Anonbug

You are Anon, Royal Changeling Princess of the Badlands Hive, daughter to Queen Chrysalis. Your life has always been static, boring and repetitive. Fate saw that it was time for a change. This is your story.

Includes or will eventually include: Dark/violent scenes, swearing & sexual + suggestive content. Tread lightly if any of these will discomfort you! This story is written for adult audiences.

(Not really writing this anymore it's kinda rough lol)

(nvm I'm still writing it)

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A1 - P1

 You wake up with a start, in an immense amount of pain.
 You are a Royal Changeling, a Princess to your hive in your Proto-Queen stage of maturation. You eat love, and all others cower before your kind because of it.
 Everything around you is sandy. It seems you ended up in a canyon. Drones hover above you, clad in blue iridescent armor.
 As you stand, your front explodes with pain. However you CAN stand, at least…
 Suddenly, a voice explodes in your brain- [Anon! Answer me NOW!]
 You knew this voice. The voice of your predecessor and Queen-Mother, Chrysalis.
 [Yes, Mother?] you ping back through your unique link with her.
 All Changelings shared the Link, a means of silent communication. No other being could access it as a Changeling could, and it made you a dangerous lot indeed.
 [You are to return to the hive at ONCE!] she screeched mentally, causing you to flinch.
 [Yes, Mother.] you calmly returned. As disoriented as you were, you did not want to anger your mother further.
 You took to the skies upon seeing your wings undamaged, and the drones followed you without a word.
 Unlike some other hives, the Badlands Hive's soldier drones were under the complete control of the Queen. You saw no problem with this. It was simply how things worked under Chrysalis' care.
 You pondered if she knew of your crash… Most likely, given the drones are to keep her constantly updated on your position and status at all times.
 Shame overcame you. She was probably disappointed, or equally ashamed that you had been done in by a stray rock formation of all things.
 Instead of mulling over your crash, you decide to fly more carefully back to the hive with the squad of drones. No point in regretting what is already done. However, you do spare a gaze to the North, seeing the distant verdant green of the Southern Equestrian Jungles.
 You were always told to never go anywhere near the place for your whole life.
 'Duly noted', you had thought as Chrysalis instructed you on the hive territories, but in all your 20 years, you had never gotten the chance to do anything except serve her.
 You were constantly under watch. Grounded outside of scheduled patrols, only allowed to eat when you were watched…
 Life was stifling, suffocating and all around boring. Change was the way of your kind, but it always seemed as though Chrysalis fought against it.
 A darkness overcame your features as you glared ahead at the distant towers of the hive.
 Perhaps it was time for change, you mused.
 A royal in her Proto-Queen stage was a weak thing indeed. It would only be a few months more, however, before you would fully mature, and THEN you could-
 You suddenly feel something secure around your body, locking your wings to your sides and forcing you out of the air.
 'Ah, I'm falling' is all you think before you mentally reach out to the squad of drones, but… they aren't there.

 ‘Shit’ you snarl and look around frantically, only to see a squad of what seemed to be armored ponies, and the ground directly behind them littered with drone bodies oozing sickly green blood.
 Oh.
 You were probably going to die.

A1 - P2

 You had hit the ground, and everything went black.
 No thoughts, head empty. Just how you liked it.
 But then, wakefulness inevitably returned, and boy did it hurt.
 The second thing you noticed was your situation. You were tied up, put in some sort of magically inhibiting cage, and left with some dry bread to your side. You even had a muzzle and a horn clamp, so there was no way to eat the bread anyways.
 How tasteful. Ponies were SO accommodating.
 You tried to reach for your Link, but nothing happened. It was then you realized you had a collar around your neck that began to glow whenever you tried to call to Chrysalis for help.
 Just peachy…
 Your torn ears perked up as you heard hoofsteps outside of your cage. Your slitted eyes squinted through the darkness to see a bright red stallion with a scraggly white mane and tail glaring down at you.
 His eyes were a deep emerald, seeming to radiate with hatred even in the darkness. His flank emblem, called a ‘cutie mark’ in some regions, was a pine tree with a broadsword struck through it.
 He spoke, “I am Commander Festive Strike, if that even matters to a creature like you,” he snorted as I rolled my eyes.
 This pony was so sure of himself, so arrogant as to think he won…
 “You are under the custody of the Equestrian Military now, ‘your Highness’. Do not expect lavish treatment” Festive Strike leaned down and stuck his muzzle into the cage as far as he could “you are scum, you are nothing, yet the Princesses requested that we use… non-lethal methods of-”
 Oh, this ASSHOLE-
 You struggled against your bindings for a few seconds, earning you an amused sneer. But that only fueled your rage further.
 SNAP! The muzzle tore away from your snout and you hissed loudly at him, baring your fangs.
 “Non-lethal my FLANK! You KILLED my subjects!”
 “A Royal is worth so much more than mindless creatures such as them, Proto-Queen,” he spat, unfazed by your show of aggression.
 “But do heed this advice” his smile returned, “pray to whatever Gods you beasts worship that your audience with the Princesses goes smoothly”
 You said nothing more, and glared as he walked away while you grabbed the dried bread in your jaws.
 Ponies were assholes.

 Morning had come, and the sun was sweltering hot on your chitin. The cage provided no relief.
 However, seeing the soldier ponies at the front of the cart working so hard, panting and struggling through the sand and heat, brought you some smug satisfaction.
 The Commander, who you had discovered to be a pegasus once the sun rose, was leading the small military caravan to the North by air.
 What a smug bastard, you glowered before you laid down, chains rustling enough to put the

ponies on edge.

- All except the Commander, apparently. Because all that son of a bitch did was keep on flying.
- Oh you hated that pony…

A1 - P3

 Days and nights passed, and you had learned the soldier’s routines, but they made up for their repetition with their security…
 You couldn’t escape, no matter what cunning tactics you tried, and it was driving you up a Gods-forsaken wall.
 Ponies were despicable beings, but at least they kept you fed and provided water. However, comforts were another thing entirely.
 It was only their so-called decency that they did not inflict injury, but you were sure they only held back because of their beloved Princesses.
 You knew it, you saw it in every glance and every hesitant hoofstep around your cage. These ponies hated you with every fiber of their being… All because of what Chrysalis had done.
 Gods, what did she think? She probably thought you were dead.
 Nobody was coming after you. It’d been a week, and nothing. A tear threatened to fall when you realized, your Mother was probably glad to be rid of you.
 “Useless grub”, “obnoxious little rat”, among other such insults crossed your mind. You realized as well, that Chrysalis had never had a loving word of praise or pride for you. She didn’t love you. How could she?
 You lowered your head and wept.

