie winced. "Yeah... I remember that..."*

*Prince Artemis was frowning. "Are you saying that ponies enjoy being scared?"*

*"Tonight," Sweetie clarified, "yes."*

*The Prince slumped. "Well, there goes the plan..."*

*"There, there," Sweetie consoled, patting the Prince's leg. "It's okay, Luna had a lot of fun once she discovered that Nightmare Night was not about ponies being miserable."*

*Artemis blinked. "She did? How?"*

*"Well, she started pranking everypony!" Sweetie replied.*

*"Pranking?" Scooteroll asked, smiling devilishly.*

*"Waaaiit..." Applebuck said. "If Sweetie already knows what pranks Luna played... why don't we plan a really big one?"*

*Silver raised an eyebrow. "That's a good idea... but what?"*

*Artemis touched his hoof to his chin as he looked up thoughtfully. "You say that the scarier the better? Tell me... how would Ponyville react to the return of Anarchy Apollo?"*

*Scooteroll's eyes went wide. "That... that would be so cool!"*

*"And we could be your evil minions!" Silver said excitedly. "Can we do that?!"*

*Artemis raised an eyebrow. "I believe so... but why would you want to pretend to be my evil minions?"*

*"Maybe we can get an evil minion Cutie Mark!" Silver exclaimed.*

*"Cutie Mark Crusaders, Minions of Evil! Yay!" four voices raised.*

*"Aha!" a voice shouted in response. "There you are! I thought I had seen you four march into Everfree!"*

*"Uh-oh..." Scooteroll flinched. "It's Rainbow Blitz!"*

*"That's right!" the cyan pegasus declared, landing in the middle of the group. "The one and only!"*

*"Greetings, Rainbow Blitz," Prince Artemis smiled.*

*"Who? Oh!" Rainbow bowed. "Prince! Fancy meeting you here!"*

*Artemis chuckled. "Don't worry, I was orchestrating a plan for tonight with the help of the 'Crusaders,' as they call themselves."*

*Rainbow Blitz blinked. "What sort of plan?"*

*"A really awesome prank!" Scooteroll grinned.*

*Rainbow Blitz smiled. "Count me in!"*

o.O.o

"And the rest is history," Rainbow Blitz finished, waving his hoof lazily about as he reclined on a chair.

Dusk sighed and chuckled. "Well, you really had me going there, I admit that, but now that Nightmare Night's over... we should think about sending you home, Sweetie."

Silver cringed. "Does she have to go?"

Elusive nodded sadly. "Rarity must be missing her, you know that, Silver."

"And I know exactly the frequency to send you back, Sweetie, don't worry," Dusk assured her.

Sweetie blinked. "You do? But how?"

"When Twilight and the others came here, we worked together to send them back," Dusk explained.

"Oh..." Sweetie looked down. "Um... I don't think that'll work..."

"What do you mean, Sweetie?" Prince Solaris asked.

"I didn't arrive here by a spell cast by Twilight... I don't think you've ever met *my* Twilight," she said after a moment. "I come from a completely different world... one where Twilight was lost."

The others exchanged worried glances. "What happened?" Butterscotch asked.

"An accident..." Sweetie sighed. "We were both there... a device exploded and... it... it broke Twilight into pieces and sent me into another world."

"Is that how you arrived here?" Elusive asked. "But, if it was your first interdimensional trip-"

"It wasn't," Sweetie interrupted. "This is the fourth world I've visited..."

"That's... hard to believe," Artemis said. "Even when you knew so much about Nightmare Night,

we all know that the other world is displaced in time from ours and things happen there first.”

Sweetie shook her head and concentrated. Soon, a familiar tear in space opened up and her notebook floated out. She placed it down next to some notes that Dusk was working on on the table. “This is my notebook... it was made for me by Twilight and Trixie from the first world I visited. I started collecting little things I could carry with me.” She levitated out a picture and passed it to Elusive, then she took out the acceptance letter and gave it to Dusk, who showed it to Solaris and Artemis.

“Oh, my... is Rainbow Dash pregnant!?” Elusive asked in shock.

“What?!” Rainbow Blitz took the picture from his friend’s grasp. “But how!? Why?! And who’s the stallion? Did he do that to her?”

Sweetie giggled. “That’s Vespa. He’s Scootaloo’s great, great, great grandson, I think.”

The others stared at her in complete shock, unable to formulate a word. A few of those present turned their attention to a certain orange pegasus.

“He is?” Scooteroll asked trying to ignore all the gazes.

“You have a great-great-great grandson!” Applebuck said. “Or, your filly you does!” he held a hoof to his head. “Wait... that’s making my head hurt.”

