

Chapter One Hundred and Fifty-One—Dawn of the First Day

The trip back to true civilization passed quickly and mostly uneventfully. One of our crew members got arrested, but when we proved they were in another city at the time of the crime, we were free to go on our way. Pinkie and Dash wanted to figure out who really did it, but I smacked them on the nose with a magazine until they changed their minds.

Because I really didn't want to get dragged to Canterlot for another few weeks of bullshit, I trained with Celestia in her dreams. And because I really didn't want my ship to be haunted, I worked with Zecora to try to exorcise some of the ghosts. I had no luck against Celestia and piss-poor luck with Zecora. Apparently something about being horribly and violently murdered makes some spirits skittish.

Our ship made it to Canterlot in the middle of the night, so most of the crew was asleep. As soon as I woke up, I disentangled myself from Twilight, took a shower, got dressed for the day, and went up to the deck. Gourd was collecting money from one of the passengers we picked up. As soon as the mare counted off the last bit, she hit the gangplank and went on her way.

My captain nodded and turned to head back below, but walked over to me instead. "That was the last of the passengers. We haven't started unloading the goods yet. Silver's gonna head down to the markets and try to get the best prices on everything."

"Send your quartermaster with her," I said. "You guys will need to know how to haggle and search for prices without her."

"Good idea. How long are we gonna be in Canterlot?"

"I'll go ahead and say three days, but that might increase if we start running into problems. I really hope we don't run into problems."

"Here's hoping. Canterlot is nice, but I'm starting to actually like having open ocean beneath us."

"Nice is a word you could use, I guess. Not the first one I'd go with, though. Anyway, does Celestia know we're here yet?"

"She hasn't sent any messengers, but I'd be very surprised if she didn't know."

"Yeah, me too. I'll go let her know we're here and ready to drop off Aerie and Blaze. Whenever you see Watcher, let him know we'll be here for three or so days. Feel free to let the crew out to see the sights."

"You got it. Are we still heading to the dragon homeland next?"

"That's the plan. I don't know if they have traders or if those traders would be interested in anything we could bring, though. Silver might be able to find out at the market."

"I'll have her ask around. But I've never heard of any trade or passenger ship going there."

That's probably not a good sign. "Well, we're probably heading to Tartarus shortly after we get back from Iceland, so if they can't find any products worth selling, don't worry too much about it."

“Works for me. Honestly, I don’t think I’d really want to go to Iceland too much anyway. I think I prefer quicker, more profitable routes. Besides, most dragons are weird.”

“They certainly can be. Once I speak to Celestia, I’ll head back here and then quickly head off to the Everfree to talk to Reginald. He can probably give me more information about what to expect in Iceland.”

“Alright. If I get any messages from nobles wanting to speak to you, what should I do?”

“I dunno. I guess tell them I’m not in at the moment. If anyone mentions they’re here to marry me, politely tell them that Taya and I are not currently on the market. For anyone else, take a message. I kinda doubt that’ll happen, though. From what I understand, a lot of Canterlot is elitist enough that they don’t like peasants who get uplifted to the nobility. And even then, I own the most undeveloped and dangerous plot of land in Equestria.”

“You’re also... well, *you*.”

“Good point. Anyway, I’m off.”

“See you later, Nav.” I nodded and walked over to one of the edges to jump off.

Before I could even level off, I was joined by one of the pegasus guards. He flew up next to me and matched my very slow pace. “You need something?” I asked as soon as I was steady.

“Watcher said to make sure there was always at least one of us with you when you were in Canterlot. He didn’t have any time to give us orders this time, so I just followed.” He wasn’t even wearing armor, not that it mattered.

“Alright, whatever.” I certainly wasn’t about to complain. The more people looking out for my life, the better, especially since I didn’t bring my ring or any weapons.

It was a typically bright and cheery and frigidly cold winter morning in Canterlot. There were almost no pegasi out and about, though the streets were crawling with rich ponies bundled up in winter clothes, trying to avoid slipping on patches of ice before the street cleaning unicorns could do their job. We were flying up high enough that no one really looked up to watch us, but I had a feeling that news of my arrival would spread quickly, if it hadn’t already.

As soon as we landed in front of the palace, the chill in the air was replaced with a nice toastiness. Celestia doesn’t much care for the cold and uses magic to keep her palace and its grounds warm and cozy. I consider that a waste of magic, personally, but I’m used to no one caring what I think.

The guards at the door just nodded at the two of us as we entered. Being a noble was enough to allow access to the palace, in case being the princess’s personal fuck toy wasn’t enough. The main hall was closer than her breakfast room, so I went there first. There was only one guard at the door and he told me that she hadn’t gotten there yet, so we started walking to the breakfast room instead. That door had two guards and they waved me in.

As soon as Celestia saw me, she put her cake-covered fork down and beamed. “So you finally made it.”

“I finally did. When can you get Blaze and Aerie set up?”

“I’ve already arranged a place in the palace for them. I would like to have your ship over the palace before moving them, though. The sight of a floating fire demon might scare ponies.”

“I’ll go tell Gourd to move it, then.”

Her horn lit up and the door locked. I lifted an eyebrow. A chair pushed itself out. “I imagine he’s offloading trade goods. He won’t be able to move for another few hours. Maybe a day, even. Sit.”

“I have other things to do.”

“And a nice, long day in which to do them.” She gazed at my hands before lifting me with magic and placing me in the chair, then pushing me in. “Which means you need to partake in the most important meal of the day!”

“...Cake?”

“Cake can be *part* of the most important meal of the day, but it doesn’t have to be all of it. As I’m sure you can see, there are plenty of other options available.”

I quickly perused the table before looking back up at her. “What, no meat?”

“If you would like, I can be a part of the menu later. But until then, I must insist that you partake in what is available.”

