



Patchwork

By Mbulst

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Foreword

To you, my dear Reader,

Organization! Oh, how I love that word. Arranging things in their proper place, and bringing the chaos of life into order. I have always been a proponent for neatness, as you may well know. I was, for a long time, the librarian of the Ponyville Central Library. And when I came back to Canterlot years ago, I took up similar duties for their University libraries. For hours I would walk amongst the shelves of books whose pages overflowed with unlearned knowledge, waiting for the willing recipient. And I loved nothing more than attending to them, ensuring they remained in their proper place, and re-shelving them when ponies came through to browse. And, of course, reading them!

Organization!

It is because of that very compulsion of mine that we are now here, me writing this note to you, and you eagerly awaiting to discover what lies within the pages of this book. Fear not! I won't take too long. I would never dream of keeping an excited reader from the adventure of their newest find in the library, but I do have a few things I would like you to know about these hallowed pages before you plunge into the story.

I was recently digging through the dark dusty corners of our archives at the Canterlot University Library, trying to bring some order to the mess. The archives are in horrible disarray, something I have been trying to rectify for many years now, and I was turning over boxes and opening drawers in the hopes of clearing the clutter while at the same time attempting to find some small diversion from the boring tedium of normalcy. It was then that I found the work you now hold in your hands. It wasn't a book then; it was a series of small diaries that were bound together with a piece of string, and stuck to a small letter that was addressed to me. The letter, as well as the diaries were written by a pony very dear to my heart, and the book you are about to read is a compilation of those diaries. I have put them together into a single bound volume and segmented the whole thing in to chapters. I feel that his is a story worth telling, even if it's just to entertain those who find themselves browsing through the library on a rainy afternoon.

Quill Paiges, the pony who wrote this, always kept a diary. In fact, in all the years I knew him, I never saw him without one of those infernal tiny books. He never let me read them, of course, the jerk.

But now, many years later, he has passed on to greener pastures, and left his diaries for me to find. The letter that accompanied these invited me to finally understand a part of his story; a time in his life he had never told me about. Perhaps I will print the letter in the back of this book, so you can understand more about the kind of character Quill was. But I think it is more fun to delve into this particular book without knowing anything about him.

In any case, I hope you can enjoy the story he wove in his diaries, the story you now hold. "Patchwork" is a book that is difficult to place. On one hoof, one could say it is an eyewitness account (straight from the horses mouth, as it were) of a series of events that shouldn't have happened. On the other hoof, these diaries could be viewed as an entirely fictitious account of events that never happened. After all, the story written here is one that is difficult to believe.

For what it is worth, I believe it. I believe every word.

But whether or not you choose to believe this story, I hope that you can at least enjoy it for what it is: a good read. Quill always did have a way with words, and I hope that this book serves his memory well.

Happy Reading!

-Princess Twilight Sparkle

Chapter 1

I'd be the first to admit that I've done some... shall we say, *morally questionable* things in my past. I've stolen things, lied to others, and even faked my own death. Yes, I've even killed a few ponies. And though it may seem like an extremely lame excuse, I never wanted to do any of those things. Believe me, whoever you are, when I say that none of these things would have happened if I had been given the choice. I want to make sure you understand that. I would never, of my own will, murder innocent ponies. I would never, just because I wanted to, break in to somepony's house and steal things. But I have, and I just want to justify that to you right now.

It wasn't my choice.

You may be wondering what you're reading, or why you're reading it. It's difficult to explain, so I'll say it outright: I'm afraid for my life. No, that's not it. I've been afraid for my life for almost a year now. I don't just fear my own death. I fear for the future of all of Equestria. I fear for the lives of every pony living today.

This probably still doesn't make sense. Here I am rambling on about my regrets and my fears when you don't even understand the position I'm in. I guess I should start somewhere more basic.

My name is Quill. It's not much of a name, but it's mine, and I like it. A name is a part of who you are as an individual, and for the past year I haven't been able to use it. I've been forced to take up a new name, and erase my past. But more on that in a moment. I just want you to know my name. Just the very fact that I can write it here fills me with hope.

Damn, now I'm making even less sense. I guess all the pressure I've been under for the past year has finally taken its toll on me. Even as I write this, I cannot help but glance over my shoulder at every noise I hear, afraid that I've been discovered by those who might want me dead; those who might already know that I'm writing this.

Excuses, excuses.

It's my job, you see?

Sometimes I regret accepting that promotion. It seemed like such an amazing opportunity at the time. I had worked for a while as a detective in the Canterlot law enforcement precinct. It was a rather cushy job; working in the Capital of the grand nation of Equestria. I was surrounded by other unicorns (magic is really helpful when it comes to enforcing the law), so I didn't stick out. Security was tight there, what with the royal castle sitting smack dab in the middle of the city and all. No pony in their right mind would ever try anything there. And, working so close to royalty, our pay grades were a cut above the rest. When you boiled it down to the very basics, I was being paid top dollar to lounge about all day at a desk and do absolutely nothing. You'd have to be crazy to throw that away.

Maybe I'm crazy, then.

I'll never forget the day I was offered a position in the Canterlot Investigation Agency. I'd been scouted by their recruitment office because of my credentials. Now *those* are something to brag about. Top of my class at a private high school (two years only), and a full ride scholarship to Canterlot Central University. Graduated there at the top of my class also, with a degree in Criminal Psychology. That also took two years. *Two Years?* They'd asked me when I told them how long I planned to take getting my degree. *Unheard of!* They were incredulous. Easy as cake, I'd told them. I had a mind for books, my momma had always said. And mothers are rarely wrong.

A tall imposing stallion dressed in a black suit and dark sunglasses had called upon me that day to meet with him and my boss in the main office. They said they'd scouted me because of my educational background. They told me that I was wasting my talent by taking a desk job in the Capital. It was absolutely true, of course. But I had a long time ahead of me. I was the youngest officer in the precinct, and I had only worked there for a few months. I was already ahead of every pony my age; I had graduated Central University in two years, I was among the youngest in my class and I had even received my cutie mark earlier than all the others in my elementary school. Compared to all the others on the police force, I was a mere foal. But I was used to being the youngest. It made me feel special. Nice little Ego boost. Every teacher and mentor figure in my life had always told me I was destined for greatness. To be honest, I was willing to settle for what I

had. Was it so bad that all I wanted was to laze about and make money by doing nothing, at least for a little while? Seriously, I couldn't have asked for a better job.

But then they offered me that position. *Think about it*, that stallion had told me. *A CIA Agent. You'd be the youngest operative in the history of the Agency!* I did think about it. I thought real hard. Leave my easy job here for some hard field work? Leave the comforts of a city I had always lived in to get my hooves dirty as a part of the most powerful government-funded agency?

Well, the choice wasn't really that difficult. Not when I was told how much more money I would be making. Money, money, money. That's all anypony cares about anymore. Money, as they say, is the lifeblood of the community and those who have it in excess will always rise above the rest. Money is power, money is happiness. And as much as it pains me to admit, the large number of zeros attached to my projected entry-level salary proved impossible to resist. As for what I would be doing exactly, well, that was apparently classified. But I paid it no mind. If they'd scouted me for my talents, that meant they thought I could handle whatever they threw at me. And with a payroll like the one I would be earning, I figured it was worth the risk.

Now, nearly a year later, I'm beginning to have my doubts.

No, scratch that. I had my doubts the moment I joined. The moment the true nature of my job was revealed to me. But by then, I was theirs. They had their claws in me so deep, nothing short of my own death could free me.

Officially, I'm just like any other CIA agent. My job title is designated "Operative," and the one document that proves my existence lists my job description as "investigative duties, assigned case-by-case by the Agency." I suppose that's somewhat true. Of course, the paperwork is only for show. It doesn't really mean anything at all. There isn't even a space in my profile for a picture, my real name, my birthplace, or even my age (lucky thing on that last one, though. If even a single soul found out a pony my age was working for a top government agency, there'd be an uproar). The reason, of course, is that most of my duties are "unofficial." I work for the CIA, but my duties aren't put on record. The only documents related to me are basically

useless. As far as paperwork is concerned, none of my missions have ever happened. It's all one big damn secret.

A secret I can't keep anymore.

There's no real name for what I do. No official name, anyway. That's just how it works when you get down to the real nitty-gritty. The kind of stuff nopony wants to talk about. The kind of stuff that would sink the CIA if anypony found out about it. But the other operatives in the Agency have their own word for agents like me:

Patchers.

It's a really cute name right? And it's got this awesome double-meaning to it too.

Mostly they call us that because of the patches we wear over our Marks. A Cutie Mark is a pony's most distinguishable feature. Slapped right there on our flanks, they proclaim to the world who we are and what we do. But that isn't exactly the best thing to have for ponies in my line of work. Patchers like me need to have a certain degree of... *anonymity*. See, the CIA has this really nice policy they work under when dealing with us Patchers. It *also* has a cute name. They call it "plausible deniability." The top officials in my organization love coming up with big words that mean simple things. This "plausible deniability" basically means that everything I do is supposedly unknown to them. I get my orders from them, all right, it's a fact. They tell me what to do and I do it. But there's nothing to prove it. No paperwork, no records, nothing. Every piece of parchment I get from them involving my orders or my missions is memorized and then burned. Any paperwork involving my existence in the organization doesn't even have my real name on it, just my Agent designation number (mine is "six"). That's not all, though. When I joined, they shaved my mane, dyed my tail, patched my Mark over (a painful process, let me tell you; sewing cloth into your skin is about as pleasurable as it sounds), and issued me a pair of super cool-looking sunglasses that hide my eyes. I'm faceless, featureless, and nameless. Any records of my life, including things like educational degrees and birth certificates were destroyed when I was recruited. If I'm exposed during any of my missions, if I get caught, there's nothing to tie me to the CIA. Hell, there's nothing proving that I even exist. As far as anypony can

tell from records and paperwork, Quill Paiges was never born. The CIA can deny any knowledge of my existence *and get away with it*.

But why, you ask, would they want to deny it?

We'll that's because of that double-meaning I was talking about. The true nature of my job. Like any other CIA agent, my primary task is to investigate serious crimes. The CIA was put in place by the Equestrian government to aid local police forces across the country with the most extreme criminal cases. My branch of the CIA, however, the branch that supposedly *doesn't exist*, deals with a completely different kind of security. It's called "Information Security." Another cute name. And like those pretty little titles I've been dropping in the past few lines, this one's nice and insidious.

Basically, my job is to cover things up. To hide things my Agency deems "unfit for public knowledge."

And that's really what a "patch" is, right? You've got a hole in your clothes, and you need to cover it, so you get a piece of cloth and you stitch it in. The hole's covered, problem solved! That's my job in a nutshell. I'm given a hole in society, an unpleasant event or a particularly dangerous individual, even accidents the CIA has made, and I cover them up with sweet little stories and lies. Maybe I have to bribe a witness, or kill a potential leak. Maybe I've got to shred paperwork, or burn down houses. I do what I have to do to make sure they are never seen again. Stitch by stitch, bit by bit, I sew a patch of lies over the ugly holes in Equestria. Then I step back and admire my handiwork. Are there any more holes? Did I do a good job? Does this look cheesy? Let's fix that story, let's bribe one more policehorse. Snip, Snip, stitch, stitch. Oh, make sure that cloth folds nicely! Don't want the patch to stand out!

I'm done with it. I'm done with all of it.

There comes a point in your life when you just have to stand up and say enough is enough. I've worked as a Patcher for a year now, and I can't do it anymore. I'm through with the lies and the story. I'm through with the killing and the burning. I've seen and done so many things in the past year that I wish I hadn't. I've had to kill ponies. *Kill*. Think about that. Could you take the life of another pony? Could you lift a knife and slash out the throat of a police officer who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time?

Could you swing a hammer upon the head of an innocent stallion who knows too much? Whatever your answer, at least you get to think about it. Whether I want to or not, when I'm ordered to kill, I kill. I have no choice.

I never wanted to kill.

You know what else I never wanted to do? Lie. I'm not talking about those fibs you give your mother when you're little. "Yes, mum, I brushed my teeth!" "Yes, I did my homework!" I'm not talking about telling your date that horrid dress she's wearing "doesn't make her look fat." I'm talking about massive, complicated, involved lies. The kind of lies that could get you in deep shit if anyone found out you were lying.

But the lies are part of the Patcher's job.

So why, you ask, don't I just quit? Just leave, just hand in your badge and your glasses, and leave. If you can't take the heat, get out of the kitchen. You're not cut out for the work you've been given. What will the CIA do? They can't do anything.

But that's the thing. They *can*. And believe me when I say, *they will*.

Legally speaking, I can leave at any time. No group, official or otherwise, can force an employee to stay. It's against the law. It's very clearly stated all Equestrian law books. But the CIA doesn't really follow the law. Hell, just look at my job. I break all sorts of laws as part of my everyday routine and I get paid absurd amounts of money in the process. Strictly speaking, my very existence is against the law. So why should the CIA follow the law when dealing with its Agents? Well let me tell you, *they don't*.

Let's say I were to leave, then. Let's say I were to walk to the main office in Canterlot, march right up to my boss and say, "I quit." What would happen? Well, my boss would turn to me and take my badge and my ID, and probably tell me that it was a pleasure working with me. She'd draw up the paperwork, and I would sign it and everything would be fine. Officially, that is.

You want to know what would happen *unofficially*?

You want to know what would happen behind the scenes? Behind those lovely Patches the CIA have strung up across Equestria? Under the lies and stories of a corrupt government organization?

I would be dead.

That's right, dead. I would probably head home in my expensive horse drawn carriage. I would trot up to my front door and unlock it, go inside and turn on my lights. Maybe I'd start up a nice dinner on my stove, humming to myself while cooking. Maybe I'd even make it to my bed for the night before they come. Maybe I'll even survive the night and wake up the next morning before they come. Them. The Patchers. Come to sew another pretty piece of cloth over an ugly gaping hole. Come to silence me lest I spill the secrets of the inner workings of the CIA. Come to ensure that I don't jeopardize the integrity of the Agency simply by existing. That's it, folks. Plain and simple. I know too much. I know far too much, and the Agency isn't going to let me go quietly. Not now, not ever.

But now there's one question left unanswered. It's a big question, and it's got a pretty big answer too.

Why are you reading this?

Why am I writing this? Why am I taking the time to explain who I am and what I do?

I'm writing this because I'm going to quit. I'm going to march right up to my Boss, hand in my badge, and give her those two words I've wanted to say for a long time.

But I'm not dumb, I know they'll come after me. And that's what this diary is for. I'm going to write about my job in here. I've got one last mission to do before I end this, and I'm going to detail every minute of it in this book. I'll tell you everything, from the nature of the case, to every little thing I do to cover it up. Then I'm going to hide it somewhere safe. I'll hide this where they'll never be able to find it. It's funny when I think about it now. If there's one thing I'm the best at, it's hiding things. The CIA made sure of that. I'm going to hide this, and make sure they know that it exists, but not where I've hidden it. Then I'm going to quit, and there's nothing they can do about it. And you know what? They're not going to come after me. They're not going to send another Agent to silence me by any means necessary.

Because they're going to know damn well that if I die, this book is going to get out. Maybe to a news reporter in Fillydelphia, maybe to some connections I have in Canterlot, hell maybe even to some retard inbred hick trash down in that Celestia-forsaken Appleoosa. I haven't really decided yet. But it will get out. It will get out, and and when it does, every single pony in Equestria is going to know that their government has been lying to them.

So this diary is my bargaining chip. I'm entrusting this thing with my life.

And that means if you're reading this, then I'm dead. They got to me. The CIA threw caution to the winds and did what they always do in times like this: they eliminated the threat. I really hope that's not the case. I've grown kind of attached to being alive.

So now you know. Now you understand. I can only hope that if I truly am dead, at least one pony reading this will understand me and why I've done what I've done.

As I sit here in my carriage writing this, I have just received my latest orders pertaining to my new mission. It's going to take place in Ponyville, a fairly large town a short distance from my headquarters in Canterlot. From the initial outline I've read, it's a pretty damn big one too. Very messy, lots of blood and whatnot. Maybe it will make for a great story. But whatever the case may be, it will definitely be my last. So here we go, little diary. It's time for me to do what I do best. Time to get to work, Quill ol' buddy ol' pal, my partner likes to say. Time to cut out a fabric pattern, snip by snip! Time to put that fabric together bit by bit! Kill those witnesses! Burn that evidence!

