

Colgate was not having a good morning. Her alarm not going off when it should have was only the latest in a string of things going wrong that had started last night when she was meant to be having a nice night in with her mare friend, Berry. What had started off as the pair of them settling in by the fire to listen to music and try out a couple of new bottles of wine had turned into a disaster when Berry, who was starting to get a little bit tipsy, had pulled out a bottle of something a little stronger, and then proceeded to demolish almost half of it by herself.

Colgate loved Berry, loved her and her filly daughter both with all her heart, but she couldn't keep being the one to take Berry to the hospital to get her stomach pumped when she drank too much. Having to limp a retching Berry to the hospital, having to take on the accusing stares of the staff, having to wait around for hours for her to sober up enough that she could take Berry home, having to wake up Pinchy in the middle of the night to help her mother into bed.

The alarm not working had been the last straw. When she had finally woken up enough to realize what the time was, Colgate saw that she only had about twenty minutes to get ready before her dental clinic was meant to open. She had a full list of patients to see today, and she couldn't afford to be late.

"It's going to be one of those days, isn't it?" she asked herself, slowly trotting over to her bathroom. The door was closed, but she could hear water running. Ordinarily, the sound of water running would be a cause for concern, especially if one lived alone as Colgate did. It would signify that either you forgot to turn off the water last night, or more likely, that there was somepony else in the apartment with you. Colgate wasn't worried though; she had a pretty good idea of what she was going to find behind that door.

Gently, she pushed the bathroom door open and looked in. Just as she expected, front hooves up on the counter and her toothbrush being worked diligently to brush her teeth, was herself. A second Colgate was already in the bathroom, taking care of her morning prep work, washing her mouth out, while a hair brush absently worked her tail into a manageable state.

Normally, meeting yourself would have reduced a pony who wasn't expecting it to a gibbering state as they tried to comprehend just what it was that they were seeing. Not so for Colgate. For her, meeting a future version of herself was about as surprising as seeing the sun rise in the morning; it was just something that happened.

"How many?" she asked her double, sidling past her to reach the toilet.

"Three," the second Colgate replied, spitting into the basin and rinsing off the brush.

"As bad as that?" Colgate said, deflated as she sat down on the cool rim of the toilet. This morning was about to get even worse if she was number three.

Not many ponies knew that Colgate's special talent actually had very little to do with her chosen field of dentistry. While she told patients that her hourglass was a symbol of her ability to keep track of brushing time, and knowing exactly when to floss and such, it was all a lie. Her actual talent lay in the field of time manipulation magic. Put simply, she could slow down, speed up, or even stop the flow of time relative to herself whenever she wanted to. She could also jump forwards or backwards through time, as she had clearly, or rather, would clearly do some time this morning. The other Colgate's answer of three was a little code that she used when she encountered herself, something that happened more frequently than she liked to admit. It meant that this was her third time experiencing this particular loop of time. There would certainly be another Colgate somewhere else in the apartment doing some other part of her morning routine.

The duplicate Colgate nodded and returned to primping her mane. Colgate didn't try to make any more conversation. Talking to yourself was always an oddly surreal experience, and one that she wasn't willing to go through right now. Right now, she needed coffee; hot and strong and bitter coffee.

Future Colgate stepped aside as she got up from the toilet and let her wash her hooves in the sink. She gave Colgate a quick smile, and then picked up the brush again and returned to running it through her mane. Colgate exited the bathroom and headed for the kitchen area, thinking about what it could be that caused her to have to jump back in time not just once, but twice in one morning. She knew that it would be futile to keep thinking about it, and that whatever the reason would be, it would reveal itself in due time.

Just like the bathroom, the kitchen was already occupied with another copy of Colgate, this one seated at the table and munching away on a bowl of cereal, with a steaming mug of rich coffee next to her. She barely even looked up as Colgate walked in through the doorway, lifting a hoof to point at the coffee pot over on the counter.

"Two?" Colgate asked her seated counterpart.

"Yep. Pot's hot, but the milk's off. Carrot Top has some, but she left for work five minutes ago." Colgate two picked up a small pitcher of milk, one that Colgate recognized as being one of Carrot's.