“But... how can this be?” Elusive asked.

“Are you tellin’ me that Applejack is hundreds of years old in that picture?”

“Two hundred actually,” Sweetie corrected, looking fondly at the mares in the picture. “In that world, the Elements of Harmony made them immortal.”

“Amazing...” Elusive whispered. “To remain young and handsome forever... what a gift!”

Sweetie looked away sadly. Her hoof slowly traced Rarity’s face and Elusive felt a shiver run down his spine, his trained eyes quickly noticing an odd adornment on his female counterpart’s hooves, around the wrist.

“This is impressive, Sweetie,” Dusk complimented, levitating the letter back to her. “You got accepted! That’s quite the achievement!”

Sweetie smiled. “It was hard. I thought I had failed when Nightmare Moon sneezed while I was taking my test.”

"Nightmare Moon?" Solaris frowned. "That name sounds familiar. I do believe it was-"

"My world's Anarchy Apollo." Sweetie nodded. "Believe me... it was a crazy experience."

"We're losing track of what we need right now," Artemis reminded them. "If you are not casting a spell to travel to different worlds, how are you doing it?" He shook his head. "While it is theoretically possible to locate your original world, every jump would have jumbled your chances. Even if all worlds are connected, you won't have a strand connecting you back."

"Twilight," Sweetie replied. "I've been finding her pieces in each world I visit and each piece has sent me somewhere else. Twilight Sparkle, the two hundred year old one that is, thought that it would be the only way for me to go home."

Solaris nodded gravely. "However, you have to consider that when you find the last piece... it might just keep you in that last world, unless it is tied to one left at your point of origin."

Sweetie's eyes widened with worry. "You mean... I could get stuck in a world even after finding all of Twilight?"

The Prince nodded. "We cannot be sure of course. But it is a possibility you should be ready for."

Sweetie slumped. "But..."

"Don't worry," Elusive comforted, placing his hoof on Sweetie's shoulder. "I'm sure that you will find your way back."

Sweetie nodded, barely fighting back tears.

"This poses an interesting problem," Solaris said. "Sweetie, you should rest. We will think about how to help you tonight, and hope to have a solution by tomorrow."

"But can't I stay with you guys and Dusk?" Sweetie asked. "Please? Twilight taught me how to do research!" She yawned, her creeping exhaustion belying her case. "I can be helpful!"

"Come now, Sweetie," Elusive said, nudging her towards the door along with the other Crusaders. "You can all spend the night at the boutique. Dusk will still be here tomorrow."

"But..." she was cut off by another yawn.

"Sweetie, please go sleep," Butterscotch said softly. "You don't want to be too tired tomorrow, do you?"

"N- no... I guess not..." Sweetie murmured.

o.O.o

*"And we expect her to make a full recovery," the doctor said to Fluttershy and Applejack, as they stood next to Rarity's bed. "Although pneumonia can be dangerous, we caught it in time before it really affected her..." He looked back at Rarity, who was silently ignoring them as she stared out the window. "But that's not what worries me... how long has she been like that?"*

*Fluttershy and Applejack looked at each other. "Ah don't know..." Applejack said after a moment. "She seemed alright when she visited the farm two days ago... a bit distant but... ever since it happened..."*

*"I see," the doctor sighed. "Well, she needs to stay here for observation, but it would really do her a world of good to see familiar faces."*

*"Oh, she will," Fluttershy assured. "We'll visit her every day."*

*Applejack nodded. "An' Ah'll let everypony else know to come visit too."*

*The doctor nodded back. "That will be good; I'll ask the nurses to keep an eye on her."*

*When he had walked out, Applejack approached Rarity and took Rarity's hoof in her own. "Rarity," she started, staring at the silent unicorn. "Ah'm here for you, you hear me? You're family to me, just like Fluttershy and Big Mac an' Pinkie an' Dashie... we're all a big family. Don't leave us, don't shut us out."*

*She let the hoof drop softly back down on the bed, and unable to contain tears, she turned around sharply. "Ah- Ah better get goin'. There's lots to do at th'farm," she mumbled. "Ah'll see y'all tomorrow."*

*Rarity didn't respond. She took a deep breath and stared at the clouds.*

*Fluttershy quietly sat down on the empty chair next to the bed and started reading a book, stealing glances at Rarity from time to time. Just to make sure she was okay.*

o.O.o

Sweetie opened her eyes and looked at the familiar ceiling. Around her, she could hear the snores from the other Crusaders.

*Why do I feel like I'm forgetting something important? Did I dream something?* she wondered with a sigh.

