

Moldbreaker
Chapter 2: Rumors

Ray was up again after the sun had risen, talking the ears off of Airy when the princess arrived. The colt addressed her with a flurry of questions and then sat patiently, listening to the explanation of his arrival. It took barely a second of thought before his next words came out, "Okay, that sounds right." The look of doubt on the pegasi's faces caused him to grin. "Well, you aren't lying and I don't have any memories. I don't see how I couldn't be from the stars."

Celestia returned the smile, "I'm amazed at the progress you've made since yesterday. If I didn't know better, I would never have guessed where you were from. I'm planning on making an announcement today about you, will that be alright?" There was a hopeful tone in her voice.

"Sure, but I'd also really like to go outside today." He responded by trotting over to the window, looking down onto the section of garden he could see. In all of the two days he had been awake, he did not remember ever having been outside, so he wondered it was like. He tried conveying this to them by jumping and head nods in their direction. "I mean, if that's okay with you..." He glanced down at the ground and pawed at it shyly.

"As long as you are supervised, I wouldn't want anything to happen to you." She nodded to the two guards, both standing ready as if to defend him with their lives. "Oh settle down, I'll be going too." A smile shared between the red colt and the alicorn was interrupted as a rolled up piece of paper appeared in front of her highness. The sudden appearance made Ray take a step back with a noise.

"It's alright, it's just a letter." With a glow of her horn, the scroll unfurled and she read it. Her smile faded gracefully and she glanced over to Ray. "I'm sorry, but something has come up and I won't be able to join you."

Ray shook his head and gave her a return smile. "It's fine, duty comes before play if I'm remembering it right." His eyes narrowed to the side as he thought. "I am." He nodded with the answer. "Will you be gone long?"

"Unfortunately, I should be heading out now as well. Please enjoy yourself in my absence." With an elegant bow of her head, she turned and made for the exit followed behind by both of the guardians.

The red colt gave her a goodbye wave of his front leg and trotted out the door and into the hallway where he was met by Skyward. The white pegasus stood in front of his path. "I can still go outside, right?"

"Yes, that was Her Highness's command." His wing extended to point the way, and he began to lead the way out towards the garden with Ray quietly followed along.

"Keke~" A light blue filly with a horn, small red spectacles, and a large pouch on her back strode through the garden unseen. Or rather every so often, she would duck behind a trimmed bush or statue. Having snuck her way this far for a scoop, she wouldn't dare risk being caught by somepony! The press conference was not until the afternoon, but this little mare was

not about to let anypony else steal her story.

The day before, she had heard from one of her good friends a rumor that there was a strange red horse visiting the princess from parts unknown. Like all good gossip, most of the royal family was known, as well as any apprentices or new arrivals.. However, this one pony was not yet accounted for and she had jumped at the chance for fame.

“Oh they laughed when I told them that The Mare in the Moon was going to be coming back this Summer, and they laughed when I told them about these little creatures I uncovered that multiply extensively upon eating food... But just you wait, just you wait! I’ll get this scoop, I’ll uncover some hidden conspiracy.. Does the Princess have some kind of affair, or a lovechild? Then they’ll know! Everypony will know my name: Penny Paper, Legendary Ace Reporter!” She posed dramatically after giving the monologue, realizing about two seconds later that she had just spoken out loud and quickly hid behind the nearest object she could find.

Thankfully, the castle seemed to be a bit empty at this point, and her outcry had gone unnoticed. “Whew..” Giving a sigh of relief, Penny took a glance out from behind her cover and with a shock she noticed something she was not expecting. There in front, about a gallop away, was the red pony in question. Uncommonly dark red mane with a lighter red coat, no cutie mark. She almost let out a shriek of excitement before she noticed that right behind him was a white pegasus wearing guard armor.

It wasn’t just guard armor, it was *royal* guard armor. This was one of the two officially appointed guardians for Her Royal Highness, and there he was seemingly guarding this pony. Another surge of journalistic enthusiasm shot through her and she frantically began to formulate theories, using magic to pull a pen and scroll from her pack and writing them down. She kept her distance as she started following them around, tipping her head and ear out to try to listen to what was being said. She was not close enough, definitely not close enough! Closing the distance while not being seen, she managed to duck under a bush just as guard’s head turned to her direction.

She could hear her heart beat and panic engulfed the filly as she heard some trotting towards her location. *Oh no oh no oh no!* Her thoughts raced as visions of her imagined glory starting crumbling down. Captured and humiliated, she’d never get her story! Another hoofstep towards her position sounding louder and louder. She tensed up, ready to make a run for it should she be discovered.

“Captain!” From above the bush and the garden, another guard pegasus descended. “We have reports of an intruder spotted near the main hall.”

Penny’s heart kept beating loudly, and she swallowed her breath to try to calm herself.

“I’m coming,” Skyward replied, taking off of the ground with a flap. It was met by a noise of awe from somewhere around her, and the reporter spied from her vantage point the guard captain in the sky. “Stay here.” He gave a command to the other pony nearby before flying away with the scout.

