

At Her Majesty's Pleasure

A My Little Pony Fanfiction by PonyToast

Chapter 1

The Manehattan law office of Singlefoot, Steele & Pace was bustling, as usual. Paralegals darted here and there, delivering interrogatories or copying papers. The attorneys were nowhere in sight, either in their offices behind piles of paperwork or out performing duties related to the job. There were motions to be filed, and briefs to write. There never was a moment for slacking.

The door swung open and a gray, blonde pony entered, her eyes askew and a mailbag slung across her shoulders. She navigated the office silently and with ease, dropping envelopes on desks as she passed. The paralegals ignored her, far too engrossed in their work to pay her any heed.

She found it all fascinating. The letters, the motions, the pure and simple power of written words—it was all intriguing. Had opportunities worked out differently, she would have probably made a fine lawyer. Fate, it seemed, had other plans.

The mailpony made her last few stops in the office in the far back, where the senior partners were situated. Donna Singlefoot, a wizened older mare, gave her a knowing smile as she dropped off his mail, while Rex Pace did not even look up from whatever he was writing to acknowledge her presence. The mailpony did not like Pace. He had never once said hello to her.

She finally stopped at the office of Roan Steele. He was barely visible, however, behind a large stack of paperwork piled several feet high on his desk. She edged around the desk and found him asleep. She giggled silently to herself and curiously looked over his desk. Papers lay everywhere, several stained with ink splatters from strewn quills. Roan himself was dozing under a couple of papers himself, looking pathetic. As his name suggested, he was a brown roan-colored earth pony, with a black mane and tail. She nudged him.

“Objection!” He shouted as he startled awake. She gave him a look. “Oh, it’s you...how are you this morning?” He rubbed the sleep from his eyes and found that one of the grey pony’s eyes was fixed on him in concern. “Oh, don’t you worry a single bit about me. It’s just all these depositions...they’re taking a while...cutting into my sleep...you know how it is.”

She cocked her head to the right.

“Anyways, what mail do you have for me this morning...er...” He looked at the clock. “this afternoon, I mean.”

She pulled a stack of envelopes from her pack with her teeth and dropped them on the desk. Each and every one was labeled “From the High Court of Equestria: Extremely Urgent.” He sighed and began opening them. It was a few moments before he realized the mailpony was still standing there, biting her lip.

“Oh. Right.” He reached under the wooden desk and pulled up a small cloth bundle and handed it to her. Immediately she could smell cinnamon, vanilla and raisins. One of the firm’s more influential clients brought muffins in every week by the basketful, and Roan always promised her a small share. A small price to pay, he figured, when you wanted every motion delivered on time via Equestrian Mail.

As the happy pony trotted off out the door, Steele surveyed his disaster of a desk. Two months or more of depositions sat here, in addition to reports from expert witnesses and court transcripts. A lot of work had gone into creating this mess, and now it would take even more to get rid of it.

He opened the first envelope. *Motion for Summary Judgment*, it read, *in the matter of Vinyl Scratch v. Hoofbeat Records, inc. (i)No genuine issue of material fact is in dispute between the parties, and (ii) the moving party is be entitled to judgment as a matter of law...* it went on for several pages. After perusing the motion

for several minutes, he set it aside to begin drafting an objection. Last week he had consulted with his expert musicologist, an earth pony from Canterlot that played the double-bass. She had analyzed the two songs in question and given her expert opinion: Hoofbeat Records had released one of Vinyl Scratch's mixes under a different name and with a slight change in pitch and tempo; and of course Vinyl Scratch was not asked for permission. Hoofbeat didn't have (if the pun could not be avoided) a hoof to stand on with this issue, and Steele was more than prepared to take the matter to trial.

Trials were Steele's specialty. Personal injury lawyers dreamed of the kind of track record he had attained in his tenure in the courtroom. Aggressive, they called him. Driven. Cunning. The winner of a case is determined in the opening statement, they say, and Steele had given some of the best openers in history. Every trial was a new challenge for him to overcome.

Trials were becoming fewer and fewer these days, however. The reputation he had garnered had also been a curse; opposing attorneys were more likely to settle a case upon seeing his name at the bottom of his motions rather than take him in front of a jury.

The bell above the shop door rang lightly. Steele didn't even think to look up. Shortly thereafter, though, he heard some commotion in the front of the office, and looked up. He craned his neck to peer around the paper stacks to see the front door. His jaw dropped.

Her Royal Highness Luna had just walked in the door.

He had met the Princess Luna only once before. It has been a warm spring night at this past year's Grand Galloping Gala. His date had abandoned him to follow a member of the wonderbolts around, and he felt particularly awkward as he wandered the royal halls. just outside the front door, around a corner, he found the princess, gazing solemnly up at the sky.

She was gorgeous out in the moonlight, her silver mane falling in curls around her neck and shoulders. She wore a simple silver silk shawl over a black dress, with glistening silver slippers. Steele had been in awe at first, and then particularly intimidated by the stunning pony before him. Not to be deterred, however, he mustered his courage and approached her.