Stitch that fucking Patchwork.

Chapter 2

It has become increasingly clear to me over the past day that I haven't really thought this through very well. How exactly does one write about crime investigation in a diary? To the detail that I would require? And furthermore, how does one in my position write in secret? I'm not stupid enough to think that the CIA isn't watching me. They might believe I don't notice, but I do. When I was sworn in to the Agency I was assigned a partner, a baby dragon who would accompany me on all my missions and aid me in any way necessary. I'll describe him in detail later, but suffice to say that while he may be there to help me, I know he's been given another job. I know he watches my every move. I know he reports to my boss about my behavior every day. How, then, am I supposed to find time to write this?

I've concluded two very basic things: firstly, this diary shall be written on a daily basis at night. Nighttime is the only time I can be away from my partner, as he sleeps early and rises early. Perhaps sometimes I may steal away to a bathroom or other private location as well. And secondly, this shall be more than a journal. I'm not going to just write in here, I'm going to slip all the evidence in here that I can; crime scene photos, official documents, anything that can serve as hard proof of what I'm doing. That means this diary might get a little messy at times, but I need to be nothing less than absolutely thorough.

As I sit here in the dark of a barn located in Ponyville, I'm listening to the snores coming from the loft above me where my partner sleeps. I have to be extremely careful about how I do this. Listening very closely to ensure my partner's snores don't waver and he doesn't wake, and keeping the glow of my horn down to a minimum, I write. Curse my horn! It's times like these that I wish I were blessed with appendages like my young dragon companion with which to grip objects and write. Instead I have to make do with my magic to manipulate my quill, and pray that the light from my horn doesn't wake him. I don't know how long I have; there's no way of telling time where I am, and at some point I have to get to sleep soon so I can be well rested for tomorrow, when my investigation truly begins. So I will have to write quickly and carefully.

Let me tell you about today.

My last entry was written at noon today. I was sitting my private covered carriage, having just decided to start this journal, on the way back from CIA headquarters to my home in central Canterlot. My carriage is one of the few places that is completely secluded for me; there are no windows or openings of any kind save for a small slide-open window that can be used to talk to the driver and the single door on one side that can be locked from the inside. My carriage was about halfway between headquarters and my home, or so I judged, when I felt the whole vehicle slow to a complete halt. I slid open the small window and called to my chauffeur.

"Jiffy!" I called to the pegasus pony pulling my carriage, "Why did you stop?"

"There's somepony here who says she needs to talk to you," came the response. "She says it's 'Agency business,' sir."

Agency business? I had only just finished my last mission down in Stalliongrad a few days before. What could be so important that they needed me so soon? "All right," I called. "Pull over and I'll let them in."

I felt the carriage being drawn once more a bit to the right, and then it stopped again. At once there was a knock at the door and I unlocked it to let in the pony who had hailed my carriage. In stepped a young blue earth pony mare. She pulled the door shut behind her and took a seat in the bench across from mine. Reaching back, she pulled something from her saddlebags.

"Thiff if mmy badge, thir!" she spoke around the object she held in her mouth.

I leaned forward and took a look at what she held in her mouth, and nodded. It was an official courier's badge, complete with the CIA stamp and everything. She had probably been sent to deliver a new set of orders. At my acknowledgment, she spat the badge back into her saddlebags and plunged her face once more into the containers she carried on her back. She pulled out a scroll, which was bound by a string and sealed with wax. I took it with my magic and examined the wax seal. It was the official CIA seal: a phoenix with its wings outstretched, grasping a symbol of the sun in one claw and a crescent moon in the other. I looked it over once to ensure that it was authentic. It was. I popped the seal off and unfurled the scroll to read it.

I'll print it's words here:

*The following document is marked at clearance level: EYES ONLY
If you are viewing this document without proper clearance, you are in violation of CIA code 172, sec. 1.*

*The **SECRECY CLASSIFICATION** of this document is marked: BURN AFTER READING
Failure to comply with any or all codes of conduct will result in immediate referral to Central Command.*

Agent Six,

Your attendance is requested at headquarters ASAP. The CIA requires your services immediately for a case that has come to our attention in Ponyville. Due to the extremely violent nature of the case, Central Command prefers that you and your partner be briefed in private. You are to halt any activities you are currently engaged in, be they official CIA business or otherwise, and return to Headquarters.

We await your return.

I read the document over three times, committing it to memory. I was a little unsettled. A case so extreme they wanted to brief me in person? This had to be a serious one. When I was done, I rolled up the document and nodded to the courier.

"You can go now."

She shook her head. "Sorry sir, I've got my orders. Protocol dictates that I have to watch you burn that before I can leave."

I looked down at the scroll. "Oh, right." Mustering up a small bit of magic, I performed a combustion spell and the scroll burst into flames. The courier watched as the scroll slowly burned away, curling and folding in on itself until nothing was left but ashes. I opened the small window at the front of the carriage to let the smoke waft out.

"Will that be all?" I asked, brushing the ashes off my coat and resolving to sweep out the mess later.

She nodded and saluted. "Leaving with your permission sir! This courier's duties have been completed."

"Run along, then." I opened the door for her and she stepped out. "Oh, wait," I added, reaching into my own saddlebags and pulling out a small pile of coins. "It's about lunchtime, isn't it? Buy yourself something tasty on your break."

She took the small tip with a nod of thanks and cantered off into the distance, presumably to spend her newfound wealth on some delicious treat at the nearby bakery.

I closed the door and locked it once more. Leaning up to the small window, I called out to Jiffy to take me back to headquarters. He nickered softly in answer and I felt the carriage being turned around back the way it came. I sighed as I leaned back in my seat. I had hoped to have a longer break after my last mission. It had been a pretty harrowing one, full of magic-related crimes and all sorts of things I never wanted to think about again. I had been planning to enjoy a nice solitary dinner back at my house but apparently the Powers that Be had other plans for me. I decided that right then was as good a time as any to begin my diary. As the carriage drew ever closer to Headquarters, I wrote my first entry.

When at last the carriage stopped, I tucked the diary away deep in my saddlebags and unlocked the door. Stepping out into the midday sunlight, I took in the glory of Celestia's day. It was pretty nice out; not a cloud in the sky. I turned to Jiffy.

"I'll probably be done in about an hour and a half," I told my pegasus driver. "Go off and find something to eat and meet me back here in that time."

Jiffy nodded and unhooked himself from the carriage. I watched as he unfurled his wings, gave a few warm up strokes, then took off into the air. He vanished quickly into the distance, probably off to his favorite lunch spot. Wherever that was. When I was finished watching him turn into a speck on the horizon, I turned to face the CIA Headquarters.

The main building for the offices of the Canterlot CIA Branch was imposing, to say the least. The massive white stone building stretched up into the sky, reaching higher than most of the surrounding buildings. A huge balcony-like structure protruded from the side about a hundred feet from the roof. This was where pegasi entered, and I could see a few of them flying circles and landing. Below, a wide set of marble stairs protruded from the front of the building and led up to a pair of tall doors, allowing entry for us wingless unicorns and earth ponies. Sighing once more, I made my way up the long staircase. Passing through the rows of stone pillars that held up the balcony above, I pushed open the two massive doors and stepped inside.

I entered the large tall room inside. The scenery always struck me no matter how many times I saw it. It was always just so perfectly *white*. The welcome room of the CIA building was always a bright white. The floor tiles, the walls, the pillars that held the ceiling, the ceiling itself, even the desk at which the sole secretary sat at. I often wondered what poor pony had to scrub every inch of the room every day to keep it so clean. Or perhaps it was just that it never got dirty.

I walked up to the secretary's desk and flashed my CIA badge, levitating it out of my saddlebags.

"Agent...Six, is it?" the unicorn said, peering over the top of her glasses. "They're waiting on you in the briefing room. Down the hall on your right, third door on the left."

I nodded and walked past her wordlessly. I admit I was more than a little interested in hearing about this new case. Despite my distaste for the more...*dirty* elements of my job, I did often hold a morbid fascination with the thrill of investigation and murder. It's what drove me to study criminal psychology at the University. As I walked quickly to the briefing room, I found myself once again hoping that this was not a Patch job, and just a normal investigation. I got them occasionally, as I was often picked for my extensive knowledge of the criminal psyche. Those jobs were the best. I got to travel, meet ponies, cooperate with local police departments, and most of all I got thanked and congratulated when we finally put the criminal behind bars. There was no secrecy, no lies, no killing. And I fervently hoped that this new case in Ponyville, violent and distasteful as it apparently was, would turn out to be a simple case of a deranged serial killer or something like that. I didn't want to deal with a terrorist group, or a

corrupt politician. I prayed it wouldn't be some scientist researching forbidden magic, or a news reporter asking dangerous questions about the government. I didn't want to cover anything up. I just wanted a nice normal mass murderer.

It's strange now that I think about it, hoping for such a thing.

When I reached the door I had been looking for, I nudged it open with a hoof and walked inside. The inside of the briefing room, much like the rest of the building, was sparsely decorated. In contrast to the pearl white of the outer halls, the inside of this room was a much more earthly brown, due to the wood paneling that made up its walls. The room was small, just barely big enough to fit the twelve-seated rectangular table.

When I entered I immediately saw that I was the last one to arrive. Already sitting at the table was my partner, Blaise. He was resting in the only chair in the room; the rest of the seats around the table were comfortable fluffy pillows. He, however, sat on a swiveling desk chair designed for creatures who were not ponies. Blaise was easily the shortest member of the CIA, standing about as tall as my chest. That was the norm for his kind however; he was a baby dragon. I say "baby," but he was probably a year or two older than me. As I recall, dragons live for thousands of years, and their infantile stage alone can last as long as a whole pony generation. I smiled and gave my greeting to my diminutive orange partner.

"Blaise," I said, acknowledging him with a nod. "How was the break?" I closed the door behind me.

"Break? Do you know what I do when we finish missions? The amount of paper work I have to fill out for you? And just guess what I've been doing all day today. I've been reading up on this case here! I was notified before you were, so they've had me memorizing the whole case file!"

"On the plus side," said the other occupant of the room, "He is now completely familiarized with the situation."

I looked over at the origin of the second voice. There she stood. The big boss lady.

"Princess Luna," I said, bowing my head low. "It is an honor, as always."

The dark colored Alicorn mare accepted my greeting with a quick nod. "Sit down, Agent Six. We have alot to discuss."

I rested my rump on the pillow next to Blaise's chair, not taking my eyes off the princess. She seemed agitated, more than normal. "Tell me about the case," I said. "What's so important about it that we have to discuss it here in private?"

Princess Luna nodded, and with a wave of her horn she set a box down on the table. She opened the box and drew out a few folders with her magic, setting them down in front of me.

"Here are the case files. This particular set was drawn up ten days ago in Ponyville, when the first report came in." Her horn glowed as she opened the folders and drew out a picture. "This pony was found dead in a local bakery. The on-site coroner who pronounced her dead placed her time of death at about one day before she was found. Apparently the shop had been closed for a couple days while the owners went to buy supplies. We are calling her time of death Day One. The first day of the investigation by local Police. They didn't call us in until this morning, ten days after she was found."

I down at the photograph. The pony that stared back had a wide grin on her face. She was an earth pony, pink in color. Her wildly curly mane was a darker shade of pink, and part of it hung down over one of her eyes. She had a tail to match her mane, and in the picture it curled around her cutie mark, which was a trio of balloons. I studied the picture for a moment before turning it over and reading the name.

"Pinkie Pie," I said, reading aloud. I flipped the picture back over. "And what was the cause of death?"

"The coroner confirmed that the cause of death was asphyxiation. She was choked to death."

"Choked to death with what?"

"That's the weird part!" exclaimed Blaise, standing up in his chair. "She was choked to death with candy!"

I stared at him for a few seconds before closing my eyes and sighing. I was about to ask if they were trying to waste my time when Luna interrupted me.

"Before you make some snide comment about a pony eating too quickly, let me confirm that this was, in fact, a murder." Luna tapped the box with a hoof meaningfully. "The amount of candy found in her trachea was well beyond the amount any pony in their right mind would ever try to eat. An autopsy report that was filed later stated that there was evidence that she was force-fed. The coroner cited heavy damage in her throat and the absurd amounts of sweets as proof of this fact. And there's something else you have to see." Luna levitated a second picture from the photo to me. "This picture was taken at the crime scene. You'll notice right away why local police called us."

I took the picture and set it down on the table to examine it. It was of a kitchen, apparently that of the local Ponyville bakery. There, lying on the floor between counters, was Pinkie Pie. She was lying down on her side quite naturally. In fact, one might have mistaken her for simply having fallen asleep in the middle of cooking, were it not for the thin stream of vomit that was trickling out of the side of her mouth. Looking closely, I could also see the stick ends of lollipops sticking out of her mouth, along with her tongue, which lolled off to the side. Her mouth and tongue were all I could see of the head, however, because covering most of her face was some kind of dishrag or towel.

But it wasn't just the body that drew my attention. Luna was right; I saw it immediately.

Next to her feet on the floor was a word. It had been written in what appeared to be pink cake icing. The writing was very proper, a carefully drawn cursive with extremely loopy L's and stylish slashes across the T's. It looked in every way like it had been written by a professional cake decorator. But most strange was the word itself:

Gluttony

That was it; just one word. I didn't know what it meant, but it was clear that it was some sort of message left behind by her attacker. I looked up at the princess.

"Well, it's pretty strange, that's for sure."

Luna sat down across the table from me. "Tell me what you can from that picture. In your professional opinion, what are we dealing with here?"

I looked back down at the picture, studying it once more before launching into my own analysis. "The first thing I'm interested in here is the cause of death. She didn't just choke to death, she was force-fed candy. That's very brutal; very personal. The killer wanted to be right in her face when she died, and I'm sure that inflicting pain was part of the kill. This suggests that the killer had an intense hatred for her, meaning the killer was someone she knew." I slid the picture over to the Princess so she could look at it. "Further evidence of that is how neat the crime scene is. Nothing is knocked around, the only things on the floor are the body and the icing message. From what I can tell, the victim's fur hasn't been messed up too much. There's no sign of any kind of struggle or fight. This means two things: first, she knew her attacker. And secondly, the attacker is both fast and strong. He was able to subdue her with little struggle."

Luna nodded, staring at the picture. "A very good analysis. Is there anything else? What do you think of the message?"

I thought for a moment. "'Gluttony,' hmmm? I'm going to go out on a limb and say Pinkie Pie here was an employee of this bakery?"

"You are absolutely right."

"Then we can assume the killer knew this as well. It may be that her working as a maker of sweets led him to think of her as a glutton or some kind of enabler of gluttons, 'Gluttony' being some kind of sin or something he thought needed to be punished." I tapped my chin thoughtfully. "The killer is probably using this as an excuse to justify murder. Killers with deep psychological instability often do things like this." I leaned back and sighed. "So local PD's called us in because we've got a killer leaving messages at the crime scene? It's certainly strange, but why did you specifically call me in for this? I'm sure there are other agents in town who can be assigned. I just returned from active duty."

"I know this is very sudden, but believe me when I say we need you." Luna stood up and began to pace back and forth. "You've shown a great aptitude in the field. That mission you ran three months ago here in Canterlot is

evidence of that. But I picked you mainly because of your educational background."

"Because I'm a specialist in Criminal Psychology."

"That's exactly it," Luna said, nodding once more. "I believe that you can find whoever it is that did this."

I looked down at the photograph, and my stomach did flip-flops. This crime was particularly gruesome, and I'd be lying if I said I was looking forward to investigating it. I sighed and nodded to Luna. "Alright, looks like I'm going to be taking a trip to Ponyville." I stood up to leave.

"Ah, we're not finished here, Agent Six. There are still some details of this case we have to discuss." Luna tapped her hooves on the table. *Clop, clop.*

"This is just a straightforward killer case." I looked back at her. "I'll see the scene, build a Profile, and let the local PD find the killer for us. What else is there to discuss?"

"I'm afraid there is more to this case than a single murder."

I sat back down, now feeling more apprehensive. "There's more? Are there more bodies?"

"Yes." Luna tapped the picture. "This was the first murder, but there have been more. Many more. There has been a murder every two days since Pinkie Pie's body was found. The latest body was found today."

