

Chapter 18

“So, as soon as this Heart-Warming thing is over, you get the tree *out*, got that?”

Tap was very adamant on this. She’d agreed to play host to their party, but it took a lot of convincing for her to allow that big, gaudy tree into her tavern.

“Got it,” said White. White didn’t pay much attention to her, though. He was occupied with decorating the tree with brightly-colored baubles and bangles and banners and beads. The ornaments floated around him as he tried to arrange them in just the right way.

The door opened and a patron walked in. He stopped and stared at the tree, unsure of what to make of it.

“What the f...” he muttered.

“Don’t ask,” said another patron.

Tap noticed that sometimes the floating ornaments dipped or twitched ever so slightly. She approached him.

“Hey, White, are you okay?” she asked.

“Huh?” White turned to face her. “Oh, I’m fine. Thanks for letting us use your tavern for the party.”

“You’re welcome,” said Tap, “but I really don’t understand what you’re doing.”

“Well, it’s simple,” White explained. “We’re going to have a nice party, with free food and gift exchanges and a punch bowl. And during the day we’ll give toys to all the foals who come by.”

“No, that’s not what I mean,” Tap sighed with an exasperated shake of her head. “Well, actually, yeah, that is what I mean, but... they tried to kill you, and now you’re talking about giving them presents?”

“Maybe it’ll make them want to kill me less?” White suggested. When he saw Tap’s unconvinced facial expression he continued, “look, it’s what you *do* for Hearth’s Warming. The presents, I mean, not the killing. I mean, what am I going to say - ‘sorry, you don’t get presents because of the lynch mob?’”

“Well, it’d at least be funny,” said Tap. “I gotta go down to the cellar and check on a few things. If Barrel comes back, tell him to get behind the counter and be ready for customers.”

“Can do,” said White as he returned to the tree. He heard a door open and shut, signifying that Tap had gone down to the cellar to make sure everything was in order.

The front door opened, and White turned to see Scroll step inside, looking around.

“Hey,” said White, “so, did you manage to get your presents in order?”

“I think so,” whispered Scroll. “I wanted to, um, show you this.” He produced a small box. White eyed the box suspiciously as Scroll beckoned him to come over.

“What is it?” White asked.

“It was my mother’s,” Scroll said as he opened the box, revealing a tiny gold locket. He carefully lifted it by its gold chain. “My father gave it to her a long time ago. She gave it to me. She said...” He gulped. “She told me to give it to the pony I was in love with.”

The two stood there, looking back and forth from each other to the locket.

“I’m thinking of giving it to Tap,” Scroll concluded.

“Ah. Well, I think she’ll like it.”

“You think so?” Scroll asked.

“Absolutely!”

“What’re you two colts talking about?” asked Tap. Scroll’s face went red and he nearly dropped the locket, but he quickly hid it on the floor behind his hoof.

“Nothing!” the two shouted in unison.

“Anyway, we gotta get back to the mission house,” said White. “We’ll be back later.”

“Bye!” Scroll said, trying his best to scoop up the locket and box as inconspicuously as he could.

Tap watched the two as they scurried out the door.

“Think she suspects anything?” Scroll asked once they cleared the threshold.

“Not a thing,” said White.

“Yes I do!” called Tap’s voice from inside.

“Ah well...” Scroll shrugged. The two Brothers walked through the streets of the town, both a little skittish and watching their backs, afraid of what might happen.

“You don’t think they’ll...” Scroll gulped. “You don’t think they’ll try anything like that again, do you?”

“No, I don’t think so... not if the general told them not to.”

“We’d better be extra special nice to the general, then,” Scroll concluded.

“Hey, we should *always* be extra special nice to everypony,” White said. “That’s the mission, after all.”

“Right, right...”

White spotted Buzz sitting off on the side of the road, glaring at him. He wasn’t making any terrible jokes or barbs or slurs or any of his usual abuses. Just glaring.

“I don’t get it...” White said. “Why would he do that? Why would he lie about... about *that*? I don’t understand.”

“There’s a lot I don’t think we understand,” said Scroll. “White? Are you okay?”

“Of course I’m okay!” White protested. “I’m always okay.”

“Well, if you’re ever not...” said Scroll, “you can talk to me, okay?”

White stopped and looked at him.

“Please?” asked Scroll. “You’re always there for me, and I want to be there for you.”

“Well, alright,” White said. “If I ever need support, I’ll know who to come to.” They started walking again. “You know, I didn’t thank you for saving me.”

