

Bringing Up Blueblood

A "My Little Pony Friendship Is Magic" fanfiction

-AND-

A Wholly Unnecessary Spinoff of "My Little Alicorn"

By InsertAuthorHere

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Chapter Two

Lofty and Blueblood's unintentional slack jawed-staring contest had been going on for five minutes before the waving of white legs in front of their eyes finally snapped them back to reality. "Hello! Equestria to ponies!" Gusty shouted.

With a vigorous shake of the heads, the two foals broke out of their hypnotic trances and instead settled for vengeful, blood curling gazes at each other. "What are you doing here?" Lofty hissed.

"Um...going to school, I guess? Why else would I be here?" Blueblood responded.

"H-Hey...you guys know each other?" Buttons stammered.

"Oh, I know him all right!" Lofty pointed an accusing hoof at Blueblood, causing the colt to recoil in surprise. "This colt is the meanest pony who's ever lived! He's a jerk, a bully, a...jerkully, and a really rotten pony, too!"

The three filly bystanders just sat there in stunned silence. As for Blueblood, the childish insults simply bounced off him like rubber. He had been called far worse things than whatever a "jerkully" was. There wasn't even a real need to retaliate, either; Lofty was obviously out of her mind, and none of her friends would give what she said a second thought. *It can't get any better than this...*

Panting for dear life, Lofty turned to her nearby companions. "C-Come on, you've gotta believe me! He's an awful pony!"

"Y-You're sure he's the worst pony ever?" Ribbon asked.

Lofty's voice almost reached a scream. "YES! A HUNDRED BAJILLION TIMES, YES! He's not even a real colt!"

And so it was that, with the flip of a lone filly's tongue, Blueblood's confidence in his disguise began to erode. His smug sneer melted into a gaping maw, his eyes receding back so far they threatened to roll down and out the back of his body. He had not planned on running into Lofty again, nor did he have time to fully win her friends over to his side. If she called him out right here and now, he would have no defense whatsoever. And he had been in the Royal Court long enough to know that once everypony knows of your ill-dealing, they would never trust you again.

Gusty rolled her eyes at this, oblivious to Blueblood's sweating. "So...what, he's a filly?"

Lofty groaned from her friend's obliviousness. "I mean he's a stallion!"

"Um, yeah. Colts become stallions, and fillies become mares," Buttons pondered. "Well, I mean, she said they sometimes become geldings, too. I have no idea what that is, but she kept wishing she had made her last boss into one."

The other fillies just shrugged at yet another of Button's inane ramblings. Blueblood, meanwhile, felt his hind legs subconsciously drift closer together just in case. Lofty, however, took advantage of the momentary lull in the conversation and trotted right up to Blueblood's face. Her muzzle pressed against his, the tips of their noses crunched together like a rear-ended wagon. "What I mean is, this guy isn't a real colt! He's an evil prince who was turned into a colt because of his wicked ways! He's probably just trying to find a way to get his revenge on Princess Celestia!"

The entire playground fell silent, save for the bouncing of rubber balls and the chirping of crickets. Lofty's insane rant was loud enough that all the foals had heard it, even as the teachers just excused it as silly play talk. Blueblood just squirmed in his spot, trying to figure which way would get him out of Canterlot the fastest.

Finally, Buttons butted in. "Lofty...what are you talking about?"

"Yeah, that's REALLY out there," said Gusty. "Are you sure you haven't been eating crayon sandwiches again?"

"I only did that once!" Lofty snapped.

Ribbon pointed a hoof at the bug-eyed Blueblood. "Look, you're scaring our new friend! Sure, he's a colt, and they can be gross and all, but that doesn't mean he's a supervillain."

Lofty was ready and willing to argue her point further, but such arguments came to a screeching halt as a loud bell rang out throughout the playground. Fillies and colts alike flattened and covered their ears just to keep that horrible noise from deafening them for life. When the clanging and banging finally stopped, the teachers walked onto the grounds to round up their

students for class.

"Well...I guess we'll see you later," said Buttons.

"Yeah, see ya around," Gusty said with another hearty slam to Blueblood's back. She turned back to Lofty, who was currently trying to grind her teeth down into nubs. "And you really need to learn to play nice. No pony likes a bully."

Lofty's eyes popped open, her jaw dropped, and her face went pale. Blueblood recognized the filly's reaction right away, and quickly did the right thing by running as fast as his legs could carry him away from her. Ribbon thought about saying something to her friend, but then realized she couldn't risk being late and joined the regressed stallion.

"B-Bully?! But..I...**BUT...GAAAAAAAH!**"

The first thing Blueblood noticed when he reentered the classroom were the balls.

On each desk sat a small tennis ball, resting still inside a small black holder. One even sat on Miss Brightly's desk. The other foals all gasped in surprise and bewilderment at the change in scenery, their tiny little brains unaccustomed to such things magically appearing out of thin air. Blueblood, on the other hoof, could recognize the thing from his actual youth, while he was being tutored at his parents' summer chateau. These were the things used when teaching basic levitation. *I never knew commoners used these things, as well. Given they have no appreciation for the intricacies of tennis, it's no surprise that...*

"Come on, Leon," Miss Brightly coaxed. "It's time to start class."

Blueblood snapped out of his usual gloating over the lower classes to find himself still standing next to the door. The rest of the class were already in their seats, absent-mindedly playing with their balls. A few snickered at the sight of the daydreaming colt; in particular, a pair of colts, one orange and one light blue, were laughing their flanks off at the embarrassment. Blueblood quickly trotted over to his desk, not even saying a word to the teacher lest he humiliate himself further.

