

Made Mare

"A gentleman always has a flower handy to drop on an opponent's grave. "

I smashed his head against the table.

Blood seeped from just above his forehead and pooled on the surface of the table before I pulled him back up. He was tougher than most. The last two brought into 'The Room' had taken one look at me and squealed like a stuck mole rat. The buck glared at me with his deep red eyes and didn't say a word.

"Just tell us who you're working with." The large red pony that 'recruited' me into his gang four days earlier smiled at the other end of the table. He'd do that for the stubborn ones. Smile and let me do the hitting. I think he liked The Room more than was healthy. "And you get to go."

"Fuck yo-" My hoof struck into his stomach. Gasping, he held his stomach, and his head slumped back into his pool of blood. "you." He gurgled, almost sounding like he was drowning. I rolled my eyes and looked away from the sorry sight. Doing shit like this made my stomach turn, at least it had the first time. Now I really didn't care.

"Listen. My friend here," he waved a hoof at me before flicking his pitch black mane out of his eyes, "likes to hurt ponies. Not much for words, but the hurting part she gets, you see? This ain't no game."

I stood as still as stone as the green stallion we were interrogating rose his head from the table and spat a glob of blood in front of the red pony. "Fuck you. I'm an NCA Solider and a citizen of Flankyard. Do you have any idea who you're fucking with?"

"Do you?" The large red pony could not hold back his glee as a smile formed on his face. "The NCA is toothless. They exist because Dise hasn't told them to fuck off yet. Do you have any idea how many NCA fools are buried in unmarked graves? And yet, the mustangs survive." He laughed heartily enough to send visible shivers down the green stallions spine. "Show our guest what we think of the NCA."

I clenched my teeth on his mane and threw him from his chair, sending him sliding into the white wall. Quickly I spit out the hair still stuck on my mouth, bits of flesh clinging to their ends. I resisted the urge to scrap my tongue with my hoof: The bits of hair I couldn't spit out were itchy and annoying but my boss hated when I broke my character. Finally I turned back to the pathetic green pony now bleeding heavily from the back of his head starting to dye his mane red.

"Will you speak now?"

The green stallion rose his head and looked up at me with glassy fear-filled eyes. I met them with my usual stoney look and he shuddered. "Y-you bastard. You and your fucking augmented, psycho, cyborg freak," How charming. I made sure to remember that in case he survived this encounter. "Fine... fuck it. Fuck them, I'll tell you, just tell your dog to heel." Now I was a augmented, psycho, cyborg dog. He really should keep his story straight.

Respectfully I backed up to my "masters" side as the green pony spilled the beans. Apparently him and four other ponies had come from the university (I don't quite know what a university is but it seemed to be key) in Flankyard and had developed a strategy to beat blackjack; Just by counting cards and some fancy

mathematics. It was a good plan, a solid plan. Until they got caught, and when you get caught cheating in Dise (or when somepony thinks you are cheating) you usually are never seen again. Frankly the whole idea was crazy.

The house *always* wins.

"These are the names and profiles of the group," red pony was saying to one of the guards of 'The Room'. "Send them to every casino in Dise, and might as well tell those fuckers at the Death Clock about them too." He turned and grinned at me, "And House says we never do nothin' good."

"You don't." I helpfully pointed out.

"We don't." he placed his hoof on my shoulder, "You're a Mustang. Might as well be proud of it."

I shrugged him off. "You're an ass, Mayhem."

"You could at least pretend to enjoy your work."

"No. I couldn't."

With a deep chested sigh Mayhem led me down the white hallway. It was a simple hallway that seemed almost too long and too bright, with only two doors on either end. This was intentional. Some ponies have been known to break down halfway through the hallway and confess their crimes before ever reaching 'The Room'. It was designed to intimidate, and it did it's job well. It was their own fault though. Trying to cheat the house was a good way to get a bullet in the brain.

"You're more fun when you're drunk." Mayhem said leading me into the roomy cargo elevator.

"Fuck off." Just thinking about that night made my head pound, and it didn't help that Serenity and Flare thought it funny to bring it up at every possible opportunity. If that damnable blue pegasus was to be believed, I'd hired a private dancer just to make her hoof wrestle me, I bought rounds of drink and dash for everypony in the casino, stolen a pit bosses gun and accidentally shot a hooker in the flank with it, and got on stage and danced. I didn't believe half of it, but my hazy memory of the night didn't give me good standing to argue.

Mayhem chuckled as the door slid shut. "You've got the next few hours off. Then boss wants you at the door to send away the street rats." He said as the elevator started to jerk upwards.

How I hated elevators, they always made my stomach turn... at least the ones in the Moon did. I have never been in an elevator before and had originally thought them magic. Mayhem said something about weights and counter weights, but I was still fairly sure it was magic.

"And Serenity?"

"I guess your whelp can have some time off." he shrugged.

"Call her that again." I said as the machine jerked to a stop. "I'll kill you."

"I only do it 'cause I know how it brings a smile to your face." The door swung open and I briskly stepped out, and quickly slammed it on his smarmy face. The front of the door was adorned with the symbol of a pony in a wheelchair, with a sign claiming it was out of order. Sighing I walked past the bathrooms, and down the small hall into the casino floor.