Slowly she stood up, keeping the warm blanket she had wrapped around herself in place with magic. Sweetie carefully made her way around the sleeping colts.

*I wonder what it was...* She sighed again. *But I have this feeling... I have to go.*

Sweetie walked into the kitchen and sat down, looking at the distant clouds as the morning started. "I should go to the Library..." she whispered to herself. With that resolve in place, she looked back at the sleeping group before slowly tip-hoofing to the front door.

She carefully opened it and walked out, taking a deep breath as the cool, morning breeze made her shiver slightly. "Better get going! I'm sure Dusk will have some tea to share!"

Sweetie trotted across Ponyville until she reached the library. As she approached the door, she heard voices from inside. Carefully, she opened the door and walked in, peeking around the corner of the kitchen to see both Elusive and Dusk sitting at the table and drinking tea.

"So there was nothing you could find?" Elusive asked Dusk, who shook his head tiredly.

"I'm afraid not..." Dusk sighed. "I learned a lot just from analyzing the notebook, and Prince Solaris and Prince Artemis also looked at it, but... the origin strands are not attached to anything we can detect. Then there's that recurring burst in the matrix that keeps nagging at me... but that only complicates the matter a tiny bit and doesn't change anything in the end at all."

"What do you mean?" Elusive asked, frowning.

"We can't trace Sweetie's travels back to her home..." Dusk said after a moment. "I think the Twilight that enhanced the matrix knew that and tried to compensate by adding the memory charm to the notebook, as some sort of guideline... but her framework is so complex I have no idea what else she might have done." Dusk shook his head, his expression betraying his amazement. "It boggles the mind... me... or another me, two hundred years older created a spell so complex that even the Princes had their doubts about its full capabilities."

Elusive sighed. "Still, that doesn't help Sweetie... Dusk, I know how I would feel if Silver was taken away from me in a freak accident... most likely not knowing what had happened to him, if he was even alive?" He shook his head. "It would kill me... I would be worried sick, night and day... and that's only if I believed he was alive, but I wouldn't be able to know, would I?"

Dusk nodded in silence. "There's something about Sweetie Belle..." he said after a moment. "She's smart... very smart. She reminds me of you, of course," he nodded towards Elusive. "But she reminds me of myself too... it's... kind of scary to see so much of me in her, especially when Silver is around. I just can't help but notice how different she is from him, whereas you and I and Butterscotch and Applejack and Blitz and Berry Bubble... we all were pretty much identical to

our counterparts.”

“There’s more to it, Dusk,” Elusive said. “She’s sad.” His horn lit up as a picture that was resting next to the notebook floated up. “What has she lived through? What is she living through right now?” He put the picture down. “It’s not surprising she acts different; she’s slightly older and more experienced. But what worries me is... Is she ready?”

Dusk looked down. “I- I don’t know... she’s strong, and smart... but she’s just a filly.” He paused. “Artemis’ gift will certainly help, but Elusive... I feel like I’m failing not only her with this lack of success, but also myself. Like I’m about to give up on Twilight.”

Elusive shook his head. “It’s okay, Dusk, Sweetie is not trapped here, all we need to do is help her find that gem she needed.”

Dusk sighed. “I just wish there was something else I could do. I wrote down my findings in her notebook, hopefully somepony else can use them...” He looked up at his friend. “Sweetie Belle is Twilight’s apprentice... in some ways that makes her my apprentice too... it’s just, one night is not enough...”

Elusive chuckled. “It’s nice to see you feel responsible, Dusk, but you’re not. We can only hope that Sweetie will be returning home soon. With our blessings, and prayers, isn’t that right, Sweetie?”

Sweetie jumped, startled. “How... how did you know I was here?”

Elusive rolled his eyes. “Your coat, dear, it clashes with the walls.”

“Oh,” Sweetie said, looking down at her coat. She smiled sheepishly. “I guess it does.”

Both stallions chuckled as Dusk’s magic levitated another cup of tea to the table. “Would you care to join us?”

Nodding happily, Sweetie sat down and levitated the tea to her lips. “Hey, this is Spike’s- I mean, Spine’s special blend! Does everypony know about it?”

Elusive laughed. “Well, I knew, of course, and after seeing how distraught dear Dusk was, I decided to share the location just this once.”

Dusk shook his head, but smiled. “Now we only need to find that fragment so you can continue your journey,” he said. “I’m sorry I couldn’t send you home, Sweetie.”

Sweetie smiled a bit sadly. “I... I don’t think I would want to go without finding Twilight first...” she confessed.

“Do you have any idea how to find the crystal you need?” Elusive asked. “I have a gem-locating spell, but I don’t know if that will be of much help...”

