

# Feedback and Sing the Night's Song

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# Feedback

“C'mon kid, get out of here. It's three in the morning, we're closing.”

“Aw, chill out, bro...I just wanna get one more drink!”

“No. No more drinks. Go home, or find a friend who'll let you crash at his place, or something, but we gotta close up soon.”

“All right, all right,” The young pegasus said, sulking away from the bar. Ziggy watched him mull across the empty hall before leaving through the open double-doors.

“Is that the last of them?” The bartender asked Ziggy, picking up the glass that the sullen colt had left behind.

“Everypony except that unicorn over there,” he answered, gesturing to a mare sitting on the stage at the front of the hall. “I guess I'll get her out the door, then lock up?”

“Naw, Don't bother her,” The bartender said, “That's the DJ. She usually stays here a little bit late, she likes to get a drink or two before she goes home. Says it helps her sleep, or something.” Ziggy shrugged, and sat at the bar.

“I might get something myself,” He said idly, “Who knows, might help me get used to the new shift – could you get me a rum and coke?” The bartender nodded, and set about making the drink. Ziggy sat in silence, thinking about his new life in Ponyville. Working nights would definitely take some getting used to – the most he could hope for was that the caffeine in that rum and coke would be enough to get him home and into bed, for how exhausted he was. He sipped at the drink gratefully when he heard a small set of hooves clapping towards him. He looked over to see the DJ plunk herself down on the stool beside him.

“Gimme the usual, Salty, I feel boring tonight.” She called, waving in the bartender's direction. He set a glass in front of her and poured straight vodka into it, tapping the bottle against the rim of the glass when he

finished pouring. Ziggy turned his attentions back to his own drink when the DJ nudged him sharply in the side.

“Man, what was with that crowd tonight? I swear to Luna, they were so quiet I could swear half of them were underage! You aren't getting fooled by fake ID's now, are you Rusty?”

“I-what?” Ziggy asked, shocked by the sudden jab, “My name isn't Rusty...I don't even know a Rusty. Who are you?”

“Yo, wait,” The mare said with what Ziggy considered an odd amount of surprise, “You aren't Rusty! Man, did he quit or something?”

“Yeah, that's...kinda what I just said. I don't know anything about anyone who worked her before me, tonight is my first shift here.”

“Oh,” The mare said, “Well, Rusty was the bouncer before, I guess. He was around back when I started working. I'm Vinyl Scratch, the DJ.” Scratch held out her hoof to Ziggy, who shook it slowly.

“I'm Ziggy,” He said, “Ziggy Stardust. If this Rusty guy worked here so long, how come you can't tell the difference between him and me?”

“Well, I can tell the difference between you, obviously,” Scratch said, rolling her head theatrically, “But it's not like I'm gonna figure it out by looking at you.” She lifted up the heavily mirrored sunglasses she wore, revealing two very, very white eyes.

“Oh, jeez,” Ziggy said, “I'm really sorry, I had no idea you were -”

“Don't worry about it,” Scratched laughed, putting her glasses back on, “It's not like I go around advertising it. I mean, most people don't like seeing my eyes, so I have to hide it, most of the time.” Her horn lit up, and a small rod levitated out of the saddlebags beside her. She gave it a sharp flick, and it extended into a red and white cane.

“I mean, most people can figure it out when they see this,” She said, “But I know this hall like the back of my hoof -” She paused for a moment, then chuckled, and corrected herself, “Well, not like I know that either, but you know what I mean. I don't ever need to use it in here, just when I'm walking around town, and stuff.”

Ziggy sat in silence, trying to think of what to say – that is, what he could say that wouldn't run the risk of offending the DJ.

“Look, if you've got a question, ask it,” She sighed, coming to a conclusion for him, “I've been blind since I was a little filly, I doubt you can say anything that would offend me now.”

“Okay, well,” Ziggy started, “If you're blind, how did you know I was sitting here? I mean, it doesn't seem like it was just a coincidence, to me.” Scratch wiggled her ears, and grinned at him, as if that explained the whole thing.

