

Opening Week

A continuation of a speed-fic based on Blaze's The Conversion Bureau
which itself was a fanfiction of My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic
By Anonsi(Bringing new lows to literature)

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DAY 3

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It was seven o'clock in the morning when Shimmer Sprite awoke. '*An ungodly hour if ever there was one,*' her mind groaned as the young mare sluggishly rolled over in her bed.

She took a few seconds to yawn and ungracefully scratch her stomach with a hoof before exiting the warmth of the bed. She instantly regretted leaving behind the warmth of the blankets and sheets as she found the medical room to be very cold this morning despite of the murky rays of sunlight that shined in through the dirty windows. Sprite grumbled a few choice words under her breath before looking to the bed of her fellow patient.

To her surprise, the young blue stallion wasn't there. In fact, his bed had been stripped of its sheets and now laid ominously bare. Pushing slightly paranoid thoughts out of her mind, Shimmer Sprite drowsily made her way out through the clinic doors she had seen Agent Graves use yesterday. The hallway beyond had no windows, making it as dark as it was cold. Despite the gloom, the yellow mare was able to spot a few hungry looking rats scurry into their holes. Though these rodents weren't nearly as friendly looking as the ones from her old apartment.

A look of revulsion crossed her face as she whispered, "Holey horse-apples, what a mess."

Shimmer Sprite hesitated before taking her first steps into the dark hallway. Once she arrived about halfway, the door on the far end opened up and flooded the dingy passage with light from the room beyond. Two ponies stood in the doorway. She recognized one of them as Cobalt Blue by the dumb smile that lit up his face when he saw her. The other was a older looking painted mare that had an auburn mane tied up in a bun, and wore two saddle bags marked with red crosses. Cobalt had what appeared to be a tray of food held around his neck by a leather strap, while the other pony carried saddle bags with a big red cross on them.

"Good morning!" the young blue stallion said happily as he trotted over to Shimmer Sprite, minding not to get too close to the small rat holes as he approached. "I got you some breakfast! It's not as good as that dinner we had when we first got here, but hey! Nothing wrong

with some oats and o.j. for breakfast is there?"

Sprite cast sleepy glances between the smiling colt and the food on the tray, eventually remembering her manners and replying, "Thanks Blue. You can put it down in the clinic, I guess..."

"Right," said Cobalt with a nod as he trotted past her. "Oh, Shimmer Sprite, this is Nurse Peanut Brittle. She'll be telling us about our duties today!"

Shimmer Sprite regarded the older mare warmly and said, somewhat more sarcastically than she intended, "I can't wait."

Nurse Peanut Brittle let go a guffaw and motioned for Sprite to go back into the clinic, "It's not all that bad dear. Just have a seat and we can get started while you eat."

After crawling back into bed and wrapping herself in the blankets, Cobalt gingerly placed the tray onto her lap and returned to his own cot looking as cheerful as ever.

"You know, you two caused quite a stir for us," said the nurse as she extracted two official looking forms from her saddle bags and placed them in front of Sprite and Cobalt, "it was all us old biddies could talk about yesterday. Can't say the Black Suits cared for it as much as we did, but I suppose they aren't much for gossip."

Shimmer Sprite gave a snort at the mention of the Black Suits, and swallowing a mouth full of oats stated, "From what I've seen of them, they don't care much for ponies either. That Graves guy even said me and Blue here were only alive because they'd be 'understaffed' if we died."

"It's true," said Cobalt from his bed, "they're not very nice."

Nurse Peanut Brittle gave a sympathetic look at the pair. "I know dearies, but what they lack in manners they make up for in efficiency. That's something good to say about them I suppose..." The elderly painted mare shook her head a bit and continued, "Anyway, those charts I've given you are your schedules. The number at the top right is what room you'll be working in, the first column on the left is who you're seeing, and the columns after that are where you write what type of pony they turn into, mane and coat color, if they have a cutie mark or not, etcetera."

"Why do they want to know all that?" asked Sprite after downing half her orange juice.

The old nurse just rolled her eyes and replied, "I can only guess dearie. Humans just seem to like lists."

