Chapter Sixteen: Hail to the Queen

How does one fathom the responsibilities of a queen? Or for that matter a Goddess?

Four ponies sat in two prison cells across from each other. The black bars had been enchanted to resist magic, but none of the occupants had any interest in making an escape. They were still wearing their costumes from the party, and they all felt a little ridiculous sitting in jail.

"I am definitely getting disbarred for this," said South Pole.

"At least you have a great story," smiled Cheerilee. "That was probably the most exciting thing I've ever done."

"This really doesn't compare to my best 'I woke up in jail' story," said Pokey. "But I gotta say, that was a great kick back there. I think you knocked a few of his teeth loose."

"It felt really good," said Cheerilee. "Nothing says equality like hooves to face."

"I really wish I had found you sooner," said Redheart. "I'm sure this could have all been prevented with a little better planning. Really, Pokey? A burglary in the middle of a masquerade? Don't you read enough stories to..." She paused, loathe to bring up Pokey's inadequacies. Pokey only shook his head.

"You do what you can with what you have," said Cheerilee. "I'm just glad no pony got hurt." Every pony stared at her. "Well, no pony that mattered, anyway," she clarified with a flippant gesture. "Really, has anything actually gone according to plan on this trip?"

"We couldn't go a dozen yards without tripping over some pony we knew," said Redheart.

"Well, that's part and parcel of the adventure business," said Pokey. "You wander enough of the world and sooner or later familiar faces start popping up." He rested his head against the prison wall. "Speaking of which, where the heck did you come from?"

"I've been a half an hour behind you for the better part of the day," said Redheart. "It wasn't until I ran into Spike at the train station that I actually found out where you were staying." She turned around to look in Pokey's direction. "Did you really threaten to kill him?"

"I would have, if those two hadn't stopped me," said Pokey. "Why didn't you catch up with us sooner?"

"Because you left in the middle of the night, you inconsiderate jerk," said Redheart. "I came to your tent early in the morning to find you two gone. When I got to Appleloosa, the train was pulling out of the station and I had to wait for the next one. Thanks for leaving me. I thought

we were better friends then that."

"I figured you and Plain Strider..."

"What? Would abandon you?" asked Redheart. "Why would you think that? We were supposed to stick together, and help each other. For all your talk of family and Kinship, you were sure quick to leave me behind. You went and dragged Cheerilee off before I could even explain what happened."

"And what did happen?" demanded Pokey. "You and Plainstrider vowed your hearts to each other? Swore never to part again? Made love in the rain?"

"Yes, yes, and yes," snapped Redheart. "We were planning on coming back to Ponyville once we had finished with Celestia's quest. I thought you'd be happy for me." Pokey threw up his hooves in exasperation.

"I'm so happy I could scream," said Pokey. "Fantastic. A big damn happy reunion. Horray."

They sat in silence for a while longer and stared out at the rising sun. It was early that morning when a member of the Equestrian Royal Guard trotted to the front of their cells. It was a large white pegasus wearing the armor of his office.

"You four have caused quite a stir," he said.

"We tend to have that effect," mumbled Pokey.

"And South Pole, my goddess," he continued. "How in Equestria did you hook up with this bunch of lunatics?"

"Good luck, I guess," said South as he rubbed his head. "Talos, this is Cheerilee, my uh..."

"Girlfriend," smiled Cheerilee. South Pole beamed at conformation of what he'd already suspected.

"And this is..."

"Pokey, yeah," he said. "You've become quite the talk of the town. Did you really cut off Blueblood's horn?"

"Only the tip," admitted Pokey. "It'll take a few weeks, but it will grow back. If he's looking for an apology, he can forget it."

“No, I’m sure that won’t be necessary,” said Talos.

“And she is...” South Pole had found himself at a loss. “You know, I don’t believe we were properly introduced before we were arrested.”

“Redheart,” she said, smiling. “A pleasure to meet you.”

“Likewise,” said Talos. He cleared his throat, and dug a royal proclamation from his armor. He put it on the desk and orated. “Hear ye, ponies of Equestria. The Ponies known as Medley, Pokey, Redheart, and Cheerilee, and any who have aided them, are hearby absolved of all crimes and misdemeanors, performed in pursuit of their assigned royal quest,. This includes, but is not limited to: assault, burglary, breaking and entering, assault with magic, forgery, grand larceny...” Cheerilee rolled her eyes.