“I heard you,” She told him, “These stools are old, and they squeak.” She rocked back and forth on her stool, proving her point. “Now it's my turn: How does a guy get a name like Ziggy Stardust? You don't sound like a pegasus to me. I mean, I don't hear any feathers.”

“Oh, I'm not,” Ziggy said, “But my dad is, Stardust is his family name...and my parents just called me Ziggy because of my mane.” Scratch turned towards him, tilting her head up and down in a pantomime inspection.

“Yeah,” She said sarcastically, “I see what you mean. Totally.”

“Oh,” Ziggy said, hitting his forehead with his hoof, “Duh, I'm sorry. Here.” He leaned in towards her, mane first. “Give it a prod, you'll understand.” Scratch raised an eyebrow at him, but reached out slowly with her hoof anyways, being careful not to hit Ziggy's head. Her hoof brushed the tips of his mane, and she pushed with a bit more confidence.

“Man, that's your mane?” She asked enthusiastically, “Do you gel it, or something?”

“Nope,” Ziggy answered, “It does it all on it's own. Has since the day I was born. Like I said, that's why my parents named me Ziggy. 'Cause my mane was all 'ziggy-zaggy', my Mom said.”

There was a lull in conversation, with both of the young ponies thinking of what to say next. Or at least, that was what Ziggy imagined the cause of the silence was. It was certainly his excuse.

“Hey, how long've we got until 'closing time'?” Scratch asked him, suddenly. Ziggy blinked, and looked at the clock on the wall behind the bar.

“Um...well, we closed like, five minutes ago, actually. The bartender's just cleaning everything up, if you're looking for another drink...”

“Naw,” Scratch said, “Rusty was cool to drink with, but that was that was all he ever did. You seem like a 'hang out' guy, though – you wanna get outta here?”

“Huh?” Ziggy asked, “It's the middle of the night – where would we go?”

“Oh, I can think of a couple of places...” The unicorn said with a sly grin, and Ziggy was suddenly very glad that she was blind, and couldn't see his face flush. Scratch continued, “but I was thinking we could just, walk and talk, y'know?”

“Yeah...yeah, all right,” Ziggy answered. He checked with the bartender to make sure he would lock the dance hall up, and got down from his stool. Scratch picked up her saddlebags and followed after him. Ziggy was surprised to see just how well she navigated the hall, exiting perfectly through the door that Ziggy held open for her.

Ziggy paused for a moment when they left the building. The air was cold compared to inside the hall, and seemed oddly crisp. In Manehattan, where Ziggy came from, a place like this would have a sweet scent lingering outside most times of the day, but in a small town like Ponyville the air smelt clean and clear. He trotted to catch up to Scratch, who seemed to relax when he pulled alongside her.

“There you are,” She said, “I thought you ditched me. Talk to me man, this town's got no acoustics.” Ziggy frowned at her.

“What are you talking about? How does a town have acoustics?”

“It doesn't,” Scratch repeated, “That's the problem. The buildings aren't big enough, sound doesn't echo. If you get too far away, I can't tell where you are anymore.”

"All right, well, I guess I'll just stay close to you, then," Ziggy said, before he stopped dead. Scratch looked back at him, a wide smirk on her face.

"Oh man, was that flirting? Way to go, Ziggy." She laughed as Ziggy attempted to apologize, and cut him off. "Chill out," She said, "There's nothing wrong with a bit of flirting. Besides, I know what you meant. You're a cool guy, Ziggy – even if you are kinda vanilla. Tell me about yourself." Ziggy shrugged awkwardly.

"I got into bouncing for a reason," He said, "I don't need to talk to ponies. I just stand there and look mean. Easy. I've never been really great at the whole 'talking' thing."

"Pff," Scratch snorted, swinging her can to smack him lightly, "Talking isn't a 'thing'. You just do it. I need feedback, Ziggy. C'mon, gimme something here. Bouncing! What's that like?"