I was reeling. A body every two days? That was unheard of. No serial killer in history had been that quick. I did the math in my head. Ten days... a body every two days... that was-

"Five," Luna said. "Five murders."

Chapter 3

For a moment I sat and stared at Luna. *Five murders*. I had to think about that for a moment. Not just five murders, but five murders in only ten days. That was more killing in just over a week than I have done in all my time as both a detective and an operative. Doing a quick calculation in my head, I thought about how many murders might be achieved if the killer continued at this pace. Investigations, depending on how much evidence there was, could take anywhere between five days and any number of years. If the killer was careless, he could be caught almost immediately. But if the killer was methodical, meticulous, left no evidence behind, and covered his tracks well, then he could remain at large forever. I shuddered to think would could happen if he wasn't caught. This pony had the potential to become the most prolific serial killer Equestria had ever seen.

"Agent Six?" Luna's prompt snapped me out of my thoughts and back to the present. "Are you ready to go over the rest of the case?"

"Right, sorry. I was just thinking." I shook my head to clear it. "Let's continue."

Luna nodded and reached into the box with her magic once more. "Here are the other four victims, in the order they were found."

Luna laid out four more pictures in front of me. Each of them was a photo from a crime scene. The back of each was marked with the name of the victim and their cause of death. I looked at them each in order, assessing the bodies and their surroundings, and making any analysis that I could.

The first picture was of a unicorn mare. My eyes were immediately drawn to her mane and tail. Both were a striking shade of purple and had been heavily styled. Locks of her mane fell gracefully down her neck and around her face before curling up. Her tail was also curled. She was very eye catching, and any male would have been immediately drawn to her appearance, for she was nothing short of gorgeous. At least, she would have been, were it not for the manner in which the photographer had found her. She was lying down on the floor of wherever she had been found ("Fashion Boutique," read the location tag). She was clearly dead, owing to

the amount of blood that pooled around her and soaked through her clothes. Or, at least the pieces of clothing that covered her. What she was wearing could hardly be called "clothes." It looked to be some kind of dress-like cloth covering, due to the way it lay on her and fell about her hooves. But her "dress," if that's what one could call it, appeared to be several items of expensive-looking clothing that had been ripped apart and sewn back together in some sort of grotesque mish-mash. Upon closer inspection, however, I realized that the pieces of cloth were not stitched together, but rather sewn into the mare's skin itself. Well, that explained the massive amounts of blood.

I looked at the name: "Rarity."
The cause of death read, "Blood Loss"

Moving my gaze over to the second photo, I beheld a scene with more blood than the first. It was the inside of a public restroom, the white walls of which were splashed with red. Upon the floor lay a blue mare with a bright rainbow-colored mane and an equally vibrant tail. She was a pegasus. She lay perfectly balanced on her back, her forelegs crossed over her chest. Under her forehooves she held her wings. For a moment I wondered why here wings were in such an odd position, but then I realized that they had been torn off and placed under her hooves. She must have been standing when this had happened, because the bloodstains on the walls spurted outwards away from the body in two directions. Above the body, painted in blood, was the word "Pride." One of the wings below her hooves was stained all over with blood, and it appeared that the wing had been used to paint the word.

The name on this picture read, "Rainbow Dash"
Below it was the cause of death: "Blood Loss"

The third picture was by far the most gruesome. The picture was of the first crime scene, the Boutique. But the picture was dated at a later day, so the unicorn Rarity's body must have been moved. It was strange that a second murder would happen in the same area, but there were other parts of this picture that were far beyond strange. The body, if there was one, had been completely destroyed. There was blood covering the entire area, and it appeared to have all splashed outwards from a single point in the middle of the picture. Squinting, I could make out what appeared to be a small spiked tail, perhaps that of a baby dragon. It was purple in color, and the spines

were green. The tail was the only part of the body I could see from the picture; almost the entire rest of the picture was colored red.

The name on the picture was "Spike (species: Dragon)"

The cause of death was strangely worded: "Unknown; victim appears to have exploded."

I decided I had seen enough of that picture for the moment and moved on to the next one. The final picture was of what appeared to be some kind of classroom. Between the teacher's desk and the front row of the student desks, lay an adult mare. She was dark magenta in color, and her simply styled mane was a base light pink, with a streak of lighter pink in it. Her death was by far the simplest; her midriff had been crushed. Looking at the picture I could see from the strange bumps along her stomach that her ribs had been broken, probably even shattered. She had vomited up the contents of her entire stomach. The strangest part of the picture was what had been used to literally crush her internal organs: it was a tiny filly's saddle. The saddle looked far too small for her and the girth was crushingly tiny. I looked closely and saw that the girth, which was probably small enough to suffocate her to begin with, had been tightened all the way. I shuddered inwardly; this must have been an excruciatingly painful death. Scratched in chalk on the floor at her feet was the word, "Lust"

According to the picture her name was "Cheerilee," and her cause of death was "Asphyxiation."

I sat there for a moment, glancing between the pictures. What lay before me was not only the most bizarre series of murders I had ever seen, it was also quite possibly the most brutal in Equestrian history. At least, to my knowledge. The death of the baby dragon, in particular, was extremely violent. That coupled with the time frame worried me. It was quite clear why I had been called; this killer needed to be stopped. I looked up at Luna and gave her my initial thoughts on the murders.

"So we have five bodies in ten days. It's clear we have a huge problem down in Ponyville." I tapped the picture labeled 'Spike.' "And it's possible we may be looking at multiple killers. The lack of a printed message, or word, in this crime scene suggests a different killer with a different *Modus Operandi*. Not to mention the extremely brutal nature of the kill. Also, this

picture of...Rarity, lacks a message from the killer as well. We can't even be sure that these murders are linked. We may have two killers on our hooves."

Blaise tapped me on the shoulder. "You're right about the dragon, but with Rarity, the word is not visible in the picture. She did have one though. The word "Vanity." It was stitched into her right foreleg with a needle and black thread."

I suddenly felt very sick.

"As for your theory," Luna interrupted, "You might be right about that. But before we jump to conclusions, there's some evidence that links these crimes."

I leaned forward. "What evidence?"

Luna picked up the picture of the first two mares, and put them side-by-side with a picture of Pinkie Pie. "Do you know these three ponies?"

I shook my head. Pinkie Pie, Rarity, Rainbow Dash... these names were foreign to me.

Luna frowned. "You need to keep up on your current events. How about this, you are familiar with the rise and fall of Nightmare Moon, right?"

I nodded slowly. It was an odd feeling talking about Nightmare Moon with Princess Luna. What was the proper protocol? "Yes, I have heard the stories of her... defeat." I hesitated slightly. Would she be offended if I said something out of line? How does one talk to Luna about Nightmare Moon?

"You can speak freely here, Agent Six," said Luna, sensing my hesitation. "I am fully aware of my past actions, and I work every day towards making up for them. But back to these three. Each of these ponies were present on the day of my defeat. The first, Pinkie Pie," she said, wagging the picture of the bright pink earth pony in my face, "represented the Element of Laughter. Rarity was the element of Generosity, and Rainbow Dash was the element of Loyalty. They were instrumental in my defeat a year ago, and each held a fundamental magical element that was a part of the basis of this world. And these two," she said, setting down the pictures and indicating the remaining two, "are directly connected to them. Spike was a personal assistant to one Twilight Sparkle, the element of Magic. And

Cheerilee was the local filly class schoolteacher. Two of her students are directly related to two of the Ponies of Harmony."

I thought about this for a moment. My knowledge on the history of the Elements of Harmony was fuzzy at best, but I knew what they were and what they had been used for in the past. They represented a kind of symbol of magical power. To the people of Equestria, they were a beacon to look up to. So if it was possible that these deaths were linked to the six Elements in any way...

"We could be on the cusp of something very big," I said, finishing my thoughts aloud. "If somepony is killing those related to the Elements of Harmony, this could mean a disaster larger than Equestria itself."

"Exactly," said Luna, nodding. "Now you understand why we've agreed to step in and help. It is not just brutal murders that are happening here. We need to put a lid on this, and fast."

I swept the photos back into the box with a wave of my horn. "I won't waste any more time, then."

"Ah, there is just one last thing, Agent Six."

My heart skipped a beat. What could it be now? I looked back up at Luna.

"There is one last part to this investigation," continued Luna. "Your orders."

"And they are, to catch this killer, right?"

"There's more." Luna levitated one more picture from the box and looked at it while talking to me. "This job is more than a simple investigative job. We called you in not only for your talents as a profiler, but also your status as a Patcher."

I felt disappointment flood my entire body. So this was one for the Patchwork after all. There went my hopes of having just one peaceful job after so many harrowing missions before.

"I'm going to have to cover this up, then."

"Yes. But this matter is more delicate than you can imagine."

She turned the picture towards me and levitated it in front of my face. It was a picture of yet another young mare, though this was not a crime scene and she was most certainly not dead. She had posed for this picture. She stood, turning her head and side to the camera to show off her cutie mark, which was a large purple star surrounded by five smaller white stars. Her coat was a pure shade of light purple, contrasted by her mane and tail, which were both a base color of dark purple. A streak of pink ran up both, from the tip of her tail to the end of her forelock, which was trimmed so that it fell neatly over her forehead and around her small horn but not into her eyes. Perhaps it was because of the small soft smile she wore, or maybe the fact that I had been looking at dead bodies, but I was struck by how pretty she was.

"Who is this?" I asked.

"That is Twilight Sparkle. She's the pony that Spike was assisting."

"And is she a suspect? A possible victim?" I wondered what her connection to this case was, besides her being one of the Elements.

"It's possible she may become a victim," said Luna. "And we must take great pains to ensure this does not happen. But more importantly, she is my sister's private student."

I started. "The Princess is her mentor?" I looked down at the picture with a newfound respect for the mare. A private student to the princess herself... That had to mean that this particular pony showed incredible talent for magic. Suddenly, I felt very silly for ever having thought my own credentials were impressive.

"Yes, and that means that she has been in constant correspondence with Celestia for many years now." The look on Luna's face told me that this was quite serious. "And that means, naturally, that she has been sending many letters about the recent murders. All of which," she added, "we have intercepted and doctored. Celestia knows about the deaths, but she is unaware of the strange circumstances surrounding the murders." She nodded to the picture I was holding. "Your primary objective is to capture the killer. Your secondary objective is to ensure that Twilight Sparkle and her friends are kept absolutely in the dark. I cannot risk Celestia finding out the true nature of these murders. We could see a spread of mass panic."

I nodded, understanding.

"You will go to Ponyville today and begin your investigation immediately," Luna continued. "I have arranged for proper lodgings for you. The owner of the Sweet Apple Acres, the local apple farm, was kind enough to extend a hoof to us and offer up her barn. There's no inn or hotel in Ponyville, so I'm afraid this is the best you'll get. The other reason I accepted this was because the owner is a mare by the name of Applejack." She looked at me pointedly. "Applejack is also a bearer of one of the Elements of Harmony. This will be a good opportunity for you to judge just how much she knows of these murders and investigate whether or not she is connected to them. She is not a suspect at this time, and it is possible that she may also be a potential victim, so it will be your job to protect her if that is the case."

"Right."

"Do you understand your orders?" the Princess asked.

I nodded. "Yes. Find and capture the killer or killers, patch the situation over, and ensure the other Ponies of Harmony are kept in the dark."

"Good. I assured Celestia I would take care of this matter to the best of my ability. Do you have any questions?"

I thought for a moment. Then I asked, "You say cover, but I will need some sort of excuse. I'll need stories, lies. How should I go about this? What is the protocol?"

"I'm afraid we'll have to trust in your judgment entirely," Luna answered with a sigh. "I can't give you any insight into this. I'm leaving the patchwork up to you. Just make sure this whole event is wiped clean from any and all records."

"And there is the matter of my payment. This case is very high profile. Very *high risk*, one might say." Hell, if I was going to be forced into this, I might as well push for a bonus. Ten Thousand bits a mission was more than respectable, but maybe I could get more out of her...

"You will be paid the standard amount, Agent Six. Not a single bit more."

Damn it...

"However," Luna continued, "Because of the sensitive nature of this case, I realize that money may be needed as a kind of... incentive for certain ponies. You will be given an additional sum of money to be used for... persuasion purposes. No questions asked, of course." I saw the faint traces of a smile move across her lips. "When the money leaves CIA hands, how you use it is up to you, and we won't complain if all of it is needed for your mission."

I suddenly hoped that I wouldn't have to bribe anypony.

"Any more questions, Agent Six?" Luna stood up from her seat.

"No ma'am"

"Good." She flicked her head at the box of pictures and files and it slid across the table towards me. "I want you to get down to Ponyville as fast as you can. You and Blaise can build a profile on the trip there. Be prepared to hit the ground galloping. That will be all, gentlemen."

I swept the remaining pictures into the box and balanced it on lower back. Then I bent down so that Blaise could grab my withers and climb atop my back. Nodding farewell to the princess, the two of us made our way outside into the late afternoon sun.

Jiffy was not waiting for us when we reached the streets out at the front of the main CIA branch building. Glancing up at the sun, I judged that it had only been about an hour since I had left him to enjoy his lunch break. My carriage was still parked nearby, but I decided to wait on the side of the road so I could see Jiffy when he came back. I set the box down on the curb and let Blaise slide off my back before sitting down to wait for my chauffeur to return. The two of us passed a few minutes in silence, I, looking up at the clouds, and Blaise amusing himself by observing the ponies passing by. After a few minutes, it my little dragon partner who broke the silence.

"You seemed pretty off in there today."

"What does that mean?" I asked, not looking away from the fluffy forms that were passing lazily by. I thought I had been fine during the briefing. I've

always been able to mask both my displeasure at my job and my distaste for Luna and the CIA well, or so I thought. Was I slipping?

"Oh come on, Six. We've been partners for a year now. I can tell when you're bothered by something."

I hated talking about this kind of thing with Blaise. Half of me always wanted to pour my frustration on him, tell him everything, even about how I wanted to leave the Agency. But the other half of me knew that he reported straight to Luna, and anything I said would go in his ears and out his mouth. I always had to be very careful.

"I'm not bothered by anything," I replied, now mildly interested in a cloud that resembled a spoon.

"Don't lie to me. I saw it in your face when you were talking to Luna. The pauses, the hesitation, what's on your mind?"

I sighed. "It's just... these murders." It was a lie I know, but at least it was believable. "They're the most violent I've ever seen. It's a little unsettling. Plus, another mission so early after my last one? I need a break." I looked over at him, hoping he would leave it at that.

"I see."

Blaise didn't seem very convinced, but he let the matter drop and I inwardly sighed with relief. I liked Blaise a lot, I really did, but there was always that distance that I had to keep with him. I wanted to trust him with my feelings. He was the only friend I had. Hell, every day of our missions I trusted him with my life. Once I even told him my real name and when we were in any private location, he liked to call me by it. We were partners, but there was just this one boundary that I could never cross. I could never tell him how I really felt. I had to hide that. And now I had to hide this journal from him too. I fervently hoped I could keep my secrets.

"So what do you think about the case? Besides how gross some of these crime scenes are going to be?" Blaise spoke up again, pulling me from my internal monologue.

"I don't know what to think yet. As soon as Jiffy gets here, we can get in the carriage and review the case and build our Profile, but let's not talk about it out here."

"Right." Blaise began prodding at a pebble with his foot.

I turned my gaze back up to the sky and stared absently at a cloud that looked remarkably like a cupcake. I narrowed my eyes with annoyance. I hated cupcakes. Scanning the horizon, I looked for any sign of my driver. A few minutes later, I spotted a small speck coming from downtown Canterlot. I watched as it grew and grew, until I saw the coat and mane color. Sure enough, it was Jiffy. Upon spotting us waiting, he increased his speed and landed down in front of us.

"Ah, sir. I see your meeting has ended early." He nodded his head at me while turning around and hitching himself to my carriage.

"Yes, and there has been a change of plans. I will not be going home tonight. I've been called for a mission in Ponyville. We need to get there right away."

"Ponyville, sir?" Jiffy said, stretching his wings. "For how long?"

I unlocked the carriage door and Blaise hopped in, carrying the box. "I don't know. We will probably be staying for a week at the least, but I can't be sure. Get us there as fast as you can, Jiffy. This one's Top Priority."