God dammit, I didn’t want this to become a thing. With the door locked and her being very insistent, I knew I wouldn’t be getting out of the palace any time soon. So I just internally said fuck it and started eating. She smiled and went back to making herself even more obese.

“Things have been fairly quiet in Canterlot since you left,” she said when we were finished. “Despite the divorce, Fancy Pants and Fleur de Lis seem to be closer than ever, and they’re cooperating to try to bring the nobles together. It’s a very... interesting and ordered state of affairs.”

“And what do you think about that?”

“I think it’s a long time coming, but I very dearly hope they remember their stations when all of the nobles are at their back. That amount of power has a way of... changing one’s perspective and thought process. Asking them to do this was a risk.”

“I figured having them under control and on your side would be a good idea when you decide to announce the truth about the whole sun thing.”

“*If* they are on my side. Certain opportunistic nobles might see that as a perfect chance to have me deposed and claim power for him or herself. Something like that is the reason I did my best to keep them bickering with each other, fighting over whatever little scraps of power they could get.”

“...I’ll admit, that’s something I hadn’t considered. But I don’t think it’ll happen.”

Her eyes narrowed very slightly. “You are not a politician, Nav. You are intelligent and you can be devious and you are usually cunning, but you honestly have very little experience in matters such as these. I know you were only trying to help, but I ask that you consult me before doing such things. It was not a terrible idea and it won’t be immediately problematic, but it has potential for longer term issues. We could have tweaked it and possibly used a different noble to

unite everypony behind. Notably *you*, which was part of the reason I made you a noble to begin with. But no matter.”

“I wouldn’t have been interested and I’ve been too busy with the whole Discord thing.”

“Which doesn’t explicitly require *you*. The things that you are doing need to be done, but you are not necessarily the one that has to do them. I could have pulled you off the ship and helped kickstart a building project in the Everfree. If you spent a few nights a week in Canterlot, it wouldn’t have been difficult for you to get all the nobles on your side. Especially if we swapped or shared bodies occasionally.”

“There’s a spell for sharing bodies?”

“There is, but it has... problems. However, most of those problems can be mitigated with other spells and the assistance of your elemental.”

“Well, either way, I still wouldn’t be interested. And I can’t imagine the nobles of Canterlot would be all too happy to follow a soulless freaky winged ape-thing.”

“Then I would be happy to show you the unimaginable. Ponies are easy to get on your side and lead. And once all the nobles were cemented under you, any... *union* between us would create a very long-lasting peace.”

“Does that mean you’re going to marry Fleur instead?”

She actually shivered in disgust. “No. Eww, *no*.”

“That’s racist.”

“It has nothing to do with her being a pony and everything to do with her being Canterlot’s personal bicycle.”

“Oh. That’s slut-shaming.” She rolled her eyes. “Anyway, that’s all going on the assumption that we get married.”

“Not necessarily. That’s the *ideal* end scenario, but you can easily become my royal consort instead. It shares many of the same benefits and would have the same basic end result. This was a very long-term plan, though, and I know how you tend to twist and tear at those.”

“...And when were you planning on telling me all of this?” She shrugged. I pushed myself away from the table and stood. “Welp, time for me to head back to the ship.”

That made her chuckle. “The door’s still locked, silly.”

“Do you mind unlocking it?”

“Yes.” I sighed and sat back down. Her horn lit up and pushed my chair back in. “What’s so distasteful about the idea of getting married, hm? Afraid of commitment, perhaps? Or do you just not want to get married to *me*?”

“Marriage feels very... permanent. People change. Falling into and out of love is easy and it seems like two very long-living people could easily fall out of sorts.”

She smiled and shook her head. “That’s where you’re wrong, Nav. You’re thinking of love as a feeling, something that just happens between two people. No, love is a *choice*. It’s something that has to be built up and maintained. Should anything ever happen to jeopardize that love, you have the choice of working together with your partner to get around it or letting it

overcome your love. I'm afraid that all too often, partners choose to succumb to the hardships of life and let their love for each other die prematurely. But never think that it can't be maintained across long periods of time, Nav. It most definitely can, should you choose to let it."

"But love doesn't require marriage."

"It doesn't, no. But it would mean ever so much to me if the pony... or *person* with whom I fell in love one day asked me to marry him... or her. It's a symbol of two lives becoming one, and symbols are very important to ponies. And I have a feeling they are to humans, as well."

I shrugged and said, "*Some* humans. Have you ever been married before?"

"No, actually. And despite what I said, it would take a lot for me to agree to marry you. I consider it something extremely sacred and special and I wouldn't want to say yes unless I knew it would last. Some ponies take such things lightly. I would not be one of them, and I would make very sure my partner was aware of that beforehoof."

"That's understandable, and something I can agree with. If you're going to bite the bullet and say those vows, you better fucking mean them. Anyway, can I go now?"

She finally stood. I started to push myself out, but her horn lit up and stopped my chair in its tracks. She walked over with a very sly grin and leaned in very close. "Why are you in such a hurry, Navi?" she breathed.

I unconsciously leaned back, which only made her move closer. "Because usually when I spend longer than an hour in Canterlot, you or Fleur have me do some retarded-ass bullshit and I get stuck here for days. I was trying to avoid that."

She softly kissed me for a moment and then placed her mouth next to one of my ears.

"Well, there is *one* thing you can do..."

I sighed, rolling my eyes. "And what thing is that?"

"Me."

"...I can make an exception this time." A flash of gold light went off next to me and I found myself on her bed, suddenly wearing only a grin.

While we were enjoying our post coital bliss and I was mindlessly running my hands through her feathers, I asked, "Why couldn't we just do this in your dreams? That would be a lot easier and we could do it any night. It would also be more fun than sparring."