"Now that we're all *ready*, let's begin." Even such young foals could sense the dripping sarcasm and hint of malice in that sentence. Such knowledge was lost on the teacher; instead, she settled for walking back and forth at the front of the class like a drill instructor. Blueblood could feel his shivers return as all the warmth and carefree joy of earlier seemed to vanish altogether.

"It seems our new student arrived at just the perfect day, class. Because today, we will be

beginning our first actual magic lesson!" The entire classroom erupted into cheers, as every filly and colt eagerly awaited the chance to reclaim their magical power from infancy and turn their older siblings and parents into toads or whatnot. Even Blueblood could feel himself getting caught up in the excitement, if only so he wouldn't feel left out. The jubilation only ceased when Miss Brightly managed to "tsst" the foals into silence. "Now, does anypony know where magic comes from?"

A pink hoof shot up in excitement, attracting Miss Brightly's attention. "Yes, Cherry?"

"It comes from our horns!" the filly shouted excitedly.

Yet another chorus of laughs from the foals followed, dying down just in time for the teacher to continue. "Well, that...is true, but what I mean is, where does *all* magic come from?"

In an instant, all activity in the classroom ceased. The fillies and colts scratched their chins and hummed to themselves as they tried to figure out just what their beloved teacher wanted them to say. Brightly said nothing at all, her only thought being to continue letting the children's brains simmer while she mentally went over tonight's homework.

It was right then, just as almost all the foals had given up, that Blueblood saw his opportunity. Standing before him was the chance for greatness he had been seeking ever since he got thrown into this dungeon of a classroom. *The intelligent always rise to the top, so I'll be the smartest foal in class!*

Miss Brightly's jaw dropped as she saw Blueblood's hoof shoot into the air. "Um...yes, Leon?"

Looking more than a little sure of himself, the fallen prince cleared his throat and clapped both forehooves together. "Magic is a form of energy that resides inside all ponies. Specifically, all races of ponies are physically built to correspond to the kind of magic they can use."

The classroom was stunned into silence. Miss Brightly's already slacking jaw was now in danger of dislocating entirely. "V-Very good, Leon. And what makes Unicorn magic different from, say, Pegasus or Earth pony magic?" Blueblood's hoof was up again in an instant. "Ah, Leon again!"

The prince's confidence was growing tenfold with each passing moment. "Unicorn magic is controlled through the horn, and can be used in any way as long as the pony knows the right spell. The most common form is telekinesis, or moving things using magic alone, and ponies primarily learn spells that correspond to their cutie marks. Pegasus and Earth pony magic is directed through their entire body. It lets Pegasi stand on clouds and fly, despite their body shape and weight. It also makes Earth ponies stronger and able to grow food."

Miss Brightly fell back on her haunches in disbelief. All she could manage was a slow clap of

her forehooves to show her approval of Blueblood's answer, and even then she wasn't sure if that was quite the right response given the level of detail. This level of detail was something ponies were supposed to have memorized by the first or second grades, not Kindergarten. "V-Very good. I...I'm really impressed, Leon."

Blueblood smiled smugly to himself. Even as the rest of the classroom remained silent, he could still feel the aura of supremacy returning to him.

Gradually, Miss Brightly climbed back to her hooves, shaking her back fur until the hairs stopped standing on end. She had to get back to the teaching plan fast. "Now that we know *where* magic comes from, it's time we started learning how to control it."

"But how are tennis balls gonna do that?" shouted the orange colt.

"A good question, Orange Peel," Miss Brightly said. "The most important magic any Unicorn can know is the ability to move objects using only their minds. When you're older, you'll be able to do just about everything with magic alone. Imagine never having to hold pencils or crayons in your mouth, or being able to talk and hold something at the same time. With enough practice, each and every one of you will be able to do all of that." Her horn lit up with a white light, accompanied by her own ball floating up to her eye level.

The foals all let out a gasp of wonderment at the spectacle before them. Blueblood, meanwhile, just rolled his eyes and returned to fuming. *Parlor tricks, feh. A mere baby could do this.*

"Now, we're just going to practice a little today." The ball gradually floated back into his holder, landing with a small thud and coming to rest in the exact same position as when the class had entered the room. Miss Brightly then lowered her head downward until her horn was pointing towards the floor. "Lower your head like this. Make sure the tip of your horn is pointed at the ball."

The class quickly obliged, and again, Blueblood found himself performing the most humiliating of things just to belong. "Next, I want you to think about lifting the ball with your magic. Don't touch it with your hooves, and don't try to tap it over with your horn. You want to try and concentrate on the ball. Try to order it to float."

The foals, ready and eager to prove themselves as future archmages, followed her instructions to the letter, bowing their heads and pointing their horns towards their balls. Each time the ponies tried to actually will their target to move, however, all that happened was a shower of sparks. A few desperate ponies even tried to move the thing with their hooves, only to be caught and reprimanded by Miss Brightly on sight.

Blueblood's story was no different. He tried calling on every spell and technique he had learned during his real foalhood, but none of them responded to his pleas. His cheeks burned hot as he

tried something, anything, to get that blasted ball to hop off its pedestal. *Come on. I have to prove I'm better than this. I can't be a powerless weakling like these commoners! I...I...I CAN'T BE NOR-*

R-R-R-R-R-R-R-R-R-RIIIIIIIIIING!

Blueblood's eyes flew open as that infernal bell rang through the classroom. Miss Brightly clapped her hooves together and beamed a bright smile at her little ponies. "Alright, everypony! It's time for lunch! Grab your bags and follow me!"

Celestia was just about finished with the latest revisions to the Conditioned Rainfall Act when she heard three knocks at her door. The Sun Princess smiled as she recognized the secret door knock. "Yes, please come on."

The door opened, revealing Princess Luna in all her illuminated glory. "I hope I am not interrupting anything, sister."

Celestia shook her head, barely suppressing a giggle at her awkward little sister's politeness. "I always have time for you, Luna."