Shimmer Sprite shrugged off the question and refocused on the last remnants of her

breakfast. She only half listened to Nurse Peanut Brittle as the older mare continued to talk about the proper procedure for administering the ponification potion to the human patients. The nurse made sure that both Sprite and Cobalt knew the steps by heart, and several times stopped mid speech to quiz the two of them about it. According to Nurse Brittle, even though the process was simple, one tiny screw up could do far worse than merely kill the unlucky patient.

Once the briefing was over, the elderly mare cleared her throat and said, "Alright you lazy bones, get yourselves ready for some work. We've got humans lining up around seven blocks, and we can't keep them waiting."

Shimmer Sprite and Cobalt Blue grabbed their forms and climbed out of their beds. The yellow mare was again beset upon by the cold air and couldn't help but shiver as the almost freezing temperature surrounded her.

"Why's it so damn cold?" asked the honey gold pony, "Wasn't it summer when we left Equestria?"

"This *is* summer for the humans," said Peanut Brittle as she lead the two young ponies down the dark hallways of the bureau. "At some point the humans had a really big fight and they used bomb so powerful that it turned an entire country into one big hole in the ground."

Shimmer Sprite and Cobalt Blue both reeled at thought of something so terrible. "Why on Earth would they use something like that?" asked Sprite with a horrified tone.

"They didn't say," replied the elderly nurse with a sigh, "but for whatever reason, they're paying for it now. It's always winter here in human lands, but it never snows. According to them it hasn't so much as rained in fourteen years. It just gets cold now, and things just freeze." With a shudder the old mare added, "Just freeze and die."

Cobalt and Sprite exchanged looks, the blue colt taking a gulp as he forced a smile and said, "Well we're here for them now, right? No more worries?" With a nervous glance towards Shimmer Sprite, he added, "A-and if you're cold, I could...uh...maybe...get c-close to you? O-only to keep you warm of course! Nothing creepy!"

Sprite gave him a flat look and stated, "Don't push your luck. I'm still not over the whole almost burning to death thing."

He gave a weak laugh as he replied, "I guess it would be too much to hope you'll forget about that one day wouldn't it?"

The honey gold mare tried her very hardest to glare at him, but her face cracked into a smile while a small, but none the less genuine, bout of laughter escaped from her lips.

Cobalt looked at her like he had just won a million bits.

"Are you two love birds done?" interrupted Nurse Peanut Brittle with possibly the most amused expression Shimmer Sprite had ever seen on a pony, "We're here, in case you two were too busy looking deep into each other's eyes to notice."

Sprite blushed profusely and focused her attention to the newest hallway the elderly nurse had led her and Cobalt to, while also doing her best to squash down those pesky butterflies in her stomach. They all stood in a busy hallway with grungy white walls and a tiled floor that was in desperate need of mopping. The floors were marked with lines of various colors that lead in different directions. Doors lined the both walls of the long hallway, and each one had an 'A' followed by a number painted onto it. The young mare assumed that this was another way the humans organized things, and began to wonder just how big a place had to be to warrant such measures.

"Okay love birds, I've got my own chores to attend to, so I'm going to leave you here," said Peanut Brittle as she trotted away from the pair of them. With one last wry smile at Shimmer Sprite she added, "And don't go finding any burning closets to share your passions in!"

"Th-that's not what happened!" Sprite stammered at the retreating nurse, "We weren't going to..." By the time the mare with the honey gold locks could think of a good rebuttal, Peanut Brittle had already disappeared into one of the doors. Shimmer Sprite let go a frustrated huff and glared at the sheepishly smiling Cobalt. "If ponies start thinking we're together, I'm going to buck you into next Sunday."

Cobalt Blue's grin faded and a was replaced with a thoughtful stare, "Can you really do that?"

The yellow mare tried to glare at him, but just couldn't come up with enough willpower to do it. She instead settled on a flat look and a shake of her head. Wishing to just get the day over with, Sprite looked over her chart and saw that she would be working in room 'C6' today. Glancing around the hall, she spotted an arrow painted on the far wall pointing left and marked with a big yellow C.

"Where are you working today Blue?" Sprite asked aloud.

"Uh..." replied the colt as he fumbled with his own form, "...I'm in B2."

The yellow mare grinned at the fact that she would be spending a great deal of time away from the rather emotional stallion, and would have a chance to appreciate giving Celestia's gift to the humans without worrying about Cobalt doing something creepy.