Despite knowing what she would find, Colgate made her way over to the fridge and picked up her carton of milk. It was indeed off, giving off a slightly sour smell. With a snort of disgust, she tipped it down the sink.

This, Colgate instantly recognized was the first reason that she had to jump back in time. Such casual use of time travel would have horrified her professor back at Celestia's school for gifted unicorns, but damn it, she needed coffee. If jumping back a couple of minutes was going to tear the universe a new one, then so be it. But that wouldn't happen. Colgate three wouldn't have

been in her bathroom otherwise.

She quickly walked over to an empty space in the corner of the kitchen that she always made sure to keep clear. Time travel was dangerous business, as you always ran the risk of appearing inside of something else that was occupying that space in the past. Keeping a space always clear helped to reduce that risk. Focusing her magic, Colgate concentrated on jumping back twenty minutes. That should give her plenty of time to go next door, ask Carrot for some milk and get back here to give the same advice to the next Colgate in line.

With a quick POP, Colgate vanished from the kitchen, hurled backwards into the nether. Colgate two just shrugged and took another sip of her coffee. Soon, she would have to do the same thing and back into the bathroom to have a shower.

Colgate reappeared in exactly the same place in the kitchen. It was darker than it had been before, with the sun just starting to rise up over the horizon. The clock on the wall showed that it was indeed twenty minutes earlier, and Colgate could hear the sounds of the shower running in the bathroom. A quick peek into the bedroom showed a sleeping mare tangled up in the sheets. The alarm should have been going off right now, and Colgate could easily just go over and wake her sleeping past self up, but she knew better than to try and do that. It would destroy the chain of events and cause a paradox, and those things were generally more trouble than they were worth to clean up. There were questions to be answered and endless sheets of paperwork to fill out.

Instead she put the coffee pot on to boil and headed downstairs and out the front door to go see her neighbor. Carrot Top was always an early riser, so Colgate had no fear that she would be waking the mare up with her knocking. Sure enough, Carrot Top came to the door a few moments later on, bright eyed and alert.

“Oh, hey there, Colgate. You need something?” She asked. They borrowed little things from each other regularly, as good neighbours were wont to do, so it wasn’t odd for Colgate to be asking.

“Do you have any milk? Mine’s spoilt,” Colgate said, asking the question more out of courtesy, and to preserve the chain of events than anything else. She knew that Carrot Top had milk, or else her future self wouldn’t have directed her here.

“Sure do!” Carrot Top was far too chipper for the time of day. “Let me just go grab you some.” She vanished for a few moments, and Colgate looked around at her well kept garden. Carrot Top was an excellent gardiner when she wasn’t working on her farm. Bright flowers were beginning to unfurl for the day as the rays of the sun tickled their petals.

Carrot returned to the front door, a jug of milk resting on her back. Colgate saw that it was the

same jug that she had upstairs. Or will have upstairs in a few moments. She had long ago given up trying to keep her tenses straight when it came to time travel.

Carrot Top gave her the jug. "Here you go, hope it's enough. Now, I've got to get ready to go to work; don't make them scream too loudly." She giggled a little at her own joke, and Colgate took the milk in her magic.

"Thanks, Carrot. I'll give it back to you tonight, that alright?"

"Sure is. Seeya, Colgate. hope you have a good day," Carrot was smiling like it was three hours later than it actually was.

"It's going to be a long couple of minutes," Colgate said, pressing a hoof to her head.

Carrot Top just smiled at that. Sometimes, Colgate said things that didn't quite make sense, or mixed up her measurements for time. She was sure that Colgate really meant it would be a long couple of hours, or something similar.

Carrot closed the door, and Colgate returned upstairs to find that the coffee pot was almost boiling, so she took it off and poured herself a glorious cup of the nectar of the gods. Exactly which gods, she wasn't sure of, as she knew that both Celestia and Luna favoured tea over coffee, but right now she didn't care. All she knew was that she wanted it.