"It's...pretty good work, I guess," Ziggy told her as they started walking again. "I don't usually work clubs – until just a little while ago, I mostly did more high profile stuff, like fashion shows. You don't usually have to actually 'bounce' people at those – though I was working at an art show once when the artist showed up. Turns out he wasn't actually on the list."

"What?" Scratch asked, "How was the artist not on the list? Was it a mistake or something?"

"No, he was just a lunatic. Even if I'd let him in people probably would've though he was a hobo, or something." The two ponies laughed at the thought of it, and when their mirth subsided Ziggy countered Scratch's question with one of his own.

"How about you?" He asked, "How'd you get into being a DJ?"

"Do you know, I don't really know?" Scratch laughed, "It just kinda happened. I mean, I got really big into music after my eyes went – my Mom had this old record player that she always had playing, and I just kinda started to hear stuff I didn't before. Like, nuances in the music, y'know? I just started listening to more and more stuff, and eventually I tried making some of my own. I moved here with my Mom from Phillydelphia a few years ago, when I was still in school, and one of the fillies in my class threw me a

party...I don't know how, but somepony got a hold of one of my tapes and started playing it, and after that everypony was always coming to me to do music for their parties.”

“Wow,” Ziggy said, “Now I feel kinda petty about bouncing. I mean, you got an awesome job doing something you enjoy, and I just went in because it was easy.” Scratch laughed at him.

“There's nothing wrong with that – live for the moment, right? It might not be what you love, but it's better than what you hate, right?”

“I guess you're right,” Ziggy agreed. “It's kinda funny, though – you saying how much you liked listening to music. I mean, you don't seem to really like listening that much...” Ziggy trailed off, leaving the two in an awkward silence.

*Smooth, Ziggy, smooth,* He thought, mentally face-hoofing, *meet an cool girl and tell her she doesn't shut up.* “I'm really sorry,” He started, “That didn't -”

“Hey, uh, this is my stop,” Scratch cut him off, nodding to a small two-story home, “But, are you gonna be working tomorrow night too?”

“Oh...no,” Ziggy answered awkwardly, “No, I'm only part-time – one day on, and one day off.”

“All right,” Scratch said, walking towards her house, “Well, I'll see you later, I guess...” With that, she left him outside, trying to find his bearings in the darkened town. It took him a while, but when he finally recognized the neighbourhood he was surprised to find the house he was renting wasn't far away. He was also surprised to find himself walking much faster than normal – ordinarily he would take his time on a walk like this, taking in all the sights and sounds the night had to offer, but he didn't really feel like it tonight. He felt guilty about how he'd left off with Scratch – and it wasn't the guilt that was bothering him, so much as that he felt guilty at all. He was no stranger to putting his hoof in his mouth – a good part of the reason he preferred not to talk. He sighed as he opened the door to his home, and thought to himself, *I must just be tired. Night shift is getting to me. I'll be fine tomorrow...still...* He shook his head, chasing the thought away, and locked his door behind him. He thought briefly about eating something, but hungry as he was, that Rum and Coke had done nothing to keep him up. Being up so much later than he was used to had exhausted him, and he



happily flopped into his bed, drifting into a warm and quiet slumber moments later.

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When Ziggy woke again, it was just before noon. He moaned groggily and tried to turn away from the light that filtered through his partially-drawn curtains, but it seemed to chase after him, filling up the room. For the briefest of moments he thought he had escaped it, and could return to sleep, when his stomach screeched at him. He shut his eyes tighter, begging his belly to be quiet, and to leave him alone, but it didn't comply. Eventually he gave up, and rolled out of bed, making his way to his kitchen.

Fortunately for Ziggy, he'd had time the previous day to go shopping, and he had plenty of food to make a breakfast from. Unfortunately, he didn't have nearly the patience to wait for food to cook in his state. In the end, he settled on a bowl of cereal – three bowls of cereal, in fact. He stacked the bowls beside the sink when he was finished, noting that he would need to wash them later. In the meantime, he desperately needed a wash himself, smelling of sweat and liquor the way he did. He ran a bath, and while he waited for the tub to fill, dragged an old stereo out of one of the many, many unpacked boxes left in his house. Putting on one of his favourite CD's, he lowered himself into the bathtub, and began to think about what he should do that day.