“Well when you say it all like that, it makes it sound bad,” she said.

“...unlicensed dueling, and jaywalking.” finished Talos. “Furthermore, Princess Celestia requests their presence at the Royal castle tomorrow afternoon. That is, today, as she wrote this last night.” He rolled up the scroll. “So, basically, you’re free to go.”

“See, I told you,” smiled Cheerilee. “Royal pardons all around.”

“I’m too pretty for prison anyway,” said Pokey.

“Oh thank Celestia,” said South, breathing a sigh of relief. “Now all I have to worry about it the bar committee.”

“Oh, you’ll be fine,” said Cheerilee. “I’m sure most of them will think Blueblood got what he deserved.”

A few minutes later, the ponies had been released from their cells, and were let back into the city. Pokey immediately left to walk back to the hotel while the others waited for a carriage. It took him an hour, but he finally made it to the Canterlot Carriage Inn. The others, he discovered, had already left for the castle.

Pokey stood in the shower for a long time. He rested his head on the wall, letting the water run through his mane and down his back. It had been a very long night. Though the Canterlot jail cells were probably the most comfortable that he’d had the pleasure of visiting, he hadn’t gotten much sleep.

His plan for the meeting with Princess Celestia swirled in his mind. All at once it seemed like the only answer and the worst idea he’d ever had. He was already sorry that Redheart had joined them, and he only hoped Luna wouldn’t be there. He turned off the shower,

and donned his armor for what he was sure was going to be the last time.

Pokey made his way to the palace alone. The streets didn't glitter as brightly as he first remembered, but they still had that shine of elegance. He was going to miss Canterlot. If his planned worked as he had hoped, he was going to miss a lot of things. He came to the edge of the city, and the cascading cliff faces of Canterlot Castle

Pokey stood amazed at the towering spires of the palace. He gazed up at the domed roofs, each pointed with a unique star shaped weather vane. The sounds of waterfalls pouring over the edges of the pools far below echoed against the verdant cliff sides and filled the palace with a calming white noise. He took a deep breath, and started up the stairs.

The blue unicorn trotted up the gorgeous marble steps of the palace. Royal guards lined the stairs. Their golden armor shimmered in the beautiful clear day. A few eyes followed Pokey to admire his barding, but otherwise remained unmoving. Talos greeted Pokey at the top, and escorted him through the massive open halls into Celestia's throne room. Cheerilee, Medley, and Redheart had arrived far ahead of him and stood in front of the throne. Plain Strider and South Pole waited quietly by the sides. The Stones of Brilliance hung around the mare's necks.

"Glad you could make it," whispered Medley. "I was beginning to think you left town." She put the sapphire around Pokey's neck as he stood beside his companions.

"The thought had occurred to me," replied Pokey. He looked around at the assembled crowd. "I probably should have." Talos reappeared from behind a curtain, and cleared his throat.

"It is my great honor to present to you the ruler of our land," announced Talos. "She who brings us the sun every morning. The good, the wise, and the bringer of harmony to Equestria, her royal highness, Princess Celestia." The lavender curtains separated and the room bowed in reverence. The majestic white alicorn entered the room; her pastel rainbow hair wafted in the nonexistent breeze. She smiled gently at the gathered ponies. Pokey simply stared, and refused to bow to a goddess he no longer believe in.

"It is my great honor to present to you the ruler of our land," announced Talos, again. "She who brings us the moon every evening. The kind, the brave, and the bringer of peace to Equestria, her Royal highness, Princess Luna." The ponies remained bowed, and Pokey finally joined them as the azure curtains separated. In strode the purple alicorn; her blue hair cascaded like a waterfall down her neck. She greeted the ponies with a bow.

"My ponies, please rise," asked Celestia. The four stood and faced their goddess. "Last night, Medley flew to my tower with the four Stones of Brilliance I had asked you to find." She looked down at the ponies. "In your journey, you have traveled through the breadth of the Everfree Forest and to the depths of the Diamond Dog caves. You have returned from the plains

of the buffalo, and to the heart of our beloved Canterlot. You have traveled Equestria in order to save it, brave ponies." She looked to Pokey. Pokey only glared back.