 They had loaded you into the cart when you heard it.
 “We’re a few miles from Canterlot. When we get there, stay in formation… The nobles want this to be perfect.”
 “Why? S’not like them nobility types will be ‘round to see our catch o’ the century! They’s scared of the beasties.”
 “Celestia’s orders, Private. She insists we handle this ceremonially, so that’s what we’ll be doing.”
 You sneered. Celestia was a name you’d recognized from one of Chrysalis’s many rants. The chief Princess of the Triarchy, Alicorn of the Sun itself.
 You kept listening, but nothing else the military dogs had said was of any interest to you. So you watched as the thick, shadowy trees of what they called the “Everfree” thinned out.
 Plains with tall grasses passed by, then you saw it. A large mountain that touched the clouds, with a large elegant city stationed on the side the natural spire. Gold, purple and blinding white marble composed it.
 You had heard stories from Chrysalis, but you never imagined you’d see it yourself.
 Canterlot, capital of Equestria.
 And you were headed right there, probably to be executed by these cruel and selfish creatures…
 Lovely.

A1 - P4

 The gates were quite beautiful, you had to admit.
 It was symbolic, at least as far as what you knew.
 The twin alicorns of both night and day, hooves and horns raised proudly.
 A symbol of protection.
 For any other, it may prove comforting. But to you, it was just another promise of death.
 Ponies were packed on the streets leading up to the castle, barely making way for Festive Strike and your cart.
 They all wanted to look at the prize, the prisoner... The monster.
 You figured you'd give them a show, and so you stood as tall as you could in your cage and hissed loudly at a group of fillies and colts, who screamed and scattered into the crowd.
 A soldier glared at you and banged your cart, but you hissed at him too.
 You grinded your twisted horn against the cage, producing green sparks, and flashed your fangs at a particularly shy looking mare in the crowd. For some reason, her buttery yellow coat and long pink mane stood out to you. Then it clicked.
 That was Fluttershy, one of the mares who stood against Chrysalis and the invasion army! You felt newfound rage boil up into your throat and you almost screeched at her, but you figured you didn't want to offend one of the close allies of one of the nation's rulers... yet.

 The crowd began to thin out the closer to the castle you got, which you were glad for.
 It gave you time to fix your emerald green mane and tail into a somewhat respectable state before meeting the end.
 In the reflection of a cage bar, you looked into your lime green eyes and sighed. You hadn't stopped to really look at yourself since your capture.
 To most 'lings you were quite the catch. At hive summits even other Queens radiated with envy, and sentient drones drooled.
 But to a pony, you figured you were just another monster. Nobody fancied your bright lime draconic eyes, your draping emerald mane and tail, your lithe form or your shining black chitin.
 There was no love in this place, you thought sadly.
 While a royal could survive without love, her physical appearance would become monstrous. Despite Chrysalis's contempt for you, she did keep you well fed. While you hadn't eaten well in a week, you did still retain some semblance of your best self...
 That wouldn't be the case for long, if the ponies decided to keep you alive. Which you doubted.

 You looked back up and grimaced as you saw the gates to the castle open wide. At the back of the path through what you assumed were the royal gardens were three very special ponies...
 One of alabaster white, with a pastel rainbow mane flowing on invisible winds, taller than the other two. Her pink eyes rested on you, emotionless. She was decked out in golden regalia, it was actually quite impressive. You were almost honored that she dressed to meet you... Her wingspan spread slowly to its fullest, and the other two followed.
 Another, a dark blue with an ethereal mane that resembled the night sky. She was somewhat

shorter than the alabaster alicorn, but was significantly more dangerous looking. Her regalia was made of obsidian, with an elegant silver moon carved into her chest piece. Her glare pierced your soul, but she kept her composure well otherwise.

 The third, a lavender pony with an indigo mane and tail. Streaks of purple and pink were inlaid in her straight cut hair. Her horn seemed to be somewhat long, but everything about her was smaller than the other two, even her wings, which indicated that she was much younger. Instead of a hateful glare, her expression was curious, almost admiring, but you could taste the fear rolling off of her.

 You thought back to your Mother's stories, and recognized the lavender alicorn as Twilight Sparkle. Bemused, you were surprised that she'd ascended into a ruler in a year's time.

 The cart stopped, and your cage was lowered to the paved walkway just feet away from certain death.

 The alabaster one, Celestia, spoke.

 "Unchain her."

 Festive Strike was flabbergasted, "but Princess-"

 "Are we not a civilized people, Commander?" she challenged gently, "we can handle it from here. Unchain her."

 Festive Strike said nothing more, and he nodded to his soldiers. A few moments later, and your hole-ridden hooves were free of the shackles that bound them. Another moment, and your horn clamp was off, the only thing remaining was the collar preventing you from contacting Chrysalis. You looked up at Celestia, shocked and somewhat impressed.

 "Changeling, we do not know your name. Speak it," the darker alicorn, Luna you assumed, commanded you. You almost scoffed, how dare this accursed pony command YOU?! Instead, you picked yourself up and stood regally as you have been taught.

 "I am Anon, Princess of the Badlands Hive."

 The Princesses nodded, and Celestia spoke, "Then we are on equal grounds, Princess. Please, would you join us for tea?"

 You went bug-eyed and slack-jawed at that.

 "But... You captured me. Your soldiers assured me I would be executed, treated with the upmost cruelty- Mother, she-" you snarled, "you can't trick me, pony! Do not presume I am stupid enough to let my guard down!"

 Celestia looked at you calmly, "then don't, all we ask is you join us for tea, so that we may talk. I'm sure there is much for both of us to learn about the other, Princess Anon."

 You felt heavily conflicted. She was an enemy, a conniving witch! But then, there was the possibility that Chrysalis had... skewed the story a bit, if these ponies were telling you the truth. Which was new to you; you'd never experienced any sort of treasonous thoughts towards your mother until the past week away from the hive... It was kind of fun.

 "U-Um," Twilight spoke up, stepping forwards, "I know we got off on the wrong hoof. But Celestia wants to extend a hoof of peace to the Changelings."

 You glared, "you're kidding. You CAPTURED me!"

 Celestia sighed, "I asked my Commander and his platoon to escort you. Not chain you up and starve you. I apologize deeply on behalf of my soldiers for your inequine treatment. He and the soldiers under his command will be punished accordingly, I promise you."

 Luna shot a glare to Festive Strike and his soldiers, who shrunk under her gaze. You almost smirked in satisfaction at seeing that worm put in his place.

 You thought for a moment. They were SPARING you... the least you could do was try and pretend to be civil until they hopefully released you.
 "Very well then, Princesses. I accept your apology and invitation to... tea."
 She smiled for the first time since your arrival. Droves of relief and joy sloughed off of her, it was almost intoxicating.
 Gods, what have you gotten yourself into...