He hadn't started his work at the club part-time by choice. He had been perfectly willing to start full time – more than willing, in fact. He was less than comfortable with math, but he was still confident enough in his abilities to work out that he would only just scrape by if he kept up with his current schedule. However, the owner of the club didn't trust the new earth pony just yet, so Ziggy was on a trial period, working one day and...sitting around his house doing nothing the next.

"Celestia..." Ziggy sighed, sinking lower into the water, "I need to find a hobby, or something."

The song he had been listening to wound down, and the void of silence left by the changing of tracks was filled with a thought: "You know, I never really heard any of the music last night, sitting outside...I should go tonight and see if Scratch is any good." His mind made up, Ziggy relaxed

and settled in the tub. The club opened that evening, and so he would still need to find something else to do in the meantime – which would probably end up being unpacking the rest of his things – but for now he could afford to have a nice, long bath.

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Ziggy spent over an hour sitting in the bathtub, very nearly falling asleep in the warm water. Finally, though, he pulled himself out when his CD ended, and set about unpacking. He finished almost depressingly fast. Most of his essentials, plates, cooking utensils and the like, he had unpacked shortly after arriving, but even then he hadn't brought much with him from Manehattan. He had managed to while away some time by reading the old 'Crimson Wonder' comics he had bought when he was younger, but they didn't last very long. That had been a few hours ago, and now he was splayed out on a sofa that his landfilly had kindly provided him, playing an old video game. He was a private detective on the streets of Phillydelphia, investigating the mysterious disappearance of a mare he had been hired to follow, and he was about to find the final clue that would reveal her whereabouts when his alarm clock went off again. He trotted into his bedroom to check that the clock was right – 5:30, on the dot. Throwing together a quick sandwich to eat on the way, he left his house, setting out for the club. It was just opening when he arrived, and the front was swamped with a queue of colts and fillies waiting to be admitted in. Ziggy found a place in the lineup, slowly approaching the door until he was stopped by an enormous red-brown stallion, who Ziggy imagined must be Rusty.

“Hey, you’re the new kid, right?” The stallion asked, “Sorry, but I still gotta card you - them’s the rules.”

“No problem,” Ziggy answered, digging a piece of ID out of the shirt he had worn, “Rusty, right?”

“That’s right,” Rusty replied, “famous, am I? Well, enjoy the night - Scratch looked like she was in some mood tonight, I think it’ll be a wild one.” Ziggy nodded, and as he walked in, Rusty’s words stuck with him. He

hadn't though too much about Scratch that day, but she had crossed his mind now and then. Mostly, he just wondered what kind of music she played, but now he was wondering if he had offended her the night before. He tried to tell himself it was silly to think she had taken something a colt she barely knew had said personally, but he couldn't help but wonder, especially when he saw her on stage, setting up for the night. It was hard to tell from far away, but something seemed different about her, to Ziggy. She seemed less excited, less bouncy than she had last night.

*She's...probably just being careful, Ziggy thought, doesn't want to damage her equipment. It looks pretty expensive.* The notion did little to quell his worries. He weaved through the sparse crowd mulling around on the dance floor, looking for all the world like a flock of sheep with no music to herd them, and made his way to the bar.

"Hey, kid," The bartender said to him, "Wasn't expecting to see you back on your day off. Coming to see our DJ, eh?" He grinned slyly at the young earth pony, who replied,

"I guess? I didn't really get to hear that much last night, waiting around outside the whole time, so I figured I'd come by tonight and see how she was."

"Is that so?" The bartender asked him. His tone had changed, Ziggy noticed, from light to suspicious, somehow. He wondered what he had said that provoked this change, but the bartender continued, "Just what were you two up to, last night? That girl's in a fine mood, that's for sure, I hope you didn't just decide to swing by to make sure she was 'fine'."