The first sip was nothing short of heavenly. tart and bitter, with just the right about of kick to wake even the dead. Just the way Colgate liked it. With that first sip to tide her over, she pulled out a box of bran flakes from the cupboard and filled up a small bowl of them, pouring the remaining milk into the bowl and settling down to eat her breakfast.

The house remained fairly quiet for a while, except for a muffled conversation coming from the bathroom and the sounds of Carrot Top leaving to go to her farm outside. Colgate didn't hear exactly what was said in the bathroom, but she knew that it would have been exactly the same thing she had said less than a half hour ago.

The sounds of hooves clopped into the room, and Colgate saw out of the corner of her eye another Colgate enter from the hallway. She looked up a little and pointed over to the coffee pot still bubbling away on its little heater/

"Two?" The standing past version of herself asked.

"Yep. Pot's hot, but the milk's off. Carrot Top has some, but she left for work five minutes ago." She nudged the empty milk jug with a hoof.

Past Colgate walked over to the fridge and picked up the milk container. She sniffed it and

wrinkled her nose in disgust before pouring the contents down the sink. Colgate watched as she sighed for a moment before walking over to the specially cleared space and teleported out with a POP.

Colgate finished up with her breakfast at a leisurely pace, before putting the dishes in the sink and walking over to the empty space herself. To give herself enough time, she aimed at jumping back an extra five minutes over what she had done the last time. That would give her enough time to get into the shower before her past self arrived to play out this loop.

Colgate arrived in the empty kitchen and made her way directly to the bathroom. It didn't take her long to get the shower going to a good temp, and she stepped in, letting the heat wash away the dirt of the night from her fur. After a full body scrub, she turned off the shower and toweled herself down and picked up her slightly worn, but much loved toothbrush.

"Brushie, brushie!" she spoke to herself in a sing-song voice before getting to work on her pearly whites. A second brush started working on her tail, making sure that it split evenly along her color lines. Everypony commented that she looked like toothpaste, so she figured that she may as well really look the part.

She was about halfway done with her brush, and just about finished with her teeth when the door opened, and a very bedraggled looking younger self walked in, heading straight for the toilet.

"How many?" she heard herself ask.

"Three," Colgate replied, leaning forward to spit into the basin.

"As bad as that?" past Colgate said, sitting down on the toilet. Colgate began to rinse off her brush, making sure that there wasn't any caked on toothpaste that would remain.

As she saw past Colgate get up, she moved off to the side, letting her get access to the basin, just as the future version had done for her. Her past self looked like she was going to say something, but thought the better of it, choosing instead to just wipe her hooves off and walk out towards the kitchen. Colgate gave her a quick smile, knowing exactly what her past self was going to have to do to get her morning coffee.

The next few minutes were spent getting her mane into order, along with some flossing and a full rinse out with mouthwash. By the time that she was done, Colgate only had a few more minutes left to get downstairs and open the clinic. But that was ok, she had finished up on her morning prep, and it had only taken her two violations of the temporal sanctity act. All things considered, it could have been a lot worse.

Heading over to the stairs, Colgate looked around her empty apartment. Both of her previous duplicates had jumped back to their respective loops, which left her as the only Colgate now inhabiting this specific time period. Paradox averted.

She was just about to head down to the actual clinic when she heard the familiar POP noise of a temporal teleportation spell. She looked up to see herself, dressed out in her scrubs and face mask walking out of the kitchen.

“Forgot something,” her future self said as way of explanation.

Colgate sighed and made her way downstairs. She didn’t bother to ask exactly what it was that she would forget, as she knew that she wouldn’t get an answer from her future self. She was cryptic like that, and it annoyed her no end. Whatever it was, she would find out in a little while.

“Be you later,” she said, unlocking the door to her first patient of the day.

Alternative Ending

She was just about to head down to the actual clinic when she heard the familiar POP noise of a temporal teleportation spell. She looked up to see herself, dressed out in her scrubs and face mask walking out of the kitchen.

“Taking an extra long lunch. Trust me, you’re going to need it,” her future self said. “Pinkie Pie discovered mega malt chocolate blast bombs come in large size...”