“You don’t have to!” said Scroll. “Remember what you told me? You’re my best friend. How could I *not* have done that?”

“Well, still,” said White. “By that logic, maybe the only pony I should thank is General Quake.”

Both of the Brothers laughed at this as they came to the mission house. Clip was happily bouncing up and down on the giant trampoline they had in front.

“You know, maybe I should thank the general,” said White as they entered into the mission house.

“What?”

“He saved my life,” White explained. A hopeful smile came back onto this face. “I think maybe... maybe I’ve reached something! Oh!” White laughed. “Oh, General Quake. You try to be all tough, but I can see right through it!”

“Uhh...”

White marched into the bunk room, seizing his nametag and necktie. “It’s time to get to work.”

“Uhh, White, I’m not sure this is a good idea...”

“When has that ever stopped me?” White asked. “I’m onto something, Scroll.” He floated a book from the pile. “You continue with the Hearth’s Warming preparations. Me...” He threw the doors open. “I’ve got a mission.”

White stood at the front of the mission house, sporting his red tie, his nametag, and a book. His mane was neatly combed back and there was a fire in his eyes as he set forth with his resolve: He was going to march right up to the general and convert him. The time for doubt was over, and the time for action had begun.

General Quake had saved his life. White thought that maybe, just maybe, there was something in him that he hid beneath that crude, crass, brutish, rough, gruff, tough, jackass exterior.

A warlord who bucks ponies’ heads right off, he thought. What’s so scary about that?

White marched down the road, oblivious to the cries of “fuck you!” thrown by the various townspoons. White had never been so sure of anything in his life.

I believe, he thought, that there's a special magic in friendship. I believe that it can bring harmony to all the world. And I believe that you can be a great friend, even if you're a murdering racist.

“Good day, gentlecolts!” White said, approaching a few soldiers. “I was wondering if you could point me in the direction of the general.”

“The fuck do you want to talk to him for?” asked one of the soldiers.

“Because I believe,” White explained, “that the magic of friendship can bring us all together. Because I believe that I can be friends with the general. Because I am a Brother.”

The soldiers stared at him.

“He's at the camp,” said one of the soldiers, pointing. “That way.”

“Thank you!” exclaimed White as he bounded off in the direction the soldier had pointed.

The soldiers looked at each other. “Should we follow him?” one of them asked.

“Yes,” said another. “This is gonna be hilarious.”

General Quake, meanwhile, was sitting and looking over one of the boxes he had commandeered from the mission. He felt like an idiot.

Toys, he thought, I commandeered a fucking toybox.

“General!” called a soldier. “We have an intruder!”

“Excuse me?” asked the general.

“He's just... walking in!”

Brother White burst into the encampment, his chest puffed up high and proud.

“General Quake!” he called.

“Oh, no...” the general mumbled.

“Happy Hearth’s Warming!” White exclaimed. “You know, I never got to thank you for saving me. Thank you.”

“You’re not welcome.”

“General, I know that you don’t like me.”

“And here I thought Scroll was supposed to be the smart one,” Quake muttered. “What the fuck do you want?”

“I want to be your friend!”

General Quake stared at him. “What the fuck is this?”

“I believe,” White said, “that through the magic of friendship, we can end the war!”

“Just how many times did that guy hit you in the head?”

“General, you saved my life,” White said as he floated the book in front of him. “You said it was because you didn’t want to risk an incident with Equestria and you didn’t want to forge my letters.”

“I regret that.”

“But Quake,” said White, “I believe that you could be a great friend. I think you could be a Brother. Think of it - you, me, and Scroll!”

Quake made an expression that plainly said that he did not want to think of it.

“Whaddya say?” White said. “We can end the war and bring peace and happiness to the island!”

“Hold him,” said Quake. Suddenly, several soldiers seized White. The unicorn’s confidence quickly dropped from his face as the general slowly stood up and approached him. “I’m going to do something I’ve wanted to do for a long time now.”

“Thanks for the help, Barrel,” said Scroll. “I think we’ve got all the party supplies moved over to the tavern.”

“Don’t mention it,” said Barrel. “I’m just glad that I could be of some use.”

“Well, see ya later!” said Scroll.

Scroll made his way back to the mission house, hoping that Brother White would be home in one piece. He knew he shouldn’t have let him go see the general all on his own. He sat down, deciding to wait.

After a few minutes, he heard something strange. It sounded like a far-off screaming, but it seemed to be coming from above. He looked up and saw Brother White careening through the sky. His jaw dropped as he watched White fall right down onto the giant trampoline before sailing through the air again. He disappeared behind some buildings with a loud crash.

