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## Chapter 2

### *In Which Old Friends Catch Up.*

For the second time in the last few minutes I found myself in a taxi, this time pure-white with flowing violet curls.

I'd stared at the letter for some time before opening it. I hadn't heard from Sly in a while. He wasn't the kind that sent letters; he was more the kind of pony who would rather call or just drop by for a visit, but that wouldn't have been suspenseful enough I suppose.

Sly and I had been good friends since the start of the OC. Both of us had been fic writers back then. We used to bounce ideas of each other, read one another's work, that sort of thing. He was a good pony, a black and blue pegasus -most of the time-, with a jester hat as his cutie mark. He was the author of Paradise, a popular series that had gained a considerable following. I still read the updates when the Equestria Daily landed on my doorstep. I'm not quite sure why we hadn't talked in a while; perhaps after I stopped writing we simply hadn't run into each other, or maybe I was changing. I didn't like the second option.

In anycase, his letter had come as a surprise.

"Hiya, Bittersweet Squeaks," it had started in his normal Droid Serif. That was his nickname for me. Back when I was in the biz my niche was writing short, often sweet stories that more often than not were constructed to bring out a tear or two. Thus, the nickname was born one day, perhaps after not enough work and too much to drink. It brought back fond memories.

"I heard about what happened to Semi," the letter continued. "Bad stuff, really, and I know who they call when bad stuff goes down. Hearing about it made me think, seeing as how I haven't seen you in a while, it'd be good to hear a friendly voice. Things have gotten bad lately and, to be honest, my reasons for calling on you aren't entirely for the sake of reminiscing. I have a feeling it's all connected, Squeaks. I could use your eyes on this.

See you soon.

Slywit.

And so I'd hailed another cab and headed down to Sly's old haunt. He lived in a house near the center of the /co/mpound, close to the writer's guild building. It was a pretty nice place, shaped like Luna's crown.

We passed it as the cabbie looked for a space. The center of the /co/mpound was always busy. Anons milled about everywhere in this part of the OC, black pony silhouettes with little definite shape or features to call their own. They say most ponies start this way; in those dark faces laid all kinds of ponies, from the most vile of villains to the kindest of saints, you could never tell with an Anon. A few of them waved warmly as I got out of the cab, and quite a few more kept walking without a second glance. Such was the nature of the /co/mpound.

I trotted up the stairs and knocked on the door. Waiting patiently, I took in the scale of the place. The /co/mpound could be compared to a large city, complete with tall buildings, houses and hardly a tree in the place. It was where a lot of the fandom sprung from and was arguably ground zero for where the OC had started. Most ponies considered it to be the center of the OC, though there could be no actual center since nopony was quite sure how far the OC stretched in any given direction. Some had tried to find out, but those who went farthest never seemed to come back.

*Perhaps this world is flat, I mused. Maybe they fell off the edge.*

The sound of the door opening shook me from my thoughts.

"Bittersweet Squeaks!" Sly exclaimed warmly. "Good to see you! Still got that hat I see."

"Good to see you too, Sly." I replied. "Yep, haven't taken it off before and I'm not planning to start now." While the majority of ponies in the OC avoided human clothing outside of glasses I'd been dropped into the OC wearing a reporter's press hat. I hadn't bothered to take it off since.

I was starting to wonder if I even could.

"True, it suits you anyway." Sly turned and headed into the house. "Come in."

I followed him inside. The interior of the house wasn't as well kept as the exterior and books were laid everywhere in various states of decomposition; Sly had never been the neatest of ponies.

"So, you got my letter?" he asked, walking into the kitchen.

"Yeah, Derpy delivered it a few minutes ago," I answered, taking a seat in the living room. "What's up?"

I heard the sound of a refrigerator opening. "Check the paper on the table."

The table in front of the couch was far from orderly, its surface hidden beneath papers, notes and unused story pages in what could generously be described as a heap.

"Which one?"

"Oh, one second, I'll get it." He walked back into the living room, two steaming cups of tea floating behind him.