The floor was just as dazzling as it had been the first time I saw it. Only now the large fake moon looked less sparkling and more chipped and cracked. The games on the floor with their bright lights now made me feel guilty instead of excited. And the dancer on the stage seemed a lot less sexy now that I knew her name was Mayflower, and was only working there to pay for her dash habit.

I blame Flare. That ass.

"Hey baby," A skimpy mare sauntered up to me, "Do you want to-oh. It's you." her voice dropped suddenly from its sultry tone. "Done with the NCA nerd already?" She flipped her hair and grinned, "hard to believe the gall of some'a them folk. Not hard ta believe you made'em crack though."


"Thanks." I mumbled my eyes searching through the casino floor. Reluctantly I'd gotten Mayhem to agree to let Serenity work, but only after Serenity had forced me to agree to let Mayhem let her work. Or something. I didn't want her anywhere near a place like this, and for good reason. But she was nothing if not stubborn. "Have you seen-"

"High rollers blackjack." The mare said at once smiling at me, "So you got some time off? Why not get a drink with me, I'm a lot more... interesting than a filly." Sighing, I turned my head to the sweet girl, knowing she was just looking to make some extra money.

"No."

I trotted my way into the din that was the casino floor. Somehow It seemed they made the rows of slot machines and tables confusing on purpose. Had I not been forced to walk around glaring at ponies every day it would have taken me forever to find the high-rollers tables, even considering it was on an elevated platform. I was nearly stopped on the stairs up until the guard recognized my metal leg and let me through.

Serenity was easy to find after that. She was cheerfully lifting up a drink from the tray balanced on her

back,  and placing it telekinetically in front of a rather serious looking player. Like everything else, she was determined to do her job with a smile.

I trotted up just to hear an old mustachioed stallion say, "Hey, pretty filly," he stroked back his sweat soaked grey mane. "How much for a ni-"

That was not going to happen.

"She's not for sale." Both filly and old man turned to look at me. Serenity squealed in delight and quickly hopped onto my back, the tray on her back clanging to the floor. The old stallion just laughed at me.

"Listen, this is The Moon. Everything is for sale. Even you if I wanted." He slammed his hoof on the table

for effect, doing little more than drawing attention to us. Great, just what I needed. "Now hand her over. Do you know who I am I-"

"I said: No." I repeated edging ever closer to the old stallion. More ponies turned and watched, but no pony said a word. I could taste the tension in the air, and the slight glow on his horn made my shoulder burn.

"Get out of my way you little bitch an-" With a less than gentle shove I sent his head into the blackjack stable. At the impact his head snapped back sending him sprawling off his chair onto his rump, blood dripping down around his horn. "W-w-w-what?"

"I said." I said as I moved over his limp body, eyes burning red hot. "She. Is. Not. For. Sale." I pressed my metal leg against his shoulder, pinning him to the ground, "Got it?" He nodded dumbly so I took the time to turn away, wondering what could make ponies so stupid.

Quickly I left the scene, hoping that Mayhem wasn't going to add more caps to my already expensive debt, but, dammit, some ponies needed to be taught manners. The crowd that had formed has already dispersed I saw as I looked back, and everypony went back to gambling. It wasn't that unusual in The Moon. Rude customers get a smack to smarten them up, cheating customers got dragged to 'The Room', and good customers got taken to the back for a private dance; Most were willing to risk the bad for that chance, so every pony won.

Except for me, because I wanted nothing to do with it.

"You didn't have to hit him." Serenity sighed placing her fore hooves on top of my head, messing up my already messy mane.

"You're right."

She peered over my head looking at me upside down with stern grey eyes. "Soooo. Why did'ya?"

"He pissed me off." Sighing she returned to curling up in my back, pouting no doubt. I weaved my way back through the half filled maze of slots, and to the bar. The bartender recognized me right away and magically held up a bottle of apple whiskey and waved it in my general direction. Groaning I waved it away with my metal hoof. "You're an ass."

"I thought you liked whiskey." Oh, how I loved whiskey, and how I hated it.

"Two Sparkle Colas." I sighed resting my head on the counter as the bartender chuckled.

"Two, you must be real thirsty." he said just as Serenity popped up on my back and rested her forelegs on my head. Again. "Oh hey there, Serenity. Forget how to walk again?" She giggled and floated one of the sparkle coals over in a pink glow. My shoulder burned slightly, but honestly ever since entering Dise it had been burning non-stop. You couldn't go three steps without running into a unicorn. Luckily, it seemed the more magic around the duller the burning would get. Really, you'd think it would be the opposite, but what did I know?

I gulped back the carrot soda in the single gulp, letting the bottle drop the counter with a ting. Honestly, I

wished it was whiskey, but Serenity would have given me one of her looks. Somehow she had a way of making me feel guilty over the most absurd things. Like beating up perverted creepy old men. Maybe it wasn't so bad, helped wane me off the stupider choices I was wont to make.

"Get up, Hired."

Groaning, I lifted my head and turned to see Mayhem leaning on a nearby railing his legs crossed casually. "Boss wants to see you." Boss? He was the boss. He told all the pit bosses what to do and only answered to Roy Mustang hims-... oh. Serious? Roy wanted to see me. There had to be some mistake.

"That must be a mistake." I remarked, turning smoothly to the red stallion.