Scroll stood there for a minute, sputtering like a fool, before running after him. He found the unicorn lying on his back, his legs in the air, weakly whimpering. Thankfully for White, his fall had been broken by a large pile of garbage.

“White!” Scroll cried. “Are you okay?”

“Not really...”

“I could’ve told you it was a dumb idea,” said Tap.

White was lying on his bunk, groaning. Scroll was next to him, examining the unicorn’s posterior. Barrel and Clip watched the whole thing with a sense of awkward confusion.

“Wow...” said Scroll. “He actually shoved the book up your ass.”

“I *know*, Scroll,” groaned White.

“It’s just that, well,” Scroll said, “how can it *fit* in there? Doesn’t it hurt?”

“Yes.”

“This...” Barrel started. “This doesn’t mean that the party’s being delayed, is it?”

“No,” said White, lifting his head up. “No it doesn’t. We’re still having our party and our presents.”

“You’ll just have to lie down for a while,” said Scroll. “As soon as we can get this thing out...”

Tap sat down, watching the scene with a sense of detached amusement. She knew that she should’ve felt a lot more concern for Brother White, but it wasn’t as grave as a lynching attempt, and she found the sight of Scroll nervously staring at White’s ass funny.

“I think what I need,” said White, “is a long trip to the bathroom.”

“And be careful with how you walk for a while,” suggested Tap.

“We’ve got your presents,” said White in an attempt to change the subject. “Why don’t we open them now so that it takes my mind off of this?”

“I’ll go get them,” said Scroll as he scurried off into the main room.

“What’d you get?” asked Clip.

“You’ll see,” White said, grinning a little. “And plans are still the same tomorrow. Scroll and I will be here at the mission house giving presents, and then we’ll come over for the party.”

“As long as nopony pisses in the punch bowl,” said Tap.

Scroll re-entered the room, carrying two brightly-colored packages. He placed one of them in front of Barrel and the other in front of Clip. Clip eagerly tore at the wrapping paper to reveal a large cardboard box with the image of a robot on it.

Kids like robots, the missionaries had reasoned.

While Clip struggled with the copious amounts of packaging, Barrel opened his box to find a stuffed seagull.

“I gathered you liked seabirds,” Scroll said.

“Thanks!” Clip and Barrel said in unison.

Tap laughed softly. “Well, Barrel, we’d better get back to the tavern. You two sure you’ll be okay?”

“Yeah,” said White, “I just need to use the bathroom.”

Tap and Barrel turned to leave, exiting the bunk room. However, Scroll followed them out.

“Wait, Tap!” said Scroll. “I haven’t given you your present yet.”

Oh, no, thought Tap. “Barrel, you go on ahead.”

“Okay...” said Barrel. He eyed Scroll suspiciously, but left without saying anything. Scroll walked over to the desk and opened a drawer, producing the box.

“I, uh... I wanted to give you this,” he said, pushing it forward.

“Is this the thing you were talking about with White earlier today?” Tap asked as she took the box. She opened it and stared at the little gold locket inside. “What... what is this?”

“It’s a locket,” said Scroll.

I wonder how much I could sell it for? was Tap’s first immediate thought. She looked back at Scroll, who seemed to have been overcome with nervousness. She looked back to the locket, carefully lifting it out of the box. It was a little gold heart on a gold chain.

“It’s very pretty,” she said.

“I hoped you’d like it,” said Scroll.

Tap laughed. “Well, great. Now I have to get you something, and I have no idea.”

“Well,” Scroll said, fidgeting with his glasses, “I can think of *one* thing...”

“What?” Tap asked.

Scroll took a deep breath. “Tap,” he said, “would you go out with me? On a... on a date?”

Tap stared at him. So he hadn't given up.

Tap thought back to when she was a little bit younger, and she had all these romantic notions in her head. Sometimes she had dreamed, or at least fantasized, about a perfect stallion: one who was strong, handsome, kind, and was interested in what *she* wanted, rather than himself. As time went on she became more accustomed to the reality. If they were strong, they were usually cruel. If they were handsome, they were usually vain. If they were kind, they were usually gay. If they were interested in what she wanted, they were usually masochists, and that creeped her out.

And now, here was Scroll. Sweet, nebbish, what-the-hell-is-he-somehow-a-virgin-again Scroll. This guy, who even after getting from her for free what she normally sold, came back and said he wanted something else. Scroll, one of the only ponies on the island who seemed to care about her as a pony and not just an object.