With a nod, Sprite pranced down the hall. "I'll meet you there when it's time for our

second shift then! See ya!” she called back to the colt. *‘No need for him to hover outside my door...again.’*

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Her mind was swimming with thoughts of her first real encounter with the people she’d be converting today. Her excitement was almost palpable as she stood in front of a door marked C6, and after taking a deep breath to steady her nerves, she pushed her way into the stark white operating room.

It was a small square room, and there wasn’t much room for movement between the operating chair that dominated the center and the cabinets full of sterilized supplies that lined the walls. A tangerine unicorn stallion with a vibrant red mane stood next to the leftmost cabinet with a large red box in front of him. From where Sprite stood, he seemed to be counting out vials of a purplish liquid one by one.

‘Don’t lurk in doorways Shimmer Sprite, it’s dreadfully impolite,’ said the ethereal voice of Madame Orange in the yellow mare’s mind. Sprite shook her head clear of the irritating voice of her previous mistress, and after giving herself a few knocks to the noggin to make sure it would stay gone, decided the best way to announce herself would be by clearing her throat. “Ah-hem.”

The reddish orange unicorn didn’t look away from the small bottles he was hovering out of the box, but merely stated, “Glad you could join us Ms.Sprite, how are you feeling?”

Moving to stand next to the unicorn, Shimmer Sprite dutifully replied, “I’m feeling fine sir.”

“Good,” said the unicorn as he placed the last vial of the purple liquid down on the shelf. Turning to face the mare, he extended a hoof and continued, “I’m Doctor Tourniquet, and if I’m not mistaken, you’ll be helping me administer the ponification potion today.Yes?”

The young mare took the doctor’s hoof and shook it, “Yes I am.”

The unicorn doctor smiled pleasantly and continued, “Did Nurse Peanut Brittle also give you the rundown of the ponification procedure?”

“Yes doctor.”

“Good, we can skip all the boring parts then and get right to the good stuff. This is your first time converting a human yes?” he asked glancing back to the small vials of potions.

Shimmer Sprite failed to hide her excitement as she quickly answered, “Yes it is.”

“Then you’re in for a treat,” he said moving towards the entrance of the room. Doctor Tourniquet pushed a small button to the left of the door that caused sharp sounds of static to fill

the air. "Nurse Broadway? This is Doctor Tourniquet, we're ready in room C6. Send down...uhh..." The doctor looked at Shimmer Sprite and whispered, "Who's up first?"

Sprite extracted the chart she had gotten earlier and read the first name, "Amelia H. Roe."

"...Amelia Roe please."

"Sure thing Doc," crackled a nasally voice from the button.

'This is it,' thought Shimmer Sprite as her excitement grew, 'I finally get to do what I came here to do. I'm finally going to help someone!'

Seconds turned to minutes as the young mare waited to hopefully meet her first *nice* human. She barely noticed the silence that hung in the room for close to ten full minutes before the door to the small operating room swung open.

There in the doorway stood Sprite's first patient. Amelia Roe was a tall woman with pale skin and a very short black mane that didn't get past her ears. Judging from how thin she was, Shimmer Sprite could only assume that the poor woman hadn't eaten in days. Perhaps even weeks. Despite all this however, Amelia was all smiles. She had the sort of expression Sprite could only describe as pure joy.

After a moment of sizing up her very first human convert, Shimmer Sprite stepped forward and cleared her throat. "Hello there Amelia," she said with a shining smile, "I'm Shimmer Sprite and that's Doctor Tourniquet."

"Hello," added the doctor, "are you ready to become a pony Ms. Roe?"

The human grinned right back at the yellow and gold pony, her malnourished features apparently able to still make one of the happiest looking faces the yellow earth pony had ever seen. "God yes."

"Take a seat then madame," said the doctor as he uncorked the bottle holding the miraculous serum, "and do you have any last questions or concerns before we do this?"

"Just one," said Amelia as she quickly eased into the chair. Looking up at the doctor she asked in complete seriousness, "When do I get to go to Equestria?"

"The boats to and from Equestria leave every two days, so you'll be spending a night here in the dorms before the boat departs tomorrow afternoon."

Amelia stared up at the ceiling as a content look came across her face. Relaxing into the chair she said, "I'm ready."