"Because as with most things, actually doing it is so much better. So much more... *primal*." She sighed and laid her head against the hand in her wings. "Oh, you spoil me so..."

"Yeah, but we're both so busy in real life. You with a kingdom, me with world saving."

"You just want to get out of sparring because you're tired of losing against me."

"This is more fun and I'm much better at it." She chuckled and nibbled at my arm for a moment. "Do I taste good?"

"Oh yes, definitely. I love it when you have more fruit in your diet than meat." Her body finally rolled over on top of me. She positioned her legs so that most of her weight was on them, but I still couldn't move under her warm, furry mass. Her pretty pink eyes beat down into my

dull green ones. “You need to learn to fight, Nav. Training in real life is much better than training in dreams, but as you said, our time is very limited. There are time dilation fields, but those have some... interesting side effects that I’d rather not risk. I just don’t feel comfortable letting you go into Tartarus.”

“Would you feel comfortable even if I had all the training in the world?”

She sighed and looked away. “No...”

“Boom, problem solved. Now, wanna go again?”

Her eyes met mine again. “Absolutely. I’ll make a deal with you, in fact. If you agree to spar with me all day tomorrow, I will spend all day today pleasuring you in every way imaginable.”

“Don’t you have a country to run?”

“I can take two days to make sure you stay alive.”

“Oh. Well, as tempting of an offer as it is, I’m afraid I’ll have to decline.”

She sighed and placed her forehead against mine. Due to how horse heads are built, that was very uncomfortable for me, since her horn was pressing against the top of my head and my entire face was covered by her snout. “If you don’t accept my offer, I’m going to have to take drastic measures. Measures that you won’t like.”

That got my attention, as she knew it would. I leaned to the side, so I wouldn’t be speaking into her nostrils, and asked, “Such as?”

“Nothing that will affect you immediately. And nothing that will harm you in any way. You will be very upset with me, but it would be the closest to comfortable I could feel with you in Tartarus.”

“Celestia, intentional and pointless vagueness is my number one pet peeve. Say what you mean or don’t say anything.”

“Then I won’t say anything. But if you don’t let me train you as much as possible, I’ll have to insist that you have a guide and protector with you when you go into Tartarus.”

“...How’s that a bad thing?”

She sighed again and kissed my nose. “You’ll know in time.” *What did I just say?* Before I could ask just that, she finally pulled back. “If you aren’t going to accept my gracious and generous offer, I’m afraid I’ll have to get back to running that country. I believe you’re making an unwise decision, but it is your decision to make.”

“I’m glad you understand that. Does that mean you’re going to get off me now?”

“Yes.” And just like that, she got off me. Her horn lit up and my clothes floated over to the bed. “Once you have the ship docked at the palace, I will move Blaze.”

“Alright. I’ll probably be in town for at least another two days, if something big comes up that you need me for. Just please, no more pointless political bullshit.”

“Nothing I do is pointless, Nav. The fact that you are unable to see *why* I do something just means you aren’t ready to make huge changes to the political landscape here.”

“And with luck, I never will be. On the off chance we can actually somehow stop Discord and I find a way to survive, I’ll probably exile myself to the Everfree. That seems like the best way of avoiding all the mindless petty bullshit that happens here.”

“We shall see.” A golden glow came to her horn and she vanished with a loud pop.

“Should I poke around in her underwear drawers, or would that be rude?” I asked.

“It would be rude,” Flo replied. “Besides, it’s not like you could find anything that would fit.”

“When raiding panty drawers, you aren’t looking for something to fit, you’re looking for something to look at.”

“...What’s the point of window shopping if you basically own the store?”

“I dunno.” It was a good enough point to make me concede and start getting dressed, at least.

As soon as I got ready, I took a quick look around. Celestia’s room had tons of little knick-knacks from thousands of years of life and who knows how many magical artifacts. Looking around was always interesting, but I decided not to take a chance in touching anything without wearing my ring. Instead, I just left her chambers. There was a single day guard at the entrance who only spared me a glance before going back to doing nothing.

Seeing him reminded me that I had to find my soldier before leaving, so I started walking to Celestia’s dining room. Usually, there are nobles and other high-ranking officials wandering around the palace. This time, all I saw was the occasional servant and guard. I kinda wondered if she actually cancelled all the plans she had because she thought I’d agree to her deal. It sounded fairly spur-of-the-moment, but I suppose anyone that skilled at getting her way could make anything sound unplanned.

My guard was still standing at the dining room’s door. Celestia’s guards had wandered off at some point, apparently. “I was starting to wonder if you were poisoned, ma’am,” he said. “I would have checked, but the door was locked.”

“It takes a lot to poison me. The princess was just interested in having a very private conversation and also sex, so we teleported to her room.” His ears twitched, unsurprisingly. “What?”

He shrugged. “I’m just surprised, I guess.”

“About what?”

“I didn’t know her standards were that low.”

“Eat a dick. Let’s get back to the ship.”

He grinned and bowed. “After you, my lady.”

I started walking to a window but stopped. “Wait, eat a dick after me or get back to the ship after you?”

“I live to serve,” he said, trying not to laugh.

“Don’t you tempt me. I will happily find a stallion just to make you own up to that.”

“Well I’m bi, so...”

“Tch. I’m in a hurry anyway.” Dealing with Celestia’s bullshit put me behind my imaginary schedule. We continued on our way, though it sounded like there was more of a spring in his step than there should have been.

The palace at Canterlot is a very open and airy place, so it didn’t take long for us to find an open balcony we could jump out of. As soon as I put my foot on the rails, my guard cleared his throat.

“Is there something *else* you want?” I sighed, turning to look at him.