Smiling sheepishly, Luna stepped into the office. The door slammed shut behind her, leaving the two secluded in the private little chamber. "Now, what can I do for you? It's awfully late for you to be up, isn't it?"

"Ever since filling in for you, my internal clock has been having issues," Luna said. She took a seat on a pillow across from Celestia's desk, posing herself like she was on an invisible throne. The elder Alicorn valiantly fought back the urge to jump across the furniture and snag her in a cuteness-induced bear hug. "Speaking of which, we have to discuss what to do with our nephew."

Celestia sighed, her quill still scratching along, as she realized what Luna was about to say. "Sister, please. Blueblood's punishment is my responsibility, and I will ensure that it is enacted to the fullest extent of the law as I see it. I understand you and he are at odds, but that does not mean you can interfere with my decisions like this."

"I know," Luna said through gritted teeth. She unbarred her jaw if only so she could at least put up the appearance of speaking normally. "What I mean is, we have Shining Armor back already, and Princess Mi Amore Cadenza..."

"I think she prefers Princess Cadance," Celestia corrected.

Luna rolled her eyes and looked away from the older sister. "Very well. Princess *Cadance* will be returning from Stalliongrad within a few days."

Celestia smiled. "I know. And I thank you for not raising any objections at the marriage. A few nobles, our nephew included, were quite upset that a princess was marrying someone with barely a trace of noble blood." Her eyes closed slightly out of embarrassment. "And we know how bad it was a thousand years ago."

Luna scoffed and giggled at the same time. "Yes, I remember that mess. Trust me, things like purity and lineage never made much sense to me back then, either. I've seen the two together, and they are a lovely couple. No, the problem right now is, neither of them was here during the recent...event."

"Oh, you mean that time you turned me into a filly?" Celestia snorted back a laugh, making Luna cringe from the un-royalness of her reaction. "Yes, we all had a good laugh when that was done. I've already told Shining Armor what I'm willing to tell him, and I shall do the same when Cadance arrives."

Luna raised an eyebrow. "Then...you told Shining Armor about Blueblood's condition?"

Celestia stopped working and sighed. "To be honest, I think he figured it out himself. I may have volunteered too much information that time. Still, he won't do anything to hurt him. I'm certain he can be trusted in that regard."

"What I mean is," Luna said, "should we not just allow the two to become involved in your scheme?"

Now Celestia knew something was wrong. "Luna, a few hours ago you were shouting at me because of this. Why are you suddenly interested in helping?"

"Oh, I would never involve myself in this," Luna said. "I was merely offering a suggestion. And consider that the two will be having foals of their own some day, and these foals will be paying their dear Aunts Celestia and Luna visits on a regular basis. I think it would be good for them."

"Sister, Cadance has plenty of experience as a foalsitter, and Shining Armor's duties will make him very busy," Celestia said. She paused in sudden thought. "Then again, it would be nice to have an extra set of eyes on him, and it might help move things along. If you wouldn't mind, please speak with Shining Armor tonight. I'm sure he would be thrilled."

Luna rose and bowed. "Thank you for letting me help, big sister. I promise you will not regret this." *Blueblood might, though.*

Normally, lunchtime for a pony like Prince Blueblood meant a grand salad, or a sandwich built by some culinary genius. As always, it would be served in his home's kitchen, rather than the breakfast nook and grand dining room, and he would never sully himself to eating outside. That was the realm of the working class, not a member of the royal family like himself.

And yet here he was, seated outside the school building, digging into a paper bag barely capable of holding the few scrapings Aunt Celestia was willing to give to him.

His entire class was lined up on the sidewalk outside the playground. The other foals were already busying themselves with their own lunches, popping open pails and bags and freely exchanging/stealing rations from one pony to another. The entire line rattled and creased with the munching of potato chips and the chewing of bread. Blueblood shuddered from the cacophony of noises assaulting his once-pristine ear drums, but said nothing. No, he would suffer in silence, like he always did. *Once I'm on top, though, I'll make them pay dearly for this.*

"C-Can I sit here?"

Blueblood looked up to find Ribbon standing next to him. In front of her sat a paper bag, almost identical to his own. The pudgy colt he was originally seated next to quickly started shuffling aside, if only to get away from the filly germs that were no doubt being breathed on him this very moment. Sighing, Blueblood motioned down to the empty spot. "I see no problem with that."

Ribbon quickly plopped herself onto her haunches, pulled her bag towards her with her mouth, and then started shuffling through with her hooves. Blueblood, in turn, returned his attention to his own lunch, which had been feeling very neglected these last few minutes. Moaning in disappointment, he stuck his hooves back in, and after a few seconds of blind fumbling and cursing the lack of any extremities on pony's hooves, finally pulled out his meal.

It was a sad-looking lettuce-and-cheese sandwich, a few misshapen apple slices wrapped in plastic, and a cup of tapioca pudding. Even worse, there were no plates to eat off of, no silverware to cut his food with, and not even one of those...*plastic spoons* for his pudding.

Yes, Aunt Celestia really did pack this.

Ribbon peeked over at Blueblood's lunch. "Wow, your mom really packs a lot."

"What do you mean?"

Nonplussed at the question, Ribbon reached into her bag and pulled out her own lunch; namely, a bread roll, another bread roll, and a few carrot sticks embedded inside a bread roll. Blueblood's jaw dropped at the sheer amount of carbohydrate-loaded delicacies shoved into one paper sack, as well as the horrific nutritional value therein. "Th-That's a lot of bread!"

Ribbon shrugged. "Mom and Dad are bakers. Mom says she doesn't have a lot of time to cook, so we eat a lot of bread."

"Huh, I always thought baker kids would things like cakes and pies over dinner rolls." Blueblood shrugged. "Well, at least it's something."