Doctor Tourniquet gave a nod to Shimmer Sprite. Returning it, the mare walked over the shelves and scanned them until she found a rack of needles filled with a power sleeping drug. Taking one in her mouth, she carefully plucked Amelia in the side of the arm with the needle and administered the powerful sedative.

The tangerine doctor levitated the potion over to Amelia and eased it into her mouth. Tourniquet and Sprite threw away their empty utensils and watched patiently as the human woman closed her eyes, falling into a deep slumber just as her skin began to ripple from the effects of the ponification potion. It took fifteen minutes for the ponification process to finish, replacing the once starving Amelia with a healthy unicorn with a vibrant green coat and dazzling blue mane.

Shimmer Sprite looked on in awe, knowing that she had never felt more proud in anything else she had done. This is what she was meant to do with her life. She knew it was.

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Shimmer Sprite learned that most converts remained unconscious for at least half a day after being turned, so the yellow and gold earth pony didn't have the opportunity to talk to the newfoals like she wanted. So she made up for this by talking to the incoming patients as much as she could before they ingested the miracle potion, something that revealed several startling things to the young mare.

Foremost was just how terrible things had gotten for the humans since they dropped that bomb. Plant life was dying all over their world from the eternal winter that they were trapped in, and save for cockroaches and rats, all the animals had long ago died from either radiation poisoning or the cold. Starvation was everywhere, and only a select few humans had the means of getting a decent meal. A young human male called Bradley told Sprite that the mob that attacked the bureau two days ago was actually a food riot that was angry at the ponies for getting to eat a banquet while they starved out in the streets.

By the end of her first shift, Shimmer Sprite and Doctor Tourniquet had converted forty seven humans. It wasn't physically demanding work, it was just giving the human a small bottle and telling them to drink after all, but the golden mare still felt exhausted. Talking to the humans and hearing about their lives had sent her on a roller coaster of emotions, which was much more exposure to her feelings than she was used to.

"What a day," said the doctor as he packed up the empty potion bottles, "I could really go for a hay and barely malt right now."

Shimmer Sprite sat on her haunches and massaged her temples, wearily adding, "Tell me about it. I still got the night shift to go through."

Tourniquet winced, "Ouch."

"That's what I said," Sprite sighed, "...but at least I'll have the humans to talk to."

The tangerine doctor looked over to her with a pained expression, "I wouldn't count on that Ms. Sprite."

The yellow earth pony stared at him confused, "What do you mean by that Doc?"

Tourniquet averted his gaze to some suddenly very interesting things on the shelves as he replied, "Night shift is janitorial duty..."

"That's not so bad. I used to be a maid," the mare responded with relief. She didn't mind cleaning at all, and it might even prove somewhat relaxing considering Cobalt Blue would no doubt be well within her comfort zone the entire time.

The mare was feeling pretty good about it, and had already begun moving towards the exit with a small spring in her step before the doctor added, "...under the supervision of the Black Suits."

Shimmer Sprite froze in place. Dipping her head, she turned back to look at Tourniquet with a pitiful expression, "Is this going to be as bad as I think it will be?"

"Depends," replied the tangerine unicorn in all seriousness. "One of the regular janitors went near the office of the human that's in charge of the Black Suits and was yelled at so bad that he refuses to go anywhere near the place again. My guess is that if you avoid them you should have an easier time of it."

'Getting yelled at huh? At least I have some experience with that,' mused Shimmer Sprite as she looked back out into the hallway with a groan. "Thanks for the warning Doc," she said as she left the room, "see you tomorrow!"

"Let's hope so!" he called after her.

The mare snorted in frustration as she made her way down the hallways. She had hoped to get away from being under the heel of an oppressive boss when she had gotten on that boat two days ago. Apparently life had other plans. Plans that kept her from being anything but a maid.

Shimmer Sprite was in such a foul mood by the time she arrived in the hallway marked with a big blue B, that she felt genuinely relieved to see Cobalt Blue patiently waiting on his haunches outside an operating room. He hadn't seen her yet, and seemed to be staring off into space with a vapid content expression.

'Right, let's go get Cobalt's head out of the clouds,' she sighed inwardly as she approached the daydreaming colt. "Cobalt," she said when she finally stood next to him.

"Yes darling?" he responded still dazed.