“Watcher also asked us to keep an eye out for you doing anything... ahem, *unladylike* in a place where others might see. Should you really jump from a window? It’s considered very crass.”

“God damn motherfucking son of a... *Fine*.” I removed my foot from the railing. “Then lead the fucking way, because I have no idea where an exit is.”

“As you wish, Lady Navarone.”

He took the lead and I got to stare at his shaking tail for a few minutes. “I thought me becoming a lady was supposed to make me unapproachable or something,” I finally said. “A lot of people implied those without titles would be too nervous or respectful to talk back to me, but you guys don’t care.”

“Most of us commoners haven’t helped nurse you back from the brink of death a few times. Or got to see you getting beaten around the ship by the naga. Or picked up and kissed by a dragoness. Or turned into a mare to have your belly rubbed. It doesn’t matter how far you rise in station, those you spend time with will always treat you differently, as long as you continue to do so with them. It’s the same in the palace with the princess, though none of the guards or servants would ever admit to it to anyone but each other.”

“Fair enough, I guess. It’s always good to have someone reminding me that I’m only human.”

“And we’re only ponies. Feel free to keep that in mind the next time you feel like giving belly rubs.”

“Yes, I’ll be sure to keep my valiant and manly guards in mind the next time I want to make someone adorably moan in delight as I rub their belly.”

“Be careful who you call manly. Nightshade will pout if you ever imply she’s not feminine.”

“That sounds adorable.”

“Oh, it is. We used to do it all the time. Then she dosed half of us with stuff that made our voices high pitched and dyed our fur and manes pink. She didn’t give us the antidote until we promised to stop.”

“Well, shit. Not like she can really make my body worse.”

“Tease her if you want,” he said with a shrug. “You were warned.”

It didn’t take us long to get to the main entrance of the palace. As soon as we did, I had to stop my eyes from rolling at the sight of Fleur. Refraining gave me a chance to see actual

surprise on her face before it fell into happiness and she dragged her two noblemare companions over to me.

“My dear Lady Navarone, I wasn’t expecting to see you so soon,” she sweetly said when she was within socially acceptable speaking distance.

“I just got back into town last night and I won’t be here much longer,” I replied. “I’m giving everyone a few days off before we move on.”

“And where are you heading next?”

“Iceland, home of the dragons,” I said. I did not at all like the grin that came to her face. “I don’t know how long we’ll be there.”

Thankfully, her smile took a hit. It was a minor hit, but it was still a hit. “Well, I was wondering if you could perhaps carry a letter with you. There aren’t many couriers or merchants going to Iceland, so we’ve been having difficulties getting word to them.”

“Word about what?” I asked, already starting to hate myself.

“Why, the new Miss Universe contest you suggested, silly! I was hoping I could go myself, but if you don’t know your schedule, I’m afraid I can’t make that commitment. But I can get you an official flyer and several letters to bring to Clutch Leader Pyrite!”

“Have you ever met him?” I asked.

“I’m afraid I haven’t had the pleasure. He’s only been to one party in my lifetime, and I was unavailable that year.”

“Dude’s huge. Bigger than this entire palace. His claws are longer than me. I don’t think he could read any letters. I’ll try to get an audience with him, but I wouldn’t hold your breath.”

She sighed and shrugged. “The dragons were always going to be a long shot. Would you mind passing out flyers in other areas you pass through? I’m sure hearing about it from the great Lady Navarone would kickstart every young mare’s interest!”

“And hopefully young females of other species.”

“Of course. I shall have a stack delivered to your ship. How long will you be in Canterlot? I’d love to have lunch one day, if you’re available.”

“I should be free tomorrow and the next day.”

“Would you care to join me at my home for lunch tomorrow?”

“I’d be delighted to, Fleur. Noon?”

“That would be perfect. I’ll see you then, Nav.”

“Until tomorrow, then.” We both happily nodded and went on our separate ways.

When they were out of earshot, my guard said, “I got dibs on guarding you.”

“Dude, why?”

“Because I heard what happened last time and I’d love to hear that.”

“Pervert.” He didn’t reply. Given that we were finally going through the palace doors, I guess I could understand. Since it was now supposedly acceptable, I spread my wings and took off. He joined me in the air a moment later, easily flanking me with my slow speed.

All things told, I didn't feel overly protected. But I also didn't feel threatened, so at least there was that.

Captain Gourd and Watcher were both on deck and talking to each other, so I landed next to them. My guard flew over to a group of his peers and started chilling. "What's the word in Canterlot?" Watcher asked.

"Bird," I replied. "Celestia wants us to move the ship to the palace once we get all our goods unloaded. She'll move Blaze then."

"Good, we don't have to pay to dock there. Did you get any information about going to Iceland from her?"

"No, that'll be my next destination. I'm heading to the Everfree to talk to Reginald, if he's home."

"You want guards?" Watcher asked.

"Nah. The Everfree does what the Everfree wants, guards or no. Resisting just makes it worse."

"...I'll keep that in mind. Will you at least take someone else with you? I don't feel comfortable letting anyone go there alone."

"Yeah, I was going to invite Twilight and Spike. Maybe Taya, if she's awake and can cast the spell to give herself wings. We're gonna be here for a minimum of three days, if you want to tell most of your soldiers to take off."

"I'll let them go in shifts, in case we need any of them. Be careful in the Everfree, Nav."

"That's the plan, old man. I'll see you guys when I get back." They both nodded and went back to talking about whatever boring peasants talk about while I wandered down belowdecks.

My first stop was Twilight's room, where I found her drying off with a huge towel. She was facing the door and smiled as soon as she saw me. "Good morning, Nav."

"Little bit late for morning, but it's good all the same. You wanna join me on a trip to see Reginald?"

"To talk about getting into Iceland?"

"Yep. I figured you wouldn't mind picking up some info about dragons."