"Of course, sir."

I climbed in, then closed and locked the door. Moments later, I felt the carriage being drawn forward at a quick pace. I closed the small window at the front and lit the two magical lamps hanging from the top of the carriage so that we could see. Blaise put the box on the floor between us and opened it.

"Ready?" he asked.

I sighed. Here we go, I thought. It was time to get to work.

"Ready."

There was a lot of stuff to go over, lots of evidence to review, statements, witness testimonials. We would have to go through it and build our Profile, our psychological evaluation of our killer. This was the most important step to the investigation: judging what kind of pony our murderer was. I hoped it would lead us somewhere quickly; I wanted to be done with this case as soon as possible. I looked down at the stacks of paper and began pulling them out of the box. Blaise and I each took a stack and began reading. Looking at him from across the top of my stack, I nodded to him and he nodded back.

"Let's begin with the Profile."

Chapter 4

Contrary to common belief, the mind of a psychopath is not a fascinating thing. It is actually very ordinary. Yes, it has often been romanticized in those two-bit crime novels they sell in street stands on the corner with newspapers and tabloid bullshit, but fiction hardly ever parallels reality. And the reality of it all, the gritty unbearable truth, is that a killer has a mind that is very normal. And as such, they appear to be very normal. They are just like you or me. They do not live in dark dank hideaways, they do not lurk in the sewers and ventilation shafts, and they most certainly do not draw attention to themselves like their fictional counterparts. I recall reading one of those horrible crime dramas late one night about a deranged pony who gallivanted about wearing the skin of his victims. I got about a third of the way in before I had to put the book down. It was absolute crap. The psychotic pony ran around town wearing a cape of skin; it was completely absurd. I then attempted to wash my brain of that rubbish with an equally trashy romance novel. I enjoyed the occasional romantic drama, I admit. Those, at least, rarely endeavor to take themselves seriously.

It's not just the unrealistic nature of those crime novels that bothers me. It's our nation's infatuation with the fictional psychopath. Ponies just eat those damn little books up. They love it. The strange and weird killers, the ones who kill for sex and money, it sickens me. I hate it because they don't realize just how dangerous a killer really is. How a killer really thinks, how they act, and how they look. They don't understand that real murderers, the really sick ones, are right in front of them, walking down the street, smiling and saying hi. They are somepony you know. They could be your neighbor, your friend, or even a family member. They could be anyone. Why? Because at the very core of their being, they are exactly like me and you. They are adept at putting up masks, lying to others, and pretending to be somepony they're not.

They're devious.

But their minds have one fundamental difference from ours. A single little thing that sets them apart from the rest of us. They have become desensitized to the pain of others, and in many cases, it arouses them. Piques their interest. But they all started out normal. Serial killers are not

born, they are made. Something in their past, perhaps a death in the family or childhood abuse, causes their minds to twist and bend. Yet twisted as they may be, they can be understood. Through proper study and scrutiny, the minds of murderers and serial killers can be understood completely.

And that's what the Profile is. It's what I studied for so long back at Canterlot University. What I've devoted so much of my life to. It's what earns me my bread and butter. The Profile tells us how the killer thinks. And when you know how a killer thinks, then you know who he is.

I took a deep breath and let it out, clearing my mind. Once again I had the pictures of the five victims spread out before me, this time with accompanying files about each pony, as well as coroner reports. Looking over them, I realized the coroner reports were almost completely useless. The times and causes of death were clear cut, but any other clues that could be gleaned from the bodies was...well, there were no clues. Absolutely no evidence left behind by the killer. But this was okay; that in itself was a clue.

"Quill? The Profile?"

Blaise snapped me out of my reverie, and I looked up from the files at him. The light from the flickering magic lamp danced across his face and cast shadows upon the walls of my carriage. I couldn't have been sure, but I thought I saw a flash of fear across his face. Or maybe it was disgust. It was understandable, of course. This particular case was far more frightening than anything we had worked before. I briefly reflected on my partner. Perhaps it was just a kneejerk reaction, but I had always thought he was too young for this job. It was silly; he was at least a year older than me. But dragons age slower, and reach maturity slower than ponies. In relation to others of his kind, he was just a baby. And the Agency was no place for children. I pushed these thoughts away as I saw that he was looking at me expectantly.

Right.

"Let's start with the victimology, then," I began. The profile always began with the victims. By studying the kinds of victims the killer chose, and the way in which he killed them, we could gain insight into his mind.

"With the exception of the dragon, each victim is a fairly young mare," said Blaise.

"Let's forget the dragon for a moment. I have my own theories about him. Because the MO for that murder is different, we should first profile the others."

Blaise nodded. "Each murder was also very brutal. From these coroner reports I can tell that each victim underwent at least a few minutes of painful torture before dying."

"So our killer is into young mares and torture," I said, tapping my chin. "Evidence of torture indicates a sadist. Statistically, sadists are male, ages between 20-35. Let's move on to the crime scenes. Any evidence of sexual abuse?"

Looking over the files, Blaise shook his head. "Coroner says they were clean aside from their own injuries and blood."

Not a sexual sadist, then. Lack of sexual activity could point to many things. I set that aside in my mind to think about later. Instead I focused on another part of each crime scene. "The presence of these...messages are also an indicator."

Blaise looked over the pictures. "Gluttony...Vanity...Pride...Lust...what do these mean?"

"They're for us. It's the killer explaining why he's doing this. Think of it as a kind of, well, excuse. He's trying to justify the murders to us." I tapped the Pinkie Pie picture. "This young earth mare was a worker at a local bakery. In the police interviews, her friends stated she enjoyed eating sweets to an excess. The probably killer saw this as a shortcoming, or a sin. So he killed her, and justified it as 'killing a glutton.'"

"Looks like he's in to irony too," he added. "He killed her by force-feeding her."

I indicated the other pictures with a nod. "And Rarity, the 'Vain' one, was killed by having clothes stitched into her. He's into poetic justice, that's for sure."

"So he kills because he hates what they do?"

"He kills because he hates them. The supposed sins are just what triggers him. The hate is very apparent, from the torture."

Blaise nodded and looked down at the files. "He must be strong, too. The police report here says that there's no evidence of any kind of struggle. He gets to them quickly and without a fight." He thought for a moment. "I guess it could also mean that the victims knew him. If that were true, then the reason for them not putting up a fight is because they were friends or acquaintances or something."

We didn't have much evidence to go on for that theory, so I changed the subject.

"I don't think there is much else that can be gleaned from these photos. Let's move on to the killer." I waited for him to look up before I continued. "As I said, sadists are usually male, 20-35 years old. Lack of sexual abuse points to him being an aggression killer. The kill is empowering to him, and he enjoys exercising that pleasure. The torture is just used to prolong their death, thereby prolonging the overall experience. Because he does not sexually abuse them, I would guess that he no longer needs them when they're dead."

"What, does that mean he doesn't care about them once their dead?"

What Blaise said stopped me in my thoughts. He was wrong; that was not what I had meant at all. I had meant that killing was his only source of pleasure, and not sex. But it was the way Blaise had worded it struck me. Care about them, I thought. Does he care about them? It was a silly question. Of course he didn't care about them, he killed them. But the thought nagged at me from the back of my head. I ignored Blaise as he asked the question again, instead holding up a hoof to silence him so I could concentrate on the crime scene pictures.

I gazed once more upon each of the photos. We had covered everything: cause of death, victimology, timespread, and even had part of a preliminary profile. But what was I missing? Perhaps I was going crazy, I thought absently. I was just about to give up and answer Blaise's question when I saw it; what I had been looking for.

"Remorse," I said.

"What?" Blaise raised an eyebrow. "What does that have to do with this?"

I turned the photos around to him and tapped each of them. "Every single one of these bodies has been tampered with after death. And most certainly not sexually. Look here, Pinkie Pie has been laid down in a sleeping position. And a towel has been placed over her face. Here, in this picture, Rarity has been put in a similar position. And lastly, look at Rainbow Dash. She has been positioned on her back with her wings under her forehooves. Almost...angelic, wouldn't you say?"

Blaise stared at them and then smiled, understanding. "They've been posed to look more peaceful."

"It's a sign of remorse," I said, leaning back into my bench. "Part of him regrets each kill."

"But that doesn't make sense. How can you hate somepony so much that you want torture and kill them, but then feel regret?"

I smiled. The last piece of the profile had finally slipped into place. Building a profile was like putting a jigsaw puzzle together. You were given many tiny little pieces that you had to turn this way and that until they fit together with each other. Then you could step back and look at the whole picture. And what a beautifully done picture it often was. Such detail, such order!

"It's simple," I said. "He knows them."

For a pony of my background, the Profile is paramount. The Profile tells us how a killer thinks, who he kills, what his past is like, and most importantly, who he is. But to build and use a Profile takes the educational background that I possess. To any street officer, the evidence is most important. I mulled this over in my mind as I felt our carriage descending lower and lower, and as the wheels lightly touched down to the ground I had already planned out the first bit of my stay in Ponyville. Reaching up, I slid open the small window and called out to Jiffy.

"Ponyville PD if you would, please. And take your time. I'm sure the flight over here was tiring."

"Of course, sir," my chauffeur spoke back amiably.

I felt the carriage drawn away to the side as I sat back down, closing the window. I felt a crunch beneath my hooves and I looked down to see that I had trampled some ashes from the scroll I had burned earlier. Once again I resolved to clean the mess later. Though I would probably forget; Blaise often cleaned out the carriage midst his other duties alongside me. Duties... there was another thing I had to think about. Absently I stared down at him from across the table in my carriage and once more found myself reflecting on my partner. Something I had begun to do more and more, it seemed, as my decision to fill this little book with classified information. I suppose at this point it is well enough to talk about him. Even as I sit here in this loft of hay, surrounded by the chirping of crickets, I can gaze down at his sleeping form. It is not terribly late, and he is still fast asleep. I have some time, I think. A horn is a wonderful thing for writing fast as well, though forgive me, dear reader, if occasionally it becomes rather messy in this book. You understand, yes?

My relationship with my partner is, to say the least, a difficult one. We are friendly, no doubt there. But as I've said before, I have this nagging suspicion (one that is not unfounded, of course) that he is an agent to my agent, if you will. I know he reports to Luna directly, and I'm quite sure he evaluates me on a regular basis. Half of my job, after all, is to show him the ropes. He was assigned to me as both an assistant and messenger, as dragon magic is invaluable in the transportation of secure documents. But when I was paired up with him, the Princess gave me another tenet: to essentially train Blaise, as it were. He's an up and coming Patcher, apparently.

Now as I stated earlier, I have reservations about this particular endeavour. He is young and impressionable, and a part of me is repulsed by the idea of taking him from crime scene to crime scene, giving him insight to the mind of a killer, and exposing him to the nature of our job. When I can, I do try to shield him from these things. Some silly voice in the back of my head wants him to grow up in a different situation than the one I now find myself in. Yet there is another part to this; I don't want to give the knowledge that could be used against me. Teaching him tells, signs of lies and deceit, how to profile a pony, all of these things could be turned right back 'round at me. Call me paranoid, but I'm sure he studies me under the same eye I've taught him to view suspects and witnesses. Paranoid or not, it would

definitely fall under the sorts of things Central Command would pull with its agents. I'm sure you, dear reader, have oft heard the joke that psychologists or the ones who most need psychological help. One of my friends back in Canterlot U used to say it a different way:

"A psychologist spends their life so devoted to studying the way others interact that sometimes they fail to properly interact with others"

I believe it was something like that.

And as you saw, I slipped up in front of him once today. He's catching on to learning when ponies hide things, which is precisely why I fear having to hide things from him.

[editor's note: at this point in the diary, the writing slides quickly off to the right as though the quill were scratched violently off in surprise]

Gah, damn! Sorry about that ugly scratching mark there, dear reader. I just heard Blaise shift in his sleep and it scared me half to death. I very nearly slammed this closed and shoved it under my pillow in fear, though I noticed quickly that Blaise was still sleeping. My nerves are getting the best of me, I think. I should finish this quickly. It has grown late, I need to sleep, and there is still much to be written. I shall come back to this subject later, time permitting.

And do forgive me if it appears this next bit is written rather hastily. That's probably because it will be.

It was Blaise once again who snapped me from my reverie back in the carriage.

"Quill?"

I paired my gaze with his, inwardly cursing myself. What did he think of my lingering gazes towards him? Was he suspicious of my thoughts? What did he conclude about my current mood?

"Yes, Blaise?" I leaned back attempting to appear as though I wasn't thinking about anything in particular.

"Why the police department first? Shouldn't we be visiting the crime scenes?"

Ah, his thoughts were elsewhere as well. That was fine. "No," I answered. This actually tied back into what I had been considering earlier about Profiles and evidence. "This is a cover job. In jobs like this, what is our primary objective?"

"To ensure the patch and secure any and all information," he repeated from memory, nodding.

"Exactly." I tapped the table in front of me. "The actual case itself is a secondary priority. We must catch the killer, yes, but the first piece of business will be securing all the evidence the police have in lockup. They won't be needing it anymore, anyway."

Blaise "Ah"d and sat back in his seat. We passed the rest of the ride in silence.

Presently, we came to a stop and a knock on the side of the carriage from Jiffy's hoof alerted me to the fact that we had arrived at our destination. Nodding to Blaise, I opened the door and stepped out in to the cool early evening air. My hooves touched down in the soft dirt and I looked around, taking in the scene around me. We were in a central square of the town, just in front of the Police Station, which was marked with a helpful hoof-made sign. Upon closer observation, I noted that the entire square was marked by a distinctly earthy feel. In contrast to the towering stone geometries of Canterlot, each building here was constructed mostly from wood, and some of the roofs showed signs of recent repair. It sure had the proper atmosphere of a town founded by earth ponies. I believe some of my friends from the University may have used the term "quaint." Personally, I rather enjoyed the place.

Blaise hopped out of the carriage himself, stretching his limbs. I looked down at him, smiling. "Ready?" With a light flick of my horn, I levitated a pair of sunglasses from my saddlebags and put them on, despite the fact that the sun was just beginning to set in the distance behind a lovely pair of hills.

"Ready," he replied, whipping a pair of his own. "This is going to be interesting."

I laughed softly. "Let me do the talking, and just chime in when you think you need to."

There is something to be said about the way ponies greet you. First impressions are important, and the way a pony meets you for the first time will invariably lead you to determine certain nuances of their character. As a Profiler, this is always important. As an agent of the CIA, doubly so. Being aware of your surroundings and aware of the way others think of you is part of my job.

And this part of my job began the instant I stepped into the Ponyville Police Department. Dealing with local police is always difficult, even when your mission isn't a cover-up. There's a kind of tone they always have in dealing with outside help and often it comes across more aggravated towards agents from the CIA. Locals have this attachment to their cases and often dislike outside help. Understandable, of course. They live in the towns themselves, see the ponies every day, and it is hard for them to accept the fact that crimes happen in their midst all the time with the ones they live with. It is even more true in a place like Ponyville, a small town where everypony knows everypony else. Accepting the fact that somepony they know is a murderer is hard, and it's even more difficult to turn over a case to somepony from the outside. Not that my job is any easier. Being an "outsider" is taxing, to say the least.

So I trotted in with this mindset, knowing I might meet resistance, and steeling myself for what might potentially become an argument.

Opening the double doors, I stepped inside to find myself in a small standard police department. The lobby was lined with chairs on either side that drew the eye towards the center, at which stood a small desk. Behind the desk lay row upon row of other desks, where officers sat lounging, or pouring over notes. Without a backward glance I strode forward to the main lobby desk, behind which sat a rather calm looking earth pony.

Immediately, as the doors closed behind me, all eyes were up on me and Blaise.

Remember what I said about first impressions? I got a small taste of what the Ponyville police were like right then and there. Think about how a pony

looks at you when you first meet. All ponies have defining features that draw the eye. For a female, it can be a striking mane style or an accessory worn on the face or head. For a male, you note a jaw line or the style of their shortened mane. How, then, does one look at a Patcher? Of course, the most obvious thing is the shaved mane. It always draws the eye first, simply because of the bareness of one's neck. But, as I noted the looks of those around me in the PD, their gazes snapped not to my strange mane style, but to my rump where my Mark sat.

