

**The Nightwatch- Judged, Juried, Executed**  
**By: Gabriel LaVedier**

Badam moved as best as he could with his pack and equipment weighing him down, his lantern jostling about with an audible clanking as he desperately dodged the attacks, “That’s it, you catty little carrot-head... Anger is so good. For me.” He twisted and danced about with a scrapper’s grace, a regular participant in little scuffles that needed only the dexterity of a pony who fights and runs away.

“You’re not going to defy me forever. Not with that weight on your back!” The dark being slashed out at the biggest target, savage claws ripping at the canvas pack. The first casualty was the lantern, which fell to the ground of the forest, still lit but badly guttering. That was changed swiftly, the creature screaming with hate and crashing its paws down on the thing, crushing it into a tangle of glass and metal, the slick of oil igniting into a leaping fire. In the light of that uncontrolled blaze, the being saw Badam running for the entrance to his prison’s bower.

Badam could hear the shriek of rage behind him. Like a cheated noblewoman, it rang with wounded pride and echoed with bruised hubris. Music to his ears. Without his lantern he was lighter, and grew lighter still as his pack spilled its contents. But he was also increasingly blind, relying only on the light of the moon. “If you really care, shine on. I never needed it more...”

“YOU!” From out of the dark, the shadow waylaid the galloping pony, crashing into his body and hurling him to the ground with a heavy thud. “How dare you?! You mocked my offers of power and plenty, you came here to make light of me, and now you think you’re clever by getting me mad? You’re a third-rate scoundrel and I’ll make you pay!”

“I doubt it!” Badam kicked out with all his strength. Though he didn’t look like much, there was surprising power in his lower legs. It was an applebucking kick, with all the force of earth pony strength coupled to unforgotten technique. “You barely had the power to attack one innocent Diamond Dog. You’re a liar and a cheat. What makes you think you can deliver?”

The creature showed a sign of pain, grunting loudly as it sailed off of Badam and landed hard on the ground. “NGH! I have been captive for many years. My powers have waned. And in this age, there’s so little hate on which to feed. I can feel it. There is so much weakness in me, from this pathetic, pitifully peaceful era. But all that will change. Never doubt it.”

“Seriously? You still think you can do anything? You need to guard your little stone prison. What can you possibly do to get your power back?”

The creature attacked, slamming its inky body into Badam and viciously hammering his body with hammer-like blows “By pain! By pain and agony and hate! This is all the food I require! All the strength in my body comes from suffering and hate. I’ll scratch festering hate into my victims. And as you saw with your pitiful dog, they will scream that hate out, bleed it through their injuries. They will obey me. That was the control I promised. Pain will make any creature obey if they think you can make it stop.”

Though Badam coughed and gasped under the savage body blows, he struggled madly and bucked away like a rodeo pony, a lucky kick catching the creature in the stomach, knocking it away and letting Badam take a shaky stand. “That’s not going to happen. Not even going to give you a chance to get one more than you did” Badam unleashed a flurry of kicking and bucking, front legs kicking out wildly and rear legs bucking away as though at a recalcitrant and gnarled apple tree.

The blows missed more than they hit. They swept through the empty air with loud rushes of the wind created with their motion. However, their fury wasn’t entirely impotent. Every so often his hits nicked or thudded into the seemingly-indestructible feline beast. “No... I will do it. You have no clue what I will do. I will spread my hate, and spread my anger. The world will destroy itself. There will be war through the face of the world. I will make this land a barren wasteland, a blasted landscape of suffering and privation. Ponies will wander, starving and dying, trusting none, having no hope that tomorrow will even come for them. It is my only pleasure.”

“Pleasure? You’re worse than I thought. You can actually have any enjoyment out of the suffering of others? You really are a monster that hardly deserves... AUGH!” Badam threw an ill-advised kick that went quite wide, the stalking feline twisting around and raking its claws down Badam’s side, cutting through his torn pack, his cloak and his clothes. Though the wounds were shallow, they still cut into him with a burning agony, fiery tendrils seeming to writhe out from the rake, though not proceeding very far from them.