"You figured right. I'd be happy to go. When are you planning on leaving?"

"As soon as I invite Spike and Taya, then grab my sword." Her horn lit up and water started sliding off her fur and landing on the floor in a puddle. "If you could have done that at any time, why'd you wait?"

"Because doing some things by hoof just feels better, sometimes. I bet if you could suddenly do everything with magic, you'd still use your hands for tons of things."

"...You would never see me rubbing a belly with magic, that's for sure."

"Nor would I ever expect it. I'll be ready when you are, Nav."

“Kay.” She started preparing a bag, so I moved on to Spike’s room. His door was closed and he didn’t answer when I knocked, so I moved on to Taya. Her door was wide open and she was stretched out languidly on the bed. “Wanna go to the Everfree?” I asked.

“How?” she asked right back, adding a yawn for good measure.

“By you giving yourself wings and us flying over.”

“Last time you wouldn’t let me...”

“And this time I will.” She slid out of bed and showed off a great big ol’ stretch. “That’s my girl. I’m gonna go grab my sword. Meet me on deck.”

“Kay.”

Once I got to my room, I realized why Spike didn’t answer. He was in my room, fiddling around with the weird balancing baton thing. As soon as he saw me, he dropped it. It hit the ground at a weird angle and shot upright. It went so fast that it overcorrected and slammed into his shin, making him jump up and down in pain. It was amusing, so I just crossed my arms and waited it out instead of trying to help.

When he was over it, he awkwardly cleared his throat and tried to stop blushing. It wasn’t working, so he just asked, “So uh... how are you this morning?”

“Good. You wanna visit Reginald?”

His smile dipped down and his ears twitched. “Uhhh... Do I have to?”

“No. That’s why I was asking instead of telling. Now what did you need?”

“Oh, right. I was gonna ask how long we’re going to be in Canterlot.”

“Minimum three days.”

“That’s perfect! Gilda and I were talking about getting all the meat eaters to a restaurant she knows in Canterlot. I think it would be fun, but we’d probably need you to get the naga in.”

“Sure, as long as it’s not lunch today or tomorrow.”

“Awesome. This is gonna be great! I’ll talk to the others and try to get a good time. See you later, Nav!” He rushed past me and then down the hall. I shook my head and buckled my sword on. There was no reason to bother with armor, so I just went on up to the deck.

Taya was the first to join me, since all she had to do was stretch. Twilight was a minute or two behind, carrying a few books. “So are you sure you’re comfortable with this spell?”

Twilight asked my daughter.

“I am,” she replied with a nod. Then her horn lit up and a pair of soft wings appeared on her back. “See?”

“That’s a very good job,” Twilight said with a smile. Her horn lit up and a matching set of wings appeared on her back. “Now can you spread them and actually fly?”

A determined look came to Taya’s face and her wings started slowly flapping. “How fast do they need to go?”

“That’s about as fast as they do go, actually,” Twilight said, demonstrating with her own. “But these wings are not pegasus wings. They don’t really generate lift, per se. Once you have

them, you just have to flap them and want to fly, and you do.” To prove the point, she gently took off.

Taya’s head tilted for a moment before she joined Twilight in the air. “I’m doing it!” She had the biggest grin on her face and for a moment, I wondered why I never really let her do it before.

“That you are, dear,” I said, poking one of her back hooves. That’s all I could reach without being in the air myself. “Do you want to do a few laps around the ship before we go?”

“No, I know you and Twilight won’t let me fall. I wanna see the whole city like this!”

“Then let’s go.” I walked over to a side and jumped off. She and Twilight joined me as I stabilized. “I want to see Reginald first, then we can fly as much as you want.”

“Okay, mommy. Let’s go!” She started flying toward the Everfree. Twilight and I joined her.

All things told, it was a very cold day for a flight. Pretty and sunny, but still extremely cold. If I still had a dick, the poor thing would have been in hibernation. As it was, my nipples were doing their best to poke through. I got to find out first hand how awful rubbing them too much with fabric is and I started hating everything before we were even halfway there.

At least Taya had fun, which made the flight partially worthwhile.

Once all three of us were down in the clearing in front of his cave, I started walking to the cave entrance. “What’s with all the bones?” Taya asked.

“This is the Everfree, and the Everfree does not like unwanted guests,” I said. “Reginald happens to be an unwanted guest who is also a dragon, so he doesn’t give a fuck what the Everfree wants, so he torched enough monsters that the Everfree doesn’t really do much to him anymore.”

“How did you figure that out, anyway?” Twilight asked.

“A mix of experimentation and something Luna told me. Once we get inside, don’t touch anything without permission.” They both nodded and we finally went into Reginald’s moist, dark hole.

As soon as we stepped inside, I heard some kind of scratching noises further in. It wasn’t a very long walk and I didn’t want to interrupt him if he was in the middle of something or had another guest in, so I stopped. “Want me to send a light in?” Twilight quietly asked. “If he sees it, he can come out.”

“That might make him think he’s under attack. His ears are good, so he should hear this.” I cleared my throat and shouted, “Hey Reginald, you home?”

The scratching stopped as soon as I shouted and then something large started moving toward us. I was quickly able to tell it was a large dragon, but the other two couldn’t see in the darkness well enough to tell. Soon, however, the great wyrm himself was before us. “Welcome back, Navarone,” he said. “Is your sword sharp?”

“Extremely. It’s also magical.”

“Perfect. Do you mind if I borrow it for a moment?”

I pulled it out of the sheath and held it by the blade for him to take. He reached a claw out and very gently took it from me, then used it to pierce his own scales. Our eyes widened and he hissed for a second before prying up, lifting the scales off his skin.

“What are you doing?” I asked, wondering if we could stop him if we tried.