"What?" Ziggy asked, somewhere between confused and offended - in truth, he had no idea what the bartender was implying, but he knew he was being accused of something. "No, I just meant that I wanted to see her play! We just talked last night, really."

"Well, all right," The bartender nodded, "Sorry about that, but there isn't much of a club scene in a little town like Ponyville, so we don't take on many employees. Rusty, Scratch and I are a bit like a little family, and I

guess we get a bit protective of her, 'cause of how young she is. But you seem like a good colt, so I trust you."

"Um...thanks?" Ziggy said. Once again, the bartender seemed to be implying something that he didn't quite get. He didn't have time to ask, though - Scratch had finished setting up, and let the crowd know by skillfully scratching a record, producing a long, melodic note. The lights in the club dimmed, and a pair of red and blue spotlights focused on the stage, illuminating Scratch amongst her turntables and speakers, and lending their colours to her coat.

"I can't see a damn thing with all these lights!" She shouted, her tenor filling the hall, "Pound your hooves so I know where you are!" The audience erupted all at once, furiously pounding their hooves on the floor. Ziggy and the bartender shared a chuckle at her introduction, before she called out to the crowd once more.

"Hell yeah! You foals ready to party!?" The audience erupted again, even louder this time, mixing cheers and shouts with the thumping applause. "Who'd you come here for!?" Scratch asked, and the audience responded,

"DJ PON-3!"

"I didn't catch that! I said, WHO'D YOU COME HERE FOR!?"

"DJ PON-3!"

"ONE MORE TIME, 'CAUSE IT SOUNDS SO GOOD!"

"PON-3! PON-3! PON-3!"

The chanting devolved into unintelligible screams and cheers, and Scratch started her first song. It struck Ziggy immediately - very nearly sending him off his seat. The song was huge and pounding, fitting Scratch's entrance perfectly, and Ziggy felt it almost as much as he heard it.

“Lord Luna,” Ziggy shouted to the bartender, “How did I not hear this last night?! How is all of PONYVILLE not hearing this?!” The bartender just laughed at him.

“We have soundproofing spells,” He shouted back, “Rusty won’t be hearing a bit of this, right now.” Ziggy nodded at him, not bothering to try and make himself heard as the song, impossibly, grew even more powerful. The colts and fillies on the floor danced furiously, with no real sense of rhythm, as far as Ziggy could tell. There were no steps, no moves, and no time, there was just thrashing and flailing. Eventually the song wound down, and Scratch’s voice once again permeated the hall.

“Man, you guys are rowdy! No more of that for you, not tonight! Have a little bit of this, instead!” She pulled on an oversized set of headphones, and several plugs and jacks in her equipment rearranged themselves as she spoke, preparing for the next track. It was still powerful music, but much less so than the previous song. Scratch was involved in this one, too, moving almost constantly onstage, adjusting dials and switches, and skillfully scratching on the turntable in front of her. She played several tracks like that, letting them go five, six, seven at a time without a word to the audience, before suddenly chiming in with a comment, or a warning, or asking for requests - though Ziggy would never be able to figure out just how she knew what the screaming ponies were asking for. Around the middle of the night, a mare approached him - a deep purple pony with an electric pink mane, and a pair of ice cubes as a cutie mark.

“Hey there,” The mare said to him, “You look new here.”

“Um, hi,” Ziggy said, somewhat surprised that somepony was talking to him, after sitting at the bar

alone for pretty much the entire night, “Yeah, I just moved here a little while ago. I’m Ziggy.”

“I’m Sweet Stuff, sweet stuff,” The mare said, sitting beside him, “Care for a dance?” She fluttered her eyes at him, and smiled faintly. Ziggy gulped.

“Um, alright,” He said, “Sure. I’m not that great of a dancer, though.”