"I said the same thing, believe me. Boss don't usually like anypony, and lately he ain't seen nopony but me and his mares." Note the plural. The only thing I knew about him came from the radio, and none of it was good. Apparently he was involved with a raid on the local power-station (don't ask what fuelled the station, I hadn't a clue. Magic I guessed), and later joined forces with the Minotaurs. Who were an equally nasty piece of work.

He was also my boss, so I was obliged to abide by his whims.

"Right. So I don't get a break?" I met his unflinching red eyes for a second before he laughed.

"No. Clean yourself up first... and wash your tail." My tail was fine, I swished it back and forth to prove that point, "When was the last time you brushed it?" Never. That was a dumb question.

"Sometimes I brush it when she sleeps~" I glared at Serenity as she giggled on my back, suspecting she wasn't joking at all. She opened her mouth as if to continue her joke when somepony down the bar cut her off.

"Turn it up!" I turned to see a shocked little grey mare staring at the radio playing Mr New Haygas' show. Unsurprising, as it was also the only show. What was surprising was that Mr New Haygas didn't seem... his usual self.

"... you heard that right everypony. Yesterday- a day that will live in infamy- the NCA South Canyon Base was suddenly and deliberately attacked. It's too soon to say conclusively, but it appears the Minotaurs had a bale-fire bomb planted in the catacombs beneath the base..." He paused, as if not actually believing it, *"It is unknown how many survived the attack, but what is known at this time, is that without a doubt we are seeing the start of another bloody chapter in pony history. May Celestia and Luna above, guide us."*

"What the..." My mind was swimming. A bale fire explosion. War. But what I thought most about was the Minotaurs, and their connection to the Mustangs. And to me, now. It seemed, without my knowledge or consent, I had declared war on the NCA. The only think I could think of, was a single word.

Survive.

"Ow," I winced kicking my back-leg involuntarily. "Gentle."

"Wimp, not my fault your tail is so tangled." I turned to glare at Serenity as she gleefully brushed my tail silky smooth. She was clearly enjoying herself way too much, but it was too much of a hassle to do it myself... It's not my fault Celestia made me an earth pony. It made things difficult. Nothing I couldn't handle, at least when I had friends.

Dear Celestia: I'd officially become a cliché.

"This reminds me." I turned my head to the window of our small dirty hotel room we called a home to see Flare float into our hotel room, landing with a flourish. "Of that night. You hired the bartender and got this brush-

"Flare. Fillies are present." Serenity just raised an eyebrow at me and giggled before running over to embrace the blue pegasus. Rolling my eyes I took a seat on the floor. "Did you need something?"

Flare didn't choose to answer my question, at least not before picking the small unicorn up, and doing a quick back flip much to her delight. "News of a sort. Figured I still owed you." Damn straight. "It's serious though," he said taking the time to ruffle up Serenity's mane. "Very serious. Like it's grade-A Celestia tier serious fucking business, so prepare yourself, this-

"The attack on the NCA base."

"You ruin everything!" Flare harrumphed, floating himself up so he could cross his forelegs at me, "Couldn't even let me have this one little thing. Just once you know! Got a big whole dramatic thing planned and you go and ruin it by already knowing it. Now I need to think of something else exciting, oh I got it!"

"I'm on the edge. With excitement." I intoned as dully as I inspected the wall paper. Once it had been white, with murals of Celestia and the Ministry Mares on it (from my understanding Dise was made for Equestrians looking to take a break from, you know, war) but has since yellowed and decayed, even stripping off at parts so I could see the rotting wood behind it.

"Somepony in this room might just get re-accepted into the Enclave. Well the Remnants. Honestly with the whole war thing going on in the north you'd think they'd change their name to something less.. less something. Way I hear it they're sending Raptors against anypony what used to be Enclave, and that puts a big ole target sign on us bu-" Celestia's Nephew, he just didn't shut up. What did I do to deserve this?

"I thought you quit."

"I did! Well. I was forced to quit after this one time I blew up one of our basements due to the fact I may have been on an altered reality, but I still quit you see." He made this explanation while flapping his wings to allow him to simulate standing on the ceiling. Talking to Flare made me dizzy. "Not for a month though. Maybe less if the war turns out in force, but they wanna make sure I am clean before taking me back. Explosions and drugs don't mix they say." His grin told me he thought differently.

"Oh, you can stay with us!?" Serenity chirped in. "Until you can join again. Hired's nice but she never tells me stories like you do." Fillies are a fickle bunch. Also prone to putting me in awkward situations with annoying pegasi. Well, at least he did have some advantages, his story telling notwithstanding.

"Yeah sure. A real power trio." I waved a hoof dismissively before stretching and returning to all fours, "Come on, Serenity. The boss is expecting me."

"Mayhem can wait. He's all bark and no bite." Flare said prompting me to give him a sly smile as Serenity hopped onto my back.

Opting to be mysterious instead of helpful I walked out the door and shut it behind me, hoping to leave Flare bewildered. If for no other reason than because I found it funny. That's a valid reason, right?

The hallway of our sixth floor room was... very bland. Maybe to contrast the excitement of the casino floor, I wasn't sure. The wall paper was plain white (or it was white, but had since turned yellow) with a bar horizontally across the centre with pictures of the different phases of the moon. A lovely aesthetic. At least I thought it was, and Serenity seemed to busy herself as we walked down the long hallway but counting the phases. So it was a win/win.