“It seems that some kind of parasite snuck into my cave and got under my scales,” he said. “It itches like fire. I hate to ask this of you, but could you... perhaps assist me?”

“I’m gonna have to ask you how, Reggie,” I said, crossing my arms.

“Anything able to affect me like this has to be large enough to be... exterminated by claw, so to say,” he said. “Normally, I’d breathe fire into my scales and call that done, but it hurts even worse until it heals, so I’d rather avoid it if I could.”

“So, what, I need to get in there and do something?”

“Yes. It is going to be uncomfortable, but it is the only safe way.”

“Ugh. Can’t Twilight just zap it?”

“It would be risky,” Twilight said. “Most of a dragon’s magic resistance is in his scales. Using magic *inside of* his scales isn’t something I’d want to try. I might hurt him.”

“Fuck it, whatever. That sword’s the only weapon I brought, so I’m gonna need a knife or something.”

He sighed in relief, blasting us all with steam. “You have my gratitude, Nav. Please, avail yourself to my treasure room. There is something suitable there, I’m sure.”

“Right, right. Oh, and this is my daughter, by the way.”

He turned his large eyes to her and smiled slightly. “Ah, so this is Taya. Welcome to my cave, dear.”

“Hi.”

He waited for a second, but nothing else came, so I said, “She doesn’t talk much.”

“Ah.” I finally started walking around him, to his treasure trove. “If you don’t mind, I shall remain here. Just having the scales open gives me some relief, and moving would agitate it.”

“Twilight, start asking him about Iceland.” She started doing that while Taya and I began searching through Reginald’s vast treasure trove.

“So what are we looking for?” Taya asked.

“I dunno, a knife or something. Preferably steel. There’s no telling what dragon fleas are made of, but I can’t imagine it’ll be anything I want to fuck with.”

“Will this work?” she asked. I looked over there and found she was using magic to hold up a small steel pickaxe.

“That’ll definitely do it,” I said. “I kinda wanna know why he has this, but there’s probably a morbid story there and I really don’t feel like asking about a dead man’s tools.” She floated it to me and we started walking back to the dragon.

The scale he had pried up was on his back, so I started walking up his tail. It flinched when I stepped on it, but he immediately calmed down and let me walk up to where he had the sword. “Do you see it?” he asked.

“Oh yeah.” It was a giant chigger that was trying to eat into the flesh under the scales. “Jesus, this thing’s as big as Taya. Nowhere near as cute, though.”

It had already torn a fairly large hole into the tough skin and part of it was already submerged in Reginald’s body. The head and upper legs were still sticking out as it tried to enlarge the hole enough for the rest of him to get down there.

I adjusted my grip on the pickaxe before jumping and bringing it down right onto the thing’s face. It exploded into gore with a horrific cracking sound, spraying bits of shell and bug goop everywhere. That was nasty, but I had been through much worse. I tossed the pickaxe aside and grabbed the chigger by its front legs. The feeling of its slightly furry exoskeleton against my hands made me shiver in disgust.

With a heave, I lifted the thing out of him, making him sigh in pain. As its body came out, droplets of steaming blood came out with it, instantly warming me all the way up and making me feel a lot more nasty than I wanted to. I dropped it over the side of his body and pulled myself off his skin.

“Thank you, Nav,” he said, pulling the sword away. His scale drooped down, but didn’t quite fall into place.

“No problem,” I said as I kicked the scale until it looked right. He handed the sword back and I slid it into place. “Is there any chance your stream is heated? I feel disgusting now.”

“It is not, but I would be happy to heat it for you. It is something I have done for Luna in the past. What temperatures are you comfortable with?”

“Preferably between... shit, three hundred and three hundred and ten, if possible.” Kelvin, of course. That was one of the more annoying parts of getting used to horse land; they use metric for *everything*.

“Excellent, then you are the same. Please, hold on tight.” I walked up to his neck and grabbed one of the spines there. He started walking back into the depths of the cave. “Please join us, Taya and Twilight.” It’s not like they were going to do anything else, but Twilight was poking at the corpse of the chigger with a hoof and writing something in a notebook. She finished with a flourish and they both fell into step behind the dragon, then quickly fell behind because he’s a fucking dragon. “So you have come to be granted entrance to Iceland,” he said.

“No, we came to ask questions about Iceland,” I said. “I figured we could just go there.”

“You figured incorrectly. Dragons are fiercely territorial and trying to enter would be unwise. Sneaking in would be akin to suicide. *You* might be able to get permission to enter, if you were lucky. Very lucky. Your dragon could come and go as he pleased. Getting your entire ship in would be impossible.” We were now at the stream, so he reached up and very carefully wrapped one of his claws around me so he could place me on the ground. “Remain here.”

He shoved his head into the stream and it immediately started bubbling. Taya and Twilight caught up a few moments after he started and Twilight asked, "What is he doing?"

"No clue. Looks like getting into Iceland might be a problem."

"Well, of course. It's not like it's gonna be easy," she replied. "Nothing ever is, for you."

"Don't I know it..." I sighed.

Reginald finally pulled his head out. The water stopped boiling and just steamed as the heat spread through the stream. "This temperature should be ideal."

"Cool." I started stripping down. I had bits of blood and bug goop all over, so I was just going to throw all my clothes in and then jump in myself.

As soon as I started pulling off my bra, Reginald cleared his throat. "Should I be here for this?" he quietly asked.

"I dunno, if you want," I replied as I got the thing off me, exposing my pointy breasticals. His ear spines dropped as I pulled the panties off next "Dude, I'm just a girl. You said you did this for Luna all the time, right?"

"...Yes, I did. But you always wear clothes. Seeing you like this feels... taboo."