The creature laughed with triumph, adding to the pain by throwing in another clothing-cutting rake. It watched Badam writhe with a dark chuckle of enjoyment. "Your insolence has angered me, and you will pay. Not only will you be my first feast, but I'll make you suffer more than you can imagine. Do you know how? Well... All you weak little ponies make so much of your connections. And you also have so many more mares than stallions. I'll make you regret that. My preference was always to attack mares. To steal their hope."

"Get... On... With... This stupid threat. I can't listen to you babble forever..." Badam gritted his teeth and snorted hard through his nose, rising shakily to his hooves, his wounds large, ugly and faintly dripping with black ichor. He swayed a bit, but planted his hooves as solidly as he could on the uneven forest ground.

"You came from a mother. You probably have sisters. Maybe a mare-friend" The monster smiled a toothy smile, and bared its glistening claws, black and shiny like oil, "I know all their secret parts. All their tenderest flesh. Every inch that will burn with untold agony beyond any torment that could rise from any other attack. I'll draw hate and fire over your cousins and nie-" The smile vanished from the creature's face when Badam whipped around suddenly and bucked it right in the face, cracking the fangs and sending it flying out to crash into a tree.

"You filled me with mindless hate! And then what did you do?" The pony charged to the fallen beast and brought his forelegs down with brutal, crushing stomps. "You gave me a TARGET!" He crushed body and head on the fallen creature, for all the good it did. "You come near my nieces or... Any other mare I know and I will feed you your own pestilent bile! Is that enough hate!?"

Though suffering injuries of some type from the brutal assault, the creature still found the capacity to rise up and attack again. It lashed out with battery and swipes of its claws. "Yes. Feed me your fury. I'll take that injury for more power! You can't defeat me, but I'll tear your flesh from your bones!" The creature added lines of angry scratches, dripping with blood and hateful ooze while also bruising flesh and coming close to breaking bones each time the thing hit Badam with its increasing power.

Badam spit out a glob of blood, panting hard and grimacing as he fought to keep control. His black mane was disheveled beyond recognition, and his suit was more ribbons than attire. Even so, he kicked and bucked, battering the beast about. "I don't... I don't have to win. I just have to last. To survive! Just hold onto the tiniest spark of life..."

"Tiny spark of life? Ha! Just clinging to your hope, like all your pitiful pony kind. Just what reason could you have to hold on to an agonized life with your veins all inflamed with my venom?"

"Because time is all it takes for a letter to be read" His body shivered harder, struggling to be the master of the unbridled hate that burned in his veins and ripped at his mind. His body was in pain, pain with which he was not familiar. But he had a duty. To Equestria. To his family. And to... "Enchanted paper is hard to come by. It takes an official capacity. Or something more personal..."

The smile dropped from the shadowy thing, its claws flexing as its teeth gritted in anger. "How did you get it? Did you steal it from the camp, proof that the letter was never sent from there?"

A small laugh dropped from Badam's lips, his wounds smoking a little bit, though still burning on the inside and seething with unbidden rancor. "I had my own. I made out a letter while Drupe thought I was weighing guilt. I burned it before I got here. So now I just have to wait."

The dark being looked around quickly, even glancing at the sky in case there were Pegasus guards about. But it saw nothing. Just the round moon, looking impassively down. "I think your hope has failed, as it always does. I'll leave you here, a bloody mess. I'll let you die here, knowing my promise holds. I'll make your family suffer. I'll find them through some means and bring them to such agony... Well, just think about that. Think as the hate flares and the pain burns in your flesh, while your blood pours out. Let me finish you..." It approached Badam slowly, flexing its fingers and grinning its feline grin.

Badam attempted to work up a kick and managed a solid one at a hand. Though it drew back the other scratched out, raking thin wounds along his neck. He could tell the thing was stronger. His own righteous indignation was being basely counted as "hate" and was feeding the monster. He kicked again, and again, batting at the claws and getting only scratches back for his troubles, which were often joined by heavy blows to the face and chest. He was losing, badly. "I have hope. I have hope... Because I have..." Badam collapsed after throwing a last kick, spitting out another blob of bloody saliva.

"No, little pony. You don't" The creature loomed over Badam, already looking bigger and more intimidating. Its features were all the sharper, and its eyes glowed with a malevolent light. "War. Suffering.