Blah blah blah. We walked and walked. Rode an elevator. Made some small talk. Honestly my mind was in a whole different place. For some reason my mind was flashing back to that *contract* Lucky gave me back in Timber after I kicked his ass out of the town. I was doing mental juggling trying to justify shirking the Mustangs if the war got started in earnest, on the off chance the NCA decided The Mustangs were too cozy with the Minotaurs. Argh. I tried to slam my head against the elevator door just as it slid open.

I hit the ground head first with a thud sending dull pain through my skull, neck... and my pride as Serenity giggled at me. "What're you doing?" Looking up I saw Mayhem's red eyes glaring down at me like I was an idiot. Groaning I jumped to my feet and shook the pain out of my head.

"Resting."

Blinking for a second he turned away, "Why Boss wants you I'll never know. This way. Up the stairs."

"Huh." I looked around at the similar looking hallway, "Aren't we on the top floor?" Mayhem obviously thought that was a stupid question and just kept walking, so I had no choice but to follow him. The room he lead us to was just a bit remarkable in that upon opening the door, the only thing in it was a large spiral stair case with gold railing.

"His penthouse apartment is up these stairs. He said he needed to speak to you alone." Mayhem sounded a bit insulted, so that made it all the sweeter.

When we reached the top I was a bit dumbstruck at the sheer extravagance. The entire top floor was set up so you see clear from one side to the other with nearly every outer wall covered in windows (which I made sure to avoid) . For lack of wanting to get into highly detailed metaphors describing the intricacies of the room that won't even come into effect I'll give you a short run down of the amenities in descending order of me giving a fuck: A large ballroom complete with crystal chandelier, a huge outdoor deck and patio with a large pool, a gilded telescope, a huge heart shaped bed sectioned off in the corner, an entire wall of swanky looking paintings, some sort of gold tub thingy (whoever built this place really liked gold), and a small (relatively speaking, as the place was fucking huge) hastily constructed wooden room with the words, "Bosses Office" painted on the front.

Hazarding a guess I walked up a set of red-carpeted stairs and gently tried to knock on the door. Only for it to swing wide open.

"Fuck took ya so long?" The pony was... not what I was expecting. A small, lithe royal blue unicorn was sitting on the cushion across from the door smirking with strangely white teeth. His black hair was cropped short, yet still managed to spike awkwardly, and his tail wasn't visible underneath the huge white fur coat he wore. "You fuckers know who I am. So when I come calling you get your rotten tail up here, capeesh?" I nodded dumbly as he waved a hoof over to a cushion across from him.

As I went to slide down, Serenity hoped gingerly off my back.

"The fuck is that? Did Mayhem not give ya the scoop, I said alone. Last I checked fillies are ponies too." Sighing he levitated a bottle of apple whiskey over to himself, drinking straight from the bottle. "Whatever. She can stay 'long as she learns real quick how to shut the fuck up." My shoulder burned, and I so much much wanted to relieve that burn by shoving it into this pony's smarmy face. "Introduction time. Go."

"Hired Gun." He rolled his eyes at my name, even though he already knew it.

"Serenity!"

"Whatever. It doesn't matter who you are only that you work for me. Roy Mustang. Got it? And before you go asking any fucking stupid questions like 'what kind of pony name is Roy,' my mother called me Rollo, but I stopped going by that after I stopped being fat, got it? Any questions? Good. Now, I've got some problems. You're retarded I can see, so I won't hurt your tiny head. Suffice it to say, I need you for a job."

"What's the-" I started to say before he cut me off.

"I'm getting to that part. Patience. Fuck it. Like talking to a foal." Serenity giggled at that until I shot her a look and warped my foreleg around her drawing her close. "You've heard of the Baises, right?"

"Vaguely."

"Course. Only two things ya gotta know. First; they run the Ale House, and two; they want to take over my assets." He groaned and rose to his feet, seemingly only to stare out the window at the dark alley mysteriously. "They think we're weak. That we'll bow down and capitulate." Captiu-wha? "Surrender that is. Well, we won't."

"Are you?" I said with a sigh, lying down and resting my chin on my metal leg. He turned his head and raised an eyebrow, somehow not comprehending what I thought was obvious. "Are you weak?"

He said more in a defensive glare than he ever could have said with words. "No. Weaker, perhaps but the Mustangs are not weak. The raid on the Power-plant was a folly, but only because it failed." I got the feeling he was trying to convince himself more than me. "But we will not fall, not to Molly."

"Molly."

"Leader of the Baises... you really don't know fucking shit, do you?" He turned back and took a seat, and didn't stop glaring at me until I stopped lying on the floor. Spoilsport. "She's a fucking liar and a cunt." he

sounded more like a spurned lover than a gang leader. "And she wants my casino, and my water."

"Why her?"

"Because Mr House doesn't give a shit about anypony. Ain't good for nopony, but ain't bad neither. I attacked him directly, and his only response was to sneer and ignore me. The Galacians ain't much better. I've heard rumours of somepony trying to usurp me, and she's the only pony what can and would bother'ta. Now stop asking so many fuckin' questions and listen like a good little filly." Urge to stomp into paste rising.

"Now here's what I need from you, so listen good." He slicked back his pitch black mane with a sly grin. "I need you to break into that cunt's casino, and get me the juice on whatever she's plannin." he rolled his eyes, "And before you ask any dumb as shit question I need those fucking plans to plan my counter attack, and if it comes down to it get the Galicians to assist. The Mustangs ain't without friends, ya hear?" He shook his hoof almost menacingly at me.