"Along the way, you've face peril and terror far beyond that of what any ruler can expect of her equines. I am truly sorry for having laid this task at your hooves." She looked back to Luna, who nodded quietly. Celestia floated the Diamond away from Redheart as Luna took the Emerald, Sapphire, and Ruby from the other three. The stones hung brilliant around the goddess's necks. A pulsing white light filled the throne room.

"I'm sure you've figured out by now what these are for," said Luna. The ponies nodded, waiting in anticipation to see them in action. "I made these stones a long time ago to save the world from another flood. While I was... away, they were taken from the palace, and given to the Hamites for safe keeping. Over the years, they forgot what the stones were for. They were stolen, or given as gifts because none of them knew how important they were. When I first heard reports of the Blight returning, I went to get them back. When the Hamites didn't have them, I asked my big sister for help."

"You were not who I would have originally chosen for this quest," admitted Celestia. "A new generation of heroes should have been called to arms, but the Hamite prophecy said to send you four instead.

"I realized that this was the sort of quest would take the maturity and grace that comes with age, rather than the brash impetuousness of youth." She stepped down from the platform. " And I knew that along the way, you'd have to rely on your past experiences and contacts to help you. I also knew you would be called upon to do things those young ponies like Twilight wouldn't have thought of." She looked at her gathered heroes.

"Redheart would seek to save a village by calling the rains," said Celestia. "Medley's desire to protect children brought peace and equality to a tribe who would otherwise know none. Cheerilee's gifts of knowledge and expertise brought the pieces together, and Pokey..." She looked sadly at Pokey, and shook her head. "Your strength and courage brought them all home." Pokey stood still. It wasn't time yet.

"Sister," interrupted Luna. "It's time."

Celestia nodded, and took to the sky. The sun rose higher in the sky at her command, and filled the skies of Equestria with its life giving light. She hung in the air, hooves outstretched to the heavens as Luna took flight. The moon started its ascent early, and soon it moved to overshadow the sun. The ponies gasped as the eclipse formed in front of them. The moon slid into place in front of the sun; the edges of the sun's light radiated around the rim of Luna's moon. It was in that moment that the Stones shone brightest, and filled the sky above with a trembling

light.

A tri-colored rainbow burst forth from the corona of the eclipse. It spread in a circle of light across the skies of Equestria. The rainbow spanned across the sky and rolled through the air in a wave of color that cleansed the land below. The patches of moss which had snuck into the palace popped into clouds of black dust, annihilated by the power of the stones. A crack of deafening thunder rattled the throne room beneath them to shake the very foundations of the castle. The rainbow rolled through the heavens and showered the land in radiant light. It continued its journey, and finally disappeared from view to cleanse the land. Luna's moon rolled across the sky again, and dipped below the horizon. The goddesses touched down in front of the four ponies.

"My dear, sweet, Medley," said Celestia, approaching the turquoise pegasus. "I'm truly sorry for what happened to you. When Luna told me she had to intervene on your behalf, I wept to think that I had nearly killed a mother of three. I didn't find that the prophecy had changed until two days ago when I received word from Thasrow that you had come. It was a mistake to send you, and I am sorry for the pain I've caused you."

"I was happy to serve, your Highness," said Medley, bowing to her princess. "You are a mother to all ponies. Even if I wasn't supposed to be on this quest, I would happily serve you again."

"There is no need for that, Medley," Celestia replied. "You can go home to your children, and raise them as you have always wished. For you, I offer the promise of education for your children, and a sum to be paid to you and Snow Catcher annually. Never shall your finances trouble you again."

"Thank you, your majesty," Medley said. Her voice was barely a whisper. "You have given me the greatest gift of all." She cmae to Cheerilee, and bowed before her.

"My dearest Cheerilee," she said. "I know you have no desire of material wealth. Instead, I have something you have sought since you were a filly." In a puff of smoke, a scroll appeared before the princess. "For your scholarly work, I am proud to award you with the title Doctorate of Philosophy. From hence forth, and according to your wishes, you may be called Doctor Cheerilee." The earth pony's face filled with joy. She bowed to the princess and her smile lit up the throne room.

"Thank you, your highness," replied Cheerilee. "I will use this gift it to spread knowledge in your honor." Celestia smiled at Cheerilee, and shook her head.