Destruction. Torture. Hopelessness. Across the face of the wasteland once called Equestria. All tender flesh will burn. All minds will be maddened with hate. No princess will be able to stand. It's really a pity you won't see what happens after the fall."

Claws moved in, aiming from Badam's throat. Before they could reach it, however, the creature cried out loudly and swatted at the air. Three cockatrices were upon him, pecking and flapping their wings as well as battering with their tails. "Over here! It's here!" Two hydra heads roared as the reptile burst through the trees with Tree Tender riding upon it. In her wake there galloped the other constables along with four black-furred unicorns wearing polished silver armor.

"Because I have love..." Badam whispered, shuddering hard as his agonized fatigue fought with the maddening rage that worked through him.

"NO! Impossible!" The creature quickly turned and leaped into the shadows, leaving the cockatrices in its wake. They clucked madly and attempted to give chase.

"Hold on!" Tree leaped down off of the hydra and ran to Badam "There's a more important matter."

"The prison is... GET AWAY! I DESPISE..! The prison has something in it the thing needs. Destroy it, you kill the thing. KILL! I hate all things.... Hate everything. Hate every... Every... This is... Unbelievably painful..." Badam went from pleading to angry and back again, though his anger lost passion quickly and was reduced to impotent attempts at a raging face.

"Clean him up, fast. By Celestia..." Slivovitz looked on Badam with a shudder. "He looks like a punching bag that ran into a manticore. Get those pegasi in here right now! Take him to the civilian. She's the closest apothecary we've got and hopefully she can keep him stable enough to last out whatever it takes to cure him."

Badam noticed the tumult and confusion of many hooves and other things hitting the ground, the sound of unicorn magic and the flapping of wings before the pain overpowered the mind-clearing power of rage and he dropped into darkness.

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The first thing that came to focus as the darkness cleared was the sound of chanting. It had no meaning but provided a clear focus, something to hold onto while climbing out of the depths. The foreign words were good as anything for returning some semblance of sense.

His eyes opened next, but shut again quickly, the first flash of even the subdued light enough to sting like mad and draw a groan from his mouth. With that sound, the chanting stopped.

"A little sound at last you make! I'm glad you've finally come awake." That rhyming. Known from letters. "My fear was this, I will not lie: I was afraid that you would die."

"Little thirsty..." His voice was hoarse, rasping, and he was suddenly aware of how dry his mouth was.

There was some rattling from nearby, then a pressure at his lips and the feel of wetness. "Drink not deeply from the cup. Too much too fast and you will throw up."

After a few small sips the stallion nodded. "I know survival situations. Thank you. How long have I been out?"

"They brought you in raving in pain. For five days I worked to heal you again." The cup came up again to deliver more bitter water. Clearly, there were herbs of some kind in it.

"Five days. You must have doped me up pretty well. I don't feel that same flaming pain."

"Shortly from the time you arrived, the wounds gave smoke and you no more writhed."

"I get it. They took care of the thing and all that was left were the real injuries. But there were a lot of them, weren't there?" He smiled, licking his slightly-less-dry lips.

"You bled quite a lot and nearly died. My efforts were great; how hard I tried."

The stallion opened his eyes slowly, the thankfully-low light still harsh, but not so bad. He looked to the striped blur beside him and smiled a bit. "Thanks for all the effort. Sorry if I was a hassle. Never my intention."

"Your body it was my pleasure to mend; I could do no less for a brave friend."

He chuckled lightly, the soreness in his body suddenly hitting him and drawing a small groan from him. "If the letters I get are any indication, and I'm reading between the lines properly, in just a few more

years you won't just be a friend, but family."

The blurred form pulled back a little bit, looking over the prone figure with obvious curiosity inherent in its motions. "I simply do not know what to do. I don't remember... Do I know you?"

"You know my family. My niece especially. The one who never knew me, but who probably still knows me. She's a good filly. I hear she spends a lot of time here. Good. Maybe she can settle down some and concentrate on what she needs to do. It'll be good for her. Until then, while she's still so young... You can be the best mentor I can imagine."