Inwardly, I mused about this. This was a clear sign of the character of the station. They were not interested in my look, or my style. They were not immediately drawn to the fact that I was wearing sunglasses indoors. No, they went straight to my Mark. They wanted to know who I was and what I was about. Of course, with the patch sitting over it, I'm sure they figured it out very quickly. As I walked forward, I noted the looks of each pony and the general atmosphere. The station had been relatively quiet when I entered, but now it was dead silent. Each pony wore a blank stare that was punctuated only by light curiosity. None smiled or frowned, however. They wanted to know who I was. But the silence...

It was not an awkward silence...

No, it was tense. These were ponies on edge. Five murders in ten days will do that.

"You're the ones from Central, huh?" The pony behind the front desk asked.

I looked him over once very quickly. He couldn't follow my gaze from the other side of my sunglasses anyway. He wore a calm demeanor, but he was sitting up very straight. His mane, cut short but just long enough to style, hung down straight to one side and his forelock was neatly combed. Here was a pony of business. He wore a face that was welcoming, but every facet of his style denoted a meticulous personality hiding behind that. That was fine; I could deal with that.

I flashed my badge briefly to him. "Agent Six, CIA. This," I added indicating Blase with a nod, "is my partner, Agent Blaise. We've been sent to investigate a series of murders that has happened here in the past week. I've come to request access to your evidence locker for investigation purposes."

A very businesslike greeting. I'm sure he appreciated that.

"Why don't you just lead them in? Ain't no pony comin' round tonight anyway, it seems," A pony to my left told the pony sitting at the desk.

He nodded and stood, motioning for me to follow. Wordlessly, he led us towards the back of the station, weaving in and out of the rows of desks. As I passed them, I felt their stares burning into the patch on my rump. It made it itch, much to my chagrin. It wasn't that I was self-conscious about it; I had sorted those feelings out very quickly early on. But that didn't mean that I wasn't annoyed. We stopped at one of the back doors, which was aptly labelled "Evidence."

The pony opened it up for us and led us in to a small room lined on either side with rows of shelves, each holding up numerous cardboard boxes. Walking down towards the end, he stopped us at one section and indicated two boxes, one large, one small.

"This is all we've got in lockup here, the coroner at the hospital has the bodies if you need to look at those."

I nodded and hefted the largest box onto my back, balancing it there between my side-saddle bags. I motioned for Blaise to take the smaller, and he grasped it with his claws.

"Your help is appreciated," I told the pony. "We shall review this evidence tonight and tomorrow morning. Time permitting, I may be able to brief the entire station tomorrow."

"Woah, woah, brief? And where do you think you're taking that? There's place here where you can look at everything we have."

I sighed. "Brief every officer here on our Profile of the killer in order to help you find him. And we will be taking this to our own private area."

"Nuh uh." The pony moved between us and the door. "You may be government types, but we have laws here about what can and cannot leave our lockup."

Here it was, I thought. He was going to argue back. Luckily, I noted, we were in a relatively private location, and he could be swayed easily.

"Look officer, you have your protocol to follow. I get it. But I have mine as well. I am just following orders here. And since my orders come from a place a tad higher on the chain of command than you, I know who I have to follow and when."

That should have done it, I thought. "Chain of command," I had said. Such a nice little phrase. It made everything sound so formal and militaristic. I'm sure he appreciated that. He was a strict meticulous pony, after all. I could almost see the wheels turning in his head as he thought this over. Of course, it was complete and utter nonsense; I had my orders, but they came from a part of my organization that supposedly didn't exist. And the protocol for joint operations between government and local law enforcement are shady at best; something I had on many occasions told my superiors to review. The pony struggled for a split second internally, but it was Blaise who broke the silence.

"Look, mister," he said, "Our job here is to help you. We have our orders, but they're something along the lines of "catch this killer," get it? We want things done just as much as you do. So the faster both our teams start cooperating, the faster you can have this town back on its feet, and the faster you can have this station calm again."

I chuckled inwardly at this. So he'd noticed, then, the atmosphere of the station. Excellent work, Blaise! And appealing to the stallion's emotions, that was good too. It was the proverbial straw that broke his back, and the pony stepped aside with a nod, letting us pass. The two of us exited, but not before I caught Blaise looking up at me. I smiled down at him. Progress was being made, however slow it seemed.

After leaving the police station, I noted that it had gotten rather late. At that point, it would have been useless to visit any of the crime scenes, let alone interview any possible witnesses, so I had Jiffy set off for Sweet Apple Acres, a large farm at the edge of Ponyville where the princess had apparently set up lodgings for us. The two of us passed the time in silence, each lost in our own thoughts. Mine strayed to the case, reviewing the evidence in my mind, ensuring we had gotten the Profile right. The Profile would be finished when I had seen the crime scenes myself; photos rarely gave a proper view. When at last we came to a stop, the two of us stepped once more out into the cool night air.

Sweet Apple Acres was quite the sight. Huge fields surrounded by rolling hills washed the landscape, and the whole area was a lovely shade of bright green, apparent even in the dim evening light. Many of the trees were dotted with delicious apples of varying colors from tree to tree, and I could also see areas of field that grew other crops. Jiffy had brought us to a stop near the main house, behind which I could see a large red barn. It was a classic farm; beautiful foliage topped with a small house and classically styled barn. The fields were well-kept as well. I could tell whoever ran this farm ran it well.

I closed the door of the carriage behind me, leaving both sets of evidence behind. Turning to Jiffy, I gave him my final orders for the night.

"This will be our lodging area for the remainder of our stay. As such, I will not be needing a transport. In the carriage is two sets of evidence that are to be taken straight to Central Command. They'll know what to do with it. Tell them it's from Agent Six."

"Of course, sir. Will that be all?"

I nodded. "Just be ready to come when we're finished. Blaise will drop you a note. Other than that, you're off duty."

I tossed him a bag of coins which he caught deftly with his teeth and tucked away. He nodded to me and, with a short thanks, flew off.

Blaise and I walked up to the main house and I lightly knocked on the door. There was a short scuffle from the inside, followed by a distinct clang! and an uttered curse. Seconds later, the door opened, and I was greeted by an orange earth pony mare.

"Hello?" She shook her blond mane out of her eyes.

I flashed my badge quickly, and nodded to Blaise. "I'm Agent Six from the CIA, and this is my partner, Blaise. We're here because you volunteered a small set of lodgings for us?"

"Oh, right! Now I remember! Come on in, why don't you?" she said, motioning us in. She had a lovely voice, heavily laced with an accent hailing from the deep south.

The two of us stepped in and I closed the door behind me. Quickly, the mare bustled about, picking up a small mess she had just made. "I'm Applejack, and I run this here farm. When I heard the government over at Canterlot needed a place to stay, why, I jus' volunteered right away! We got a big barn out back, and it's right comfortable enough."

"Your help is extremely appreciated, ma'am." I stayed by the door, not wanting to intrude too far into her comfy home.

"Oh, psh... ma'am, heh..." she chuckled. "Applejack's fine."

"Of course, miss Applejack."

She rolled her eyes, but said nothing more. I liked to maintain a constant modus of respect when dealing with others. It tended to get them to trust and like you more.

"Can I get y'all somethin' to drink?" She had finished cleaning up her mess and was leaning against a wall, one foreleg crossed over the other.

"Actually," I said, looking down and noticing that Blaise was stifling a yawn. "I think it may simply be best if you show us to our quarters, miss Applejack. My partner has grown rather tired." He was a baby dragon, after all.

"Aw, sure! It's right this way, now. I fixed up the barn just this mornin'."

She led us out the back of the small home, and into the barn behind it. The inside of the barn was massive, though mostly empty. Large haystacks dotted the floor and above lay a loft on either side of the barn. The barn itself had been clearly recently cleaned, and there were a couple beds laid out.

"It may not look like much, but I promise it'll do. Close up these doors, and it stays plenty warm enough in here." Applejack tapped one of the large doors with a forehoof. "Built it mahself."

I smiled warmly at her. "I'm sure it will do fine, miss Applejack."

She turned and left, and we were alone. Blaise had already made himself quite comfortable in one of the beds. I took a blanket from one, and climbed up to the loft, so that I could write while keeping an eye on him.

And that was where I began this rather long entry here. I will stop for the night, as there is little left to be said that cannot be said later, and for the fact that my eyes have grown rather heavy. I shall close this up then, hide it away, and continue sometime tomorrow.

I hope the investigation goes well. As you know, I want out.

Goodnight for now, diary. And goodnight to you, dear reader.

Chapter 5

[editor's note: actual photos of crime scenes have been removed. Due to the graphic nature of many of them, as well as the personal connection many of the ponies involved in turning these diaries into books had with various ponies depicted in said pictures, it has been decided that any and all photos would be removed. Descriptors of photos shall remain.]

I awoke this morning to the sound of trilling birds and the thin rays of sunlight filtering through the cracks in the roof, tickling my face. Idyllic, I think, this town. So colorful and bright. Such harmonious sounds to awaken to, and to see you through the day. It's nothing like the gray stone-walled cityscape of Canterlot. No, this town is simple and honest. There are no lying agencies or corporations to be had; no agent runners skittering about delivering the latest of the cover-ups. Just a nice town square, a shopping district, a few houses, and a lovely farm. These streets weren't paved with the lies of a government secretly controlled by the princess of the moon; they were carved through honest labor of hard-working earth ponies. I think that's why these murders hit me so hard. No pony expects something this terrible to happen in such an honest town. But then again, one rarely expects things this terrible to happen ever. I know that one would think me jaded at the very least, when it comes to murders. My own mother used to love saying that I was jaded. I hated that. In reality my own job makes me as sick as it would any other pony. I've just learned to deal with it; internalize it, compartmentalize it.

As my old mentor used to like to say, it's like your mind is made of two boxes: one for the now, and one for the later. There are things that you need to deal with right away, and things that can wait for later. You take those things that you need to deal with later, and you shove them in that box, close it tight. There will be time later to open it back up and cry and rage over them, but in my line of work, your mind has to constantly be in the now.

And yet here I am, raging to you, dear reader. Perhaps this little book is my way of dealing with things. I'm not entirely sure. I've never had to Profile

myself before, you understand. But take my thoughts, then. Perhaps my thoughts can shed some light in to this grim situation. At the very least, they will help you understand me. I like to think I am one of the more sane members of the Agency, after all.

I laughed at that last sentence. I really did. Sane, methinks. Ha! Sane, I call myself, and here I am laughing at a little book that will never be able to laugh back. This diary is a true friend in that respect.

Yet I digress once more. A nasty habit of mine. You'll stop me when I do that though, right? Of course not, you're a diary being held by a reader. Ha. I laughed at that as well.

The night goes on now, and I have much to say about this day. So before I trail off into some wildly unrelated topic and find myself writing until just before the rooster crows and the sun peeks over the distant hills, let me detail the continuation of this gruesome investigation.

We made our way to the crime scenes today. After politely declining what I'm sure would have been a wondrous breakfast from miss Applejack, Blaise and I made the trek towards the center of town. We would be visiting the five cordoned-off areas in Ponyville that had been the sites of the recent murders. It was a necessity; not just because photos rarely did justice to a crime scene, but also because analyzing what could be seen and possibly have been missed by the local police, we could solidify our Profile. We had the initial Profile, yes, but we had yet to complete it, and make sure it was nothing short of perfect. Today would be the day to do that. As we walked down the well-tamped dirt path leading towards town square, I took the time we had before we arrived to quiz him.

"Blaise." It had been silent for a while now, and it was me who broke it.

He looked up to me. "Hmmm?"

"What do you think we'll be doing today?" A test, then, I decided.

"We will review the crime scenes, amend the Profile where needed, and present it to the local law enforcement." He gave the word-for-word textbook answer. At the very least, he was studying.

"Good," I replied, nodding. "We'll start with the first murder, at the bakery. We'll go chronologically, and then end at the police department."

We walked a few more moments in silence, which was broken then by my partner.

"You're...excited about this, aren't you?" Blaise was looking up at me with a raised eyebrow.

"What?" I snapped my gaze to him.

"Your pace picked up a little bit when you were describing that to me. You're walking really fast now."

I looked down at my hooves as we trudged forward, and noticed that he was indeed right. He was wrong in his assumptions, however. I was intent on finishing this day quickly, but not for the reasons he may have suspected. I was simply interested in getting this over with so I could get back to my writing, and be done with the first brunt of our work. Inwardly I laughed, though it was devoid of mirth. So he was profiling me after all, I noted. That confirmed my suspicions. I would have to be careful. Not that I wasn't already being careful.

"We must finish the Profile quickly," I told him. "The faster we get this done, the sooner we can present our Profile, let the authorities find our killer for us, and begin the second phase of our mission." A neutral reply, I figured.

Let him take from that answer what he would. If he thought me simply excited that was fine; as long as he didn't sense my apprehension about certain parts of my mission. I suddenly had a realization; if I could allow him to Profile me incorrectly, I could feed misinformation to the Princess about my intentions and motivations. It would be a delicate chess game, to be sure. Hiding my emotions while displaying fake ones would work in my favor, but would inevitably be very difficult. But I wasn't about to let my years of schooling be bested by a baby dragon who was learning from me. The age-old trope of student-to-master wasn't going to happen here if I could help it. I let my head swing back to front, so he couldn't sense my inner ramblings from my face as I mulled this over. A chess game it was, then, I decided. Inwardly I smirked.

Your move...

When we arrived at the bakery, I could tell that the place was still heavily cordoned off. The yellow police tape still extended out from the entrance, and there was a police officer on duty, standing by the only door leading in. I flashed my badge to him and he nodded to us in acknowledgement.

"Nothing's been touched in here, sirs. The owners were gone for a trip when the murder happened, and found the body when they came back. Since then, they've been staying somewhere else and the shop has been indefinitely closed." He had a grim look on his face.

"I might need to question them later," I told him.

He gave me a withering look, though it was only slight. "They've already been questioned, and anything they've said has been put on file for you."

"I know," I replied, walking past him. "But I'll have to interview them all the same."

I didn't bother explaining why to him. He wouldn't much have appreciated it anyway. I know they might pride themselves in their job, but this is their town, after all. And it's a small town. Hard for somepony of the law enforcement to question people they know and see everyday about something like this. It's even harder for them to imagine that the criminal is amongst them. It clouds their judgement. And besides, I might add, they don't have my eyes. They don't understand how to Profile.

I resolved to finish that later, however. Today was going to be about the main Profile. And for that I needed to focus on the crime scenes.

The interior of "Sugarcube Corner," as the store was called, was a very generic bakery. Sparsely decorated, and with a small counter and moderately sized waiting area, where parties could be held. I strolled past these quickly. I was interested in the area behind the counter, into where the kitchen was. It was very much like what I had seen in the pictures. The kitchen was quite spacious, with enough room for two ponies to work comfortably without getting in each other's way. The scene hadn't been touched, though the body was gone. That was understandable, of course. I made a mental note to visit the local coroner to discuss the bodies. Who

knew... perhaps they could shed some light beyond the things they had written in their reports.

"Not much to go on here..." Blaise looked around. He stepped over to a spot on the shiny linoleum. "Got a pile of barf here, though. More than was in the picture."

I looked down, searching for the spot where the body had lain in the photos. I discovered that I had been standing in it. Eeugh... There was that thick trail of spittle and vomit that had trickled from Pinkie Pie's mouth. I took a step back and looked over at where Blaise was standing. It was closer to the counter where the cash register lay.

"Another one?" I tapped a hoof to my chin. "She must have thrown up once while struggling, if she struggled at all. Then again, as she was dying."

"This must have lasted a long time," Blaise added. "This pile here shows that she was able to get some of the candy out of her throat while the killer was shoving it in."

"Enough strength to eject that..." I looked around. Sure enough, in an opposing corner, were bits of broken candy. "She must have had a stomach of steel and a lot of resolve."

"But..."

"Hmmm?" I looked over at Blaise.

"There's no other signs of a struggle. I mean, there's some candy here on the floor, and some over there, but nothing else is knocked around, or on the floor. Look over here..." he pointed at a nearby cutting board and knife rack, and then indicated above him an array of hanging pots and pans. "All the things that a pony would pick up to use as a weapon haven't even been touched."