The filly cocked her head. "Has anypony told you that you talk like a big colt?"

Blueblood blushed. She was right, after all. He had been letting his advanced (compared to these fillies) vocabulary out a bit more than he should have. Still, it was something that made him look better than them, so that was a plus. "I-I study a lot, that's all."

"Yeah, I have to, too," Ribbon sighed. "My parents are Earth ponies, so they can't really help me too good with magic. And they keep saying I have to get really good for some reason." She leaned her head forward, her eyes catching somepony at the far end of the sidewalk. "And what's the deal with you and Lofty?"

Blueblood shrugged. "She's just an angry pony, that's all. Why?"

"Well, she's been staring at us all lunch."

The remains of a half-swallowed chunk of sandwich threatened to jump back up the esophagus at the news. With much pain, Blueblood swallowed his lunch and leaned forward himself. Sure enough, Lofty was staring at them from her own class group. Her eyes were glaring, her wings extended, and her hooves shaking in anticipation of rearranging Blueblood's face. The threat was slightly dulled by the globs of peanut butter and jelly smeared across her face and hooves, but the intention was perfectly clear.

"Whatever you did, you sure made her mad," Ribbon said.

"She'll forget it in time," Blueblood said with a shrug. "And what about the other two we were with? Where are they?"

"Their class has lunch after ours," Ribbon said. "We can only play together during recess. By the way, do you want to climb the jungle gym after you've finished eating? We get to play a little before we have to go back to class."

Blueblood swallowed the last bite of his sandwich, its bare taste doing little to captivate his taste buds. He had never liked apples as a colt, and he doubted he would now. His pudding would have to remain trapped for the time being; there was no way he was going to lower himself to eating it with his tongue or by sucking it out like a normal, spoonless foal would. *Well, it appears I am done eating, and I do have to start forming some sort of network here...*

“Sure. I’d love to.”

It was after about two hours of watching the new recruits run their drills that Shining Armor realized why he hated this part of the job so much.

It hadn’t always been this way. When he was a colt, he would watch the guards outside the palace gates change shifts, mimicking their salutes and gestures as best he could. When that wasn’t an option, he would read old training manuals he got from the library, and then copy everything inside so he could be the best guardpony in all of Equestria. Even when he reached young adulthood and finally got into the Royal Military Academy, he just loved every last movement of the legs, every kink and clang of his rusty trainee armor, and the sweat on his brow from a successful Shield Spell.

But then he became Captain of the Guard. Suddenly, the routine duties of his former positions were considered to be beneath him by his peers. He would run through the usual swordplay and magic practice, but the rest of the time he was expected to “supervise.” And today was no exception.

The guards marched in their usual formations, with each one standing shoulder to shoulder in perfect symmetry. Every hoofstep was executed with absolute adherence to rhythm, to the point that the entire compound shook from the thunderous sounds of their hooves. And all Shining Armor had to do was watch some of the really young Academy students banged on a pair of massive drums. Each guard’s legs lifted and dropped to the banging of the drums, the beat playing over and over again until each pony had it burned into their brains.

Suddenly, the drums stopped completely. Realizing his cue, Shining Armor floated a whistle to his lips and blew. The shrill screech echoed throughout the grounds, but the guards were unfazed. That is, until Armor started pointing northward. “ARROWS!”

The response was quick and professional, as was expected of the Royal Guard. The Pegasus Guard took to the skies, hovering about six feet off the ground and baring their more heavily-armored barrels to the sky. The Unicorn Guard, meanwhile, ducked in beneath their flying compatriots and started charging their horns to deflect the oncoming squall.

Another shrill screech, and Armor’s hoof was pointed westward. “DRAGON!”

The guard wheeled itself around without as much as a single break in their lines. The only difference lay in the brighter glow coming from the horns, and the heavier beats of the wings.

Armor was just about to blow the whistle again when he heard another, much louder pair of

wings flap beside him. And then came the voice. The loud, demanding voice that could break a lesser pony's spirit like it was twine. "Captain Shining Armor. It is good to see you attending to your responsibilities already."

Slowly, Shining and his stallions turned towards the large, dark blue, winged-and-horned regal pony that had just entered the yard. In a flash, the entire guard unit was on their knees in reverence. "Y-Your Highness?"

"There is no need for such reverence, Shining Armor," Luna said with a wry smile. "I am sorry to interrupt the day's training exercises, but I must speak to you in private tonight. We have much to discuss."

Shining Armor raised an eyebrow at the request. He had only spoken to Luna in private a hoofful of times, and even then it was just so she could complain that he wasn't following some ancient protocol or how unfitting the new suits of armor looked on his guards. Still, he couldn't help but notice something decidedly different about her. She seemed far more relaxed than before, her eyes were genuinely warm and welcoming, and her speech was no longer peppered with anachronisms like in the past. "I...I will be there."

"Very good. I wish for you to speak to me tonight, just before you retire. Meet me in my bedchambers." The guards immediately gasped, prompting Luna to roll her eyes in disgust. "And no, it's not for *that*." *I thought we hired stallions and mares, not foals.*

"Of course, your Highness," Shining Armor said. "I will see you tonight, as ordered."

Luna nodded her acknowledgment and flew off without another word, heading towards her personal tower to get some rest. Once he was sure she wasn't going to come screeching back, Shining Armor turned back to his waiting guards. The horde of ponies were glancing about each other in confusion, each not entirely sure what to say to Luna's sudden appearance and departure.

Then came the shrill screech of the whistle, followed by Shining Armor pointing towards the horizon. "Look out! We've stumbled in the path of the Great Dragon Migration! Everypony scramble!" The guards promptly shut their mouths and darted to their predestinated spots in the defensive formation.