"So you're from this place, nearby your home. I guess that... You're not Badam Pome?"

"Add it to the list. I never write anything down but, add it to the list anyhow. I imagine that it'll be a very useful name. So, now that I'm conscious, when can I leave?"

The image grew clearer, Zecora's striped head slowly shaking as she rose. "I am very sorry but a promise I did make..." She went to the door of the hut and opened it slowly, motioning towards the distance. She returned to the inside of the hut, followed quickly by the members of the Ponyville-area Nightwatch, conspicuously minus Pocket Change. "I swore to tell them when you were awake."

"Ahh, that's ok. I know from promises. I'd imagine they were a little worried."

"A little worried" he says. You seem to have a tremendous capacity for understatement."

Slivovitz stepped over to the prone stallion and looked down with a half-smile and shake of her head.

"When I saw you last you were nothing but a bloody, ooze-dripping hunk of tenderized meat clinging to life by the short-and-curlyies. Excuse me for having a little twinge of doubt about your future condition."

"Ah, hey, come on. Zecora knows her stuff. And you had serious backup. I saw some silver armor before I dropped off into la-la land. Luna's guard. And they were mages. That means you had the serious mana power you needed to shove off that monster, just like it told me. I hope you stomped that shadowy kitty-cat into the ground. I tried my best, but... Well, I got the worst of it, even if I DID buck it in the face more than a few times. Any normal critter would have at least had the decency to have its skull crack open."

Drupe walked up then, nodding his head. "Yea. The mages went ahead of us, using their magic to batter the thing away from us as we went along. It was getting pretty desperate, probably because it thought it was going to win. We finally found the prison and got a lot of light on it. It was... A giant black cat statue with a hole in its chest. At the base there were a few words carved into it. "*Odium. Agonium. Dolor.*" The mages told us not to worry about what it meant, just ancient words that were put down to describe the prisoner. It didn't matter. We set to it and kicked the thing to pieces. We could hear the monster screaming and raging as we did it. And then start to scream even louder when a black lump of something inky and smoking fell out of the rubble. We all crushed it, stomped it into pieces while it screamed and begged. I can't speak for everyone, but I didn't feel even a little sorry when it went quiet, and the mages told us there was nothing there anymore."

"That must have been when all the black ooze and venom burned away. Zecora was telling me that when that happened, her job got a lot easier. So, thanks on her behalf. Oh, that reminds me... How do I look? Tell the truth. Lots of scarring? Am I still bleeding, or covered in open wounds? I probably can't tell, there are likely a lot of herbal substances running through my veins now."

"Actually, you look alright." Tree Tender stepped forward, looking over the exposed body on the floor. "All the wounds look like they're closed and there are plenty of plants on there that will prevent scarring. I don't know what's going on with your bones but... That's something else altogether."

"Nothing's broken. I've got farmer's bones, and there's no casts on anything. I guess I'm doing alright."

"Yes. It would appear you're doing well." Slivovitz nodded with a sad look, then made a motion with her head. Drupe hesitated for a moment but finally went to the door of the hut and waved a hoof outside. From outside, there came a quartet of white pegasi dressed in silver armor, carrying chains and manacles with them.

"Oh right. I guess you finally did some paperwork checking. I'm still a little surprised you're going to do it. But, you're a professional, and a damn good chief, so far as I saw. Alright, folks. Manacle me securely. I think I'm recovered enough to get out of these if I want to try to do so. Hope you've got some decent escorts."

"We're your escorts. The mages too. They've got a big troop transport waiting, with very secure mage-controlled-locks. You can't pick those." She shook her head and moved aside to allow the pegasi to

lock up the stallion. “Mister Bad Apple... I can say this... You were a good constable. And that’s what really mattered out in the forest.”

Bad Apple was helped to his hooves, supported on one side by Emerald and the other by Clear. He hobbled along slowly, legs barely able to move thanks to the short lengths of the chains between the manacles locked around the lower parts of his legs. “I hope I don’t have to wait long. Holding cells are the most boring part of the lockup.”

“You’re not going into holding. You’re going right to court. And no, you’re not going before any magistrate. You’re going to be facing her Royal Highness Princess Luna herself. You broke the law on her territory, and she wants you before her” one of the Pegasus guards, walking before Bad Apple explained the case with a neutral, clinical tone.

