

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... Exceeecept-”

“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, lunno, 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.
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Revision #1

Created 2024-04-26 00:18:17 UTC by oblivvys

Updated 2024-04-26 00:23:36 UTC by oblivvys