"What do I get?"

"The privilege of working for the fucking boss..." He rolled his eyes and causally strolled over to a small cabinet and levitating a large wooden box out before dropping it on the floor in front of me. "You'll get out of your debt by the end of the week, a job here if you want it, and this motherfucker." he levitated the lid off with an orange glow, revealing the inside.

I licked my lips at the sight.

That was a damn fine gun. A Battle saddle mounted .50 calibre semi-automatic anti-material rifle with what looked like a custom oversized magazine and auto ammo-changing attachment, all in a sleek dark grey skin. I cannot express in words how much I loved that gun (Which is a shame considering the format you are getting this information in), but if I could I most certainly use the adjectives: sexy, amazing, unbefuckingleivable, wing-boner inducing.

Of course there were so many problems with this request; the most important being: how the fuck was I, the monster mare from beyond the stars with the subtly of a jackhammer, supposed to sneak into the head office of one of the most important ponies in Dise. I say this now, but at the time it wasn't really that important because goddamn that gun. It was what every gun should aspire to be.

"I'll do it."

"Good." he smiled. "Now get the fuck out. And Tell Mayhem to bring me the girls. Need to relieve stress."

"That's a terrible plan."

Less than two hours after meeting with the rather incorrigible boss of the Mustangs, me, Serenity, and Flare were sitting on my raggedy bed.

"I mean shit, just a terrible plan." By the way Flare was flapping his wings I guessed he did not care for my

plan. As he raged on I took the time to help the slowing peeling away wall paper by poking at it. "How do you plan to sneak through the fucking halls of the Ale House? Even if I could fly you on top, which by the way I can't, I ain't the Batmare." He groaned 'accidentally' smacking my hoof with his wing. "Even if I could I wouldn't. You may be obliged to make an enemy of the Baise's, but I am not so dense."

"You will." My lavender eyes shot up meeting his in a stern glare. He started to talk, but I'd had just about enough of that. "Because you owe me."

"For wha-"

"How much?" He raised an eyebrow as he slowly floated back to the floor. "Those drug dealers. How much did you owe?" I was taking a gamble, but a casino seemed an appropriate place for that.

"Fuck." He stomped his hoof ineffectively on the floor. "Okay so maybe I lied, maybe they weren't selling drugs cheap they just were pushing me for money. Okay. I saw a fucking opportunity, and I," he lowered his eyes looking almost ashamed, "I took it. How the fuck did you know, debt ain't a thing that spreads around." I saw him eyeing the open window, and just as he did a pink glow slammed it shut. Smiling, I gave Serenity a nod of approval.

"I didn't. Until now."

As I gave him time to pick his jaw off the floor I quietly congratulated what had to have been my most clever moment in a long time. "Now you owe me. You owe Serenity. Almost killed her, so you owe."

"And if I refuse, what? You'll kill me, is that it? I know what I did was wrong, so you're preaching to the choir," He said backing up towards the window nonetheless. "I just wanted a new start. A new life. I didn't think anypony was going to get hurt. I never wanted nopony hurt, you gotta believe me. I just..." he grit his teeth and tried his hardest to burn a whole in the carpet with his gaze. "Fuck. Alright. You win."

Was there ever any doubt?

He groaned and flopped onto the floor, which gave Serenity plenty of time to tackle him. The blow sent Flare stumbling to his side and Serenity into a giggling fit. Clearly she had already forgiven him. I couldn't help but smile as they wrestled on the floor. The epic battle of wills not ending until Flare had managed to deviously ensnare Serenity in one of his wings. The tickling of his feathers proved too much and she was forced to surrender in between fits of laughter.

I was reluctant to stop them, but we had work to do. I quickly grabbed the map Mayhem had given me after my meeting with the boss, and rolled it out on the floor between us. It was a highly detailed, if crumbling, map of the top few floors of the Ale House's third building. To be honest, I wasn't sure which of the three buildings Molly's office would even be in to pilfer the information the boss needed from, but this one was my best guess, if only because it was the building that once held the Casino's pre-war owner.

"Alright, so how are we going to die?" Flare said as Serenity scrambled out of the folds of his wing to look at the map too.

"This way." I pointed out an overlarge vent that, for some inexplicable reason, connected the pre-war boss's office with the roof. Actually it wasn't that inexplicable, and it was the first thing I noticed when

looking at the map. Honestly my best guess why that particular vent was oddly placed and oversized was not that the former owner wanted to be spied on, but as an easy escape route. It was simple to deduce. What with the war coming, and an easy escape to the Stable being a priority.

And Mayhem had told me all the hotels had secret escape routes.

"That could work... well if you were some other pony." Flare rubbed his chin thoughtfully. Also I took offence to that. "Don't take offence. I'm just sayin' you're... well you're loud is all. And with that hoof of yours stamping all over the place in a metal vent, well you ain't gunna be very subtle. Folk will either figure out it's a spy, or think a Sonic Rainboom is invading their hotel." Sonic-what now? I raised and eyebrow but gave up on asking, I figured it was a pegasus thing.

"Well I could try to..." Do... something. Quiet like.

"What about... um..." Flare furrowed his brow.

This was a terrible plan.

...

A really bad plan.

Fuck.

"I can help."