A1 - P5

 Tea had been awkward thus far, you felt.
 You stared across the ornate tea table at the other Princesses, then looked down at your own drink.
 You were suspicious of the warm, floral liquid. It could be poisoned!
 You were definitely NOT afraid of trying anything that wasn't royal jelly or sand water… definitely. Not.
 Twilight looked at you inquisitively. You could tell she was barely holding in all of her questions. So much so that she looked a little red in the face, oh dear.
 You cleared your throat and spoke, "Princess Twilight, if you have something to say, please say it."
 She beamed, oh Gods- "you have NO idea how happy I am to hear you say that, Anon!" she squealed and pulled out a thick notepad. Even from your line of sight you could see it was chock full of scraggly writing.
 Oh, this was going to be a long one…

 By time you even got to finish your tea, the sun had neared the horizon. Judging by its position, it was perhaps 5 or 6 PM.
 "So you're saying that Changelings eat emotions to survive?" Twilight's voice had been ringing for hours, yet it never lost its sparkling tone.
 "Yes, drones at least, rely solely on emotional energy to function," you instructed, a bit tired. The line of questioning had not been as bad as you expected, though.
 "Incredible… So what about Royals?"
 "A royal can survive without any love at all, or I'd be much worse for wear," You sighed, recalling your poor treatment on the way here, "physical matter sustains us."
 Twilight looked confused, and nodded as she wrote down notes, "I wonder why that is…" she mused.
 You glanced at Celestia as she spoke up, "and that is why Queen Chrysalis invaded our lands? Starvation?"
 You nodded, "yes… For our people… And myself."
 Luna narrowed her eyes, "explain."
 You bit back a retort and nodded, "when Mother invaded, I was a princess 'ling. During my maturation into a Proto-Queen, I needed more love than the entire hive combined, or I would perish."
 Celestia gasped quietly, understanding and empathy spreading over her gentle features. Luna's gaze softened, but Twilight simply continued to take notes.
 You looked away, ashamed. They thought you were weak… Time to put that notion to rest!
 "However, now I am in the Proto-Queen stage of maturation. I have but a few more months before my crown emerges fully, and I will be able to start my own hive… Or succeed Chrysalis."
 Celestia looked a little concerned at that, "succeed her?"
 "The way of the Changelings. It is cruel, compared to your way of life, Princess Celestia. When

the eldest of a Queen’s offspring matures fully, they must either leave their birth hive to start their own, or kill their predescessor and succeed her as Queen.”

 The mood dampened at that, and you look down. You had fully planned upon succeeding Chrysalis once you became a full Queen. You may still do it once you escape these ponies. But you could not deny they treated you well… After the whole shackles and cages fiasco.

 “The hour grows late. Anon, would you join me on the balcony?” Celestia smiles at you and you nod cautiously, “fear not, I would not harm you, Anon.”

 You still felt apprehensive, but you had little choice but to trust her at that moment, so you followed the alabaster Princess outdoors. Twilight and Luna exchanged a glance, and quickly departed.

 Celestia stopped and looked out across her kingdom for a moment.

 “Anon, it occurred to me during the afternoon that… well, you have no idea what Equestria is truly like, do you?”

 “I… I have heard stories from Chrysalis,” you spoke quietly, “that ponies are cruel, unforgiving and selfish creatures. That you hoard your love, food and lands from anyone that doesn’t look like you or fit your definition of ‘normal’. That you hate us, and wouldn’t understand.”

 You glance away from Celestia, mind swimming with conflicted thoughts.

 “But how was I to know she was… wrong?” you choked out the last word as though it was poison. Treason, Anon! Bucking treason! What was wrong with you!

 “Hm,” Celestia turned away from you to gaze out at her kingdom once again, “Chrysalis was not entirely incorrect. Ponies can be selfish, ponies can be cruel, and xenophobic.”

 You balked at that.

 "But so can any other creature in this world, Anon. We are all our own beings. Chrysalis is her own as well, and she chose to act with haste and violence, rather than patience and pacifism as we strive to, and so it is there we are different.

 “But so different as to not get along? Well, I disagree.” She turned to you with a kind smile.

 “You put aside your misgivings to share tea with three ponies today, Anon. You are not your Mother, that much is obvious.”

 You sighed, guilty and conflicted, “you’re right, I’m not my Mother. The hive follows her, not me. If you want me to convince them to stand down and make peace…”

 “That is not my intention, Anon.”

 “Then what was?”

 “Truthfully? I wanted to see what a Changeling was really like. Now it is clear to me that if a future Queen, under the rule of an enemy of Equestria, can be shown kindness… So can the rest of the Changelings.”

 “Sister, that’s enough!” Luna barked from the doorway of the balcony. You jumped, and twisted around to look at her.

 “Sister…” Celestia sighed.

 “To befriend one is crazy enough, to trust a royal is insane. To make peace with ALL of them?! Beyond the pale, sister.”

 You watched as the two sisters began to bicker between themselves for a long while, until you lit your horn.

 Emerald changeling magic sparked to life and you charged a quick spell. Upon releasing it, a sharp SNAP filled the air, shocking the sisters out of their argument.

 “Far be it for me to tell you what to do-”

 “Indeed!” Luna growled.

 “-but I think Luna’s right.”
 “HA!” she laughed at Celestia, who gave her a deadpan expression.
 “But I also think Celestia’s right.”
 Celestia looked at you, mildly surprised.
 “The changelings can’t all be won over by friendship and rainbows. But what can win them over is a solid deal. I’ve been to summits; they value material gain, food and power over anything else!”
 Oh Gods, what were you doing! You were telling the ENEMY how to bribe other Queens!
 “It’s not ideal…” Celestia began, “I will have to bring it up with my advisors.”
 “Sister-”
 “Enough, Luna,” Celestia snipped, “I must depart for bed. Please escort Anon to her quarters.”
 “We aren’t letting her go? She is no longer of use-”
 “It is not about using her, Luna. Please escort our guest.”
 Celestia departed before Luna could make more of a fuss.
 Luna glowered at you, “come.”

 The bed was comfortable. You purred as you settled onto it, pulling the soft covers over yourself with your magic.
 Ahh, you hadn’t ever been in a bed so comfortable before. It was… nice.
 You were about to settle in for sleep when you saw a shadow fall from the ceiling onto the rug below with a feminine ‘oof!’. Reflexively, your horn brightened up and cast light upon the shadowy form that had fallen.
 “Princess Twilight?” you hissed, “What are you doing in here?!”
 “S-Sorry, Anon! I wanted to study your-”
 “Study?! Am I just an experiment to you, Princess,” you spat, recoiling.
 Her eyes widened, “No! Of course not, Anon. I- It’s just- you’re so fascinating…”
 You blushed deeply at that.
 She spluttered, “WAIT! I didn’t mean it like that!”
 “Uh-huh. Sure,” you purred and nodded towards the door, “here’s the deal, Princess. We’ll talk all you want tomorrow, IF you leave me alone in my chambers. The least I can do is get some privacy after being in a cage surrounded by sweaty dumb stallion ponies for a week, hm?”
 Twilight nodded feverishly and made her way to the door, quickly. Once she was gone, you slammed the door shut and bound it to its frame with a simple spell.
 You weren’t sure why you hadn’t run away yet, but something was drawing you here. Was it the desire for change? Power? Maybe, ugh, friendship? You’d never known another sentient soul beyond Chrysalis until you’d met these ponies… Or maybe this was all a game to you? You tried not to think about it, or much of anything. Thinking brought doubt, doubt brought inaction, inaction brought hooves down upon your head…
 You made yourself comfortable once again, and let sleep overcome you.