“Oh don’t worry, sweetie,” Sweet Stuff laughed, gently tugging him from his seat, “I’m sure you’ll do  
*just fine.*”

Sweet Stuff dragged Ziggy out to the dance floor, and started to sway and move. Ziggy, for his part, mulled around, awkwardly bobbing to the beat, Sweet Stuff laughing at his lack of ability. After a while watching her, though, he started to get more of a feel for it. He had been right before, when he guessed there was no sense of reason to the dances, but there was a definite rhythm to it. He did as he saw his dance partner doing, letting the music fill him up, swaying and bucking in time with the pounding beats. He loved the feeling of it, and it must have showed - Sweet Stuff picked up the pace of her own dance, occasionally brushing up against him, and giggling slyly. Ziggy lost track of how long they danced together, but by the time he was shaken from his music-inspired trance, his legs ached, and sweat was beading on his face and back.

It was Scratch’s voice that drew his attention away from Sweet Stuff, calling out after another set was done. “Hey foals, I got a treat for you!” She called out, levitating a new record onto her turntable, “Some of you boring ponies are gonna ditch us all soon, so have a listen to this before you go: I’ve got a new track for you guys!” The dance hall erupted into cheers, including Sweet Stuff beside Ziggy. when the roaring subsided, Scratch called out again, “I call this puppy ‘Hobo Paintings’! Be sure to dance nice and loud, so I know what you think!” The song started slow, almost boring, like elevator music, but quickly warped into something fast and manic, twisting and grinding almost as much as the furiously dancing ponies. Everypony except for Ziggy, who stood stock still, his mouth hanging open.

“Hey, are you alright?” Sweet Stuff asked, nudging him, “What’s the matter, don’t like the song?”

“What?” Ziggy asked, shaking himself from his stupor, “I - no, that’s not it. I, Uh...I’m gonna go sit down. I was nice meeting you, Sweet Stuff. I had fun dancing.”

“You know, sweetie,” Sweet Stuff said, rubbing up against him and fluttering her eyes once more, “If you’re tired, I can always take you back to my place and give you a place to sleep...”

“No thanks,” Ziggy said, barely listening as he started for the bar, “I’m just gonna...I think I need a drink.” With that, he left the confused and offended mare on the dance floor and went to sit back down at the bar. “Hey, Salty, was it?” Ziggy called to the bartender, “Can I get a rum and coke?”

“Sure thing, kid,” The bartender said, “What’s up? you look confused. That mare wasn’t what you were expecting?”

“Well...She was different than what I was expecting, that’s for sure...” he replied, cradling his head in his hooves, “But that’s not it. It’s the song.” He paused, and listened to the music, which had turned into something resembling circus music filtered through the auditory equivalent of shrooms, “I mean, aside from the fact that It seems to be eating my brain.”

“Yeah, she’ll make those from time to time,” Salty laughed, handing Ziggy his drink, “what’s the problem?”

“Well, last night I told Scratch a story about bouncing an artist that looked and acted like a hobo...” He gulped at the drink in front of him, and looked up almost entreatingly, “There’s no way she could work that fast though, right? I mean, pump out a new song in less than a day?”

“Heck, I’ve seen her make a new track in an hour when it suits her,” Salty said flippantly. “Looks like you inspired her.” He listened to the song himself, and added, “Not sure how to call that one, I can see why it’s got you worried.” He laughed at Ziggy’s sunken expression, and told him, “listen, I’ve heard a song that she spun when her first coltfriend broke up with her - as far as I can tell, you’re probably in her good books.”

"You think so?" Ziggy asked, glancing at the lively DJ on stage.

"Well, don't take my word for it. Stick around and ask her yourself - club is done in an hour anyways." Ziggy glanced at the clock, which read 2:10.

"Huh..." He said slowly. It suddenly occurred to him just how tired he was, not having gotten nearly enough sleep, and now having danced for at least a couple of hours. he stifled a yawn, but said, "I think I'll do that, yeah."