"A gift implies you didn't earn it," said Celestia. "Your work with the stones and the paper that Ingrid Marie forwarded to me indicates that you have earned your diploma a dozen

times over. I know you'll use your new title to spread knowledge, and I know your boundless cheer will keep education in the minds of all you meet." She turned to Redheart, and only smiled.

"I have what I've always desired, your majesty," she said as she bowed to her princess. "It was because of your quest that Plain Strider and I are reunited. Nothing you could offer could compare to what you have already given me, and to have served you is the greatest reward of all." Celestia nodded, and at last came to Pokey.

"My dear Pokey," she said. Celestia walked in front of the blue unicorn. He stared, stone faced, at the wall behind her. "I can't fathom how much you've lost. Is there nothing I can do for you to ease the burden of what I have asked of you?"

"I only want a word alone," said Pokey. His voice was as cold and flat as marble he stood on.

"Surely, whatever it may be, you can ask in front of your companions?" asked Celestia. "Have you not become family over this trip? Have your hardships not brought you closer together?"

"It's personal," said Pokey. "If you don't wish to speak with me, I'll just leave."

"Very well," said Celestia. "Please follow me." She led Pokey to a door behind the throne room, and the two disappeared inside. Cheerilee looked up, worried at Pokey' secrecy. Redheart bore a look of serious concern as the door shut behind them.

"Your majesty?" asked Medley. Luna looked to the Medley; her face was blank with fear.

"I really don't think she should have done that," said Luna.

Celestia's private office was surprisingly simple. A fireplace crested with a crown burned in one corner, and a stand for reading scrolls sat next to a low, round bed. The walls were a subtle blue, and tapestries hung from the walls depicting maps and stars. A basket of flowers grew in the corner. Celestia turned to speak with Pokey. He was at Celestia's throat in an instant. His horn shimmered with a dark light.

"You've taken away everything I've ever had," Pokey growled. His horn glimmered an inch from Celestia's perfect white neck. "I used to pray to you," he said. His voice was quaking in rage. "Every day, I would call to you, asking for a sign that you cared. You have never answered the prayers of your followers. Not once have I seen a sign that you cared, Celestia. NOT ONCE." His horn was shaking now; his whole body trembled in righteous fury. "I have sacrificed everything I had to your damn quest. How many more ponies must suffer because of you?" His eyes narrowed, and he drew breath in ragged gasps. "Give me a reason why I

shouldn't kill you and free ponies from your tyranny. GIVE ME A DAMN REASON."

"Because your life has been a lie Pokey," said Celestia. Her voice was as calm and dulcet as if she were addressing a child. "Everything you've done since you left the Kin has been a lie. You're not a chef. You're not a home body. You don't even like cats." She stared at Pokey's glowing horn; it reflected in her eyes. "You've been lying to yourself, Pokey, and that's the one pony you should never lie too. You worshiped me when you thought it would make Redheart happy. Why would I answer insincere prayers? You're a Kin. You worship my sister, like so many other ponies. Why didn't you pray to her, Pokey? What made you think she wouldn't listen?" Sweat formed at Celestia's brow, and dripped down her face.

"I know you hate me Pokey," she said. "But I love you. Hard as that might be to believe, I love you just as I love all my little ponies." Pokey kept his horn to her neck. He searched for the courage to strike her down. All it would take is the flick of the neck, and here he stood, unable to finish the job. Maybe Blueblood was right. Maybe he and his Kin were cowards.

"I don't expect your love in return, Pokey. I only ask that you understand. I do what I must to make Equestria a better place for every pony." Celestia stepped back. Pokey stepped with her, and pinned her to a corner. "You think I'm a horrible tyrant, that imposes my will on ponies for my own sick amusements. Or perhaps that I'm some salacious monster who preys on the bodies and emotions of ponies to feed my insatiable lusts and ego. But I'm none of those things, Pokey." She searched his eyes. She was looking for the hero she knew was inside this hate filled monster that stood before her.

"What I am is a Princess," she said. "And sometimes that means sacrifices. Do you know why I didn't want to send you on this quest?" Pokey simply glared as he tried to force himself to strike. "I didn't want to send you on this quest because I knew how much you'd lose." Pokey's face lit up with shock. He moved his glowing horn from her throat.

"What?" he asked. His horn still flared with dark light.