A1 - P6

 In the morning, the first thing Celestia asked of you was to pretty yourself up. You scoffed at that; you were always pretty! But it wouldn’t hurt to wash your chitin and fix your mane…
 Twilight had accompanied you, of course. The youngest alicorn had been inseparable from your side for the whole first half of your morning, asking foalish questions and taking notes incessantly.
 The second request was by far the most difficult decision of your whole life.
“Princess Anon… I know this is a difficult ask, and you may decline if you so choose… Please, help us achieve peace between our peoples. Ponies cannot do all the work, we need trustworthy, intelligent young changelings like you.”
 You accepted with little hesitation, which made you sick to your stomach. How could you betray your own Mother?
 You had stood next to Celestia, Luna and Twilight as Celestia made the announcement, putting on your finest regal posture and stoic expression.
 “Princess Anon has shown herself to be a worthy ally of the Equestrian people”, Celestia had told them towards the end of all the ceremonial pomp and circumstance, “she has agreed to assist us in finding common ground between the Changeling Queendoms and our great nation. Princess, will you say a few words?”
 You felt a little uneasy when she asked you to step forward. With a gulp, you complied, and cast a voice amplification spell. Here goes nothing.
“Erm- Hello, ponies of Equestria! I apologize profoundly on behalf of my Mother, Queen Chrysalis. How she invaded this country and harmed its people is- unforgivable. It’s inexcusable.”
 You took a breath and continued, despite the sheer level of ungodly treasonous your words were.
“I will dedicate all of my resources to assisting the ponies of this nation initiate peace talks with my people. We will find common ground, we will resolve this conflict for the betterment of us all.”
 Silence. You could hear a fucking pin drop.
 Then, one by one, ponies began to stamp their hooves. Not everypony joined in, but enough that you didn’t feel your short speech was a total loss.
 Many ponies didn’t trust you, you knew. But maybe, just maybe, friendship would win out in the end.
 Twilight was jubilant. She congratulated you on your speech… You know, the one about being a traitor to your kind. It was just as backwards as everything else these ponies considered normal.
 After that, Twilight introduced you to her friends. Oh boy.
 It wasn’t easy getting Rainbow Dash, Applejack and Fluttershy to trust you at first. Rainbow Dash was utterly convinced of your deception, Fluttershy was… well, every bit afraid of Changelings as your mother described.
 Applejack was a tough nut to crack. It felt as if the stalwart Earth Pony was always trying to be one step ahead of you.
 Rarity and Pinkie Pie were utterly delighted, following a few moments of unsure glances and clearing throats.
 Rarity had, of course, instantly zeroed in on your appearance. You had always known you were a

gorgeous chunk of chitin, but hearing it from a being such as a pony was a whole new level of ego-boost.

 Pinkie Pie thought it was best to throw you a ‘welcome to Equestria’ party as soon as possible. She would throw out all the stops, everything would be perfect. You had never been treated to an Equestrian style party before… Or any party, for that matter.

 Upon your acceptance of Pinkie Pie and Rarity’s kindness, Fluttershy stepped forward, and it was rather elementary to ease her out of her shell. She had so, so many questions, and you could barely answer them all.

 While Applejack and RD were still very suspicious of you, the others did their best to make you feel welcome.

 It was… nice. You smiled and carried on.

 Had you ever truly smiled like that before…?

 Equestrians were equal parts horrible and amazing, you thought.

 It had only been a few weeks, but you were making headway in diplomatic meetings with the Princesses and their highest ranking ponies.

 The military minds in Celestia’s ranks were hard as stone, your charm meant nothing to them.

 Half their plans were about somehow forcing Changelings to kneel to Equestrian supremacy, or wiping them out altogether.

 Terrifying, amoral (at least by pony standards) and utterly ruthless. The Changeling in you respected and feared their tactics. Chrysalis was lucky the ponies did little more than kidnap her heir.

 The nobility were snobbish, uptight, and well… really, really racist.

 They would discuss you in private when they thought you weren’t around, as though you were a monster, a barely tamed beast. They would flash looks of distaste or outright hatred your way.

 You could hardly blame them, though. Your mother had done a number on the general public’s opinion of Changeling kind.

 Yet, ponies like Twilight were simply breathtaking. The way that their kindness radiated around them like an aura of magic was incredible to you.

 True love was alien to you, but you could truly feel it every time Rarity had measured you for a dress, or when Fluttershy had studied you intently as she took notes about your physiology. Even when Twilight glared at you when you did something rude at the table, you could feel her friendship manifesting in your chest.

 You were, slowly, becoming their friend.

 But the problem still remained regarding Rainbow Dash and Applejack. You doubted you’d ever get them to like you. It seemed every time you tried to approach them, their guard would raise. Applejack wouldn’t even speak to you.

 It was discouraging, but Rarity insisted that they would warm up to you eventually…

 Eventually.

 You laid comfortably on your bed within your chambers on an ‘off day’, reading some strange fiction book, when you heard a knock on your door.

“Come in!”

 You sat up and hid the book underneath your pillow as Twilight Sparkle stepped into the room.

 ”Hey, Anon!”

“Hello, Twilight. Did I forget there was a meeting today?”

 Twilight shook her head, “no no! I wanted to… you know, talk.”
“About?”
 She blushed and cleared her throat, “About um… Rainbow and Applejack.”
 Ah.
“I don’t think they want anything to do with me, Twilight. I’ve been trying to leave them be but-”
 ”Yes, I know… Exceeeept-”
“Except… what?”
 ”They actually showed up a few minutes ago in the dining room? They wanted to have breakfast and… talk.”
“Talk.”
 ”Yes.”
 Well, that was the second strangest thing to happen to you in the past month since your arrival in Equestria.
“Very well, but Twilight?”
 Twilight tilted her head curiously.
“Could you… come with me? I don’t want to be alone if things go wrong.”
 You were admittedly very nervous about approaching two of the strongest and fastest mares in Equestria for breakfast, especially because they hated your guts.
 ”Of course! I’d love nothing more, Anon.”
“Thanks, Twilight.”

