

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."
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- 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."
- Sniffing. 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.
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