“It’s okay,” Sweetie said before taking a moment to take a sip of that familiar tea. “I already know where it is.”

o.O.o

“Are you really leaving?” Silver asked, looking at Sweetie with sad, puppy eyes.

Sweetie Belle cringed. *Did I ever do that to Rarity?*

“I have to, Silver... this morning... I don’t know why but... I- I *know* that I have to go.”

“It’s too bad, kid, I was starting to like you after last night’s prank!” Rainbow Blitz grinned.

“Aw... I thought you could help us with getting our Cutie Marks...” Scooteroll said, walking up to her. “With your magic, I’m sure we could have made some awesome plans!”

“Ah’ll miss you, Sweetie Belle,” Applebuck said, giving her a short hug. “It was mighty fun havin’ you around.”

“We see that we didn’t miss Sweetie’s departure,” Prince’s Artemis’ voice reached them as he walked into the library.

“You’re doing that thing with the ‘we’ again,” Scooteroll commented, frowning.

Artemis blinked and cleared his throat. “Ah, right. I have to watch it, you see... I have a tendency to slip back into the royal ‘we’.”

“That’s better,” Scooteroll chuckled.

“W- I have brought you this, for your travels,” he said to Sweetie, levitating a small black gem and a white gem, which attached themselves to the spine of her book.

Sweetie’s eyes went wide when, with a small flash from the gems, a small trail of energy appeared over all the small gems in the book. “That’s the spell matrix!”

Dusk leaned close. “It is; usually you need a spell designed to let you see it for you to work on it directly. Gems and lenses are usually enchanted with it, along with a permanency spell to allow magical artisans and certain experts to work on them.”

“Ooh!” Sweetie smiled at Dusk. “I remember Rarity had one of those! She said she used it to make the diamonds and gems in the dresses! I never knew she was enchanting the gems!”

Elusive chuckled. “It is indeed a very useful tool!”

“So that’s how she made the notebook in the first place!” Sweetie said. “She created a simple matrix and used it to decorate the notebook as she would a dress...” she started pacing. “... but by using really good quality gems, she allowed Twilight to also enchant the notebook with the pocket dimension spell tied to me.”

Dusk frowned, as if he had thought of something for a second, but he shook his head and nodded. “Yes, the quality of the gems has allowed every other Twilight to add to and modify your notebook a bit; however, the last Twilight added some very heavy spells to it, and the space left is very limited.”

Sweetie studied the matrix. “I see... there are nine gems on the cover. The ruby on the upper left corner seems to be the start of the spell matrix, and it’s glowing pretty strongly in contrast to the opal on the opposite corner. These three, starting from the upper right all the way down to the lower left seem to be for one spell alone, feeding off the ruby via the central sapphire, but creating a loop with the jade to its left, linking to the opal, and the opal’s spell is dedicated, so it has no facets... my guess is that the Pocket Dimension spell is housed there and it uses the same energy such a reaction creates to ‘feed’ back the loop.”

“It’s truly ingenious,” Prince Artemis said, nodding alongside Dusk. “But it has basically reached the end of its upgrade capability, as it is. There’s a couple of spells in there that take a huge amount of energy and space; what they are for... I can only wonder.”

“Ah... could y’all translate all that magic mumbo-jumbo for the rest of us please?” Applebuck asked.

“It has a lot of spells already and can’t take anymore,” Prince Artemis simply stated.

“Ooooooh...” came a chorus of voices.

Sweetie sighed. “I guess there had to be a limit. The only thing it can take anymore is just plain written word...”

“Which,” Dusk interjected, his horn alight as he floated a scrap of paper over. “I happen to have something of the sort. You got something from the Prince. Now have something from me.”

Her eyes wide and curious, Sweetie took the paper into her own hold, and scanned its contents, an eyebrow raised. “A... A vessel of white, to hold the down...?” she asked, looking back at the stallion quizzically.

"Sweetie, I want you to understand this." the librarian stated, stepping close. "If you ever feel in need of... shelter, from your travels... when you use that spell, it'll take you straight back to this dimension. But don't use it capriciously. This WILL drain you of all your magic when you activate it. Only use it when things are too dire for you. Understand?"

The filly nodded slowly to him as she slipped it in between the pages of her notebook. "I understand, Dusk," she answered. With a brief flash of magic, she dismissed her notebook before turning towards Artemis with another question. "So, what do the two gems you added do?"

The prince chuckled. "I'll let you find out. Use the white one if you ever need to go to a formal occasion and the black one if you really need extra protection."