 You arrived in the dining hall, prettied up and ready to meet your doom. Or new friends, if you did things right.
 Applejack and Rainbow Dash already sat at the table. Rainbow appeared greatly impatient, tapping her hoof on the table.
 ”Is she gonna show or what?” RD spoke, exasperated.
 ”Now now, sugarcube. She’s royalty, and royalty’s gonna take as long as it’ll take, darn it.” Applejack tipped her stetson down over her eyes, leaning back in her chair.
 You cleared your throat as you walked into earshot, and Rainbow’s ears twitched.
 ”Hey, girls,” Twilight smiled, “sorry it took so long, Anon was very nervo-”
“Hush.”
 You giggled and glanced nervously at Rainbow, who narrowed her eyes at you suspiciously.
 ”Riiight. Anyways, we’ve been waiting like fifteen minutes, so let’s chow down.”
 You nodded and sat next to Twilight at the large dining table. It was long, usually fit for a large banquet with a dozen seats. The four of you only took up a small portion of the table at one end.
 A servant of Princess Celestia trotted over shortly, and asked what you all would have to eat for breakfast.
 ”Hmm… I’ll have a hash brown sandwich, hold the olives!” You could tell Twilight resisted the urge to have a hayburger at 9 AM.
 ”Cloudsdale haycakes, extra syrup.” Rainbow Dash’s order was a supposed Equestrian classic. You’d expect nothing less of a Cloudsdale native.
 ”Ah’ll have some granny smith apple haycakes, hold the syrup… And a virgin cider.” Applejack, true to her name and heritage, ordered what you’d heard was a delicacy in Ponyville.
 ”And you, Princess Anon?”
“Um… Uh… Do you have ramen?”
 ”Ramen? Yes, we do have vegetable ramen. Would that suffice, your Highness?”

“Yes, it would. Thank you… uh, what’s your name?”
 ”Runny Yolk, your Highness.”
“Thank you, Runny Yolk. That’ll be fantastic.”
 The servant, Runny Yolk, blushed and bowed as she exited the dining hall.
 ”Well, ah’ve never heard of ‘ramen’ before. What is it?”
“It’s a type of noodle soup… The creatures that live in the Badlands, including Changelings, make all kinds of dishes, but Ramen is a classic import from Neighpon.”
 ”The Badlands is surprisingly diverse in its cuisine! Many of the airship port cities on its edges are a melting-pot of different cultures, not just Equestrian!” Twilight added, causing Rainbow Dash’s eyes to light up.
 ”Airships? I didn’t know the Badlands had airships! Hey, hey, Anon, do you have airships back home?”
 You blushed and smiled sheepishly.
“Not quite, but we do have an organic equivalent. We grow a special kind of fungus that serves different purposes in our hive, and one of the variants allows us to fly long distances without wingpower from drones.”
 ”Uh, wow. Fungus, huh?” Rainbow raised a brow, “I thought you, like, Iunno, made drones do everything. Like, genetic experimentation n’ stuff?”
“Not quite… Some hives do have drones perform more literal roles, but the Badlands Hive is a militaristic society… at least, compared to Equestria.”
 ”Militaristic? So ya’ll have, uh… soldiers, rather than citizens?” Applejack asked. You could tell she was trying her best.
“Yes, we have a 70% soldier drone population. We have different types that inhabit a corresponding legion. Such as the scout legion that survey lands and explore new places, or the zephyr legion that is composed of our fastest flying drones.
 ”Wait, you have a whole ‘legion’ thingy for fast flyers?!” Rainbow grinned excitedly.
“Well, yes. But I doubt any of them could keep up with the likes of you, RD… Pony wings are far superior for speed, while ‘ling wings are well adjusted to precision flight.”
 ”Aw man! Well, maybe I can be the judge someday when you guys achieve peace or whatever.”
 You smiled at that. RD: Won over.
 Applejack didn’t seem especially impressed, however.
 ”So what’s the other 30% of yer drone population?” she asked.
“Oh! Well, a hive is nothing without our workers. We have love collectors, shopkeepers, nobility. farmers… We do have a small gathering of performers as well, for Chrysalis’ and the nobility’s amusement.
 ”Ah see. Well, why do ya gotta farm if ya’ll feed off love?”
“Love, among other emotive energies, is a nutritional requirement for drones and for royals like myself magically. Drones would die without at least a little bit. But food has plenty of nutrients that ensure we perform at our best physically. Without certain vitamins, our chitin would grow brittle. However, the hive only has a small percentage of farmers, so we ration our food to a daily requirement rather than eating freely as ponies do.
 ”Interestin’… Sounds like Changeling life is tough, Princess. Maybe ponies can help ya’ll with that someday soon.”
 You sighed in relief as AJ’s gaze softened.
 Now you just had to get through the rest of breakfast without any incidents…

 Applejack and Rainbow Dash had left a little later in the day to return to their quarters. They'd further warmed to you, and things ended on a good note, thank the Gods.
 Twilight had enjoyed herself as well, laughing often and proposing ideas that could improve your hive's way of living someday.
 You had returned to your quarters and instantly sat on your haunches in front of the door.
 A glint of the metallic necklace around your neck caught your eye, and you hissed pitifully.
 You and the ponies agreed you'd keep your hive-mind suppressed until further notice, to ensure Chrysalis would not come after you. It beat the yoke that weighed you down, and it was beautiful, but you felt so… alone. No voices in the back of your mind chittering away, no buzz of the hive's activity. Even under Chrysalis's iron hoof, life was good.
 But it wasn't good, was it? You'd been suppressed, lied to, and taken for granted for your entire life.
 Your mother mistreated you, your drones pitied you. You were weak, but just a couple more months… Just 2 more months, you would fully mature into a Queen!
 You could take your revenge, you… you…
 You would only disappoint your new friends by doing that. You knew revenge was not the answer, but the clearer your mind became, the more you hurt!
 The hive mind was poisonous to you, because your mother was at the center of it all! And you MISSED it! How could you miss being controlled, watched and shouted at day by day?
 "Anon?! Are you okay? Anon!"
 You only realized after you heard Twilight's voice on the other side of the door that you had been crying.
 Wiping your tears away, you stood up and called raggedly to Twilight.
"I'm okay, Twilight!"
 "I'm coming in, Anon!"
 A moment later and the door burst open with a flash of purple magic, and Twilight gazed upon you with alarm, then sadness.
 "Anon-"
"Don't say it… I know I'm…"
 You shuddered a sigh, flopping onto your rear. Twilight sat next to you, a wing over your back.
 "You're what?"
"Pathetic. I didn't want anypony to see me like this… But I just miss my hive, Twilight. I'm… homesick."
 Twilight sighed.
"I know, how could I? How could I miss it? It was the only thing I ever knew, and I see now it was horrible!"
 "Anon, you were subject to abuse for your whole life…"
"A-Abuse…"
 "In Equestria, when a pony is mistreated, we call it abuse. There's different kinds, but at the end of the day, it's wrong. It's common to feel like it was your fault, or to feel like you want to go back to that… But it's never your fault, Anon. And you never have to go back, we won't let Chrysalis hurt you again."
 You leaned into Twilight… And let yourself cry. For so long you had figured that life was normal and fine. Now, Equestria has taught you so much.
 Equestria taught you friendship, love and comfort. It's taught you right from wrong… Mostly.
 You've had a chance to learn things your Mother and the hive never would have taught you. And

now, away from the clutches of those that hurt you… You can begin to heal.