Blueblood and Ribbon were almost at the jungle gym when the trouble began.

Orange Peel and his blue-coated crony from before sauntered up to Blueblood so quietly that the cold barely had time to register what was happening until both unicorns were circling around him like vultures. The royal foal seized up immediately, his eyes following the two in confusion.

"Is there something I can help you with?"

Orange's sidekick snickered at Blueblood's response. "Do ya hear this kid? He talks like a big pony!"

"And he's a real egghead, too," Orange Peel added. Blueblood's eyes drifted downward just enough to notice the extra bits of dirt his attacker was kicking up with each step. "Hey, Snowball! You ever hear of a new pony knowing so much about magic?!"

"I...study?" was Blueblood's response.

All this earned was another round of riotous laughter from the two bullies. The other fillies and colts simply started walking away from the scene, just in case the two burly youths decided to turn their wrath on them next. Even Ribbon was starting to backpedal away, hiding behind the jungle gym for dear life. "Oh, is that all? I never heard of a foal who actually *liked* going to school!"

"I...I don't like it." Blueblood could feel something tearing up inside. It was a cold, empty feeling, the likes of which he had not experienced in such a long time. He could almost taste his will to live flee from his body. "I...I'm just smart, that's all."

The entire playground erupted into a fit of laughter, the foals either laughing because they genuinely enjoyed watching yet another egghead suffer, or because they didn't want to end up next on the bully's hit list. Orange Peel was barely able to contain his laughter. "Well, if you've got such a big brain, maybe you should share it with the rest of us!"

The raucous laughter only grew in volume. Blueblood could feel a thousand little eyes leering in on him, threatening to crush him beneath the weight of peer disapproval and ridicule. He had felt such things before, usually after he had said something that should have been kept quiet or humiliated another pony before he was supposed to. Even worse, he was hopelessly outnumbered, he couldn't levitate a weapon to his aid, and his attempts at brandishing even a training sword in his mouth tended to end with chipped teeth and splinters. That left only one way out of this situation.

Run.

Blueblood began to back away from the two, his head bent downward to refrain from any antagonizing eye contact, until he was just next to the sandbox. His steps couldn't come fast enough, however, and Snowball and Orange Peel were surrounding him. Already the bullies could taste sweet victory. "Ah, what's the matter?" asked Snowball. "Are you gonna cry like a sissy little filly?"

"Of course not!" Blueblood's shaky shouting betrayed his growing fear. "I am not afraid of the

likes of-”

Whatever boasts the deposed prince could have dug up died as one of his hind legs stepped onto the wooden edge of the sandbox. It didn’t step back far enough, however, and when he tried to place more weight on it to pull himself up it slipped and sent him fumbling forward. At the same moment, Orange Peel had wandered in front of him, ready to unleash yet another round of insults. In his sneering glee, he had failed to notice Blueblood’s current predicament.

Nor did he notice how Blueblood’s trajectory was heading right to his head.

The two crashed into each other like a cart rolling down a hill, tumbling into a massive pile of limbs and hooves. Snowball instinctively dove to his friend’s aid, pushing Blueblood off of Orange Peel’s body and pulling the downed colt back to his hooves. The noise, however, was enough to finally attract the attention of the otherwise indifferent teachers. Miss Brightly galloped up to the other injured student, who was barely able to hold himself back from bawling like an infant.

There was a massive bruise around his eye, no doubt from impacting with Orange Peel’s horn and forehead. Fortunately, the horn hadn’t actually hit his eyeball, so there was no sign of impalement. The shellshocked Miss Brightly could only mutter a few “Oh, dears,” before helping Blueblood onto her back and cantering towards the nurse’s office.

From her vantage point at the sidewalk, Lofty had seen everything. She had watched Blueblood get the bullying and shellacking he so richly deserved, only to have him get carted off like a downed victim. Even worse, she felt nothing in this moment. There was no rush of victory, no cause for celebration, and not even any eternal glory from defeating an evil prince. The bully had really been hurt, and that certainly never happened in the books her mother insisted on reading to her.

He got what he deserved. But he also got really hurt. What am I supposed to do?

The filly let out a resigned sigh as her better nature got the best of her. She slowly turned to her teacher, a violet pegasus mare with a crossed pair of pencils as a cutie mark. “Mrs. Sketch, can I please go to the nurse’s office?”

“What’s wrong, Lofty?” the teacher asked.

“Well...that was a...” Her brain gagged at the word. “Friend of mine, and I really wanted to see if he was okay.”

The teacher contemplated her options for a few minutes, then turned back to the filly with a big

smile. "Of course, if you're willing to give up the rest of your lunch break. I'll take you down there right away. We can't keep your little friend waiting, after all."

"Nope!" the filly said with a fake smile. "We sure can't keep my...**friend** waiting."

"Now does it hurt?"

Blueblood looked up at the nurse with his one open eye. The other was still in working order, but was covered by an ice pack to help prevent any swelling. The nurse, a middle-aged Earth pony mare with a pair of medical crosses on her flank, kept the blue pack pressed firmly against the massive wound with one hoof, while the other front leg balanced on the edge of the cot the colt was now sitting on. Miss Brightly just watched from the doorway, feeling concern both for the hurt little colt and the damage this would do to her pension, assuming she even had a job after today.

Blueblood moved one of his own forehooves to the pack. The nurse pulled her hoof back on reflex, allowing the colt to take over. "I'm fine. I'll be fine." It was a lie. That whole section of his face felt like somepony had taken a hammer to it. Unicorn horns were harder than the rest of their bones, both out of necessity and because of the amount of magic that flowed through even an untrained foal's pointy cone. He was just lucky gravity hadn't dragged him just an inch or two to the right, and that a foal's horn was round at the tip rather than the sharpened point it would eventually become.