Shimmer Sprite reeled back before rolling her eyes and repeating louder, "Cobalt. Wake up."

"But I don't have work today, and the foals are at school. Can't we just stay in bed and cuddle?"

'Wow. Barely know him for two days and he's already thinking of starting a family. You sure can pick'em Sprite.' Grimacing, Shimmer Sprite prodded the blue colt in the side with a hoof and said with a very stern voice, "Wake up Blue."

The poke seemed to have done the trick as Cobalt yelped in surprise and quite nearly toppled to the ground. He looked around wildly for the pony that knocked him out of his trance, only to stare wide eyed at the looming form of Shimmer Sprite. "O-oh! H-hey there beautiful!" he stammered. The mare's look of irritation only intensified. "I-I-I mean," he said backpedaling, "Shim-Shimmer Sprite! I didn't mean to call you beautiful! I mean, you ARE, but you keep glaring at me, and I should probably stop shouldn't I?"

"Yes," came her stern reply.

The young blue stallion rose to his hooves and straightened out his mane and coat, clearing his throat before nervously asking, "S-so...ready to get started on that second shift?"

The golden locked mare shook her head and began walking down what felt like the millionth hallway in this damn bureau. "It's only three o'clock Blue, our second shift doesn't start until six."

The colt hastily trotted up next to her with a confused look, "So then, where are we going?"

"Lunch," she said as her stern voice softened to a merely neutral tone. "After that I am going to my room to get a nap in before tonight."

Cobalt gazed off down the hallway like the gears in his head were turning in overdrive. After a short silence he finally said with a bright expression, "Would it be okay if I meet you at your room? Later I mean. When it's time for our shift."

Shimmer Sprite gave the question a once over in her mind before deciding that there wouldn't be any harm in it. She gave a dismissive nod and said, "Sure, but don't think this is an invitation for you to just wait outside my door everynight."

"Oh no," he said smiling at her, "I think I've figured out what constitutes being a creep by

now, and I want to turn over a new leaf.”

It wasn't much of a joke, but the statement somehow made a bemused grin etch itself across the yellow mare's face. “Come on,” she said increasing her pace, “our lunch is probably getting stale.”

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She saw a stallion, hot pink with stark white mane and matching tail, standing in front of her inside of their old apartment. Then there were dozens of other ponies, and they all started laughing. Then it was just him again, and he was yelling at her for some reason. He was so angry. Then the other ponies returned. They were all laughing again, even him. But she wasn't because she knew. They were laughing at her. Then there was a knock on the door.

“Hello? Shimmer Sprite? Are you awake in there?”

The earth pony mare with honey gold locks woke up with a start from the mess of heavy blankets and sheets that had once been her bed. “Star Dust?” she asked half asleep, “What do you want?”

“Uh...No, it's me Cobalt,” said the voice, “It's time for our second shift.”

She blinked a few times before her brain turned back on, the dream she was having fading quickly into oblivion as she became aware of the time. “Oh hayseed! I'll be right there Blue! I just need to tidy up a bit first!” she called to the waiting colt.

After a few minutes of fixing her bed and fixing her mane and tail into something she could take in public, the Shimmer Sprite opened the door to her room and beheld Cobalt Blue. The young stallion had obviously taken a shower before coming here, and Sprite could smell the shampoo he had used. She had to admit the floral scent was rather nice. Cobalt had also combed his mane for the occasion and decided to wear a fetching red bow tie around his neck. The yellow mare was on the verge of giving him an incredulous look before she saw the single daisy in his mouth.

Instead, Shimmer Sprite gave the colt a pleasant smile and simply stated, “You certainly went all out to do janitor duty.”

He smiled as widely as he could at her with the flower still clenched in his teeth. “One of the humans I converted today said the first date has to be memorable, so I'm going to make sure this will be the best night shift you ever had!” he replied.

Sprite couldn't hold back an amused giggle. Approaching the young blue stallion, she inspected the flower that was clenched in his teeth. “I would have preferred a bouquet we could

munch on, but I think it'll do."

"It's all I could find in three hours," Cobalt said dejected. "I would have gotten more, but-

"I love it," the yellow mare interrupted with a quick smile to the colt. Seeing a look of euphoric bliss cross his face, Sprite leaned her head next to his and waited. Cobalt Blue blushed and fidgeted with increasing severity the closer she got, until after a few seconds the mare threw him a bone and said, "Go on."