 You looked down at the necklace as you cried, and you smiled despite the tears.

 It’d be a long road, but you’d be okay.

 You had a chance to fix everything the Queendoms destroyed. Whether you’d march with Equestria’s armies or talk down their diplomats, you’d be able to save Changelings… You’d be able to save your home.

 Except… that wasn’t your home anymore. Even after liberating your drones someday, too many bad memories echoed in the halls of the Badlands hive.

 Equestria was your home now. And you hoped that you would be strong enough to protect it.

“Thank you… For everything…”

 ”It’s what friends are for, Anon… We’ll always be here to support you.”

 You’d fight the sun itself to keep these ponies safe.

A1 - P7

 You remembered your childhood all too well, despite the fog cast over your memories by your Mother’s influence.
 When you were but a nymph, you had been taught the cruel ways of the Badlands Hive.
 You stood in your Mother’s throne room 15 years ago, the eerie green lighting adding unease to the tantrum she was throwing.
 She had dismissed the guards and the servants… But not you.
 Ever loyal to your Queen-Mother, you stood at attention as she blasted the walls of the throne room and stomped rubble into dust.
 ”How dare those little… INSECTS!” she roared, wings flaring as she blasted the wall behind you with a beam of sickly green energy.
 ”Tell me, Anon, dear… What do you think those pitiful excuses for drones should have done instead?” Chrysalis spat.
 You hesitated, throat dry from fear. She was quizzing you…
 ”TELL ME NOW!” she screeched, prompting you to cover your head in terror.
“I- they should have checked to see if they were followed, Mother! They were careless and let the ponies follow them!”
 Chrysalis beamed, but it was not a kind smile in the slightest.
 ”Good, good my dear. You are at least a step above those grubs, following basic common sense! The last thing I need is a stupid heir!”
 You were too terrified to smile. Mother was in a terrible mood…
 ”We will need to make the proper preparations, lest those ponies find our hive.”
 Your mother quickly pinged the guard captain, Captain Vysevus, over the hive mind.
 [Vysevus, get your best! Double the guard around all hive entrances! I want our brightest mages on disguising the spire! DOUBLE TIME!]
 You slowly backed away from your Mother as she was distracted by her conversation with her guard captain.
 Slinking away, you overheard one last command before you forced yourself to drown out the hive mind…
 [And have those sad excuses for scouts recycled IMMEDIATELY! Perhaps whatever is left of their husks will better serve the hive as barricades!]
 You knew what horrible things awaited those who disobeyed or defied the hive; recycling chief among them.
 If a drone or unworthy heir defied Queen Chrysalis to the highest order, they would be recycled. Their bodies would be repurposed post-mortem to serve the hive in other ways…
 You’d been subjected to seeing the results of it. Chitin would be sewn into armor, walls and other such things. Meat would be used as bait for Sand Skimmers or wild animals to be tamed.
 Half the walls of the hive were made of the chitin of traitorous or unworthy drones, displayed as trophies.
 Back when you were a nymph, you had no concept of how horrific such a practice was. It was simply how things worked.

 Now, though… You knew how barbaric your mother truly was.

 You had been drowned in the terror of your memories when you felt a gentle touch.
 ”Anon! Anon, it’s okay! You’re safe. Please wake up, Anon!”
 Your eyes shot open and you let out a violent sob, barely comprehending anything save fear.
 Senses were overwhelmed, swimming in a current stronger than themselves.
 ”Anon, focus on my voice.”
 You recognized the speaker’s tone, but your mind barely comprehended it as you tried to slow your breathing.
 It took several long minutes before you felt okay enough to open your teary eyes.
 Twilight Sparkle sat before you, holding your hooves and murmuring comforting words.
 You were both on your bed, the blankets a mess and tears staining the pillow next to you.
“Twilight… I’m sorry.”
 ”Don’t you dare apologize, Anon. You’re hurting, and I want to help you. I want to be here.”
 Your mind tried to catch up after your episode. Among all of your concerns, Twilight being in your room while you slept was… well, it was a big one.
“Twilight… Why are you here? N-Not because I don’t want you here, but… I’m just confused.”
 Twilight laughed a little and patted one of your hooves.
 ”You fell asleep after our talk. I didn’t want to leave, and I didn’t have any duties for the day, so… I stayed. I hope that was alright.”
 You blushed a tad, but Twilight didn’t seem to notice. You fell asleep in the middle of the afternoon after crying to a pony about your problems.
 Equestria had certainly changed you, if you were only a little embarrassed about that!
 ”Anon?”
“I’m okay! It’s okay. Thanks for staying with me, Twilight. I think I needed the rest…”
 ”If that’s the case, maybe you wouldn’t be opposed to dinner?”
“Dinner? Is it that late already?!”
 You bolted upwards, and Twilight grabbed your shoulder.
 ”No! It’s okay, Anon. We’re not late for anything! Actually… I was hoping to share something new with you.”
“Huh? New?”
 You had no idea what that could possibly mean.
 ”There’s an old restaurant I used to visit when I was studying here in Canterlot as a filly. The best hayburgers and fries bits can buy! I know you don’t get any real magical benefits from eating physical food, but I know you’d still enjoy getting out of the castle for a while, right?”
 You smiled at that, and nodded.
“I’d enjoy that, Twilight… It’ll be nice to explore more of the city.”
 ”Then let’s get ready! I’ll see you at the gates in 30 minutes, okay?”
“Sounds like a plan.”

 You had prettied yourself up for the occasion. You hadn’t been outside of the castle gates since your arrival, and you’d been excited to see the city without crowds gawking at you inside of a cage.
 You sat on a bench in the royal gardens near the gates, watching fireflies buzz about a particularly sickly sweet smelling bush.
 In the Badlands, few insects had been so small or harmless. Fireflies certainly didn’t exist, but large killer bugs (that weren’t Changelings) that could kill a full sized stallion with ease did.