I looked at the two entrances to the place; one at the very front of the store, above which was a bell that would ring whenever anypony entered. Then, walking over to the side of the kitchen, I tested the side entrance they probably used to load ingredients in bulk straight to storage. It was locked.

"Both entrances are secure. One is locked, and the other would ring if somepony came in. That leaves us with only one possibility here. They had to have entered from the front, which means they were somepony she knew. And secondly, they had to have been extremely strong. There is absolutely no evidence of a struggle. Even if she were surprised, the way she was killed would indicate an extremely slow death, evidenced once more by this second pile of vomit. And that would mean...?" I trailed off, looking expectantly at Blaise.

"... that statistically, he is probably a stallion. We already thought about that though, because sadists usually are." Yet another textbook answer. He was learning well.

"Well, Blaise," I continued, "do you think there's anything else we can glean from this crime scene?"

He looked around once more. "I don't think so... We should probably talk to the owners, but other than that, I don't see anything else we can get from this place."

"Neither do I." I started heading for the door. "Come on...we have a lot more to see today, and time runs short."

Time was indeed running short. The killer had killed somepony once every two days... which meant that if they held to their pattern, there would be another killing tonight. If you really think about it, there is every possibility that the killer is out there right now, murdering somepony as I write this. The thought brings a chill to my spine. And there is nothing I can do! Even with the Profile now, there is no surefire way to know who exactly they are. We have very little evidence to go on, and the police are spread far too thin already. I could go patrolling, but I would probably not find anything, or be too late anyway. And I need my rest too...tomorrow we still have much to do. There surely is not enough time in a day for me to get work done. And yet as I write that, here I am rambling once more. Onwards then, dear reader.

What we found at the Carousel Boutique, the store where the bodies of both Rarity and Spike were found, was in one word, grisly. The pictures I had seen hardly did it justice. And the smell, too... an awful smell of dried

and drying blood. That was understandable, of course; the place was literally covered in it. I recalled to myself, as we entered the shop, the coroner had marked the death of the baby dragon down as largely unknown, though it clearly looked as though the poor creature had exploded. I was not one to disprove this, as I looked around at the mess. In the center of the room was a large splattering of blood, and there were trails radiating outwards from the center. At the end of each trail, lay a small plastic card with a number, which as I remembered from the evidence records corresponded to a piece of the body that had been found and taken to the coroner.

Exploded was right; this was truly disgusting.

I stepped over to the area that had been pictured in the photos or Rarity. She had been lain on the floor in front of one of the tables that were strewn about the place. There was a considerable amount of blood here as well, though it had been pooled, not splattered. Her death had most certainly been slow and painful.

"I don't get it..." Blaise said.

"What?" I looked down at him. He was standing on his tip-claws, trying to look up at the table in front of us.

"The sewing machine is perfectly clean. Shouldn't there be blood here?"

"Why would there be blood here?" I saw what he was getting at, but I didn't point out his mistake.

"The white unicorn here was found with a bunch of clothes sewn into her skin, and a word stitched into her foreleg. Why isn't there any blood on this sewing machine? It's the closest one to where she was lying..."

"Ah, but," I retorted, "A sewing machine doesn't have the power to go through skin and muscle consistently. You can't stitch things like that. This was done by hoof."

"Oh..." he looked rather sick now. I didn't blame him. "So the killer really is quite strong..."

I nodded, turning my attention to the large blood splattering that decorated the middle. We wouldn't learn much more from Rarity's death. Not until we were able to speak with the coroner. What I was more interested in was this dragon's death. It was an anomaly. It was, like the others, a very brutal murder. But it lacked a written message, and the nature of it was strange, to say the least. Explosion, I mused... this was evidence of possible magical activity. And there was no evidence to suggest a second killer as of yet... It was possible that this killer was either a unicorn, or just very very strong.

"Hey, what's this?" Once again Blaise snapped me from my thoughts.

"What?" Had he noticed something I didn't?

"There's a bit of blood that goes out over here..." he stepped around the large "explosion." Pointing downwards, he traced a trail of blood that led away from the initial splatter. But unlike the other tendrils, it was thicker in width and longer than the others.

"Strange..." I walked over, and then followed its trail with my eyes. It led over to a shelf on the far end of the room, much farther than anything else had been flung. I looked over and, squinting, I could make out a small card with a number on it. "Blaise," I said, "Look at your notes. Scene two, card six, what was it?"

Blaise took out a small notebook. "Uh...a leg. Dragon. Blown off just above the knee joint. That's what it says."

I looked down at the splatter once more. It was so out of place, this trail. The "explosion" had a clear radius, but this one exceeded it. It was out of place, as though...

"Wait..." I said it aloud.

"What?"

I traced the circle with my hoof just above it. "This is a circle here, with trails radiating from it in equal distances. The erm...pieces of the dragon's body were flung far, but this trail here," I said, pointing out the anomalous tendril, "reaches farther than the others. It appears to be from a second attack."

"So...he exploded twice?"

"A crude way of putting it...though no less accurate." It would have to do as an explanation, I decided. There was no real way to tell exactly how this dragon had died, but it had been brutal and quick. Much different than the other murders, which had been brutal but slow. There was a clear amount of aggression here, but little to no evidence of torture, and the lack of a message indicated less hatred. The brutality was born either from desperation of sheer anger. I would factor this in later, when I presented the Profile to the local authorities.

At this point, I decided that there was little left to see in the Boutique. Admittedly, I was getting rather tired of the sight and smell of all that blood as well. I decided to end our investigation of that particular scene, and we exited.

We dined at a local restaurant for lunch. It was a small venue, with a lovely outside dining area. It was an interesting experience, to be sure. Not just for the looks that I got from passerby, either. Of course, the looks are normal. With my shaved mane and other features that draw the eye, it is only natural that one in my situation would get stares. But what I found most interesting was the looks of others around me, and their interactions with those around them. I noted, as I sat eating away at a daisy sandwich, that everypony wore very neutral looks on their faces. A "poker-face," I believe one might call it. Most around me showed little emotion, smiling only occasionally, and talking at a moderate volume. I watched couples sitting at lunch to eat, and saw that they conversed in more subdued tones than normal. Despite the affectations of the decor of this particular restaurant (they were rather festive in their color choice and wall art), the overall mood of the whole place seemed, in a word, dim.

I had not seen this as much before on my missions. This was a small town, of course. And with small towns comes the strange phenomena of fast-travelling news. Neighbors gossip. Ponies gossip at the market. Ponies gather for lunch and exchange gossip. In a town where everypony knows pretty much everypony else, news travels extremely fast.

Of course, that wasn't all. Those who had heard of the murders likely had heard rumors that the killer lived amongst them. It was highly likely, to say

the least. It was fascinating to see this town now, let me tell you. Everypony was scared. Everypony was suspicious. Everypony was quiet. I had never seen anything like this in all my time as a Patcher. Having mostly worked large cities, and having stayed most of my early career in Canterlot, I was used to the uncaring sea of faces that came with large-scale cities. But here...no, this was different. This was true fear.

I realized then that I would have to be careful for two important reasons. Firstly, I had to be careful what I said and to whom. If word and rumors travelled as quickly as I suspected, then I would need to choose my words carefully. And secondly, I would have to caution the local police. Citizens were scared. And when a pony is scared, sometimes they do things they will regret. We had to keep this investigation under wraps, as it were. Not that I wasn't already doing that; this was a Patch job after all. But we would have to tread lightly.

Inwardly, I sighed. Treading lightly had become something of a constant for me lately. It was very tiring.

I shall not bore you with the intimate details of the other two crime scenes; they provided even less information than the first two, only serving to confirm our initial Profile. Rainbow Dash had been blitz attacked in a public restroom, and the local teacher had received a fate similar in pain to that of Pinkie Pie. Both were brutal, well controlled, and extremely slow.

On another note, I only vaguely remember what we did after the Boutique. Suffice to say that my mind was in a haze today, dear reader. After the scene at the Carousel Boutique, I had trouble concentrating. Not from the disgust at what I had seen in there, but the evidence of the second "explosion," as well as the initial "explosion" itself. It was a high probability we were dealing with a magical killer, but I couldn't rule anything else out. I went over possible scenarios in my head, all of which I would later present, but nothing seemed to truly hold water. Then there was the missing message...

Gah, even now as I write this, I feel as I have gotten something very wrong. And while I am not one to always "follow my gut," as the saying goes, I cannot ignore that small voice in my head that is telling me to re-think things entirely. It is quite bothersome. And it has been quite distracting

today as well. And that is a poor thing to have when on the job. As my old mentor might say, it's going to take a lot of flexing my brain to keep that second box closed. Things for later must be dealt with later. Focus on the now. Interesting... even when I write that, I still read it in his voice.

I would take some time to talk about him, as he is somewhat important to this story, but I'm afraid that I do not have much time left before I must sleep tonight, and that is a rather long bit of writing. I still have to finish writing about today. Perhaps I will have more time at a later date. For now, back to the story. That is...assuming I can remember where I was.

Ah, yes. The Police

Our job here, in terms of catching the killer, is mostly advisory. The local police still handle most of the work, but where we come in is the Profile. By giving them the Profile, we can help them sort out their investigative work and set them on the right track. Of course, it falls to us to help them canvass the area, but after all, they know this town and the locals better. So by presenting them the Profile that we've built, from our looking over both the evidence and the crime scenes, we can better their chances of catching the killer in a timely fashion.

But I am worried about this particular case. The killer has been extremely fast. I fear we may see more deaths before this investigation is over. And even with our help, I'm not entirely sure how many may die until then.

It is with these thoughts that I once again trudged up to the Ponyville Police Department this evening, with Blaise in tow. I would have to present them with a solution, but not let their hopes be raised too high. I fear that getting their hopes up may result in those expectations being dashed to the ground.

Chapter 6

As I stepped in to the Ponyville Police Department for the second time in my life, I was once again met with that oppressively quiet atmosphere. And it had seemed to me that scarcely a pony had moved since last I left. They all still sat at their desks, pouring over their work. I could hardly blame them; there was little left for them to do aside from their normal daily duties. At least, that was all they could do until I walked in of course. Today was my day, so to speak. The day for me to prove myself to the local police, gain their trust, and let them into a part of the investigation. Gaining their trust would be instrumental to my plan. They had to believe they were as much a part of this investigation as I was, after all. That would make it easier to pull the wool over their eyes, so to speak. I expelled a quiet breath as I closed the door behind me and walked in. It was time to begin.

"I am now prepared," I announced the the entire room, "to present my Profile."

This garnered inquisitive looks from the room, but everypony stopped what they were doing and looked up at me. They were hopeful looks, I noted. Hopeful that I could possibly help. I moved to the opposite end of the large office-esque room so that I could be seen and heard clearly by each pony present.

"Alright listen carefully." It was time to put on a small show. I looked down to Blaise, who was standing off to my side. Watch and learn, little buddy, I thought. This is how you deal with the local PD. Looking back up, I addressed the room. "Many of you are probably wondering how exactly we intend to help. Our place here is not so much a physical form of help, but rather, intellectual."

This earned me a few raised eyebrows, but I ignored them. They would soon see how much use I could be here.

"We were called in to advise on this case," I continued, "by Princess Luna. Our job here was to investigate every scene, review evidence, construct a Profile of our killer, and present it to you. The purpose of our Profile is to help you narrow down suspects, and if possible, set you on track towards

new and unseen suspects. The Profile, by itself, does very little. How you use it, however, could determine how quickly you catch the pony responsible."

Interest now, a few perked ears. They would listen, I decided. "It would help if you all took out notebooks and wrote down what I am about to say."

There was a scrabble for notebooks as each officer opened drawers and grabbed writing implements. Every unicorn horn in the room was lit immediately with light telekinetic spells and they all readied their writing. I took a moment to ensure they were all paying attention before continuing. As I did so, Blaise spoke up. I had given him this small part of my speech. He needed the practice addressing crowds, so I felt it wise to do so.

"It's really important to remember that our Profile isn't a sure-fire method," he told them. "It can guide your hooves in the right direction, but it is not perfect. Not every part of it will be spot-on, and you should always remember that. But it will help, even so. Always have this Profile in the back of your mind when interviewing or canvassing suspects."

I nodded to him before continuing.

"We began with victimology, or rather, the study of the victims the killer chose. By studying these, we discover what the killer prefers. When looking at the victim spread here, however, the killer's preference appears to be all over the place. Various kinds of ponies, as well as species. Note the dragon. Each victim is a young mare, yes, but the population of Ponyville is predominantly young mares in population. This tells me that there isn't a specific type of pony he is after in terms appearance. These victims were not chosen by look. Also note the lack of sexual abuse. Our killer didn't choose these victims for that. These victims were chosen for a different reason."

I tapped the board behind me, and raised a marker with my magic. The chalk squeaked across the board as I wrote out the words that had accompanied each of the bodies. Gluttony, Vanity, Pride, Lust. They had pretty much been burned into my memory.

"And this is the reason. At least the reason he gives us. He perceives each of his victims as having a great sin or shortcoming, and that is what triggers his need to kill. But," I added, holding up a hoof, "that is not the absolute

true reason for it. The true reason, the reason that perhaps he himself doesn't even realize, is shown to us through each kill."

I thought back to the photos and scenes. I had gone over them many many times in my head, and through careful scrutiny, I had come to this conclusion.

"The purpose, fellow colleagues," I added that last bit to keep them on par with me, "is the act of killing in and of itself. If you look to each of the photos, and coroner reports, evidence suggests that each pony died slowly and painfully. Our killer drew out their deaths and made them suffer unnecessarily. This narrows down our Profile to a very specific type that we call a 'sadistic killer.' A sadistic killer focuses on the pain he inflicts on his victims, and nothing more. To him, the kill is more arousing and exciting than anything else. And now, look at the scenes."

It was a rhetorical command; nopony actually had the pictures on them. I had made sure of that.

"The scenes were well controlled by our killer," I pointed out, "and even if the victims put up a struggle, there is little evidence to suggest that it was much of a struggle anyways. This tells us a great many things. Firstly, our killer is strong and fast. He can subdue and torture grown mares with little effort. Secondly, he knows the areas. He knew when and where to strike, and was able to come and go largely unnoticed. This means he's studied the area and his victims. Thirdly, and most importantly, he knows his victims. He knows them well. This is also evidenced by..."

I tapped the board with a hoof.

"...these. These messages are interesting as well. One might even say they are the most important part of each scene. Not because of the words that were written, but the very fact that they were written at all. This shows us the most important thing: how much our killer studied his victims. He was close to them. One could go as far as to say he was friends with them, or at least he thought he was. And that brings us to our last bit of the profile. The way in which the bodies were staged after their deaths." I began pacing. "In the case of Pinkie Pie, her face was covered after death. Rainbow Dash was placed in an almost angelic pose. And Rarity was made to look as though she were sleeping. This is important. This is very important. This tells us that after each kill, our killer felt remorse. He may have hated them

just enough to kill them painfully, but a part of him is still emotionally attached to them."

A pony to my left raised a hoof questioningly. I already knew what his question was going to be, but I allowed him to ask it anyway. The interaction between us would help build some trust.

"How does this help us actually find out who this pony is?" A perfectly valid question.

"It is very important," I answered him. "Because our Profile will tell you how this pony behaves, what he may look like, and how you might find him."

Raised eyebrows at this. Some ponies leaned forward with interest, and others displayed disdain. That was fine; we'd see how they felt when I was finished.

"I'll start, then," I continued, noting these looks. "We have a clear case of a sadistic killer. Statistically, sadists are male, between the ages of 20-35. A sadist is easily driven to anger by what are called 'triggers.' For him, the triggers are things he perceives as horrendous shortcomings. And he reacts violently and brutally. He punishes his victims for their sins by inflicting as much pain as he can before killing them. This tells us that he is strong. The lack of struggling indicates that he is either a very strong pegasus or earth pony, or he is a magically skilled unicorn, able to subdue victims with little to no struggle. Because he is so closely personally tied to his victims, he probably sees them every day. He has studied them closely, so at the very least, he has access to their personal lives. Look first and foremost at friends and family, using this Profile to narrow them down. Make your way out from there, keeping in mind that this pony had to know them and know them well."

I thought for a moment before continuing with the final part.