“I should have known. Let’s go, then. We mustn’t hold up justice.”

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“Hear ye! This is a special court, presided over by Her Royal Highness Princess Luna, Grand Monarch of the Order of the Starry Night and head of the House of Night. Before her Royal Highness have been brought Constable Pocket Change on the charge of unleashing a dangerous monster into Equestria for the purposes of personal advancement; and Bad Apple, alias Badam Pome on the charge of impersonating a constable and undertaking constable activities” The velvet-dressed page used every ounce of lung power in his earth pony body to boom the charges across the throne room, which was empty of all non-essential personnel. Silver-armored unicorns and pegasi crowded around the two manacled ponies in question; around Bad Apple, the Ponyville Everfree Nightwatch was also present.

Princess Luna looked down on the two prisoners with imperious neutrality. She focused her gaze first on Pocket, eyes narrowing and lips pulling back slightly in a sneer. “You... For the sake of greed and laziness you chose to take the word of an ancient monster, chose to bring darkness and suffering upon the face of this land.”

“Mercy, Princess! Mercy please! I didn’t know! And besides, it seemed to be a good thing. Imagine an imprisoned wretch, alone in the forest, no one hearing its pleas! How could I have been aware of what would happen? Please, I did not mean any harm.”

“The crime seemed so small, and as you say, hardly like a crime, but rather a good thing. However, we may still judge and punish innocent acts that have led to terrible consequences. Involuntary manslaughter still exists as does destruction of property, even without intention. You will be punished for the crimes that nearly came about. I can judge this from what became of constable Emerald, and to your fellow prisoner.” She nodded to the guards, who closed in tighter around Pocket.

“N-no! Have mercy on me! Please don’t... Whatever it is you intend, please do not do it! I admit it! I am petty, I am weak, I am a poor constable, but I am not a monster!”

“You betrayed your nation, your fellow sentients, and your fellow constables. But even above and beyond... After a thousand years of exile, I have returned to all my old responsibilities. Now I am head of the Nightwatch once more. That means, aside from all else, you have betrayed ME!” A crack of magical energy shook the room as Princess Luna’s horn shot a purple jolt. After a short moment of panting and regaining her composure, she resumed. “You will be banished. Take him beyond the borders of the griffin kingdom. Pass through with any diplomatic passes you need, and make sure they know in the kingdom what his punishment is. They can have him in their land if they want him. But tell them we never want him back here ever again.”

With a wave of her hoof, and a nod of her head, the guards did as they were told, dragging a pleading, screaming Pocket Change from the throne room towards a waiting transport. The page cried out, “Judgment has been decided and the punishment enacted! The case of Pocket Change is closed!”

“As for you...” Luna’s eyes settled on Bad Apple. The caramel pony was, improbably, smiling a large, bright grin, which looked unusual amid the healing wounds and bandages holding bundles of herbs. “I have one question for you; just a single opening question that is the crux of everything: What did you think you were doing?”

Bad Apple chuckled gently, looking up with a wink. “I think I was trying to impress you. So... Did it work?”

Princess Luna lost her face of imperious authority and simply goggled like an awestruck filly.

“The... The cheek. The insolence and amazing audacity!”

“So, did it?” Bad Apple just continued to smile, and even popped his eyebrows a bit.

Princess Luna sniffed and snorted in great impatience. But she looked aside and said, “Yes. I must admit... It was quite impressive. You actually managed to get a professional constable to think you were also one. You love that trick, don’t you?”

“I use what works. So, what gave me away, really? There’s no way they’d look through paperwork while I was recovering.”

“You think too much of your capabilities. Your fake badge was perfectly made. But your constable number was a problem. There are no repeating numbers in real badges. And besides... Four sevens? Why not just put a big sign on your head that says, “I am a card gambler?””

“Why would I be so obvious? I like a challenge but giving away the game is not smart at all.”

“Yes, so I see. Rather than going back to the camp you ran off to find a monster and thought you could... I don’t know. Were you going to lock it up again? I’m struggling to understand this.”