"Honestly, is he going to be all right?" asked Miss Brightly.

The nurse smiled and patted Blueblood on the top of the head, causing him to grimace from the patronization of it all. "He doesn't seem to be too hurt. You can return to class, if you wish. I can take him back when he's ready."

Miss Brightly turned to Blueblood. "Is that all right, Leon?" Blueblood responded with a nod. "Very well, then. I'm so sorry this happened on your first day here. Those two have been trouble since the year began, but this is the first time they've actually hurt anypony. Trust me, their parents are going to hear all about this."

There was a knock at the door, followed by another adult's voice. "Excuse me? Can I come in?"

Miss Brightly raised a confused eye as she recognized the voice. "Oh...of course, Mrs. Sketch." The teacher's horn ignited, her magic opening the door to reveal the named teacher and a small filly. Blueblood recoiled slightly as he recognized his visitor: Lofty. "What can we do for you?"

“Well, Lofty here was so worried about that poor colt that she wanted to make sure he was all right. Apparently they’re friends outside of school.” The older Pegasus smiled down at the yellow filly, who gave an equally large smile back. “She is such a caring filly.”

“That is so *precious!*” cooed the nurse. “Is it all right if she stays a few minutes? I’m sure Leon would appreciate it after what’s happened.”

“I don’t see much of a problem,” Mrs. Sketch shrugged. “Just make sure she’s back soon. We’re going to start Reading Corner soon.” She looked down at Lofty. “Do you want to stay?”

Lofty nodded affirmatively, not daring to speak lest she give away her true intentions. Blueblood, meanwhile, found himself wishing he could just hoist himself out the nearest window. He was in no condition to fight this filly right now, and she was the only one her privy to his true identity. All she had to do was tell the nurse what had happened, and he would not only be exposed to the world at large, but would find himself at the mercy of a pony close to Princess Celestia. He had seen it time and again in the Royal Court; by Celestia, he had pulled the same trick dozens of times himself. It was what was expected of a noble, after all.

“Very well, then,” said Mrs. Sketch. “I’ll see you in a few minutes.”

“Allow me to walk with you,” added Miss Brightly. “Lunch period is almost over, and I don’t want to let the aides get overwhelmed corralling the foals.”

The teachers gave their students a final farewell, said their thanks to the nurse, and were gone. The moment they left, the nurse herself started packing together some bandages and disinfectant. “I’m sorry to leave you, but I have to attend to something. I’ll be back in a few minutes.” And with that, she, too, was gone, leaving two Kindergarten-aged foals completely unsupervised in the middle of a school.

Once she was sure the nurse was out of earshot, Lofty’s smile changed to a frown. Her eyes locked onto the captive Blueblood, ready and willing to shoot him down for the slightest bit of disobedience or rude behavior. “Okay, what are you *really* doing here?!”

Blueblood sighed and rolled his eyes. He didn’t want to appear any weaker than he already had. “Princess Celestia thought I could learn something by coming here. I fear she was mistaken. There is nothing valuable that can be taught by a school that would allow a troublesome Pegasus like you admittance.”

Lofty gasped, her mouth recoiling open in offended horror at his words. “Y-You think I’m the bad pony here! You’re the one who tried to kidnap the Princess! You were gonna slap me in the face!”

“Because you got in the way,” Blueblood said.

Seeing there was nothing to gain here, the filly gave an “Hmph!” and turned to the door. “Well, if that’s how you’re going to be, I sorry I came. Call me when you stop being a jerk.”

She was about five steps from the door when she heard it. “Stop.”

Lofty was never quite sure what motivated her to actually answer Blueblood’s plea. She had already seen enough of the “colt” to last a lifetime. Her mother had always taught her to forgive and forget, but even she had sent the meanie flying with one swift kick. He had made her out to be a crazy pony to her friends, all so he could steal them from her. She didn’t care if he was related to the Princess anymore; all she wanted was to leave and never see him again.

And yet, by some unfathomable twist in life, she turned around and faced Blueblood again. Her eyes popped open at what she saw. Gone was the infinite levels of smugness radiating from his very complexion. What was before her this time was little more than a scared colt, with no idea where to go or who to turn to. As much as she hated to admit it, she really couldn’t bring herself to walk away.

Sighing in defeat to her blasted morals, the filly walked away from the door and plopped down in front of the cot. “What do you want?”

Blueblood took in a massive gulp of air before continuing. His face was already beginning to beat bright red. There was one thing the Prince was never good at, and that was groveling. “I...I would like to request your services.”

Lofty tilted her head to her right, her eyes already narrowing in a rage. “What does that mean?”

Why must I deal with such foals? “It means I want your help. If I can meet whatever criteria...” He saw the blank, non-understanding feeling in Lofty’s eyes again. “If I can do what she wants, she’ll let me be a big pony again.”

“And what does she want?”

Blueblood shrugged. “That’s what makes it so troublesome. She hasn’t told me anything.”

“So how am I supposed to help you?” Lofty asked. “She might be my friend, but that doesn’t mean I can read her mind. I haven’t even seen her since she became a big pony again.”

“I just want you to promise to help me when I finally figure out what she wants,” Blueblood said. “I doubt it will be anything illegal or too terrible. It’s Princess Celestia, after all. She barely has a bad bone in her body.”

“So...you want me to promise to help you do something, but you don’t know what that is, and if

you do whatever it is you have to do, Princess Celestia will turn you back into a mean old pony again?”

Blueblood rubbed the back of his crest with his free forehoof. “I...wouldn’t have included the ‘mean old pony’ part. But yes, that is what I am proposing.”

Lofty tilted her head. “Pro-what now? You’re not trying to marry me, are you?!”

“No, of course not!” The ice back began to slip slightly, dripping its coldness across an ever-increasing portion of Blueblood’s face. “I am simply asking for your help.”