Those three little words nearly threw me off my feet. Instead I just sorta stared wide eyed and bewildered at Serenity. How was she supposed to help? Unless she magically got a cutie-mark in infiltration I doubted she would be much use. But I let her speak her piece. Just in case I was wrong, and/or an idiot. Turns out both.

"How?"

"I uh. Know this spell." She gulped a bit her cheeks reddening as she stared up at the ceiling. "Mister Morrowind taught me. It's um, well, I can turn sound off." Off? Like a switch or something. "Do you remember the, um tunnels? With the drug dealers, and that awesome rocket launcher?" Me and Flare just nodded dumbly. "Well, I kind of used it there, cause rockets are loud when they explode, and I didn't want it to hurt my ears."

Should I have noticed that? I remembered something about her being there, but... whatever. "Serenity. It's dangerous." And stupid.

"It's okay!" She bounded up to me, "I won't ask for a gun or anything. I just wanna help cause I like to help, even if it's dangerous. I mean, everything is dangerous. I know ya wanna keep me safe and I like being safe, but you know I have to take risks sometimes or we'll never getta do anything. So com'on. Please? Pretty please?" Those eyes. Nopony should be that cute. Argh. Puppy eyes are officially cheating.

"Fine." Odds are currently, 9 to 1 that I regret my decision. Taking all bets.

Serenity squeed with delight and embraced me. From the burning in my shoulder I guessed she was magicking something. "Just this once." I tried to say, except what came out was... uh... nothing. My mouth moved but no words came out. And Flare was laughing his flank off.

Yeah, yeah. Serenity was just showing off now.

Even still. I had to laugh. Just a little bit. And only because nopony could hear me anyway.

"How much longer do we gotta wait?" Serenity was driving me batty. All we had to do was sit on the bench watching The Moon's water show and wait for Flare to arrive with what we needed for our mission. Instead she got bored and now was running in circles around the bench complaining.

"Until he gets here."

"That's a stupid answer." She hopped her way onto the bench's backrest and balanced on two hooves. "He's slow. You'd think a Pegasus would be faster, you know. Not super slow. I'm bored. This should be exciting not boring." Everypony I know talked too much. I didn't ask for this.

"Ooooh." My head snapped at the strange voice to see a frail old unicorn way too close to me. I may have jumped. Just a little. I'd never seen so much grey on a pony before. His coat, his mane, his clothing, even his eyes were grey. Just looking at him made me feel old.

"What?" I said. With a glare of course.

"Interesting choice. Yes. Very interesting. I haven't seen a working series 19-B in a while in years. Yes, yes. Reliable, but so very old. So many more styles to choose from, yes, yes." Was he talking about my leg? Not even a hello first? How rude. "Ma'am you should think about upgrading. Yes yes. I would suggest perhaps a Cerberus Model. Yes it'd fit somepony of your... stature. Retractable claws for gripping, yes yes, and an optional shotgun. Though it works better with a full set, yes yes. A quick amputation--"

"My legs are fine." I shoved the old man away harshly with my perfectly fine cyber-leg. Just because it was old and a bit skeletal looking didn't mean I needed a replacement.

"Cerberus models are dumb." Serenity said resting her forelegs on my head, and her hindlegs on the bench backrest. "All kick, but they break down. Everypony knows that. You shouldn't try to rip ponies off." I looked around, and though ponies were numerous (many liked to stop and watch the water show) none were Flare to save me from.. from whatever was going on.

"Oh?" the old stallion wrinkled his already considerably wrinkled snout. "And what would be better little miss know it all?" I briefly weighed the morality of murdering obnoxious elders.

"The Ten-Oh-One, for starters." The old stallion rolled his eyes. "Pssh. It's a million times more reliable. What's the good'a having a shotgun strapped to your leg if you have to clean it every shot?"

"So what?" came the dreaded response. "The Ten-oh-One is sturdy but useless other than for walking, not to mention heavy,"

"Where have you been? The newest version is sleek, trim, and twenty percent lighter. House came out with it last week, and almost half of his guards are wearing that version. Cerberus is a joke. Everypony knows that, at least anypony with a brain. Guess that don't mean you." For some reason I felt this unnatural urge to chide Serenity for being rude, but I couldn't follow through. If only because I was far ruder far more often.

"What're we arguing about?" Flare!

Thank Celestia -- it was Flare floating above us a look of bemusement. "Save me." I mouthed to flare as the two continued to bicker about wires or something. He laughed and did a quick flip before landing in front of us.

"Look at the time," I quickly jumped to my feet pulling Serenity onto my back. "Lets go." Before either of them could get off another word, I followed Flare.

He fluttered off just ahead of us as he lead us down a small alley way beside The Moon. I couldn't help but notice the difference between the outer facade of The Moon and the dusty dirty side walls that looked almost indistinguishable from the abandoned four story building on the other side of the alley.

"How did you convince them?" I asked, keeping my voice low. I was more than certain undesirable ponies hung out in the back alleys behind the Strip's casinos. I kept my eyes to the sky at the dark cloud layer burning red as the sun began to set.

Flare landed in front of me before turning into a long empty street. Once upon a time, I was sure it had been a busy pre-war street, but now it was trash. A backwater street in a city where only the Strip mattered. Some buildings had stood strong, while others had collapsed into heaps or fallen into the street filling it with rubble. They said Dise had never been directly hit by a Megaspell, but looking at the tumbled down backstreet it was hard to believe. As pretty as the main street of the city was, this street looked no better than Parasite Mound.