“I was there to keep it in place, and to show where the prison was located. I wrote out a letter to you on the paper you gave me and burned it. I knew that Pocket wasn’t going to send it. I was very glad you managed to send your guards in sufficient numbers. And so fast! Mind you, it was a scary moment when I fell down. But all I had to do was buy a little time.”

“Looks like you did. You held down a monster of terrible power and brought the guards needed to destroy it. At considerable risk to your life. That was very admirable. It almost seems like you should get a medal.”

“A medal? But that requires public honors and paperwork and some kind of conferring of honors for the use in heraldry or... Some other such thing that my mother would find impressive for whatever reason. Can I just get the equivalent in metal and gems?”

“I didn’t say I was going to give you one. You might deserve one but... You impersonated a constable! That’s a felony, and a serious one at that. There’s serious consequences implied with this.”

“Your highness, please, if I may...” Slivovitz stepped forward, head low, ears back, looking as supplicatory as possible. “I know that he violated the law. And it’s a good law, it keeps untrained and inadequate persons from doing a job that is very important, and makes sure the ones that are doing this know the rules that protect themselves and the ones they’re dealing with. But... He’s not a bad stallion, all told.”

“So, what are you saying, Section Chief? Are you saying that he was not doing something bad?”

“I... I just... I have to take certain things in stride. In the forest, you can’t be spit and polish. You have no time to follow every “I” and “T”. It’s not about what you are. If you want respect in the forest, you earn it. And seeing him reduced to a bloody hunk of meat just to buy time enough to bring the guards... He’s got my respect. That’s all I can say.”

“I see, Section Chief. And what of the rest of your corps? Do any of your constables have anything to say?”

“I have something.” Emerald stepped forward with great boldness, the Diamond Dog not awed by the princess of the night. “Monster hurt me too. My body burned and I had hate. Same monster hurt him even more. I understand pain. And he was strong. A good, strong pony. That important to Diamond Dogs.”

“And if I may...” Clear stepped up, gently pressing against Emerald as he came beside her. “I can’t say much about what he did. It was very wrong, and I know the penalties. But I have to agree with Emerald. I can’t imagine the suffering he endured to save our lives and the land. He couldn’t let what happened to Emerald happen to anypony else. I can... Admire that.”

“He was a good colt. I mean... The critters liked him. If they trust him, what do I care he was putting us on?” Tree Tender hung back, not daring to look up at the great princess.

“I only spent two nights with him. One night he did his job, went back and that was it. Second night, he got to know us all, solved a mystery and got the everloving fodder beaten out of him to save all our flanks. I’ve gotta say... I could have worse partners as a constable” Drupe spoke up.

Princess Luna nodded at the constables, stroking her chin with her fetlock and looking to Bad Apple. “You committed a serious crime. On a lark, as far as I can see, at the outset. But, the Chief brings up a good point. All of them do. You did a good job. You did something so very important that helped this land tremendously.”

“What’s my fate, Princess? If it’s exile, make it the Savannah. I hear it’s developing nicely.”

“No, no... You are not getting exile. You deserve a medal, and jail time. So, put them together and you cancel out the effects. You’re not completely off the hook. But you’re not getting put behind bars.”

“Oh... That’s fair. Can I get some time with these folk? I think they’ve taken enough time off and need to get back to work. And I get the feeling I’m not going to see them for a while.”

“Stay in the chamber. But yes, you may speak with them.”

“Thank you...” Bad Apple bowed slightly and slowly turned around to face the collection of constables that had just spoken on his behalf. “Please hit softly. I’m still recovering. Five days don’t heal wounds.”

“Our hitting you would be very wrong. It might be appropriate for some, but we’ve already seen you ripped into pieces and beaten into unconsciousness. So... No need to be afraid, mister Apple” Slivovitz said with a smile.

“Oh right. Drupe, I hope this doesn’t change anything between us. I can tell you, I was an apple farmer but I got kicked out. Haven’t bucked an apple in ages. So, I’m not one of the ones flooding the market.”

“Oh, I hadn’t even thought about it. It’s alright. From your look in the first place, I figured you weren’t a farmer at all.” Drupe chuckled softly, rubbing his forelegs together nervously.