 It was a refreshing change of pace that not everything in these lands tried to kill you on sight.
 As you observed the sweet bush and its occupants, you heard hooves behind you.
 Turning, you saw an alabaster coated unicorn stallion, with a luxurious blonde mane and tail.
 He was dressed to the nines in a velvety blue suit and bow-tie, and had a glint in his icy blue eyes that told you he was bad news.
 ”M’lady… er… I presume?” He stumbled over his words a bit, unsure of how to refer to you. You snorted a bit, a bit offended at his tip-toeing around.
“Princess Anon, and you are?”
 ”Prince Blueblood, m’lady,” he bowed slightly to you, but his eyes held dishonesty. You could taste his heart was dark with a mixture of long-seeded jealousy and a pampered upbringing.
 Why the stallion was jealous, you hadn’t the slightest clue.
“And why, exactly, do you deign to approach me, Princeling?” you sneered. You knew he wasn’t there for any particularly good reason, and you truly wanted to get the politicking over with before your mood was spoiled for the evening.
 Scoffing a bit at your attitude, Blueblood cleared his throat, taking on a nastier tone.
 ”I come with tidings from the Blueblood family. You are to meet my father, Lord Blueblood, at his estate tomorrow afternoon, one ‘o clock sharp… Assuming you don’t burn in the sun, vampire.”
 Your eyes burned with rage as you snarled, but you did not strike the pathetic stallion, nor cast in his direction. Instead, you reminded yourself that you are not your mother. You tactfully took a page from Celestia’s book, and smiled.
 Seeing you go from angry to eerily calm caused the stallion to swallow nervously. You spoke with a steady tone as he glanced at your horn.
“Very well… I will be there at the specified time.”
 ”Delightful, your Highness,” Blueblood reasserted his confidence, upon realizing you would not be attacking him… yet. He licked his lips and departed with haste, looking back a couple times to ensure you weren’t going to attack.
 Oh, you so desired to rip out his neck meat and suck the love and life out of the pathetic whelp, but you were on thin ice. You had been on civil grounds with Equestrian royalty thus far, and you had been making great strides in learning how their culture works as well.
 You were not a murderer, despite your residual urges. You were not your mother.
 You’d daresay that your heart-to-heart with Princess Twilight was incredibly pony-ish of you.
 Just weeks prior that would have disgusted you beyond measure… But you truly believed ponies and Changelings weren’t so different after all.
 You could unify ponies and Changelings, but you weren’t about to take any abuse to do it.
 Regardless of your mercy, ponies would fear you, perhaps forever.
 No matter what you did, you would always be a monster to at least one.
 Sighing as Blueblood disappeared out of the gates, you looked down to your holey hooves and noticed that the distance between your hooves and your eyes was growing larger. Only another month, Anon… And you would be fit for your crown.
 It wasn’t uncommon for Changeling Princesses to leave their hives before becoming a full Queen ‘ling; many hives encouraged this, as expansion was typically more important to the Queens’ Summit than a hive coup.
 You had decided days ago that you would build your hive here, in Equestria. Assuming that the Princesses would allow it at all. You had a few ideas for where you could build a bustling, successful hive.
 However, that was many moons off. Perhaps many years. You, as a Changeling Queen, could live

to at least ten-thousand years as the Queens of the Old Hives… Presuming that war did not lead you to a quick death.
 Most modern Queens could live to a few centuries, or a few thousand years if they were smart enough.
 Chrysalis had never directly mentioned her own age, but you could guess she'd lived at least a thousand, judging by her knowledge of the Eclipse War so long before your time.
 Either way, you had time to wait for Equestria to forget the horrors of Chrysalis's invasion before building your hive.
 You were nourished well enough by the passive affection and fond respect of the Equestrian Princesses, and by Twilight's friends.
 It was no lavish meal by any means, but it kept you relatively pony-like in your appearance. Certainly a step above how you'd felt and looked in your cage…

 "Anon!" Twilight's voice rang clear from the palace doors. She trotted closer, and you almost stared a bit too long at the pony Princess's appearance.
 Twilight was gorgeous. Not in a fancy way, mind you. She wore a regalia that you'd only seen her wear twice.
 Once, when you first arrived in Canterlot. The second time was when you'd announced your loyalty to the Equestria-Changeling peace initiative.
 Twilight hadn't done anything too special, but she had an odd sparkle in her mane you'd not seen before, as well as a faint glow to her coat.
 Clearly, she had wanted to impress you.
 You tasted the air discreetly, and hummed curiously.
 Twilight tasted… Well, you weren't sure what she tasted like. It was obviously some sort of positive emotion, as the closer she got the more invigorated you felt.
 Beyond that, you were clueless. Must be an odd pony thing?
"Twilight."
 You acknowledged the Princess respectfully, and stood to your hooves.
 "Shall we get going?" she asked with a smile.
"Yes, we shall."
 You motioned for Twilight to go ahead of you, and she shook her head.
 "Let's walk together, Anon. I don't want you to feel like a stranger, and we may get looks if you're just following behind me like some sort of prisoner…"
"You want to send a message to them."
 "Yes. That you're not our enemy, and you have the trust of my… crown."
 You raised a brow, and smiled.
"You don't like being a Princess?"
 Twilight sighed as you both walked side-by-side through the front gates of the castle.
 "I do recall mentioning I'm not exactly experienced at all this to you before. The truth is, I've only a bit under a year of experience, and I'm on the same level as two ponies with thousands of years of experience."

 You nodded, understanding. Time was still strange for Twilight; a year of immortality. She must have been thinking such terrible things. She'd outlive her friends, she'd even outlive you one day. It's a lot to get used to. Not even you were prepared to lose your first drones… You were only 20, it'd take another lifetime to lose any drones, as their lifespans were similar to that of a pony.

 ”I’m… scared. I didn’t ask for this, any of this. I…”
“You will not be alone.”
 ”What?”
 Twilight looked up at you, shocked to see your steely gaze forward.
“You will not be alone. I will… remain by your side, Twilight.”
 ”What do you mean, Anon?”
 You looked at her, a small smile breaking your determined look slightly.
“I will live a long, long time, Twilight. Gods willing. I would be honored to be your friend, until my time comes.”
 Twilight’s eyes widened. There it is, that strange feeling again… What is that?
 ”Thank you, Anon…”
 You nodded, and continued. It was only then you’d noticed ponies giving you a wide berth.
 Ponies were even taking photos of you and Twilight, or whispering to each other.
 You felt a snarl rising in your throat, but Twilight placed a hoof on your shoulder.
 ”Anon, don’t… Just ignore them. You get used to it.”
“You’re telling me these leeches can just… do that?!”
 You growl lowly, but keep walking after giving a particularly ballsy photographer a nasty look.
 ”It’s against the law for private parties, but I’m a public figure now. It’s a shady thing, and they do it to the- other Princesses too… We just have to live with it, I’m afraid. At least, as long as you’re with me publicly.”
 You squinted at that.
“I will stay.”
 You kept your other thoughts to yourself on that. In the hive, your mother would simply kill whatever drone stepped out of line and keep their carapace for a barricade.
 Equestria was a surprisingly free triumvirate, you thought with equal parts bitterness and respect.
 Ponies could do whatever they liked, compared to your suffocating existence of scheduled training and sleeping otherwise. Drones did not even have the freedom to choose their destiny, but in Equestria anypony, or anyone for that matter could choose their fate.
 And, you suppose, some ponies choose to lead miserable lives feeding off others…
 Ironic in your case.