“Lovely evening, isn’t it?” A terrible opening line, he had to admit to himself as the princess looked back to him with a raised eyebrow. But a quick recovery was to follow: “I’ve always found the night to be so gorgeous. I suppose you modeled it after yourself.”

She laughed, like a chorus of tinkling bells in the night air. And as she did, he noticed with embarrassment that the edges of her eyes were stained with mascara; she had obviously been crying naught but a few moments before. He took a step back. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to bother you...”

She raised a hoof to stop him. “No, no, it’s fine. I...” she looked around at the other party guests, who gave her such a wide berth that it was clear to anyone that she, the younger royal sister, was to be avoided like the plague. Some of the ponies even gave Steele looks as if to say, “Why would you spend time with *that*?” Luna took a deep breath. “I could use the company.”

“Of course. Can I get you anything? A refreshment?”

“No, no, I’m fine.” She rubbed her eye lightly with her hoof. “So, tell me what you like about my night.”

He sat beside her, his heart thumping loudly enough that he was sure she’d be able to hear it. “Well, let’s see...” he looked up and searched for something charming to say. “I like how the stars are just bright enough that they can still be seen through the thin clouds but not so bright as to breach the shadowy cloak of darkness. I like how they are arranged into patterns...”

“I put them that way because I loved animals. I decided to show my love for them by

painting their pictures in the sky.”

Steele nodded. “I also like how the moon...it changes day to day, both in its place in the sky and in its shape. it is far less predictable than the sun--”

Luna shuddered. Steele realized, too late, that the mention of the sun was a chilling point for the princess. He decided against trying to finish his thought and risk digging into a deeper hole. “Is everything alright, Your Highness??”

She turned to him and gave him a questioning look. “I’ve been sitting here for hours, you know that? And you’re the first one out of *everypony here* to ask if I was alright.”

“Well, I--” his thought was cut off by the Princess, however, as she leaned in and kissed him. It was brief, but passionate. She pulled away after a moment. “Thank you.” And off, she disappeared, in a cloud of smoke, disappearing into the night.

And now, here she was again. Dressed in a conservative saddle and with a small handbag over her back, she spoke quietly to the intake paralegal at the front desk. The paralegal, more than a little starstruck, looked back toward Steele’s office and made a You-have-time-for-this-don’t-you look. He nodded and gestured for the princess to come back.

Far from the cliché damsel in distress, Luna strode to the back of the office with style and dignity known only to noble equines. A subtle daintiness mixed with determination. Her hooves made a soft click-clack on the hardwood floor as she approached. Steele quickly began moving piles of paper aside. He had just enough time to stuff a large pile under the desk when she reached the door and he leapt to his feet. He was about to introduce himself when none other than Rex Pace stepped in the way.

“Your Highness! What an honor to have us grace you with your presence here at Singlefoot, Steele and Pace. I’m Rex. Rex Pace. An honor.” He bowed.

Luna looked particularly uncomfortable. “Uhm. Charmed. Yes. Thanks.” She edged around him and into Steele’s office. Rex slinked sleazily back through his office door, glaring at Steele’s office door.

Luna took a deep breath and stepped forward. “Good afternoon, Mr. Steele. It’s my understanding that you—” She stopped as she got a good look at his face. “*You!*”

Steele blushed and contemplated hiding behind the only remaining stack of papers on the desk. The consequences of offending royalty could range from heavy fines to banishment; he knew this all too well.

“I...” He searched for the words. “I’d like to apologize—”

“For what?” she looked slightly annoyed. “Don’t—don’t even worry about it. I’m not offended or anything. I was just...surprised to find you...here. May I sit?” Asking! As if the question needed to be asked. He nodded and she sat. “Mr. Steele, I’m looking for a tort attorney. I’ve seen your courtroom track record and I’d very much like your assistance in a matter of great importance.”

Steele nodded and rooted around for a pad of paper from the mess of his desk drawer. Finally find one, he pulled the pen out of his coat with his teeth and poised to write. He paused and put down the pen. “You know I would be more than glad to listen to your case, Your Highness, but—”

“Luna.”

“I...what?”

“Please call me Luna.”

“Right. Luna. Anyways, I’d be glad to listen to your case, but why are you hiring a private attorney in the first place for a legal matter? Don’t you have access to the Royal Attorneys at Canterlot?”

Luna gave Steele a look of pure annoyance and Steele slowly slid toward the stack of papers. Then she sighed. “I can’t. They’re...I mean...they won’t help me...because...they’ll be representing the defendant.”

It took a few moments for the implications of this to sink in. “That means—”

“Yes,” Luna said, fixing Steele with a stern glare, “It is my intent to sue Princess Celestia in civil court for wrongful imprisonment.”