Lofty was silent for several moments, causing Blueblood no small measure of continued distress. He could already feel the hoofscraws twisting in her mind. It had been foolish to ask for her...

“I’ll do it.”

Blueblood’s jaw dropped in surprise. Lofty’s eyes were closed, as if she herself was not believing what she was saying. “Y-You will?”

Her eyes suddenly flew open, revealing a dagger-like set of eyes. Blueblood had seen the look before; it was the same thing she tried to use to stop him during his foalnapping attempt. He started shuffling back against the wall as the filly drew closer. “But listen up! I’m only doing this because Princess Celestia’s involved, and I want to help *her*, not you. You were mean as a stallion, you’re probably still mean, and since you’re a colt now, you’re swimming with cooties. From this point on, if you hurt any of my friends, or do anything that makes us look bad, or act in *any way* like you used to, I **will** turn you in! But right before that, I’ll show you what these hooves can do to a jerk’s face! Understood!”

Blueblood gulped back his growing terror. “Y-Yes!”

The nurse’s door suddenly swung open, revealing the room’s owner. The two foals quickly reassumed their normal, childish smiles and chuckles, as if nothing had happened. The nurse smiled as she saw the spectacle. “I’m so glad you two are getting along! There’s nothing that fights a bad day like a good friend, after all! Are you two ready to go back to class?”

“Yes, ma’am!” Lofty said.

“Uh...yes,” said Blueblood. “I...I think I’m ready.” *Ready to get away from this future ax murderer as soon as possible!*

“That’s wonderful!” said Equestria’s most oblivious medical professional. Come on, I’ll take you two back to class.”

Sky Bloom reached the school gates just as the bell rang. Looking down, the servant could see the tiny pebbles skipping in place as a horde of hooves came storming out of the preschool, their thunderous pounding accompanied by shrill shrieks of joy. The other mothers and fathers eagerly embraced their foals as they darted out, the older ones listening intently as the younger ponies prattled on about their day's adventures like they were the most fascinating things in the world. Even Bloom couldn't help but blush as she thought of the stories Blueblood would have to tell.

And then she saw her "son."

The colt slowly wandered through the gate, looking more than a little disheveled. The big black mark around his eye was certainly nothing that could be glossed over. Standing next to him was Miss Brightly and two fillies: one a yellow Pegasus, the other a blue Unicorn.

Gasping, Sky Bloom galloped over to Blueblood and pulled him in for a hug. The colt struggled at first, but then gave in rather than risk drawing a scene. Her eyes locked in on the teacher. "What happened?"

"I'm afraid some of the foals were playing a little too rough," Miss Brightly answered. "One of them struck him by accident."

Sky Bloom's eyes narrowed. "By *accident*?"

Miss Brightly nodded. "I'm afraid so. In any case, I have to escort some of the foals home. Their parents are still at work, and they can't go wandering around Canterlot on their own." She turned to the waiting two, as well as another small crowd of fillies and colts just past the two little ponies. "Come on, let's get you home."

Her goal of remaining willfully indifferent satisfied for the day, Miss Brightly trotted over to the homeward-bound foals. Once they were a safe distance away, the two fillies turned to Sky Bloom. By now, the young mare had dropped Blueblood, who now stood at her side if only for the added protection. "So...was it really an accident?"

The blue filly shook her head. "No. Some stupid ponies were picking on him because he was smarter than them."

"I figured," Sky Bloom muttered. She looked down at her false child, who was still rubbing at his bruised eye. "Are you okay? Do we have to stop by a doctor's office?"

"I'm fine," Blueblood muttered.

"I-If you're sure," Sky Bloom said. "Now come, we have to get going."

The two ponies spun about and started down the street towards the castle. The mare was trying to look as normal as ever, while the colt hung his head low in shame. He had been bested in a fight, proven wrong in his assertions about what was popular, and had been forced to seek aid from an enemy. All in all, this was not shaping up to be a grand day.

"Hey, Leon!"

Blueblood spun his head back to the two fillies. By now, they had joined the small herd of similar foals, if only to keep from getting left behind. Lofty was still staring at him, albeit more in a curious way rather than the maliciousness of before, but Ribbon was enthusiastically waving her forehoof to get his attention. "I'll see you tomorrow, right?"

All Blueblood could muster was an, "Um...yes, sure." His body told another story, however. His cheeks were crimson from a combination of embarrassment and general cluelessness about what to say next. He hadn't been greeted in such a way for decades, and even then it was only with the few family members that could tolerate his presence. He couldn't help it if his parents actually told him how a noble was supposed to behave, but they still wouldn't wave at him on the street.

And Ribbon was a total stranger. She shouldn't be nice to anypony she didn't know, especially strange colts that just appeared out of nowhere for no discernible reason and wouldn't be staying very long.

He was knocked out of his reverie only when he felt a hoof playfully jab at his shoulder. He spun around to find himself facing Sky Bloom once again. This time, the mare seemed to be smiling. "I guess today wasn't completely terrible, after all?"

Blueblood shrugged. "I suppose. I'm still no closer to being an adult again, though."

Sky Bloom said nothing more, only rolling her eyes and making sure the two were moving in the right direction.

Shining Armor blushed slightly as he entered Princess Luna's quarters. He had been in Celestia's chambers plenty of times, but had never been in his new ruler's private sanctuary before. Given the stories he had heard of Luna, he was honestly surprised at how remarkably simply the whole place was.

Luna stood impatiently at the center of the room, next to a large wooden trunk. "Captain Armor.

I thank you for responding so quickly. The Captain we had a thousand years ago would have taken almost an hour longer just to get up the stairs.”