 The restaurant was… well, it was colorful, to say the least.
 The smell in the air was distinct and greasy, you could feel your arteries clogging from merely stepping hoof into the establishment.
 The branding on nearly everything was tacky and strange, depicting a stallion dressed in a cow’s outfit with the bubble lettering “Heel’s Hayburgers”.
 You looked to Twilight, unsure of how to proceed. Twilight smiled at you warmly. That unfamiliar feeling slipping off of the mare made it feel like your chest was about to explode…
 ”So, the menu is up on that board there. Order anything you like! I’ve got the funds for the whole darn menu, actually..” Twilight grinned and hummed, eyes hungrily scrying the menu.
 The menu was incredibly diverse, with many varieties of ‘hayburgers’, ‘fries’ and desserts available. A couple stood out to you; a hayburger with basil and avocado toppings, or a Neighpon special… As familiar as those felt to you, Twilight’s earlier statement came back to you.
 ’I was hoping to share something new with you.’
 There was that odd feeling this time, but it wasn’t coming from Twilight.

 Determined, you had made your choice.
 You stepped up to the cash register, Twilight following behind you, and glanced down (yes, down! You were definitely taller these days!) at the cashier.
“I’ll have…!”
 The cashier gulped at your intense tone, clearly intimidated by your size and… well, you being a changeling.
”Two triple trouble hayburgers.”
 ”U-Uhm, just the sandwiches? O-Or, a combo m-meal?”
 You hummed in thought, then grinned, unintentionally baring your fangs.
“I will have the ‘combo meal’, thank you.”
 Twilight chuckled awkwardly, “I’ll have a triple trouble myself! Oooh, and maybe add a chocolate sundae? Oh! And an extra order of large fries on that triple trouble…”
 Twilight rattled on for a bit longer, to the point you were moderately concerned if the two of you could eat all of that greasy food.
 Oh hoof it! Tonight was clearly special to the alicorn somehow, and you wouldn’t spoil that. You smiled and waited for Twilight to finish her order.

 The restaurant had been fairly packed when you and Twilight arrived.
 Now, it was nearly empty.
 You tried not to believe that you’d scared everypony off, but you couldn’t shake the feeling a month’s worth of public appearances and diplomatic meetings wouldn’t exactly help things.
 It didn’t take much longer for the food to be brought out by a lithe, shaking mare. She couldn’t have been much older than yourself and Twilight as she placed the food down, and quickly retreated back into the kitchen…
 Sighing, you looked down at the delicious-smelling food wrapped in paper.
 You couldn’t help but wonder why the food was wrapped… Was it some sort of… challenge? It didn’t appear very challenging to unwrap. In fact, it could be some sort of-
 The crinkling of paper made you look back up at Twilight, who’d already dug into her burger and eaten nearly half of her first order of fries while you were busy thinking… No, not thinking. Hesitating.
 Twilight noticed you staring a moment later, and a slight blush colored her cheeks.
 ”Ah, you just… unwrap it. The wrapper keeps the juice from dripping, see?” Twilight levitated her burger a little higher, and you smiled nervously.
“I see…”
 You shook off your nerves and levitated your own wrapped burger, carefully folding the paper down around the hot food item. It smelled alien, but absolutely bucking delicious nonetheless.
 You nervously wrapped your mouth around it, bit down, and flavor exploded in your mouth.
“Mmm!”
 You giggled and took another bite, then another. It was amazing!
 ”Good, huh?” Twilight smiled, her blush deepening.
“Very-”
 You swallowed your current bite and chuckled.
“Very much so. Thank you for bringing me to this place.”
 ”It’s my favorite, ever since I was a filly… Mother always brought me here after a magic exam… Of course, after she got sick, Shiny started bringing me instead.”
 You furrowed your brow.

“Sick?”
 Twilight’s expression fell a bit at that.
 ”My mother, Twilight Velvet was her name… She fell ill when I was 9, just a few years after Princess Celestia took me under her wing. Cancer.”
“I’m… I’m so sorry, Twilight. We don’t need to talk about it.”
 Twilight shook her head fervently.
 ”No, no! It’s alright, Anon. I’m pretty much over it… I’m just sad she never got to see Shiny’s wedding, or my coronation…”
 At each listed mention of a major event in her life, Twilight became sadder, until she became quiet.
 You didn’t dig any deeper, and simply continued your meal in silence.

 You and Twilight had left the establishment quickly following your meal.
 The streets had become much quieter since you’d entered, and the few ponies who remained didn’t give you or Twilight any trouble.
 You had felt horrible about Twilight’s mother. Perhaps foolish as well, since you’d mentioned how your relationship with your own mother was poisoned with abuse and manipulation before.
 Sighing, you steeled yourself for your final attempt to comfort the downcast mare.
“Changelings… When an honorable changeling passes on and is buried by their kin, they are sent to the spirits of the First Mothers for eternal life, to watch over future generations. They become a part of the Great Menagerie, the spirit hive, able to be called upon by future Queens or drones who seek their wisdom…”
 Twilight, though downtrodden, appeared fascinated.
“I have no doubt that though pony traditions are different, Twilight Velvet lives on. Her lessons imparted upon many, and her actions impactful. She lives on eternally in those who loved her, and wherever she is now… Your mother is proud of who you have become.”
 Sniffling. You had made Twilight cry. Yet sadness did not waft from the mare. Instead, some sort of happiness had begun to slip off of her in droves.
 ”Thank you, Anon. I feel so silly, it’s been 12 years, but I… I can’t help wondering what she’d think of me now. How she would have reacted about my ascension, what she’d think of my friends.”
 You hummed, and looked up at the full moon above Canterlot. It was brightly glowing, moonbeams shining down through the streets and reflecting a silvery glow like a blanket.
 More notably, you gazed at the stars. So many… your first drone nanny had always said that the stars were the Great Menagerie’s manifestation in the physical realm, a reminder that even for a long-lived Queen, she had much to learn. ‘Yes, your highness. Even your mother has lessons to learn from the Queens of old!’ she’d chided after you asserted Chrysalis was perfect.

 You recall mentioning that to Chrysalis later, and not seeing that nanny again.

 With a sentimental twist in your guts, you couldn’t help but wonder if the Great Menagerie was more than just changelings. You wondered if ponies also went to the skies when they passed, to live on as stars who watched over dreaming ponies, changelings, griffons all…
 It was a soft thought, the remaining voice of your mother squawked at you. A pathetic sentiment. Only the honorable and worthy were to be given burial rights. And a Queen’s word was law… You felt sick at the thought that so many changelings deemed ‘too soft’ for a proper burial were denied their afterlife, hung and sewn into the walls of the hive. Bound forevermore to the

earthly plane.

- You had been glad you didn’t mention that particular detail to Twilight.
- Were artists, poets, bards and common drones too soft to be allowed entrance to the Great Menagerie? This wasn’t right. It was not a Queen, no matter how old or wise, that should have been able to decide who was allowed peace in death.
- You sighed softly as you refocused yourself.
- After you finished with your Mother, you’d burn every inch of that accursed hive. Not for revenge, you reminded yourself… But to bring the dead, and yourself, the peace they deserved.