“Tough cases,” Steele’s professor had told said to her class in law school, “Do not come by often in the field of Tort Law. I would say that 99% of the time, your case is either going to be one you can win, or one you can’t.” She looked around the room at the students in the class. Mostly ponies, the class also hosted two griffins, a dragon and a manticore. She continued, “Occasionally, however, you’ll find one of those cases. On the outset, the case looks to be open-and-shut. But on the second glance, you find, to your horror or delight, that the case is not what you first imagined. These cases are the ones that take skill. These cases are the ones that take guts. These are the cases that require you to think like a lawyer.”

Steele was entranced by these words. He absorbed every aspect of the law, reading every

book on the subject he could get his hoof on. He had put some time into studying criminal law, but once he had begun to study personal injury he became hooked. It seemed like a noble calling for lawyers: the good guys making the bad guys pay up for hurting others.

Soon he began attending the law school's monthly tort mock trials. His first win had seemed like dumb luck, but then came another, and another. Soon he had taken the mock trial by storm. Other students no longer wanted to go against him. He knew he had found his calling.

His reputation in school had been quite a boon upon his graduation. Immediately he had received several offers for positions in a couple of firms. Most of them were larger, more corporate firms. The thought of pushing paper in a back office and never seeing the inside of a courtroom was not to Steele's liking, however, and he ended up turning most of them down.

Then, one day, he received an offer. The letter simply said, "Dear Mr. Steele: Looking trial partner. Hear you're good. Impress me and the job is yours. Sincerely, D. S."

He arrived at the door of Singlefoot & Pace less than a week later for an interview. Donna Singlefoot had taken him into the conference room and sat him in front of a stack of case files.

"Your task is simple, Mr. Steele. There are thirty cases here. Ten of them were won in court. Ten of them were lost in court. Ten were settled. Figure out which are which and I'll hire you. You have an hour." She left, closing the door behind her. Steele stared helplessly at the pile of cases. It would likely take the average attorney over an hour just to read them, let alone analyze them for case viability.

Challenge accepted.

Donna Singlefoot was completely unsurprised to hear the conference door open and the front door bell ring about a ten minutes after leaving Steele to do the nigh-on impossible task. Only

one pony had ever completed the test. The rest either tried, and failed miserably, or they just left rather than even try. She sighed. She had hoped that Steele would at least be among the former.

About twenty minutes later, though, the front door opened again, and Singlefoot saw a a tan pony-shaped blur dart into the conference room with a large cup of coffee. He only had a little under half an hour left now—he couldn’t expect to be able to do this with a third of his time gone?

Her curiosity got the better of her shortly thereafter. With only ten minutes left, she opened the door to take a peek. There Steele sat, leaning back in the chair, sipping his cup of coffee. The files were arranged into three piles of ten files each. *Impossible!* She entered the room and walked over to him. He smiled up at her.

“Well, Mr. Steele?”

“All done.” He gestured to the piles with his free hoof.

She started checking the files, dubious. Her face began to drop, however, as she scanned the file names and discovered that each and every one was in the right place. “How—you—”

He stayed silently smug as she rounded on him in disbelief.

“How did you...and you left for twenty minutes—”

“To get coffee. I hope that wasn’t a problem...I work better with a caffeine buzz.” He raised his coffee cup. “Cheers.”

Steele put the quill pen down and picked up his coffee cup. It had gone cold since the

morning. There was a long silence in the air between them. Luna then took a deep breath. “I know what you’re thinking. I actually went to a few lawyers in Canterlot but they all said the same thing...that this kind of case was too risky. I think that they didn’t want to be seen as—”

“—treasonous?” And to be fair, he had been thinking the exact same thing. Any attorney that took this case was facing a PR nightmare. This was a career-killer. This was the kind of case any prudent attorney would avoid.

Luna looked at the ground. “Exactly. But the situation is more difficult than that. The power my sister has amassed that gives you that fear of treason is the power she stripped away from me. Yes, I’m still ‘Princess Luna’ but my sister holds all of the power now. And because of that, she’s not liable for any crimes she commits?” A tear rolled down her face and dropped to the floor. “It’s not right.”

Steele pulled a tissue from his desk and handed it over. “I understand that.” He sat for a few more moments, thinking the situation over carefully. From the outset, this case would have fundamental problems. An impartial jury would be difficult. Then there was the issue of Head of State immunity. And witnesses—no one but the plaintiff and defendant would have been alive a thousand years ago. This seemed to be an open-and-shut *I can’t take this case*.

And yet...

He thought about it further. A jury would not be too much of a problem. At the least, the assembled jurors would need to be from somewhere far away from Canterlot, where Celestia rarely visited. It was doable. As for the rest...there were loopholes. There were always loopholes.

Luna looked up from the floor and fixed him with the most pathetic and adorable gaze one could possibly ever imagine.. “Will you help me, Mr. Steele?”

He leaned back in his chair and took another gulp of cold coffee. "I can promise you I will do the very best I can."