"There is one more thing," I said, "but it is not to be taken in to consideration as strictly as the other parts. This is where our study of criminal psychology gets a little fuzzy. It is clear from our perusal of the evidence that we can narrow down to a specific type of killer. However, my job is to help you narrow that down even further to help you find suspects. I can give you a statistical interpretation of this particular killer's personality, but remember that this is in no way concrete."

I paused to take a breath for a few moments before continuing with my last bit.

"Sadistic killers," I said, "are easily prone to violent bouts of anger. However, we can tell from the evidence that this particular killer is extremely smart. He plans for his kills, leaves no evidence behind, and has been able to kill quickly without any trouble. As such, he has probably adapted to fit in to normal society well. This pony will be well-spoken, reserved at times, and possibly somewhat shy. But behind that demeanor lies a showman." Once more I tapped board. "These messages are for us as much as they are for him. They display for all to see what he believes to be ideals. Even more so are the ways in which he has killed and staged his victims. Heavy usage of irony, as you can see. These are his way of taunting us, daring us to find him, and daring us to guess who his next victims are. If brought in for questioning, this pony will be confident that we will not know he is responsible. He will be calm and collected. He may even talk back to his questioners if he isn't playing shy. Be on the lookout for these kinds of character traits."

Well, that was it. This was our Profile, for them to use as they would.

"Are there any questions?" I asked

A pony towards the back raised a hoof. "How does th' baby dragon have anythin' ta do with this? There was no message left at that scene."

A valid question. "It's difficult to believe," I answered, "that there is more than one killer, so I would strike that notion from your heads right now. Killers of this magnitude rarely hunt in packs. In all likelihood, the dragon was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. I think that the killer came back to the scene in an attempt to relive that particular kill by taking in the scene, and..." I trailed off, attempting to remember the name. "...Spike just happened to be there. The lack of the a message just goes to show us that it was not a planned kill. I'm pretty sure that it was the same killer, and the most important thing for you right now is to stop focusing on our past victims, and start thinking about the victims that are to come. It's imperative that we try and catch this pony as soon as possible."

That seemed to answer his question, as he went back to writing in his notebook. I looked around expectantly to see if there were any more questions that needed to be answered, but all that was returned were either

blank or satisfied stares. I nodded to everyone then, and wished them the best of luck. As I turned to leave, however, Blaise tugged at my sidesaddle bags. I looked down at him to ask him what he needed, and he told me he had to run off to the restroom for a bit, then dashed off before I could offer to hold his bags. Inwardly, I sighed. That could have been a perfect time to read through his notebooks, but perhaps there would be time for that later.. Shrugging, I made my way to the front entrance, past the rows of desks, the the waiting area near the front doors. I sat down, taking the weight off my hooves. Leaning back in the chair, I allowed my chin to rest in the crook of a forehoof, and fell into deep thought. We had finished the first phase of our little operation. I had gathered up all evidence the local police owned pertaining to the case and sent it back to headquarters. They would deal with processing and destruction. I had presented a Profile that was accurate to the best of my ability in an effort to speed along the suspect process. The local Police would catch the killer for us, and I would take him into custody. That left a few areas tied up. I needed to interview a few ponies around to ensure their knowledge of the case was fuzzy at best. I would also need to secure the bodies. I made a mental note to check in with the coroner and have the bodies sent to headquarters as well.

With any luck, I decided, we would be able to perform our cover silently, quickly, and without fail. I was worried, however, at the possibility of there being more victims. I frowned. There was going to be more. That was a fact that I could not deny. This killer was good, and even with a perfect Profile, we could not be sure how quickly we would find him. More bodies were going to turn up. That was good in its own way, however. More bodies meant more evidence, more chances for him to slip up. As wrong as it sounded, more bodies would be a help. I could only pray at this point that we wouldn't need the help.

"Excuse me?" A voice from above me snapped me from my thoughts. I whipped my head up to look at who had spoken. It was one of the police officers who had attended my short lecture.

"Yes?" I looked him up and down quickly. He was rather young, only a year or two younger than me. He had a roughly cut mane, with a forelock that hung down to his eyes. His dark yellow coat was well taken care of, though it appeared that he had not groomed in a few days. My eyes instinctively flicked to his cutie mark, which was a pen set upon a six-pointed gold star. I felt a small twinge in my stomach at that; it was very similar to a cutie mark

I had once seen every day but hadn't in about a year. Shifting my gaze to his face, I studied his demeanor. He wore a tired but inquisitive look.

"Hi, I'm officer Scrawl," He said, holding out a hoof. "Well... most here know me as Ambrose. Though some of the officers around here like to call me 'Amber.'" He laughed at the joke nervously.

I held up a hoof and tapped it to his, returning his greeting. "A pleasure, officer Scrawl."

He laughed again. "No, the pleasure's all mine, actually." He shuffled his hooves awkwardly. "I uh... had a couple questions to ask you about the case, and your job. And it looks like you're just waiting here, so I figured I might as well ask."

"Ask away, then," I answered, motioning for him to sit down. I wasn't sure how many questions about my job that I could actually answer, but I figured I could entertain a few of them.

He pulled a chair out and sat down to the side. "Well... I was just wondering how many cases like this you've seen in your job. I know that agents at the CIA only get called in when things get too crazy. And I was also kind of wondering how it is you got your job."

I expelled a short breath, tapping my chin. "In regards to your first question, I can't really say that. Agency rules, you see? Suffice to say that I have reviewed quite a few cases that were... well, rather extreme in nature. Though I will admit, this is the first case I have come across that is so violent. As for your second question... I was recruited for my educational background."

He leaned forward. "You were scouted? I hadn't heard of many ponies getting admitted to the Agency that way."

"It does happen." More than one might think, actually. The CIA was always looking for new blood, ponies willing to do their bidding.

"I've been wondering how that worked. Jobs at the Agency always seemed like something I could see myself doing. I dunno, though."

I looked at him out of the corner of my eyes. He reminded me a lot of myself. At least, myself back at my old desk job in Canterlot. He wasn't a far cry from where I stood, I just had a couple years on him. Well, that, and a whole slew of missions from the Agency under my belt. Those had not been kind to me, though I am loathe to admit it.

"You don't know?" I asked in a very neutral tone.

"It's just this case..." He trailed off, not really knowing how to answer.

I nodded. "Let me guess. This is your first case, and you've only been working here for a couple weeks."

That nervous laugh again. "Was it really that obvious?"

It was. "You're a couple years younger than me at the least. Your co-workers here have given you an embarrassing nickname, something many veterans do to new officers." It was true. They'd done it to me. "By the looks of it, you haven't properly groomed in a couple days. That tells me either you've been putting in a lot of overtime, or you've been fretting about this case for a while now."

"You really nailed it, actually. I've been putting in a lot of overtime on this case." He sighed. "I really want to get some work done here, finish it, and-"

"Make a name for yourself." I finished his sentence for him. "You've got your sights set on a job at Canterlot, possibly in the CIA."

"Right again. You really are a Profiler."

Profiler. Now there was a word I hadn't heard in a long time. That was the real name for what I did. But all this time it had been Patcher this and Patcher that. It was quite nice to hear the real title for once. A blast from the past, if you will.

"Years of study make you an apt pony, that's all. On that note, what area do you specialize in?"

"I did general Justice Studies at a local university near Manehattan. That was how I got my job here. I'm planning on specializing in the lab stuff, though. Going to school while I hold down this job. Fieldwork isn't really my

thing, I found out this week. Would it be possible to get into the CIA in that area? I don't know how many lab techs they need up there."

That wouldn't have been very hard, I thought. There were always openings for lab assistants there. My own mentor had worked in the R&D labs in the main headquarters for many years and was always on the lookout for interns. I thought for a moment about how to answer this question, however. Part of me was ready to give the answer we were always supposed to give. The higher ups had always directed us to point possible recruits to the applications offices. It was almost a mandate; the CIA loved getting new helpers. But a part of me rebelled at the idea. Well, perhaps not. The entirety of me rebelled at the idea. Here was a perfectly willing young pony who wanted nothing more than to catch killers and keep the peace. I didn't want to crush his hopes and dreams with stories of heinous crimes. But more than anything, I didn't want to see him end up where I was; a tool of the government, thrust into a dark world to do its dirty work and then sworn to secrecy. He seemed like such a dedicated pony, too. No, I decided, the standard answer would not fare here. Blaise wasn't around, I might as well speak my mind. At that thought, my eyes quickly flicked towards the direction Blaise had walked. Where was he, I wondered. He certainly was taking an awful long time.

"I'm not entirely sure, actually," I lied to Scrawl. "I'm a field agent, so I don't really get to see the lab techs very often. But if you'd like some advice...?"

I continued at his nod. "Take it a case at a time, officer. I won't lie to you. This is a brutal set of murders. But all over Equestria, these sorts of things are happening all the time. And I can tell that this case is already wearing at you. I don't blame you. It's wearing at me, and I've only been a part of it for two days. Setting your sights high is a lofty goal. But buckling down and fighting the fight here? That's an admirable thing. I've seen too many law enforcement offices go down under the strain of being underfunded and understaffed. Places like this? They could use you. The CIA has applicants coming in daily. I'm sure that you could get a job there, but to be honest, places like Ponyville need ponies like you working for them."

He beamed at this comment. "That's really nice of you to say."

"I mean it," I answered. "And, one more thing..." I sighed. "I'm not going to lie to you. In all likelihood you'll find yourself working a case that's as hard as this one. Just be prepared for that."

Looking back, I'm surprised at how jaded that last comment had sounded. Jaded... how I hate that word. How I hate it when ponies use that word in tandem with descriptions of my personality. I like to think that I've managed to retain a hopeful outlook. For Celestia's sake, I'm writing this damn little book here in hopes of finally getting free. But now that I think about it, I begin to realize more and more that this job has turned my thoughts towards cynicism. I dislike many things about the way that this country is run. Or rather, I dislike many things about the way this country is actually run behind the sunny facade of two benevolent princesses. And knowing that so many things in our history have been covered up with sickeningly sweet stories and patchwork lies does not help my opinion of our current government. I dislike what it has made me. But enough about that. Perhaps later there will be time to write about this. Time to put this back in its little box in the back of my mind, and save it for later.

Officer Ambrose Scrawl thanked me for my time as I stood, telling him that I had to go. Out of the corner of my eye, I had seen Blaise coming back from his lengthy trip to the restroom, and I decided I should probably halt that conversation before he listened in. Scrawl replaced his chair in its place along the wall and went back to his desk just as Blaise walked up beside me.

"Sorry about that, Six," he said. "Lunch wasn't really agreeing with me."

"We'd best get going, then," I answered. "We have one last stop to make before we go back to the farm."

We left the muted atmosphere of the Police Department just as the sun was beginning to touch the horizon.

As we entered the morgue of Ponyville General Hospital, I was once again reminded of why I disliked medical facilities. It was the color. It had always been the color. So blindingly white. It reminded me of the lobby area of the Canterlot branch of the CIA. Every inch of the floors, walls, and ceiling is always so clean, and the air of the place always has a sterile smell to it.

Hospitals are the same way. Always so damn white. No matter how much death or disease rolled through a hospital, it was always cleaned up in a neat and orderly fashion. Patched over, if you will.

So it was with a frown that I pushed through the double doors and stepped into the morgue. I looked around distastefully at the clean room, each wall lined with small doors that stored bodies. The tables around the room were all full metal, which had been shined to an almost blinding extent. When the door latched shut behind us, a head snapped up from under one of the tables. An earth pony had been cleaning a spot on the floor. She stepped out to see who had disturbed her and I finally got a good look at her. She was white in color, almost as blindingly white as the walls around us, with a very light pink mane and tail. She wore a simple nurse's hat that covered her long mane, which had been tied up in a bun. A quick perusal of her attractive buttocks gave me her cutie mark, which was a red cross; a symbol that stuck out in contrast to her milky white coat.

She looked us over once, and nodded when she saw the patch over my mark. "Can I help you?"

"Are you... Nurse Redheart?" I recalled her name from the coroner signature from our evidence.

"Yes, that's me." she leaned against the shiny table, a tired look in her eyes.

So this was the coroner. I looked her over once more and noted that she seemed very stressed. She had bags under her eyes and despite the fact that she was smiling at us, it was a very strained smile. Her bun, which I'm sure at some point today had been done up well was beginning to sag and stray hairs were popping out. I briefly reflected on her before continuing our conversation. Aside from the few policemen who had investigated each scene, this young mare had come into contact with more evidence than anypony else. She had handled the bodies, and performed the autopsies. As such, she was a primary target for the Patch. In essence, she knew too much. I would need to discern what she knew, and if it was a possible threat.

"Then you're the coroner who drew up the reports for the string of recent murders?"

She sighed. "Yes, I am. Truly awful things, let me tell you."

"I'm here to ask you a few questions." My heart went out to her. This seemed like such a nice town. Or rather, it had been, until this happened. She seemed nice, too. I sincerely hoped I wouldn't have to kill her.

"Everything I have to say was drawn up in the reports I sent to the police. I don't know what I could possibly tell you now."

"I mostly have some questions about the bodies, and a few inquiries as to your opinions. I won't take up much of your time. I know this must be taxing for you."

She slumped against the table, her legs giving way. She seemed so drained. "I'm sorry... It's my job to deal with this sort of thing on a daily basis, but these murders..." she trailed off, biting her lip. I thought she might cry right then and there. "...they're like nothing I've ever seen. I'll be glad when this is well over. I'm ready to put it all behind me."

That was a good sign. Perhaps silencing her would not be necessary. "Tell me then, nurse, about the dragon."

She shuddered. "I don't even want to think about that one. There was so much of him gone it was impossible to even begin piecing him back together. I could hardly get anything off of him."

"In your professional opinion, what happened to him?" I was genuinely curious.

"I have no idea," she replied. "It looked to me like he'd simply been torn apart by an explosion. Best answer I could give you is that it was a magical death. I don't know of anything that is strong enough to rip through scales like that..."

I nodded. "And what of the others? Anything strange or different that you didn't put in your reports? Any small detail you didn't see fit to record?"

Even through her exhaustion she managed to give me a very pointed look. "I am a thorough pony, mister. I didn't leave a single thing out."

"I didn't mean to insult your job, miss Redheart," I said, holding my hooves up defensively. "These are standard questions I have to ask."

"Oh, I know. I'm getting short with everybody around here. I haven't slept in a while." She rubbed her eyes with a forehoof. "My shift is up soon, and I'm not sticking around for overtime tonight, I'm afraid. I'll do more bad than good here right now."

"Of course." I stepped forward. "I just need to see your records of the bodies, as well as the bodies themselves before I go."

"I'm sorry, any records we had went straight to the police. As for the bodies, well, we have the dragon's body, but I'm afraid the rest are gone."

I was taken aback. "Gone?"

"They've been laid to rest at the request of their families."

I frowned inwardly. This would make my job rather annoying. Outwardly, I smiled. "That's good, then. Can I ask where?"

"Looking to pay your respects?" she yawned, smiling.

"In a manner of speaking, yes." Actually, I wasn't. We needed those bodies. I didn't have the time, anyway.

"Well let me see if I can remember." She tapped her chin with a hoof. "Miss Pie, miss Dash, and miss Cheerilee were all sent to the Ponyville Cemetery. Miss Rarity's body was sent to Manehattan where some of her family resides to be buried near her home. As for young Spike, he will be cremated at the request of one miss Twilight Sparkle."

That left the body of the dragon already destroyed for us. I would need to get my hooves on the others. That would be an easy task, however. Thankfully, they had sent all their paperwork to the police, which meant I already had it.

"Thank you, nurse Redheart." I turned to leave, but before walking back through the double doors, I spoke to her over my shoulder. "I'm very sorry that you've had to work through this. The feeling of wanting to put this

behind you is very justified. I suggest you get some good rest tonight, you need it. And thank you for your time."

With that, Blaise and I exited. Though not before, I heard the nurse mutter, "I don't think I'll be getting any kind of sleep soon."