"G-g-go on and w-what?" asked the colt with a confused quiver in his voice, "are we a-about to...you know...k-kiss?"

It was with a quick glare that Sprite immediately instructed, "Put the daisy in my mane you dope."

"Oh! R-right!" he responded with palpable mix of relief and mild disappointment.

Possibly more nervous than before, Cobalt Blue very carefully angled the flower's stem behind Shimmer Sprite's ear. She could feel his warm, minty, breath on her neck, and couldn't resist getting small goosebumps. After the daisy was nice and secure, Cobalt kept his head close to Sprite's for a short time more before the mare moved away, her own cheeks flushing an embarrassed red as she awkwardly looked at the ground.

Shimmer Sprite's heart was beating like a drum. It hadn't made a rhythm like this for the mare in a long time. "I...um, thank you Cobalt."

"M-my pleasure."

Awkward silence filled the hallway, and it was Shimmer Sprite who finally suggested, "We should probably go report to the front desk for our shift."

Cobalt nodded his head and replied, "Y-yeah. Let's go."

Shimmer Sprite avoided making eye contact with Cobalt Blue as they escorted each other down the many dimly lit hallways towards the front desk, fearing that looking at the young blue stallion might make her admit that he was actually somewhat...charming.

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It was close to midnight when Shimmer Sprite finally put down her mop. She and Cobalt Blue stood in the newly cleaned cafeteria, both of them proudly gazing at what seven hours of hard scrubbing and mopping could accomplish. She and Cobalt had been able to clean the floors from the front of the bureau complex all the way to the back. It was a difficult task

considering how labyrinthine the building was, a fact Sprite hadn't quite come to grips with until she was mopping the hundredth or so hallway. Navigating the building and avoiding the Black Suits wasn't much of a problem for her thanks to her special talent, but Cobalt had nearly gotten lost or stumbled into a wandering pair of the intimidating humans once or twice.

Much to her surprise, Cobalt had been more helpful in the chore than she had thought he would be. The colt knew his way around a mop and broom well enough, and had only accidentally tripped over his bucket of cleaning water three times during the grueling process.

"So..." Cobalt spoke in an effort to fill the silence, "...uh, what do you want to do now?"

The colt had tried several dozen times to strike up a conversation during the cleaning, but Shimmer Sprite had ended them all prematurely with various dismissive replies. Thinking back, she had blamed the disinterest in chatting on a desire to focus on the task at hoof, but now that they were done, she found herself without a suitable excuse to avoid talking with the young blue stallion.

"Sleep," she responded with a tired yawn, "though I think I'll be seeing mops in my dreams tonight."

"Well at least you can make dream mops sing and dance," he said with a smirk towards Sprite.

The mare's reply was a neutral, "Yeah." The blue pony's optimism was admirable, but Shimmer Sprite was just too tired for it.

The two of them spent a few more moments in silence before finally collecting their cleaning buckets and walking side by side through the dark and winding hallways of the bureau. The squeaky wheels of the bright yellow buckets only added to the eeriness of the late night atmosphere. It took several minutes for them to reach their destination, but it was thankfully without incident. Shimmer Sprite put her bucket and mop to the side and set about unlocking and opening the storage room, while being careful to not dislodge the daisy tucked into her mane in the process.

"Shimmer Sprite," began Cobalt with a twinge of his trademark nervousness, "Can I ask you a question?"

The yellow and gold mare was in the process of opening the storage room door with her teeth, and could only respond to the colt with an affirmative, "Hm?"

"Who's Star Dust?"

Sprite gave Cobalt a look. "What?"

“Star Dust,” he repeated, “When I knocked on your door to pick you up tonight I heard you call out for somepony named Star Dust.”

At first, the look appeared to turn into one of panic, but it quickly shifted to a glare that looked directly into the colt’s eyes. Releasing the doorknob, the mare faced him and warned, “Not somepony I want to talk about.”

Cobalt went silent and averted his gaze from the mare’s, while she went back to trying to open the door. After a few moments he asked, “Would it be better if I ask you about it in the morning?”