Armor adjusted his...armor slightly, its metal joints clinking and clanging against each other as he pushed them aside. With a glow of his horn, he closed the door behind him, leaving the two utterly alone. “H-How may I help you, Princess?”

Luna shuffled a few steps closer to the chest. “I trust Princess Celestia has told you of what happened during your absence.”

“Well, yes, but not exactly,” Armor replied. “I understand she was turned into a filly by some spell, and that Twilight was responsible for turning her back.”

Luna nodded in response. “And I take it you have learned what happened to Prince Blueblood.”

Shining Armor grumbled at the name. “From what I can gather, he was hit with the same spell that was used on Princess Celestia. He’s still a colt, I take it?”

“And attending Magic Kindergarten, believe it or not.” Luna turned towards her window, her eyes glancing over the whole of the palace grounds with a forlorn gaze. “When she began this scheme, however, she had not factored that you would be back early, or that Princess Mi Amore Cadenza...”

“Cadance.”

Luna growled. “*Princess Cadance* would be returning to the palace as well. Since the two of you were well out of Canterlot when this mess began, it was necessary to...reevaluate where you stand in her plan.”

“I’ve already spoken to her about Blueblood,” Shining Armor responded. “I gave her my word I wouldn’t hurt him in any way. And besides, even if he is scum, it wouldn’t be right to pick on a foal, would it?”

Sighing, Luna turned back to the waiting Shining Armor and trotted up to the chest. With a glow of her horn, the chest opened, revealing a small photograph on top. Curious, Shining Armor leaned over to take a closer look. He soon regretted his decision. “I-Is that...?”

“Twilight Sparkle? Yes, I’m afraid it is. This was taken the day Celestia returned to normal and Blueblood became a colt.” Luna floated the picture over to Shining Armor, who grabbed it with his own telekinesis. “You see, when the counterspell was used, the excess energies from the curse exploded around Celestia’s body. Everypony had to put on hazard suits to keep from being affected by the same spell. Twilight had one as well, but Blueblood broke into the room in a mad frenzy. Your sister tried to stop him from attacking Celestia, but his horn ripped a hole in

her suit during the struggle, and..."

Shining slowly lowered the picture. His eyes were like daggers, desperately seeking out somepony to stab for this. "He...He got my little sis cursed?!"

"We did manage to restore her to normal," said Luna. "Had we not been able to, however, she would have been trapped as a filly until she had aged back the natural way. Even worse, he could have seriously hurt her. She's powerful, but if that horn hadn't just hit the suit..."

Every fiber of Shining Armor's being screamed murder. "Just tell me what to do..."

Unbeknownst to the two conspirators, their conversation had not gone unnoticed. Sitting on the rooftop above Luna's chambers, Celestia had decided to privy herself to all the little details of Luna's meeting with Shining Armor. And so far, she did not like what she was hearing.

Luna...why are you doing this? Why are you torturing your own nephew?

She stared off at the distant moon, Luna's former prison and her personal torture device for a thousand years. The night was just beginning, and already things seemed to be falling apart. *Perhaps Luna is right. Blueblood may just be irredeemable. But...*

She couldn't help the memory. It struck her like a bolt of lightning and refused to release her until it was done...

Another day, another crisis. That's how it had felt to Celestia for almost a thousand years. Ever since Nightmare Moon, she had been balancing the entire nation on her back, and she couldn't help but feel herself starting to shrug. Things were as normal as ever in Equestria, and she still had a little over a decade before Nightmare Moon's return, but time was running short. Her sister's inevitable stab at revenge only added to the stress already building on the Princess.

There was one moment of solace in the day, however, and that always came around six o'clock every night. This night was no different.

There was a knock on her chamber door, as usual. Celestia would climb out of bed, trot slowly and gracefully to the doorway, and finally open the entrance herself. She would then have five seconds before the little white colt charged and grabbed onto one of her long limbs.

Again, tonight was no exception.

Celestia laughed at the tiny, super-excited foal. "Welcome back, Blueblood. How is everything?"

"Amazing!" Blueblood answered. "I got an 'A' on my spelling test today, and Ponetics said I was one of the best ponies she's ever tutored!" The colt finally released his aunt's leg, his tiny little eyes locking onto hers like an overly-enthusiastic puppy. "And now we get to hang out!"

"Yes we do," Celestia said. "Now, I want you to tell me all about your day today. And tell me everything this time. Yesterday, you didn't say you had mustard with your salad."

The two had a small laugh, and the colt began to describe his misadventures in great detail. And Celestia, for her part, laid herself upon the floor and listened to them all. She smiled and nuzzled the colt as he described his daring climbs out of the castle windows, even as she chided him for his carelessness. She cheered him on as he spoke of fighting imaginary dragons and bandits in her name, cried with him when he talked about something terrible his father had done, and comforted him when he wondered if he would ever amount to much as a prince.

Celestia had a lot of relatives, to be sure. None of them were directly linked to her or Luna, of course, but adopted family was still family. She had plenty of nephews and nieces, nearly all of them within spitting distance of the castle. And yet, Blueblood was the only one to regularly visit her, the only one who wasn't terrified of her presence. And despite her misgivings of his aristocratic parents, she couldn't help but just hug and love the foal.

He was, after all, her favorite nephew.

Blueblood laid himself upon his bed. His mind was already going over everything that had happened today, if only to find some kind of pattern to this madness. So far, he was coming up blank, save for one thing.

According to Aunt Celestia, the Elements of Harmony are the most powerful form of magic in the land. And at the center of it all is Magic, or rather, Friendship. If I apply the same thinking to the school, then the path to power is clear. I need to make friends. The more friends I have, the more influence I have on the school grounds. If that is what Princess Celestia wants, then that is what she will get.

He scoffed at the simplicity of it all. *And I've already got three friends. How hard could this be?*

TO BE CONTINUED...