"You were the only pony in all of Equestria that could have done what I needed you to do. I didn't know all of the challenges along the way, but I did know that you, and only you, were the only pony who I could count on to bring all those other ponies home." Pokey's spell wavered; the black light flickered a moment. "You are the greatest of your generation, Pokey. Don't ever let any pony ever tell you different." Celestia put her head on his shoulder. Her neck was only a merest touch away from the dark light. Pokey stood transfixed to the spot, unsure if she was bluffing.

"This was your last quest, Pokey," said Celestia." Look at what you've accomplished. You are the pony who saved Equestria from the Blight. Fillies and colts will look up to you and want to be like you. Ponies will see that your Kin aren't just mules and donkeys, but equines

with hearts and souls that beat just the same as their own." Celestia's words pierced through Pokey's hate, and his spell failed him. He stepped back from the princess, overcome with guilt.

"What you've done will open the flood gates of love and tolerance once more. It will show ponies the best of all walks of life, and bring forth peace to our lands once again." Celestia stepped away from Pokey, and spread her hooves for battle. "So if you still want to kill me now, go ahead. I won't send you away; I won't call for my guards. But I can promise you Pokey, I will not go without a fight." Her own magnificent horn glowed with the same black light Pokey had come to depend on. "And you know what they say about ponies and promises." Pokey shifted into stance. He cursed his cowardice for not striking when she was defenseless.

Pokey and Celestia circled each other in the small office. Pokey searched the alicorn for a weakness, any vulnerability. He watched for an opening; that one opportunity to strike her down once and for all. They both knew this battle would only have one blow. Pokey glared at the princess with unbridled hate. Celestia only looked down on him with regret.

"That horn of yours is dangerous, Pokey," she said as they circled. "It's probably one of the few things that could really hurt me." She stared into his yellow eyes, not with hate or anger, but with infinite sorrow. "You have always used your power for good." Tears filled the corners of her violet eyes. "Please don't make me do this."

You've always used your powers for good.

Celestia's words cut through his rage as surely as his horn would have cut through her. He thought back on this quest; on all of his quests. Over the years, he'd lost, and he'd sacrificed, but in every situation where he had triumphed, he'd brought forth only good.

Now he stood before a beloved goddess, not as a hero accepting the spoils of victory, but as an assassin. Had he fallen so far from his ideals because she had made him lose something? What would Redheart think? Or Medley? Or Cheerilee? This wasn't what a warrior would do. Pokey's dark light flickered out, and he fell to his knees.

"I filled my heart with hate for you," sputtered Pokey as tears of rage and guilt choked his throat. "And I came here to end your reign of terror." He looked up at the white alicorn. His yellow eyes were full of the pain of failure. "But you're not a tyrant any more than I'm an assassin. You're just like every other pony; you do the best you can with what you have. Sacrifices are always required to achieve good, and I lost sight of the fact that I am that sacrifice this time. " He slumped to the floor, defeated in spirit and broken in soul. "I have nothing left of me to give. I am a traitor to myself, and all that I've ever believed in." He removed his helm and let it clatter to the floor. Pokey closed his eyes and presented his neck to the princess.

"I accept your execution as a sweet mercy. Please swing true." The dark light that

surrounded Celestia's horn faded as she wrapped her arms around Pokey. She held the unicorn as a mother cradles a child.

"I love you Pokey," she said. "Please forgive me. I promise I'll never ask anything of you again."

Epilogue

No story truly ends.

It was the late in the winter when Medley heard hooves knocking from outside. She gathered up her foal, and made for the wooden door. Behind it stood Redheart. Her candy cane scarf accented her cheerful smile.

“How is little Rain Fall doing?” she asked.

“He’s doing great,” smiled Meldey. “How is Plain Strider handling the winter?”

“He keeps claiming to be built for the harsh snows,” said Redheart. “But I know better. He’ll come around and buy some galoshes eventually.” She unwound her scarf and hung it up on a nearby peg. Potpourri dashed up to the white pony and hugged her legs.

“Hi!” she exclaimed. Redheart picked up the filly.

“Oh, you’ve gotten so big!” said Redheart. “What has your mommy been feeding you?”

“Only the finest fruits and vegetables we can afford,” smirked Medley. “I’m so glad you decided to come back to Ponyville.”

“Plain Strider wanted to settle somewhere that would accept us,” said Redheart. “And where better than my own home town?” Cheerilee appeared at the open door with a basket of cookies in her mouth.