The thing about Slywit was you could never be quite sure what he would be on any given day; last time I'd seen him he'd been a pegasus, but he was currently a unicorn. No one was sure why but the popular theory was that his "idea" had been jumbled. When he'd come in everyone was thinking of a different Sly and, as a result, he got the mixed blessing of three different bodies. Sometimes he'd stay in one form for weeks on end and other times he'd shift between states in a matter of minutes, often at rather inopportune times.

One of the cups landed in front of me, a bit of coffee spilling onto the floor. One of the setbacks of three bodies is he was rather unpracticed in their use; he could manage a few spells as a unicorn and a couple of tricks as a pegasus but he was a bit shaky as either. He got along pretty well as an earth pony, but that form seemed to pop up less.

He sifted through the pile of paper on the table, his horn glowing blue as they floated into lesser sub-piles on the floor.

"Here," he offered, floating a bit of newspaper my way, "read the first article."

The front page was a story about the newest background character to enter the OC, Bon-Bon, along with a few new fics mentioned on the side.

"What am I looking for, seems like a fluff piece to me."

"That's just it, that's a copy of the Equestria Daily."

"Yeah, I know, I get them everyday," came my reply as I flipped through the inside of the paper.

"Think about it Squeaks; that paper is magic. It'll update itself for the rest of the day, right?" he pressed.

"Right"

"Then why, if Semi was murdered, is there no mention of it anywhere inside?"

It dawned on me. He was right, the Equestria Daily always had the latest news, right down to the second it happened. It'd been a few hours since the Mods had found Semi, so why had there been no report?

"They're keeping it under wraps,"

"Exactly." Sly took a sip of coffee.

"You think the Cube is in on it?"

"I don't know, but I think somepony is." Sly looked back and forth conspiratorially. "That means this goes pretty damn deep, Squeaks."

It was silent in the room for several minutes. The Equestria Daily newspaper was at the heart of the /co/mpound; it's where everypony gets their news, where every event was planned, and where nearly every contributor could be found at one point or another. I'd had an office once, same as Sly, back when it was small. The Daily was run by Sethisto, one of the odder denizens of the OC due to him being one of the few beings that wasn't a pony. He was a small cube that floated around collecting content and obsessing over "The Great and Powerful Trixie". It was said he was themed after some video game, possibly an offshoot from another OC somewhere. He'd been just as surprised as the rest of us when it took off the way it did. Now it was massive, hosting hundreds of fics, art, any content you could care to think of.

Any content, I realized, besides fapfics.

"Got an idea?" asked Slywit. "You've got that face that tells me you're about to do something you probably shouldn't"

"Am I that obvious?" I asked, trying to adopt an impassive look.

"You're no great poker player, Squeaks."

Fair enough, he'd taken enough bits from me in a game to know that well enough.

"Well... we do have someone on the inside."

"Oh." Slywit paused. "You're going to see *her*."

"Can't think of a better lead at the moment." Several people took residence in the

Equestria Daily building, mostly just background ponies who had made their way into the OC. But *she* was one of the top contributors and if anyone could tell me what was going on, it would be her.

“I haven’t seen her in a while. You’ll have to give her my regards.”

“I will,” I promised. Getting up, I added, “Thanks for the tea, Sly, it was good to see you again.”

“No problem, Squeaks,” he replied, magically lifting the cups. “Just don’t get yourself killed alright?”

I gave him a thin smile. “The OC won’t be rid of me that easily.” I looked at the paper. “Mind if I borrow this?”

“Sure, take it,” he replied, waving a hoof dismissively.

“Thanks.” I picked the paper up in my mouth; one of the drawbacks of being an earth pony is that you have to taste most of what you want to carry. Speaking around the paper, I managed to say “By the way, I’m sure Maxie’s forgiven you for the April Foal’s joke by now.”

*Poing-smash*

I turned to see that the two cups were now in a thousand pieces on the floor. Slywit’s horn was gone, now replaced by a pair of up-right wings.

Some fan theories applied to everyone.

Sly had turned into a pegasus, his changes were seldom in his favor. It made him rather fun to mess with sometimes.

“Don’t you say a word, Squeak. Not. A. Single. Word.”

I smiled “Wouldn’t dream of it.” I walked towards the door before deciding to mess with him a bit more. “I’ll remember to give Madmax your regards.”

*Poing*

In my defence though, I have to say that had been a very interesting April Foals for everyone.