“This is incredibly uncomfortable, isn’t it?” The constables nodded slowly, which made Bad Apple smile. “Yea, sorry. I was going to just hang around doing the work for a week or so, as long as the paperwork wasn’t an issue. Believe me; I was going to work hard. I hope I demonstrated that.”

“As I said, mister Apple. You earned my respect. Oh, I’m still mad you pulled on over on me, but that’s my fault. I’ll get tougher about the rules and keep a tighter ship. Well... Maybe. It’s still the forest. Our spit’s better in our mouths and polish scuffs up on moss and tree sap. But I’ll keep an eye on papers” Slivovitz answered, a grin tugging at her face.

“That’s probably for the best. Don’t change too much, chief. You’re doing great” Bad Apple looked over at Emerald and Clear. Emerald was running her hands slowly over Clear, who was looking somewhat nervous but still nuzzling up at her. “And you two... Isn’t this better than teasing and hiding?”

“I must admit... This is pleasant” Clear kissed the Diamond Dog on her lips, left with a little lipstick smear on her mouth.

“Is wonderful! Glad to have Clear to hold. My handsome pony. Smart pony. Here to love me” Emerald tickled Clear under the chin and touched her nose to his.

“For now. Constables cannot fraternize this way. And we’re not so hidden, so even the chief looking the other way can’t help us” her paramour answered, blushing.

“You can. If you’re married. Married constables can work together, even in the same squad” Bad Apple winked at the pair.

“Married? If we’re married? That’s all it takes?” Clear stared, dumbfounded, at Bad Apple.

“I going to be married? To my pony? Ooh, get to be beautiful and have big wedding, with pretty dress and bridesmaids and pretty gems on cake!” Emerald took on a dreamy look, her tail waving wildly behind her.

“By the way, before you ask, no. I cannot be your Advocate when the time comes. I already promised some family that I’d be the Advocate for them, and you know you only get one shot in your life.”

“A-advocate? You mean for... Hybridization?” Clear looked even more gob-smacked, eyes seemingly ready to pop out of their sockets, mouth hanging agape.

“HYBRIDIZATION! I get to be married, and have puppies with my pony!?! Yes! We go get married right now!” Emerald started jumping all around, her tail going a mile a minute as the energy surged through her.

“You’d better get her to a wedding planner before you leave Canterlot or she’ll never give you any peace” Bad Apple chuckled softly and looked to Slivovitz and Tree. “Bachelorette party time, I think. And Clear, I hope you can get a good bachelor party out of Drupe. Sadly, I can’t join you. Err, can I?” He turned, to look over at Princess Luna.

The Princess of the Night was smiling, looking over the scene with some humor. “No, no. You must remain here, at my discretion until I think you’re ready to be let go. Put that in some official-sounding language and record it.”

“The judgment has been decided in the case of Bad Apple! Formal charges have not been brought and formal punishments will not be imposed! However, Bad Apple is to be detained in Canterlot at her

majesty's pleasure! The case of Bad Apple is closed!" The page nodded his head and smiled. "Thus, the cases to be adjudicated have been concluded. Guards, please unshackle the prisoner to be released into her majesty's custody."

Silver-armored guards stepped forward and carefully removed the shackles from around Bad Apple's fetlocks, freeing the stallion. He shook his legs and stretched out a little bit. "Good to have those off. Err, sorry about the nudity. But my clothes were ribbons anyhow, and I needed serious medical treatment. Think I can contact a tailor?"

"In time. In time" Luna slowly strode down from her throne to meet her prisoner "Very well. This is concluded. Please excuse us for the remainder of the night."

The page and guards nodded, slowly leading the group of constables out of the throne room. As they slowly walked out, Tree leaned over to Drupe and shook her head while whispering, "Poor guy. "Detained at her majesty's pleasure." That doesn't sound good at all. Probably going to be thrown in the dungeon or something."

Drupe looked back quickly, before the doors to the throne room closed. He could see the two equines standing before one another, lips pressed together, Luna's hoof stroking his cheek. Drupe chuckled gently and whispered back to Tree "I think he's going to land on his hooves. He seems to be good at that."

**The End**