“Well, look who it is!” said Redheart. “Explored any new ruins yet, Dr. Cheerilee?”

“Not at all,” said Cheerilee. “A summer break of digging through the hills of Stalliongrad will seem like a picnic compared to these fillies and colts.” She glared at Medley. “Speaking of which, your filly...”

“I know, I know,” giggled Medley. “Ingrid Marie told me all about it. I’ll be sure to give her a firm talking to.”

“It was pretty funny though,” said Redheart. “There wasn’t any permanent harm done, just a bit of discoloration of her mane. She’ll figure these kids out eventually.”

“Is South going to be able to make it?” asked Medley.

“I’m afraid he’s in Manehatten these days. We uh...” Cheerilee looked away. “We don’t get to see each other much anymore.”

“Oh, dear; I’m sorry to hear that,” said Medley. “I really do like him.”

“I do too,” said Cheerilee “We’re going to spend the spring break together, and we’ve got some plans for later in the year. We’ll be okay.” Cheerilee looked out the window. She thought she saw a dark light piercing the falling snow. “Have either of you heard from Pokey?” she asked. Medley shook her head. She poured out a few glasses of wine, and passed them to the other ponies

“Not since Fall,” replied Medley. “I think he’s really gone for good this time.”

“I hope not,” said Cheerilee. “I miss his foul mouth.”

“I miss his crass humor,” admitted Medley.

“I miss his company,” said Redheart. “He was always an interesting pony to be around.”

They stood in silence a moment with their thoughts. Behind them, a fire warmed the house, and the children happily stood at the hooves of the mares. Cheerilee raised her glass to the ceiling.

“To Pokey,” she said. “May he find faith.”

“May he find love,” toasted Redheart.

“May he find his home,” toasted Medley.

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The moon shined down on the landscape as it climbed through the night. Miles upon miles away, Pokey sat beside the fire with War Jenny. He stared into the Kin’s campfire. A few of the Kin were enjoying the products of good forage, and generally celebrating life. Pokey thought of the news coming from Equestria, and how his quest had played into the changes that were sweeping through the country.

The Kin of Luna had started coming back to Equestria after word of the deeds of one had traveled the lands. True to her words, Celestia welcomed home all those who worshiped her sister, and urged peace among equines everywhere. There were growing pains, as was expected with any growing family, but the salvation of Equestria at the hooves of a Kin had helped bridge the gap.

“What’s going on inside that head of yours, dear brother?” asked War Jenny. “Not thinking about leaving us again, are you?” Pokey shook his head.

“I sometimes wonder if I’ll ever find what I’m looking for,” said Pokey. “Maybe I’ll travel with Trixie for a while. She’s always been good at finding what she’s looking for.”

“And what are you looking for?” asked War Jenny.

“Meaning,” said Pokey. “I’ve been given all these gifts. I have all these memories and adventures and quests, and nothing seems to tie them together.” He looked up at the moon. “Every night I pray for answers, and every night I come up with nothing.”

“Don’t start to doubt your faith, Pokey,” said War Jenny. “You know that they both listen to you.”

“My faith is the only thing I’m certain of anymore,” said Pokey. “And I thank Luna for giving me the strength to keep going.” He closed his eyes, and laid his head on his hooves.

“So why question her for meaning?” asked War Jenny. “Did you ever consider that what you’re looking for can’t be found here?” Pokey’s head perked up. He looked at his sister as her idea sank in. He nodded, andconsidered the wisdom.

“I suppose you’re right, my dear Jenny,” said Pokey. “Finding meaning in life really is that one last quest that we all take.”

Pokey stared up at the moon, and prayed to the goddess he knew listened. He offered only thanks, and asked only to see the next moon rise. In the morning, he would pray to the sun, and thank Celestia for a new day. The encounter at the palace had changed him, and given him the faith in both Goddesses that most ponies never felt. It was a sense of completeness that he had been missing his entire life.

He looked out onto the campsite, where mules and unicorns foals played together in the moonlight. They would be moving on in the next evening, but where ever they camped was home.

Home. Pokey considered the word.

Ponyville had never really been his home, though he had resided there for a number of years. The lies he had told himself had brought him only misery. Though he missed Redheart, her happiness had given him the courage to seek him own. Happiness starts at home, and he had found home again in the arms of his Kin. Home was where you could be yourself, and here among the Kin, Pokey was home once more.