“Well, alright,” she said.

“Really?” Scroll asked.

“Really,” said Tap. “Have a happy Heart-Warming or whatever it’s called.” She looked down at the locket dangling from her hoof. “And thank you.”

Scroll watched as Tap left. The door shut, and Scroll stood there for a minute. Then he let out an excited squeal and stamped his hooves on the floor.

“Yes yes yes yes yes yes *YES!*” he exclaimed.

“Scrooooooll?” White called from the bunk room. “I think I need help getting to the bathroom!”

The next day, Brother White was able to pull off the surprising feat of both walking with a spring in his step and limping.

“We’re not in any danger of running out of presents, are we?” he asked.

“Umm...” Scroll looked at the large pile of presents and then looked at the rest of the mission house, which was empty. “No, I think we’re good.”

Sadly, it seemed that the foals of the town were not interested in getting free presents. Also, Scroll thought that the fake glowing snowpony was a bad idea. One of the foals who walked in

stared at the snowpony for a full ten minutes before asking what on Earthquake Island it was supposed to be. Still, they'd wait and hope some for some foals to come.

Meanwhile, a box with a depiction of a robot suddenly sprouted pink legs and started walking around the room. "Beep! Beep!" said Clip. "I'm a robot! Take me to your leader!"

"That's aliens..." said Scroll.

"Beep! Beep!" Clip yelled as he aimlessly walked into the kitchen.

The door opened and in walked a little brown colt. Buzz entered slowly, looking around with a bitter glare on his face. White and Scroll stared at him.

"Well..." said White. "Hi." There was an awkward pause. "Why, uh, why'd you say that I did that?"

"He nearly died," said Scroll.

"I hate you," Buzz whispered. "I hate you!"

White and Scroll looked at each other and then back at Buzz.

"Well," said White, not one to be defeated. "Here, have this." He floated one of the many packages over to Buzz. "Have a Happy Hearth's Warming."

Buzz stood there, staring and glaring. After ejecting every possible dagger from his eyes, he took the package in his mouth and walked out the door. He grumbled to himself about how much he hated both of those faggots, but especially White. However, somepony was waiting for him outside the door.

"Hey," said Tap.

"Huh?" Buzz asked. He looked up as Tap shoved him to the ground, making him drop his package. "Hey, what-"

"Shut up," said Tap, pressing a hoof down on his chest. "You have got to be the most repugnant little fuckwad I've ever met, you know that? Oh sure, I can understand being an asshole - pretty much everypony on this island is, but you're a real vicious little shit."

Buzz didn't say anything; he was too frightened of her.

"I mean, first you throw rocks at my little brother, and then you try to get one of the missionaries killed. And by lying that he molested you, of all things." She laughed bitterly. "But you know something, I think I know *why* you did that."

Buzz gulped.

"Oh, you hate Brother White. You *really* fucking hate him, but not because he's a horner. At least, not *just* because of that."

"I fucking hate that f-" Buzz began, but Tap pressed her hoof down.

"Shut your fucking mouth, you little punk," she snarled. She lowered her head, resuming. "You know, you accusing him of molesting you served two funny purposes. It gives your daddy a reason to get all his buddies together for a lynch mob, but it also gives *you* an opportunity – an opportunity to tell everypony about your little fantasies..."

"Shut up!"

"Oh yes, it's funny, you hate Brother White because you like him. There's a lot to like when you ignore the stupidity and the self-righteous sermonizing – He's nice, he's very attractive, and he has that dazzling smile. Nice singing voice, too. And he's *just* dumb enough to try to be your friend even after tons of abuse. And every day you see him out, singing and giving books to ponies and being so 'gosh-darn nice' about everything. And you notice. You can't *help* but notice it. It's like he's showing you this great big world where ponies can be nice to each other, and even though it's the dumbest thing you've ever heard in your life, what you wouldn't give to *believe* in it. And on top of that, isn't he *handsome*?" She smirked. "That neatly-combed mane, the dazzling smile, the milky-white coat, those flanks, that *horn*?"

"Shut up..."

"He's like a great big fucking knight in shining armor, here to take you away from the horrible life here, and who'd accept you for something you wouldn't *dare* open up to your father about, so you have to get rid of him because you can't get him out of your head-"

"SHUT UP!" Buzz spat. "JUST SHUT UP! SHUT UP SHUT UP SHUT UP!"

Tap lifted her hoof and the little colt scurried to his feet and ran off. White stuck his head out the

door.