"I asked nicely." Flare floated down the street.

"And the Finishers just let you borrow it?"

"Nope." He grinned turning and leaning on the Sky-Carriage. "They let you borrow it. Heard from Screenshot: Photo feels guilty for what happened to Serenity. Guilty! A weak back for a gang leader if you ask me, but what other gang is like The Finishers? They got a shtick and stick to it," He tapped the wall of the carriage with his hoof, "so I ain't complainin'."

"Well," I said, trotting over to the back of the carriage and helping Serenity inside, "I'll have to thank them." Serenity looked around the cart nervously as I turned back to Flare. "You can do this?" Before he'd said he wouldn't be able to carry me in it. Or was it that it would be too slow? Either way I wanted to make sure so as not to fall and die to our deaths.

"Yeah, no worries. I totally got this." he lowered his body as if ready to spring out at me, "I'm good. You'll

see. Smoothest ride ya ever get, you can count on it." I'd rather not ride at all, and didn't plan to after this adventure. Not that I was afraid. No-sirree. I wasn't afraid of nothing...

Even if I was afraid, which I wasn't, Flare pushed me into the cart before I had a chance to say anything. It seemed as almost as soon as the back panel snapped up and locked (to keep us from rolling off). With a jolt that shook me off my feet and nearly into Serenity, who of course giggled, we were off. I could already feel that sinking sensation as my stomach tied itself in knots.

Turning to the open back of the transport, I saw the ground. I knew the plan was to fly high into the clouds so we could fly from west side of the main street where The Moon was, to the east where The Alehouse stood, but I was not prepared for the way the ground grew smaller and smaller, and the buildings shrank beneath us. I tore my eyes away and covered them with my good foreleg (accidentally whacking myself with my pipbuck). All that open space. How easy would it be just to fall. I hated falling.

I could feel Serenity nudging me with her nose. Quickly I moved my leg back to the floor, and stared at the front wall of the cart. I couldn't bear to show weakness. Again. Dammit. "Are you okay?" She moved closer, trying to comfort me, I was sure. Instead it was all I could do not to jolt away from her. "You're not gunna fall, don't worry. Flare will keep us safe... Hired?"

"Sorry," I mumbled not able to look her in the eyes. Fuck heights.

"Are you afraid of heights?" No. I was afraid of falling.

"No." I said, "Just. I fell once. Off a cliff. A long time ago." I didn't actually remember the fall. Or the landing. Wildfire said I fell from my guardpost back in Marefort. "Nearly died." It was... not a pleasant memory for a lot of reasons. And whenever I looked down that's all I could think of. "Seeing the ground like that. Just..."

In Marefort, I'd got over my fear of that cliff, so long as I never looked straight down, because I was there every day. This was different though. Nothing between me and the sky but a thin sheet of wood. And Serenity was there in the cart with me, and she reminded me so much of that charcoal grey filly.

Stupid, weak Silver. Get over it. *Survive.*

So I clicked on my radio instead. It helped me not think about falling. It was hard with the way my stomach twisted as Flare turned, but the radio was depressing enough to counter it. *"Reports are still coming in hot and sketchy about the bombing yesterday. So far the NCA has reported less than two hundred casualties including thirty members of The Watchers who had a medical camp set up in the base. However we have reports from anonymous individuals who place the number at over three hundred and fifty. A huge blow to the NCA regardless of the actual figures... Well that's enough depressing news. Onto something heartwarming, it seems a Raider gang that had been pestering caravans in the north-east has suddenly vanished. Multiple witness' have reported a Mare and a filly walking away from a known raider base shortly before the Raider gang vanished. Keep up the good work, gals. Onto the music, now with twenty percent more repetitiveness."*

I rested my head as a familiar Sweetie Belle song poured out of my pipbuck, my mind going back to a raider I'd met weeks earlier.

"We're here~," Serenity said a little while later, her head peering out over the back panel. Reluctantly and at Serenity's behest I looked out, and down at the top of one of the Ale House's three buildings. Gulping I quickly pulled my head back inside. Time to put my stupid plan to the test.

"Wait here," I commanded Flare. We had waited until it had become full dark before truly descending and landing on the roof.

"Fine by me. Have fun storming the castle." I rolled my eyes as I helped Serenity down from the cart, my fake leg creaking noisily. I really hoped Serenity could do that spell. Flare just watched, leaning on the cart.

"If anypony shows up, run." His smile said he had already planned that. "Then come back. Later. We'll hide." After I got a nod, me and Serenity were off.

The round roof had a series of vents sticking off the top, all around the relatively raised platform (with a huge letter 'V' tattooed on it) we had landed on. The one we were looking for was kind of obvious as that it was larger than the rest by miles (No pony could fit in a real air vent unless they were a foal, and maybe not even then) and when I kicked the metal door open it had a sloping set of stairs. I guess my theory was right.

Nodding, I let Serenity go first, and, reliably as my metal hoof hit the metal steps, there was not a sound to be heard. In addition, the light from Serenity's horn was more than bright enough to allow us to see. A vent being dark was not actually factored into my ingenious plan, as for some reason I expected the secret passage way to be perfectly lit.