"You'll live." I walked over to the water and bent over to stick a hand in. It was a little more warm than I liked, but I figure it would cool off after a few minutes. So I slipped under and rinsed all the bullshit off me. Being able to breathe underwater is a godsend; I spent about a minute down there before I was scooped out of the water by some claws.

"Are you well?" Reginald asked, lifting me up to get a look at my face.

"Yeah. Why, did you find another bug?"

"You were underwater for over a minute. Not many races can hold their breath for that long. I was checking to make sure the water was not too hot and that you did not need assistance."

"Dude, I'm not a baby."

He sighed. "My apologies. I know most mortal races are frail and at times I forget how tough they can be." He lowered me back to the water. That's when I saw that Twilight and Taya were also soaking in the hot spring. *Oh great, it's the onsen episode...*

That didn't stop me from getting clean, though. I went back underwater and got the last of the sticky crap off me, then slid back up to the surface. Twilight and Taya were sitting on one of the edges, so I swam over to them and forced myself in the middle, because cuddling against mares is awesome when you're naked.

"So how do we get in?" I asked Reginald, who was staring at the water. "There's gotta be a trick."

"It has been over a thousand years since I was last there. Things have possibly changed, but I highly doubt it. Dragons do not much care for change, after all. I've been considering going back for quite some time. If there is anything you would like me to do while I am there, I am at your service. Spike may accompany me as well."

Flo, how dangerous would a dragon be to a water elemental?

“They could be very dangerous. We need the lay of the land scouted before we could even try to sneak in, and we need to know if it would be safe to extract the elemental there.”

“Shit, there has to be *some way* to get me in there,” I sighed, leaning back. Taya pressed against me, so I unconsciously began rubbing her back.

“Hm. It’s risky, but I could eat you,” Reginald said.

I thought about that for about thirty seconds before very slowly asking, “And how would that help?”

“I’d vomit you up once we got somewhere private.”

“And then I’d be naked, half-digested, weaponless, in unfriendly territory, and again, half-digested.”

“Not necessarily. We could—”

“Vore is not my fetish, Reggie. I’m not letting you fucking eat me.”

He snorted and rolled his eyes. “Fine. The only way to get into Iceland is to be a dragon. And don’t think a changeling could do it, either. You have to be the real deal. They’ll know. So unless you can just magically transform into one, you aren’t getting in.”

“I can do that, actually,” Twilight said.

“Are you sure?” I asked.

“Of course!”

“As sure as you were that time you wanted to turn me into a griffin?”

“Hey, I apologized for that! And it’s not like you got hurt.”

“Fluttershy’s still blushing around me!”

Taya giggled and asked, “So what happened?”

“Ugh, Twilight turned me into a house cat,” I said. That made Taya laugh and Reginald spew steam everywhere. “Yeah, yeah, laugh it up. So you can turn me into a dragon. Are you sure it won’t just be a giant lizard?”

“We can try it right now to see if it’ll work,” Twilight said. “Though we should probably go outside first. If there are any difficulties, I can fine-tune the spell while we’re in Canterlot. It’s not like we can really do much until we can get someone entry into Iceland anyway.”

“If you can really turn her into a dragon, that would be amazing,” Reginald said. “Truly, magic has come a long way in my absence from the world. As long as I can sense a dragon spirit in her, I could easily get her into Iceland.”

“Can you turn me back?” I asked. “I know we talked about this before and that was the main concern.”

“It still is,” Twilight said. “But Taya and I both have wings now. If we can’t turn you back, we can fly to Canterlot and get Celestia to help us.”

“And if not, there are many worse things to be than a dragon,” Reginald said. “I would be happy to help you adjust.”

“Don’t get me wrong, being a dragon’s gonna be fucking awesome, but I still quite like being a human. But hell, I guess if I can adjust to having a vagina, I could probably survive as a dragon.”

“Then shall we head to the entrance?” he asked.

“Dude, it’s freezing out there. I may be tough, but I don’t want to go out there while wet and naked.”

Twilight’s horn lit up and she dragged me and Taya out of the water. She flew over next to us and then used magic to hit us all with some kind of heat. The water oozed out of their fur and just ran down my body until I was completely dry. “There,” she said with a nod, releasing me and Taya.

“You need to teach her that one,” I said, tussling my daughter’s hair.

“I will. Now get dressed and we can head outside.”

“Yes to heading outside, no to getting dressed,” I said. “I’ll just have to take it all off anyway. Just keep me warm.”

“Happily,” Reginald said, grabbing my body with his claws. “Remain still and you shall stay warm.”

Dragon. Right. “Then let’s do it.” Taya’s horn lit up and grabbed all my clothes and we all started to the entrance. “So how did you end up with only one of those chiggers?” I asked. “I thought they came in swarms.”

“I noticed the rest looking for weak points in my scales as soon as this one bit down. I immediately toasted the others. I’ve been trying to get under my scales for a few days without causing too much damage to either me or my claws.”

“And you’ll heal fine under the scales?”

“Yes. My body will fight off any manner of infection and heal from most wounds, given time. Should you ever tire of your own body, I would be happy to welcome you among the dragons, if this spell bears fruit.”

“It will!” Twilight panted from next to us. She was doing her best to keep up.

“But at the moment, I’m happy as I am,” I said. “Swapping around just happens to be useful, occasionally.”

“As you say, Nav,” he grumbled.

Since he was huge, it didn’t take long for us to get into the chilly air outside. Twilight and Taya walked over to an empty area and started quietly talking. A few minutes after they started, in which time I managed to get somewhat comfortably situated in his hand, they called us over.

“If you would set her down, we can cast the spell,” Twilight said. “But as Nav fears, if it fails, she’ll... likely become a lizard. Or some other cold-blooded creature. So please be ready to hold her again. In this temperature, staying out too long while cold-blooded would be bad.”