“What’s going on here?” he asked.

“Nothing important,” said Tap. “Just giving him a piece of my mind.”

White looked down sadly at the package. “He forgot his present...”

White and Scroll had their matching party hats on and were quickly doing the last bits of setting-up they needed for the party in the tavern.

“Hey, open up!” shouted an angry voice from outside the door.

“In a minute!” called White as he set the final piece: the punch bowl. “Alright, Tap, open up!”

Tap took the bar from the door and the door opened.

“Fucking finally...” muttered one of the ponies as he walked in. However, he stopped right after he passed the doorway.

“Dude, fucking move!” said a pony behind him. However, the first pony was still in awe of the gaudy paper, balloons, and candy canes plastered about the room.

“Welcome!” said Brother White. “Come in! Come in!”

“We have punch and sparkling cider!” said Scroll. “And remember to make sure everypony has had firsts before you start having seconds.”

The ponies streamed in, stating variations of “what the fuck?”

“Good ponies of Earthquake Island,” said White, raising a glass of cider. “I would like to welcome you all here for this Hearth’s Warming Eve party.”

“What’s going on?” asked an exasperated patron.

“He’s giving a speech,” said Tap. “He does that a lot.”

“This winter festival is a celebration of the founding of Equestria, of the end of an era when

ponies, very much like yourselves, were able to put aside their differences and enter into an age of harmony and prosperity. It was the magic of friendship that saved those ponies so very long ago, and the magic of friendship will continue to save us and carry us through even the darkest of times. Do not fret, my friends, for the bad times upon us now are merely a fading shadow of bigotry and hatred. So let us celebrate this night with merriment and joy!”

There was the dull sound of a hoof hitting the floor in subdued applause.

“We also have pin-the-tail-on-the-pony,” added Scroll.

The ponies of Earthquake Island, however, were not particularly interested in party games. They did, however, look around the room - for once, it seemed they were interested in free food, even if it didn't have alcohol.

“We also have ‘spin the bottle...’” Scroll said, before noticing that the patrons were almost exclusively male. “Oh. That isn't going to work.”

White, meanwhile, ventured over to a few ponies who were at the punch bowl. “Hiya!” he said. The other ponies stared at him.

“Hi...”

“How's the punch?”

“I haven't tried it yet.”

“Oh,” said White. “Well, then, I'll leave you to it.”

One of the ponies watched as White went over to explain to another pony what the pine tree was for. Yet another pony scooped out a cup of punch and tasted it.

“How is it?”

“It's okay,” said the pony with a shrug. “I like something with a bit more kick to it, though. Hmm...” He produce a flask and poured out the cork. “How about we try adding some of this.”

The “party” didn't really pick up, as many of the usual patrons just went about doing what they usually did at the tavern, save for the few who ventured over to the food table. The Brothers, however, judged the party as a success on account of the turnout.

“Great, just great,” said White as he prepared two cups of punch. “I think we might finally be making some headway.”

Scroll took a drink from his cup. “Tap said yes,” he said. “She said she’d go out with me.”

“Really?” asked White. “That’s great! I tell ya, Scroll, things are finally starting to look up. Even my rear doesn’t hurt as much right now.” He finished his cup. “Great punch, Scroll. I’ll have another.”

“Me too.”

Barrel and Tap tended to their customers at the counter, because most of the stallions there were interested in hard cider rather than sparkling cider. Barrel shuffled back and forth between two stallions whose orders he had mixed up.

“Sorry, sorry...” he said. He looked over at his sister, and noticed the gold locket around her neck. “What’s that?”

“Just something that Scroll gave me for Hearth’s Warming,” she said in her offhand manner.

“Oh,” he said. “Was that what he wanted you to stay for?”

“Yeah,” she said.

“Why didn’t he just give it to you when they gave presents to me and Clip?”

“Oh, I don’t know, Barrel,” she sighed. “Maybe he just forgot or something.”

“Forgot?”

“Well, almost forgot.”

“You *still* got my order wrong!” called an irritated bar patron.

“Hold on, I’ll get it,” Tap said, eager to break away from Barrel’s awkward questioning. The last thing she needed was for Barrel to get suspicious of Scroll. After all, the Brothers had been good to him, taken him in and practically given him membership, nametag and all. True, she thought it was stupid, but the idea of friction between Barrel and Scroll over her was *not* something she

wanted to put up with.

“Hello!” said Brother White, approaching the counter.

“Hi,” said Tap, not missing a beat as she corrected the customer’s order.