“Whew...” She managed to breathe a sigh of relief right before the red colt poked his head into the bush she was in, managing to get right up next to her face.

“Hiya!” He said with a friendly tone. “Why are you hiding in here?”

The surprise made Penny give out a shriek, but she closed her mouth with a hoof quickly since she didn't want the captain of the guards coming back.

"Um..." The red colt turned his head to the side, confused by her behavior. "Did I do something wrong?"

"No no, I'm fine." She quickly shook herself back into a normal mindset. "Just a little startled is all." Then with a quick opening of her eyes, she faced the red pony with a grin. "I wasn't expecting my story to just come up and greet me, but it did and now here I am, ha..." Her eye twitched a little and she adjusted her glasses. "Right! Well, better make the most of it."

The unknown colt retreated his head and watched her exit the bush, brush herself off of the leaves, and then unpack her bag quickly. A pen levitated in front of her, a bottle of ink to the side, and a long piece of paper. "Now then.. What is--"

"Hiya!" He interrupted her and she furled her brow at him

"Yes, hello. Now, what is--"

"I'm Ray, what's your name?"

She heaved a sigh, but then straightened herself up. It wasn't really proper protocol to just jump into the interview without some kind of introduction. She remembered the scolding she got from the first hurried interview she had conducted in her first year. "Apologies, my name is Penny Paper. I am a reporter conducting research for the not-so-well-known newspaper, Equestria Daily."

"Oh? That sounds neat." His voice screamed with enthusiasm that she couldn't really place, but at least he was willing to help her.

"It is, isn't it? Well then... I'd like to ask you some questions about yourself, please be wholly honest with me." She gave him a wink and then grinned as he nodded. "Excellent, excellent. Now then," A quick clearing of the throat and she started her questions, "What is your relationship to Princess Celestia?"

He scratched his chin with a hoof, appearing to be thinking about it for too long. "I don't think I'm related to her."

"Not directly? Are you related to one of the other nobles, no but then why is the captain of the guardian pegasi watching over you?"

"Skyward Wing? Celestia asked him to watch over me." His response held no hidden answers, but that didn't stop her from trying to dig deeper.

"Such informality! Oh, you must really be related to her, and she even directed one of her royal guards to you. Are you a secret son of hers?"

"Uh...?" He stood dumbstruck, not really sure how to answer that so she started fishing for him.

"She looks after you, doesn't she? How long has this been going on for?"

The red colt started recoiling a bit as her presence became more dominating. "Um, I guess she does look after me.. And since yesterday."

"Ah, so you're a foreign pony." She took a moment to think up some more questions while he scratched at the ground in embarrassment. "You still look like you're hiding something..."

"I'm just not used to the attention." Ray admitted, still scratching at the ground.

"Oh, so you were isolated before a few days ago, or maybe you were being hidden away

from the world. Ha, I knew I uncovered some deep conspiracy! Are you the Princess's hidden son?"

"I'm not her son..." He both half-asked and half-stated.

"Ah, but what other reason could she have to hide you?"

"She said she was going to announce me to the world today."

"Oh my, but why the sudden news! Think Penny, you can do this.. Think think think," She trailed off, lost in thoughts until she gasped a second later. "Can it be? Are you some sort of hidden prince from her missing sister?"

"She has a sister..?" He asked with confusion.

"Oh yes, that has to be it. I had heard rumors about the Princess's most eligible bachelor nephew, and here I am talking to him!"

"Eligible?" confusion sounded in his voice.

"Well, you aren't seeing anypony at the moment are you?"

"I'm looking at you right now."

"Oh stop, that's so flattering but I'm not interested. You're not going to be secretly engaged any time soon are you?"

"No, I don't think I'm to be wed any time soon." His answer was given slowly back to her.

"Well then, that proves my point." Her ears perked up and she glanced skyward. "Out of time, thank you very much for the interview!" Hurriedly, she magicked all the items back into her bag and rushed off in a quick trot.

"Kay, bye Penny!" He called after her, sitting in the spot that the guard captain had told him to stay put in.

"Ha, so lucky... 'There's no way you can get a scoop like that, Penny~', well I did!" She could be heard musing to herself as she made her way back to the hole she had come in from.

Ray stayed put, contemplating what had just happened. The whole scenario seemed strange, but he had tried to answer questions honestly and it couldn't hurt to help Celestia out with her announcement. Still, what was he to her? What was family? The thought of being just a star or not mattering made him a little, no quite a bit sad. He had a frown on his face as Skyward landed next to him. He met eyes and the pegasus gave a snort.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting so long." He gave no report, since this was not his job. Normally his job was to guard the Princess, but she had assigned him to this space foal, much to his disappointment. He also noticed the frown on the colt's face, but made no attempt to ask why. There was just one task on his mind at the moment, keeping this palace and his charge safe. That however did not stop Ray from asking him questions.

"What am I to the Princess?"

"I cannot answer that, you will have to ask her upon her return." A quick response from Skyward put the colt back into his thoughts.