With a growl, Shimmer Sprite glared at the colt and snapped, “No it would not! Are you trying to be this thick, or are you touched in the head?! Just...” The mare realized that she had started to yell, and judging from the pain stricken face of the colt that stood in front of her, her tone was less than friendly. Taking a deep breath, Sprite calmed her nerves and very calmly said, “Just drop it, okay?” She refocused on the door knob, this time going at it a bit more ferociously.

The colt nodded his head and went back to being silent. The mare at last opened the door and bucked her bucket into it, causing a loud and sloppy sounding crash from within. Sprite just glared at the interior and motioned for Cobalt to put his supplies away while she held the door open for him. After he carefully placed his own bucket inside the small storage room, the two ponies trotted towards the staff housing area.

Shimmer Sprite wasn’t angry with the colt, as he probably thought she was, but was in fact just...frustrated. Cobalt’s question had touched on a very old memory that Sprite would rather have forgotten and thoughts about a pony that she had long ago left in the dust. Or so she had thought. Quickly glancing back at the young blue stallion that lagged slightly behind her, the mare wanted nothing more than to at least apologize for screaming at him. As much as she hated to admit it, right now Cobalt Blue was the closest pony she had to a friend in human lands and she couldn’t shove him away because he asked a question.

As the two of them reached Shimmer Sprite’s door, the yellow mare paused her gait. Cobalt followed suit and looked at her with a warily curious expression. She turned to face him with an apologetic look. “I’m sorry for what I did back there Blue. I really didn’t mean to explode like that, it’s just...that name carries a lot of baggage for me.”

To his credit, Cobalt Blue had the tact to not immediately ask what sort of baggage. He instead nodded his understanding and appeared as though he were about to say something, but apparently reconsidered it. The following pause in conversation lasted a good half minute as the two of them shifted uncomfortably in silence, both unsure what to say to the other.

‘What are you doing Shimmer Sprite?’ rang the hoity voice of Madame Orange in Shimmer Sprite’s skull, *‘Your manners are dreadful! Bid our guest goodnight! I swear, fillies*

these days...

The thought trailed off into memory as the mare's thoughts returned to the present. Shimmer Sprite cleared her throat and readjusted her posture, wishing to at least end the night on a high note with the young stallion. "Well good night Cobalt," she said pleasantly, "thank you for the daisy and walking me back to my door. You made tonight, um...memorable."

The young blue stallion beamed at her as he simply replied, "You're welcome."

Sprite cocked an eyebrow.

A second later he realised the faux pas he had made and hastily stammered out, "I mean, uh, you were very...welcoming in your, uh..." Sprite could see Cobalt scanning his brain for a suitable compliment, and patiently waited for him to find the right words. The best he could come up with was, "Your flank looked great tonight!"

She just stared at the colt, shaking her head slightly as she turned away from him. "Goodnight Cobalt," she said pushing her door open with a hoof.

"Y-yeah, goodnight!" he said waving a hoof back, attempting to cover up the embarrassment in his voice as best he could.

'Not exactly the high note I was hoping for,' Sprite thought to herself when she was halfway through the door, *'So I might as well throw him another bone.'* "Cobalt," she said turning to look back at the colt. The move had clearly caught him by surprise as he had already begun a mournful walk back to his door.

Stopping mid sulk, his expression took on a hopeful tone as he asked, "Yes?"

"Want to go with me to watch the boats leave tomorrow?"

"Really? Yes! I'd love you-I MEAN TO. I'd love TO."

Shimmer Sprite gave a bemused huff as she shot the eccentric colt one last farewell smile before retreating into her room. From outside she heard a small cheer burst from the odd stallion. Once again shaking her head, she climbed into her oversized bed and tried to get as comfortable as she possibly could.

'Another date with the creep. I must be either completely insane or really desperate.' she mused. After some careful examination of the past three days she added, *'Nope, not desperate, just insane.'* Shimmer Sprite's mind began to wander into her dreams, and had one last coherent thought echo in her head before her senses faded completely, *'At least he's better than Star Dust.'*

The clock struck midnight as the mare fell into a deep sleep.

HE CAN'T WRITE
BUT HE KEEPS DOING IT!
OH GOD WHY?!

Anyway...

More forced romance you say?
Shouldn't there be some overarching
plot around here someplace?
Next update for this, I will totally get to it.
Promise.