“Here,” White said as he floated two cups, one to her and one to Barrel. “Have some of the punch. It’s really good! I mean...” He looked at a few ponies who were standing by the bowl. “It seems to be pretty popular.”

The other ponies at the punch bowl looked into it.

“So you put what into it?” one of them asked.

“Oh, just my special stuff,” said another. “Thought it’d give it a little kick, y’know?”

“Good idea,” said another pony, who produced his own flask.

“Well, thawas great!” shouted Brother White, watching the last few patrons leave the tavern.

“Have a happy... happy hopy Heart-Warming Eve!”

“Dude...” said one of the patrons. “You’re gonna need one hell of a shower tomorrow.”

“I always do!” said White proudly. His mane was messy, as was his red tie. He had at one point dunked his head into the apple barrel and needed to be pulled out by a frantic Scroll (“Not my fault the apples kept moving...” he grumbled).

Tap was chatting with Scroll, who was giggling uncontrollably.

“I tell ya, that’s the last time I do *that*,” she said. She swayed a little in her chair. “Fuck, I’m drunk.” She looked at Scroll. “You’re all full of giggles and stuff, aren’t ya?”

“Snkt... I can’t help it...” Scroll said, trying to stifle himself.

“Well, it’s a nice night...” she looked over at Barrel, who had fallen asleep at the counter. She sighed and thought for a minute. Then a grin came across her face and she turned back to Scroll.

“You know somethin’?” she asked, trying very hard to keep her face straight. She had a hilarious

idea, and it was all she could do to keep from cracking up.

“What?” Scroll asked.

“I was just thinking,” Tap said, leaning into Scroll’s ear, “that it’d be totally sweet if you...” She whispered the rest. Scroll burst into fits of giggles.

“Heehee! You really think-”

“Yes. Definitely.”

“Oh, I dunno...” Scroll said, unable to suppress his giggles. He looked over at Tap, who was smiling at him. “Oh, alright.” He got up and slowly walked over to Brother White, who was examining the punch bowl.

“Y’know, it’s funny,” said White, “like, real real funny. I think the punch bowl is magical.”

“Magical?” asked Scroll. “Howso?”

“Like, I keep drinking punch,” White explained with vague hoof-motions, “but it never goes empty. And it changes color. An’ tase.”

“Hey,” said Scroll. “So, how’d you think the party wen’?”

“I think ihwent predy well,” White slurred.

“Good...” Scroll said, before he resumed his fits of giggling.

“Whatso funny?”

“I like your mane...”

“Yep,” White said. “I always keep it brushed an’ stuff.” He looked at Scroll. “Your mane’s nice too.”

Scroll giggled some more. “So...” he said, “I was just talking with Tap...”

White looked behind Scroll and saw Tap seated on a bench, watching them with an excited grin on her face. White looked back at Scroll, who was blushing. White cocked a quizzical eyebrow.

“She thought it’d be totally awesome if we...” Scroll leaned in and whispered into White’s ear. White’s other ear twitched, and he looked back at Tap, who was grinning back at the pair.

“Huh,” said White. He looked from Tap back to Scroll, and then back at Tap again.

“Yeah, I think-” Scroll was cut off as White grabbed him and pressed his face into his, locking them in a kiss. Scroll’s eyes went wide in surprise before he relaxed into a lull.

Tap watched she saw each of them raise a hoof and run it through the other’s manes as they kissed. the smile on her face widened.

“Yeah...” she said. “You two are... you two are really goin’ at it, aren’tya?” She leaned back, still grinning. “Nice...”

Scroll and White broke off the kiss.

“Wow...” Scroll gasped. He looked at Tap. “He’s a really good kisser.”

“Lot of stage ‘sperience...” slurred White.

“Well...” Tap got up from her seat and walked over to them. “That was a show a girl likes to see.” She smiled at Scroll. “Girls like me *love* that stuff.” Scroll giggled. She looked at White. “You should totally do that again.”

“Nnnnope,” said White. “One’s enough for now. ‘Sides, I think Scroll’d hyperventilate.”

Scroll bust up laughing at that and fell into a chair as White walked over to the punch bowl and took the ladle. “Oh, gosh-darnit,” he said as he struggled. “Punch won’t stay in the ladle.”

“I don’t think that counts as punch anymore...” Tap said.

“Here!” White said, lifting a cup. “A toast to Hearth’s-Warming Eve and friendship and the Fraternity and... and stuff!”

“Stuff!” echoed the other two.