"Then I'll ask her when she gets back. In the meantime..." His voice trailed off as he spotted a majestic crimson bird flying across the blue sky not far from them both. "Wow..." Ray went back to trying to figure out the rest of this garden and the outside world.

By the time Celestia had returned, Ray had spent plenty of time tracking down and naming off animals in the garden. There were quite a few he found, noting that there were probably many more and that no one could possibly hope to get close to them all in one day. Besides that, most of them were afraid and tended to skitter away from him. All except one, who was resting on his back as the Princess and Airy landed in the garden.

"I see you've met Philomena." She said with a smile, gracefully trotting up to the three. The phoenix took off from his back and landed on her outstretched leg. "And I see you've met Ray," she told the bird as it nodded in agreement. "How have you two been getting along?"

"Good--"

"Scree--"

They both spoke at the same time, then paused together and laughed lightly. Philomena squawked out something while Ray stayed silent, waiting his turn to talk. Celestia nodded to the elegantly plumed bird before it flew off and away, circling around the red colt one more time and giving him a farewell squawk. "I'm glad to see that you're getting along so well with everypony you meet, or in Philomena's case, every phoenix."

"Did everything go okay for you too?" His attention settled on her and she gave him a nod.

"Yes, a small dragon from a neighboring land decided it would rest in Fillydelphia and made quite a mess. But we managed to talk it out." She felt excited to share the news, or rather that somepony had asked her aside from it being a royal duty. Not to mention that when he listened, she could almost see the questions written on his face that he was waiting to ask. To her surprise, Skyward was the first to speak though.

"Your Highness, there was an incident while you were away. A young roc made its way into the main hall and got stuck. We managed to free her however." He reported directly to her, not mentioning his small venture away from Ray, nor addressing him for that matter at all.

"I see, thank you very much for help. It seems like many things are falling out of the sky recently." She gave him a nod of approval and he trotted back behind her to resume his job of keeping her safe. Celestia returned her attention back to Ray. "What about you, did anything happen while I was away?" She could see his face light up with many things, and she motioned with one of her wings for him to follow so they could talk while they walked.

Talk he did, he had many things to say. From the way he was speaking, he sounded like a very excited young pony who had an eventful first day of school. There were many things brought up: questions about the large bright thing in the sky, questions about the various animals and why they were so shy, questions about why the ground was so green and why when he looked at it he felt hungry. Celestia tried her best to keep up with his excited questions, answering when she could amidst his flurry of enigmas.

"-- And then this filly showed up and--"

She looked over to Skyward, who also had a surprised expression on his face. The

princess narrowed her eyes a little, still smiling as if she would speak to him later about just how long he was away from the star pony.

“--and then I wanted to ask you something when you got back!” Ray finished as they stood in front of a large door. “What am I to you?”

The question disarmed her, and for the first time all day she was left without an answer. What was Ray to her? She had found him, and she was letting him stay in the castle. But what did he mean to her... was he anything but a pony from space? She frowned, unsure as of what her own feelings were and looked down at him. Before her eyes, she saw his face turn familiar, one like her own sister whom she missed every day, a pony that simply wanted to be appreciated for her talents.

He reminded her of Luna. He was like her sibling or child that she was taking care of, somepony like Twilight. What would happen when she announced that he was a pony from the stars, fallen to Equestria for some unknown reason and so close to Nightmare Moon's return? Worry ran through her mind and she closed her eyes, hoping the answer would come to her in time.

“You are--” She began but was interrupted by the large crowd of ponies gathered in the great hall, all eagerly eying the two of them. Airy to her right and Skyward to her left stepped forward, standing at attention and keeping a sharp eye on the crowd. It gave her just the moment she needed to wipe the surprised expression off her face and regain composure.

“Ladies and gentlecolts,” She addressed the crowd, all waiting in silence at her announcement. “The previous evening, a star was seen falling from the sky.” A soft murmur escaped over the group, but was hushed as she resumed her speech. “The star landed inside the Everfree Forest. Some of you may be concerned about further stars falling, but I can assure that there is no need to worry.”

“Who's that?”

“Why is he up there standing next to the Princess?”

“I heard he's the Princess's visiting nephew!”

Celestia strained her ears to hear what was being said, albeit very loudly, while keeping her poise. An idea struck her and she started to address them again. “There are rumors that my nephew is visiting from a foreign land. The facts aren't all established, but I do believe that this pony is indeed part of my family.” She looked over at Ray who had a both a confused and shocked smile on his face. “He will be staying here in Canterlot for the time being. I would very much appreciate it if everypony would extend a warm welcome to Prince Ray.”

“I KNEW IT!” There was a shout of joy from the back of the crowd, a light blue coated filly with small red glasses was hopping up and down excitedly while some of the ponies beside her stared at her peculiar actions.

She looked down at her 'nephew', hoping she had made the right choice. When she saw the expression on his face, the one where he was smiling so much that he was about to cry, she knew she could live with it.