“You better not turn me into a regular fucking lizard, Twilight,” I said. “I’ll make you regret it.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Reginald set his claw on the ground, allowing me to step out of it and onto the cold, hard ground. “Are you ready?”

Flo took over my body and said, “I believe it might be best if I vacate Nav for the transformation. Brook’s fate in Spike is on my mind.”

“That’s not a terrible idea. Twilight, would you mind having extra company?” I asked.

“I guess—”

“I can do it!” Taya said, zooming toward me. She placed her forehead against mine, which once again gave me the uncomfortable feeling of a hard horn pressing against the top of my head.

Flo?

“I would be much more comfortable in Twilight,” Flo said with my mouth. “So if you could carry me to her—”

“I said *I* can do it!” Taya said, pressing against me harder.

“You can carry her?” I asked. “That’s great. Please drop her off with Twilight.” *Flo?* She sighed in my mind before ejecting from my nose and seeping into my daughter’s fur, where she remained.

“Now go the rest of the way in,” Taya said, backing off. Nothing happened, of course. “Ugh, why do you have to be so difficult?! Just get in me!”

That’s what she said! I waited for someone to smack me against the back of the head, but it never came. Which is also what she said, for what it’s worth. “Taya, take Flo to Twilight, please.” She sighed in utter disappointment before landing and walking over to her teacher. She poked Twilight’s side and Flo scooted down her hoof and into Twilight’s body.

“Having another one is... weird,” Twilight said, shivering. “Anyway, are you ready now?”

“Yeah. Just be ready to back away, because I have no clue how big I’m going to be.”

“Right. Taya, meld flows with me.”

Their horns both lit up and a weird light show started appearing between them. After several seconds of lights swimming between their horns, they carefully pressed the tips together and an explosion came out. The light bathed over all of us and an orb of purple shot into me.

My eyes widened in surprise as my body immediately seemed to burst into flames. The heat seared into me almost instantly, leaving the pain behind. After that, my hands and legs involuntarily stretched and elongated, changing form and shape as my body molded to the will of magic.

Long story short, after only a little bit of pain, I was turned into an actual dragon. Gravity forced me onto all fours, sending Twilight and my daughter scampering out of the way. As soon as I was settled, Taya flew up to one eye and Twilight took the other. “How do you feel?” she asked.

“I feel...” I slowly breathed in and then released it as steam. “Amazing.” My body was coursing with heat and fire, and it almost made me speechless. I had never felt such raw strength

before, such *power* in my body. I turned my head and spat out a bout of flame. “I am fire.” I extended my claws, tearing into the ground beneath me. “I am steel.” I drew one of those claws against my chest, doing nothing. “I am rock.” I spread my wings, the span of which was easily five times what it had been. “I am flight.” I leaned back and managed to stand on two legs so I could stretch up as high as I could get, which put me at about the level of the average tree around us. To see how it sounded and felt, I roared out as loud as I could before looking down and growling, “I am *dragon*!”

“An adult dragon, at that,” Reginald said. He walked up closer and started circling me, looking me up and down. “A healthy and beautiful white dragoness of... about eight hundred to a thousand years, I’d say.” He was still much larger than I was, probably about three times as big. “You shall pose as my daughter. Dragon families are not incredibly close, but it will allow me to protect you if necessary.”

“Works for me,” I said, finally easing back down to the ground. “And we won’t have to worry about anyone hitting on me, since it’s not mating season.”

“That means little, but it should not be a pressing concern. Expressing disinterest will be enough.”

“Cool. Should we bring Spike?”

“You may, if you choose. He will have to act as your son, however.”

“Whatever.”

“What about me?” Taya asked. “Twilight could make me a dragon, too!”

“Nope,” Twilight thankfully said. “We were barely able to cast that spell on Nav. I don’t think it’s one I could cast on you by myself, let alone casting the one to turn you both back. I’m afraid this is going to be up to the three of them, unless Nav wants to send someone else in her stead.”

“Which I don’t,” I said. “Way I figure, if I’m gonna be stuck doing all this shit to save the world, I might as well see some cool parts of it that I’m gonna save. So I’ll happily go.”

“Never let me do anything fun...” Taya muttered, kicking at the ground.

“What was that, missy?” I asked, gently poking her side.

“Nothing, *mom*,” she sighed.

“That’s what I thought,” I said, nodding. “So, you two wanna turn me back now?”

“I’m afraid not quite yet,” Twilight said, shaking her head. “After casting the wing spell and then turning you into a dragon, I need to rest for a few hours. I’ll be able to turn you back before we all turn in tonight, I’m sure. And if not, Celestia can help.”

“Oh. Taya, you wanna do something fun?”

“What’s that, mommy?”

I carefully picked her up. “Let’s go for a flight, dear.”

“Oh. Okay, mommy!”

“Reginald, I’ll want to head to Iceland in about three or four days. Is that okay with you?”

“Yes. It will give me time to prepare my cave for departure. Meet me here when you are ready.”

“Cool. Twilight, can you return Flo to the ship? She’ll be able to meld with her own body until I’m human again.”

“Of course, but I’d like to speak to Reginald more, if he’d be willing.”

“I would,” he said with a nod.

“I’ll be back at the ship within a few hours, Nav,” she said. “Whenever you’re ready to turn back, just let me know. I’ll tell the crew to keep an eye out for you.”

“Alright. Then let’s go, Taya,” I said, spreading my wings again. She held on tight as I shot into the air.

It’s rare that I get to see Taya’s eyes light up like an actual little girl’s. Letting her fly with me high up in the sky put some life in her. It made her laugh and smile like a child, not like a cruel little gremlin. Being stuck as a dragon for several hours was worth it, to see her happy...