Sweetie nodded as she levitated the purple crystal Elusive had taken and replaced from her dress. She looked at it as it spun in front of her, then turned to look at the others. "It feels like I always say goodbye in this place," she said, looking around at the bookshelves and the ponies around her. "It's funny how I come here to find so much and yet... lose so much in the end."

Elusive nuzzled her. "Sweetie, you are much too young to be talking like that."

Sweetie smiled a bit. "I don't feel that young." She looked up at Elusive. "Elusive... brother, I... I wish I could stay a bit longer, but..."

Elusive nodded, his soft smile remaining as he took a step back. "You are always welcome back, sister. I always wondered how Rarity felt when she met Silver... and now I know. There's love that goes far beyond the limits of our dimensions."

Silver stepped forth and hugged Sweetie tightly. "I'll miss you..."

"I'll miss you too, Silver." Sweetie Belle said.

The colt nodded to her, pausing for a moment before speaking up again. "Sweetie..." he started, voice tinged with shyness as he searched for the words. "I- I think you should know... I... I like you... *really* like you."

Sweetie held him closer for a moment, before pushing him back so that she could see into his eyes as she held his shoulders. "Silver... you should know that... I love you. But like a brother, Silver. Just like I love Elusive. Can... can you live with that?"

Silver sighed, before nodding, accepting the situation. "Y-yeah," he replied, looking up at her with a bit more confidence than before. "You should come back to visit sometime... sis."

Sweetie nodded. "I'll try, bro... I'll definitely try."

"Sweetie," Dusk said, stepping up. "I can't speak for all Twilights and Dusks in the multiverse... but I think that most of us, if not all, would be proud and happy to call you our apprentice."

Sweetie nodded, trying her best to keep the blush off of her face as she replied. "T-Thank you Dusk... I hope to see you again."

Sweetie Belle stepped away from them and then turned, so she was facing them for a second. She then closed her eyes as her magic made contact with the crystal.

*Sweetie...* she heard Twilight's voice. *You're still here...*

*I'll bring you back home, Twilight... I promise.* Sweetie replied in her mind.

Dusk frowned again when he noticed the crystal start to pulsate. "Wait... wait! That's it! Sweetie!"

Sweetie Belle opened her eyes, startled. Already most of her body had disintegrated into motes of light.

"Sweetie! The Spell Matrix! The elder Twilight left a message for all other Twilights! It's in the matrix! The pulse..." He fell silent as the last of the lights faded.

Within seconds, the library was a scene of sadness, the departure of the filly having placed a damper on the mood. Especially the mood of one stallion, who had just now, realized what was at stake.

"I hope you heard enough..." he sighed. "Because you *need* to know... and soon."

o.O.o

"What did you mean, Dusk?!" Sweetie asked as the world flashed around her. Her eyes widened when she saw a metallic pony-like thing turning to 'look' at her.

"INTRUDER DETECTED!" it hollered. "STOP RIGHT THERE, CRIMINAL SCUM!" it added, turning fully to face her. "SURRENDER NOW AND BE ANNIHILATED!"

"Wait!" she shouted as two tubes mounted on its sides shot something at her. Sweetie Belle dove to the side, watching in horror as the ground was scorched where she had just been standing before. She quickly raised a shield, which buckled under another attack.

Sweetie Belle was pushed back, unable to do anything but concentrate as hard as she could on

the shield as several miniature objects slammed into it constantly as the metallic pony slowly advanced on her. "I'm... sorry! I didn't know I was trespassing! I'll go away!" she shouted over the rattling sounds of the things being shot at her.

The metal creature did not stop, however, until a rock hit it on its head.

Sweetie almost let the shield fall in surprise when a filly even younger than her and dressed up in some sort of yellow suit with a glass helmet ran straight onto the metallic pony and started smashing its face in with the rock.

"I hate bully-bots!" she shouted.

"IN- bzzt- SURReeeenDuuuur" SLAM! "ANNI-" SLAM! BAM! "LATED.." SLAM! SLAM! CRASH! A female voice clicked in from the remains of the metallic pony. "Your Solaris Inc. product seems to have malfunctioned. Please contact-" BAM! With a final smash, the *thing*, whatever it was, quieted down.

The little filly turned and looked up at Sweetie, who just then realized she was now in an adult body again, when she had to look down at her saviour.

"Hello, pretty pony!" The pink-eyed filly said with a smile. "I'm Puppysmiles! I'm looking for my mom! Have you seen her?"

o.O.o End Chapter 4 o.O.o

Next Chapter: [Pink Eyes](#)

A/N: [Read it here](#) Also, if you haven't done so for some reason, make sure to go read the new chapter of "[On a Whisper of Wind](#)"

