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.

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