We had one last bit of work to do before heading back. I needed Blaise to write us a letter to my liaison back at Headquarters.. We needed to deal with the bodies that were in existence, and I required the services of the CIA to do so. I dictated it to him and I shall reprint it here:

*The following document is marked at clearance level: EYES ONLY
If you are viewing this document without proper clearance, you are in violation of CIA code 172, sec. 1.*

*The **SECRECY CLASSIFICATION** of this document is marked: **BURN AFTER READING**
Failure to comply with any or all codes of conduct will result in immediate referral to Central Command.*

Dr. Whooves,

As part of an ongoing Patchwork investigation based in Ponyville, I require that four bodies be exhumed for processing. Under confidentiality codes, I am not allowed to discuss the case itself, though I will request that princess Luna brief you in it, as I will need your expertise. You may use this letter as my formal request. Before the bodies are destroyed under the standard Patch codes, I would like you to examine them. Your insight may prove useful.

The bodies are as follows:

One Rarity Belle, buried in Manehattan

One Pinkie Pie, buried in Ponyville

One Rainbow Dash, buried in Ponyville

And lastly, one Cheerilee, buried in Ponyville.

Please take care of this as soon as possible. The current investigation depends on a swift reply.

Sincerely,

Agent Six.

Chapter 7

The sun had completely slipped behind the hills by the time we finally made our way to Applejack's ranch. As the light from it faded into the darkness and the moon took over, I walked along the fence, my head perpetually facing the field of apple trees. They were so perfectly planted, I thought. Row upon row of the great deciduous fruit bearing plants that were so straight, so even. It was not difficult to see how easily it would be to systematically go through each, and there was a lovely little path that ran twixt each row. This was an organized farm, to be sure. I briefly recalled that it was Applejack herself who ran the farm. I mused about what she must be like from this. She was clearly a very methodical pony.

As we were about to round the main house and head for the barn, the front door flew open and Applejack appeared on the porch, smiling. The timing seemed so perfect that I wouldn't be surprised if she had been waiting for us to return. She walked over to the side railing of her porch and called down to us as we walked by.

"Looks like I just caught ya right as you were 'bout to go on back to the barn!" She called, putting her forelegs up on the railing and leaning over the edge.

"Yes," I replied. "Our work for today is over and we were just about to head back for the night."

She looked over at the hills in the distance. "The sun's only just set now. It's not all that late. Why not come in for a bit of supper?" She motioned towards the door with a toss of her head.

I was about to politely refuse her offer and simply head back to the barn so I could get to writing once Blaise fell asleep, but Blaise's stomach had other plans. It growled audibly just at the mention of food and I looked down at him. He shrugged sheepishly back. I realized at that point that the both of us hadn't eaten since lunch, which had been hours before. Looking back up at Applejack, I decided that it was time we finally took her up on that generous attitude of hospitality she had. I had declined two of her meals

thus far, and admittedly I was getting rather hungry. So with a smile and a nod, the two of us followed her inside.

As I stepped inside, my nose was immediately overwhelmed by the scent of apples. It was only natural, I supposed, that as an apple farmer her day-to-day meals would consist of such. Nothing like not having to pay for food, right? Applejack led us inside to a sideroom that housed a large dining table. Through the other side, I could see a small homely kitchen, from which these lovely smells were wafting. She ducked quickly into the kitchen, only to return with a tray laden with food balanced on her back.

"I hope you're alright with some simpler foods than they've got in Canterlot," she said, sliding the tray onto the table and moving back into the kitchen.

"Oh, I'm sure it's fine." I looked down at the trays. It looked quite nice. A small salad that already had its dressing for each of us.

She returned once more with bowls of soup, and went back to the kitchen a last time, returning finally with a home-baked apple pie. My mouth watered. True, as she may have thought, food in Canterlot was wonderful. Such a lavishly built city was bound to have all sorts of wonderful places to eat. But at the same time, a home-cooked meal is difficult to beat. And as simple as this one was, I also hadn't eaten much today. My own stomach protested slightly at the smells, calling out for food.

Applejack chuckled softly. "Looks like you're mighty hungry as well." She motioned for us to sit down and then sat herself down across from us.

We each took a portion for ourselves and tucked in. As the smells betrayed, the food was excellent. The salad had its own apple-based dressing, the soup was of a vegetable base but was well spiced, and the pie...oh, the pie was absolutely delicious. We ate in silence, the two of us ravenously filling the holes our stomachs had become since midday. Applejack herself sat quietly across from us, not looking up. In between mouthfuls I looked across at the table, trying to discern her thoughts. She certainly was in thought, that was for sure. The typical country-dwelling earth pony meal was bound to be full of talking. For them, food was often the time to socialize, something that brought families together. And not to mention the fact that we were guests from a city she had only visited once or twice in her life. Surely she may have had questions, possible lines of

conversation? Yet here she was, looking down and eating silently. Something weighed heavily on her.

Out of the corner of my eye I observed Blaise. He dug away at his food without care for anything else around him. I considered him for a moment; if he was troubled about anything he certainly didn't show it. And on that note, I reminded myself to hide my own. I resumed eating, pushing thoughts of profiling and cases aside. Back into that second box, I commanded. The meal itself provided a passable enough diversion; Applejack was a wonderful cook.

After a time, we all finished our respective meals. Blaise excused himself to sleep with a large yawn. I thought to follow him for a moment, but decided against it. I did want to get straight to writing, but perhaps it was best to let him get to sleep first. Instead I stayed behind and helped Applejack carry our spent dishes to the kitchen and wash them.

"Oh, y'all don't have to do that," she said with a tired smile, seeing me gather them up.

"I insist," I replied. She had cooked for us, after all. It was only right.

I followed her into the kitchen, balancing a tray on my back and a stack of dishes with my horn. We set to washing in the sink side by side wordlessly. The loud running water in the sink wasn't able to wash away the sound of a few sighs I heard from Applejack. I glanced at her edgewise and saw that she was frowning very slightly. These recent murders must have hit her hard, I thought. I recalled that she was one of the Ponies of Harmony. That must have meant that Rainbow Dash and Pinkie Pie had been close to her. Spike as well. And miss Rarity also, I reminded myself.

We finished the dishes up quite fast between the two of us. As Applejack put them out on the drying rack, she spoke up to me for the first time in many minutes.

"Now I know it's a mite late, but your dragon friend is probably still settlin' down to sleep."

"Hmm?" I turned to her.

"Would you like to join me for a drink? Just sit a while out in the main room for a bit. Least I can do."

One one hand, the prospect sounded lovely. A small drink, then bed. On the other hand, I knew I had to get to writing. Yet, I chided myself, I had a case to work. And part of that case was judging how much the other Ponies of Harmony knew. Not to mention that I should probably interview them about the case anyway as standard procedure. On that thought, I nodded.

"You're too kind, miss Applejack."

A small laugh. Mirthless, but a laugh nonetheless. "Least I could do," she repeated.

I followed her out of the kitchen and past the dining table, to a room that was rather large. In the center stood a grand fireplace, beside which a few cushions for ponies to sit upon. The fireplace was stoked high against the cold night air. Applejack popped the cork on a bottle of what looked to be apple cider and poured two glasses, setting them down by the cushions. She settled into one and I pulled up the other to sit across from her. Sipping the drink she had poured for me, I discovered that it was indeed apple based. And not too bad, either. We passed a few moments in silence before Applejack spoke up again.

"I never really got to thank you for comin' down, Agent...uh..." she trailed off.

"Six," I reminded her. "Agent Six."

She cocked an eyebrow, sipping her drink. "Six, right. That your name, or just a Agency thing?"

Ah, the name question. I got that a lot. "I'm afraid I'm not at liberty to divulge my full name, miss Applejack." If we were to have small talk, that was fine. I would steer the conversation lightly to see what I could make of her. But letting her ask questions was part of seeing how she thought, after all.

"There a reason for that?" Applejack frowned. "I'm guessin' it's the same reason for the..." she motioned at her mane with a forehoof and then patted the three shining apples that graced her flank.

"Ah, the patch and the er... the mane style." I nodded. "Agency policy. My identity is known by few. For your protection, of course. The less you know about me the better, apparently." This was true, to a certain degree. I was involved with all sorts of higher up legislation and policies that most members of even the Canterlot Royal Castle and Guard knew about. This was a standard answer that we were told to give, however. I scoffed inwardly. How easy it was for the Agency to order their workers how to talk. Another reason I was growing weary of it all.

"I'm not sure I get it, but okay." She bent down to drink again, licking her lips. "Just seems a little weird to me, is all."

She was being polite about it, though she was still very blunt. Here was yet another pony of business, I decided. Straightforward and to the point always. I thought back to my conversation with Princess Luna, and remembered that this pony embodied the element of Honesty. At least she adhered to it. I made a mental note to ask Blaise to have the Agency send me everything they had on the Ponies of Harmony.

"Let me assure you, it wasn't my choice. To be honest, it wasn't my choice to come here either. Not that," I added, "I wouldn't have come here anyway to help, but the Agency assigns us all our cases."

"Still mighty fine of the government to help out a little town like ours." She finished her drink and carefully poured herself another, balancing the bottle in her mouth.

"A case like this..." I hesitated to give details, not for fear of leaking information, but simply for fear of distressing her. I didn't know how much she knew of her friend's deaths. "A case like this can't be passed up by anypony. It's far too important."

I watched as she set the bottle down, staring at her reflection in the bubbly liquid. She didn't move to answer what I had said, simply sitting in silence. I figured she was probably thinking about her friends.

"Miss Applejack?" I snapped her from her reverie and she looked up at me. "May I ask you a few questions pertaining to the case?" It was a good enough segue, I thought. A bit forward, I will admit, but being roundabout might have annoyed her.

"I don't know what I could tell you," she answered. Then she gave a half-hearted joke. "Unless I'm a suspect."

I gave her a jokingly half-lidded stare. "Standard procedure, miss. I have to ask everypony these questions. Though don't think," I added with a light smirk, "that I haven't got my eyes on you."

She laughed then, a clear sound akin to that of ringing bells. It was the first true laugh I had heard from her, and it was followed by the first true smile. "I dunno what I could possibly tell you, but I swear I ain't done nothin' wrong, officer!"

"Just a few questions, miss Applejack, then I'll cease my pestering." It was my turn to laugh. "How much do you know about the ponies who have died?"

Though the mood was lightened, Applejack's smile still faded. I was sad to see it go. "Dash was one-a my closest friends, y'hear? Rarity too, but we argued a lot sometimes.. Actually, so did Dash and me. Pinkie was... well, she was Pinkie. She was hard to understand sometimes, but she had a big heart. An' her laugh always made ya smile. Spike was a nice little feller, always tagged along with Twi everywhere. An Cheerilee? I dunno her very well. But my sister's in her class at school an' I always heard nice things about her." She leaned forward. "Can I ask... can I ask if..." She trailed off once more.

"Yes, miss Applejack?"

"The Police haven't told me anything about how they died," she said.

Ah, good, I thought. They'd been keeping it under wraps, presumably out of respect for family and friends. That made my job a lot easier.

"An' I was just wondering..." Applejack continued, hoofing at the floor absently. "I don't really know how they were found, but could you just tell me, was it really bad? My friends, I mean. Did it...hurt?" She choked out that last word.

Of course I couldn't give her any details. I tried to be as gentle as I could. "Those memories you have of them, are they wonderful?" I asked.

She nodded.

"Then," I continued, "hold on to those. They are all that should matter."

We talked for some time, I asked her some questions but she knew very little, thankfully. We chatted a bit of small talk about the farm, and she told me of all the work she put into it. It was really quite impressive, actually, how much time out of her life she had dedicated to it. In fact, one might go as far to say that the farm was her life. She had taken over the business entirely when her grandmother had lost full use of her aging hips.

When our conversation had wound down and we had finished our drinks, she excused herself to bed, listing slightly to the side. She had had a bit more to drink than I, yet another sign of her distress. Saying my goodnights, I left the house and began to walk around it towards the barn. On my way, I slowed my pace and took out my notebook, finishing up my profile of Applejack by writing down a few notes. I will copy them to you here:

Subject: Applejack (side note: Pony of Harmony; represents element of "Honesty")

Age: (on file)

Occupation: (on file)

General Impressions: Applejack adheres to her element. She is straightforward and direct, though polite. She is hard working and meticulous, having helped to build and maintain a farm since she was very little. She seems friendly enough, and has many acquaintances both in pleasure and business around town. She seems very modest, though not reserved. I believe one might call her a true "country girl." She is devastated by the loss of her friends, evidenced by slightly excessive drinking (not to an extreme, however), a difficulty referring to the death of the current victims (her friends), and a transient mood and thought process. I observed her lost in thought and frowning on several occasions.

Suspect status: very low. It is highly unlikely that she even could begin to suspect who the killer is. The emotions she displays at the death of her friends is not remorse, but a sense of genuine loss. Her schedule as a farmer consists of daily work lasting almost the entire day. There is little time for her to get away from her job, and furthermore I can see no motive. My professional opinion is to ignore her as a suspect.

Other notes: Victim "Cheerilee" is the teacher of her sister's class. Must investigate this further and talk to the sister.

I cracked open the giant doors to the barn softly and peeked in. With the aid of the small sliver of moonlight that filtered through the crack, I could see Blaise lying down in the soft bedding, his chest slowly rising and falling in a slow rhythm. I tip-hoofed in as quietly as I could. I was about to climb up to the loft above to begin my writing when I saw Blaise's bag off to the side. It was rather inviting, how open it was. I realized that I could rummage through his notebooks at that very moment.

I also realized how silly it would look if he awoke while I was doing so.

Yet... it beckoned...

In the end the bag won. I edged quietly over to it, not taking my eyes off of Blaise. When I had sidled up next to it, I bent low and lifted it open with a hoof. Keeping both ears tuned to his rhythmic breathing to hear if it stopped, I quickly memorized the positions of everything in the bag so that I could put everything back the way it was. It was pretty standard; a wallet, a small box of pens, assorted personal items. I immediately located his notebook and pulled it out riffling through it in the pale moonlight. It was filled with notes about our current case, copies of evidence, and the like. His job was to familiarize himself best with the case, after all. Small wonder that he was always able to answer my questions! He must have been working hard to memorize it.

As I came to the end of the notes about the case, which was about halfway through the notebook itself, I came to a new page that was headed with my name. I raised my eyebrows at this. What was he writing about me? The quizzical look turned to one of amusement as I saw that it was the beginnings of a crude Profile. I was right after all, I thought. He was

analyzing me. No doubt once he finished this it would be sent straight to the Princess. I began to read it over, making sure there was nothing terribly incriminating.

Blaise snorted in his sleep. It made me jump and I quickly whipped my head around to look at him. He hadn't woken yet; he merely rolled over on to his side, facing away from me. A perfect opportunity. With his face away from me, I lit up my horn slightly to throw some light on to the notebook and looked back at his writing.

It wasn't too bad; just a small Profile. Something about me having heavy narcissism and an infatuation with the bizarre cases. He'd completely misread me, just as I'd hoped. There was nothing in the report to suggest untoward emotions directed at the Agency, and nothing about suspicious writings. If anything, I was a bit miffed at the narcissism comment. The next time I get a better look at it, perhaps I'll copy it down in here.

There was something distressing, though. As I flipped past the few pages written about me, I came to a place in the book that showed signs of pages having been torn out. There was a small few millimeters of the book that showed space when I closed it, and the pages above and below this space folded at opposing angles. When I opened the book to these pages, it was clear that they had been torn out; I could see bits of paper left behind in the binding. Upon closer inspection, however, I discovered that it was not tearing that had freed them from the journal. The little bits of paper left in the binding were slightly charred, and the edges around this charring were tinged green. Dragon magic, I realized. He had written something, and then burned them away with his fire and sent them somewhere.

I pondered what they could be. It certainly wasn't anything on me, unless the Profile he had written on me was a decoy meant to misdirect me if I ever tried to read what he had been writing. I let this train of thought run for a few seconds before killing it. Not to belittle his intelligence, but I didn't think that was something he was capable of coming up with. No, these had to be something else. But what, though? It was definitely something he hadn't told me about. Usually I had him rip things from his notebook for me to look over before having him send them. And I didn't remember this. Letters, perhaps?

It was clear to me that I wasn't going to be able to figure it out just yet. Closing the journal, I set it back into his bag, quickly making sure that all the items in the bag were in the same position as they had been when I opened it. Satisfied that he wouldn't be able to tell I had messed about with it, I closed it back up and climbed up to my loft to begin writing today's entry.

And with that, dear reader, I shall finish for tonight. It has grown late as my eyes have grown heavy. I must be well rested for tomorrow.