Though a more important question entered my mind. How was it possible a filly with such magical ability didn't have her cutie-mark yet? I was positive I was younger than Serenity when I got mine, and I still had no idea what mine meant. I crouched low as the stairs ended and nearly whacked my head off the ceiling. It seems even overlarge escape-route vents still weren't made for a pony my size, and I had more important things to worry about than cutie marks.

The vent twisted and turned as below me I could hear ponies idling chattering. Before you ask I did not bother to remember what they said, as idle chatter is usually trivial and non-important, but every time I heard them my heart jumped into my throat. Not out of fear, but out of not wanting to fight my way out of that damn hotel without a single weapon on me. Only a single shot rifle on my battle saddle.

Slowly we made our way through the vents, until it started to slope again, ending abruptly at a wall. Great. I suppose I could just kick the damn thing down. It always worked for me before. I lifted my hoof.

"... we need a patsy then." A slick voice came from the other side of the wall, slightly muffled.

"Now, now," a surprisingly feminine voice answered, "such an ugly term. All we need is a pony what knows how much a bottle cap is worth."

"When Granny Dynamite finds out-"

"She wont. Don't worry your pretty head. Just get them ready... Poor Mustang won't know what hit'em." Jackpot. Could I get anymore lucky? Stumbling into information just like that. Almost anti-climatically. I chuckled a bit at the thought.

Chuckled.

Wait. I could hear myself... fuck.

Looking down I could see Serenity's horn had died down, and could hear her panting for breath. Fuck. Idiot, idiot. I let her get tired. Over use her magic and...

BANG

The bullet embedded into the wall right beside my head. "A rat?" The feminine voice said laughing a bit. "Sneaky Mustangs rats never stop crawling around my hotel. And now they think I'm an idiot and don't know my own hotels secrets? Tsk Tsk. Wont even need to call an exterminator for this one." The second shot ricocheted, skinning my leg just above my pipbuck and knocking me messily out of my stupor.

"Fuck." I said picking up the filly by the scruff of her neck.

We bolted up the stairs. Sort of. I had to crouch so I couldn't run, but I scooted as fast as I could for fucking sure.

My leg clanged nosily. My position was given away with every step as bullets flashed upwards through the vent. I had to stop. I threw Serenity onto my back and crouched down lower. I couldn't let my stupidly get her hurt. Again.

A sharp pain suddenly exploded through my back hoof. Gritting my teeth, I charged onwards. The vent creaked under me as more bullets sprayed, my blood leaking through the holes. Most missed. Still, it was all I could do to keep from screaming. Little light. Bullets everywhere. Serenity on my back.

I yelped in pain as a bullet scrapped my side. Another impacted my metal leg with a ting. The whole structured creaked. I kept moving though. Gotta keep moving.

There was a snap.

A creak.

Suddenly I was falling. The ground came up to quick. My chin cracked against the floor and I could taste blood. Somewhere Serenity was groaning. I heard shouts all around. But I could only see darkness.

I rose to my feet.

The remains of the vent tumbled off me. Looking up I could see the hole in the ceiling. And the parts of the vent that didn't break away. My exit. Now ten feet away and I couldn't jump that fucking high.

"She's a big one."

I looked down. The whole hotel seemed wobbly. Maybe I was dizzy. Head trauma is fun. But even with the wibbly-wobbly way of seeing things I recognized the barrel of a gun. It was attached to a battle saddle, that was attached to a dark green mare with a huge yellow mane of varying shades. On her flank I could clearly see a cutie-mark in the shape of a black cowpony hat.

Click.

So apparently long falls fuck up guns. Why do all my guns break? I took my mouth away from the bridle and lowered my body. Bullet holes or no, I was getting out of this hotel. "Oh, calm down," the mare smiled seductively. "You can't escape. We found your friend ten minutes ago." She motioned her head to the right where Flare was sitting at the end of the hall, tied up and smiling sheepishly. "Or did ya really think you'd stumbled onto our secrets? Silly rat, that's not how you play this game."

Celestia's Cunt. This sucked.

"Well..." I slurred through my bloody tongue.

"Owie." Serenity popped her head out of the rubble of our escape plan. "Wha... did we escape?"

"No, little one," the green earth pony said, "but if you're good. And if you tell me why my hotel is infested with rats." she smiled brightly, "Then you might just. But if you lie to me, then mommy and I are going to have a little chat. In private." I should have been worried about the impending torture and epic failing of my plan. Instead the only thing I could think of was...

"She's not my daughter."

Level Up!:

Skill Note: Sneak 40

Companion Perk Unlocked: Silent Goings: With Serenity in your party you have the option of removing all sound once a day for a five minute period.

New perk! Acrophobia: You have a fear of heights (probably due to some traumatic incident in your past). You're not a wimp, but you suffer -1 endurance and -15 DT when over 20 feet in the air, but gain +1 Endurance and +15 DT when on or under the ground. The sweet, sweet ground.

((This is the part where I thank Kkat for being awesome and doing awesome things, like writing stories for me to butcher. As well as a special thanks to my awesome editors theBSDude and Errant Indy. Finally, a shout out to the FO:E Sidestory protodoc. All aspiring Sidestory writers should visit:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1KaoFWVIFIMjYR2KmTWxwCYnvTZQcjEULO9YHSaqqk9U/edit?hl=en_US&pli=1#heading=h.ppfknyb4tr6))

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