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"Alright, we're done here, fillies and colts!" Scratch called out when her last track finished an hour later, "Get outta here, and have a great night!" She laughed into the microphone, drowning out the half-hearted booing that came from the crowd, and began to disassemble her equipment. What little remained of the crowd dispersed, and Rusty came in to clear out the few ponies still dragging their hooves. He passed over Ziggy with little argument, and when he was done he sat at the bar a few seats down. The two bouncers were silent, sipping at their drinks, until they were joined by Scratch, same as last night. Unlike last night, however, she paused before taking her seat.

"Hey Scratch," Ziggy said, trying to stifle a yawn, "How's it going?"

"Ziggy?" Scratch asked incredulously, "I thought you didn't work today, what are you doing here?"

"Ah, well..." Ziggy shrugged, and took a swig of his drink. "I didn't get a chance to hear your music at all last night, so I figured I'd come by and see how it was." He scratched at his face, and added, "And, well...I didn't really get a chance to apologize properly for what I said last night - "

"Aw, are you still on that?" Scratch laughed quietly, "I told you, it's not a problem, it's - look, let's go for a walk, okay?" She pulled out her cane, and gave Rusty a swat as she walked past. "Good to hear you, Rusty, but I



guess I'll talk to you day after tomorrow." Rusty grunted in response, and Ziggy threw a few bits down on the counter, following after the blue-maned Mare.

"Like I said, I wasn't offended or anything," Scratch continued once they were outside, "You just took me off guard is all. You kinda reminded me of my Mom, actually - she's always telling me I never listen."

"Is that..." Ziggy asked, trotting up beside Scratch, "I don't know how to feel about that. Is that good? Nagging?" Scratched laughed him off, saying,

"Nah, that's good. My Mom's great...I mean, she's a bit overprotective, and she won't let me move out on my own, but she's still cool about everything, you know? She didn't even try to tell me what my cutie mark looked like more than the once."

"Wait...you don't know what you're cutie mark looks like?" Ziggy asked, blinking.

"Oh, I know what it looks like - somepony was bound to let it slip. But I got it after my eyes went, so I always liked to imagine it was something really awesome, like, I dunno, a pony fighting a dragon, or something." She grinned broadly, and chuckled. Ziggy chuckled too.

"I guess..." He said, but paused midway, wondering whether he should say it or not. When he did, Scratch walked in front of him, and turned so Ziggy could see her face. They stood there, for a moment, with Scratch completely silent, and Ziggy trying, and failing, to scan the eyes hidden behind her glasses for a hint of what she might be thinking.

"Look, Ziggy," She said suddenly, "I know you're trying to be nice. But I'm not made of glass. I told you yesterday, you aren't going to hurt my feelings. Ask. The. Question." Ziggy grimaced, and shuffled his hooves.

"Sorry," he said quietly, and asked, "I guess you went blind pretty young?" Scratch gave him that same puzzling look, and answered him.

“Really young, yeah. A little while after I started school. Is that really what you were afraid of asking? A question about my childhood?” She shook her head and smirked, “Most ponies are at least afraid of asking me the big things, like how I do stuff, or what I think things look like, or -”

“Or what it was like?” Ziggy blurted out. He immediately regretted it, because this time when Scratch went silent, he could read her expression - deeply shocked. Ziggy lowered his head, half expecting some kind of outburst.

“I’m so sorry, I’m tired, and I wasn’t thinking at all, and, and, and...” Scratch raised her hoof, silencing him.

“Ziggy,” She said, “follow me, okay?” Ziggy did as she said, following just behind her as she walked. Scratch seemed consumed in her thoughts, so Ziggy didn’t try and speak to her. Instead, he brushed his hooves along the ground as he walked, trying to make sure she knew he was there. He had no idea where they were going, but it was in a completely different direction than they had taken last night, going east away from Scratch’s home. Finally, they crested a small hill, and Scratch sat down. Ziggy sat beside her, but they still didn’t speak. Scratch still seemed deep in thought, so Ziggy surveyed their new environment. He hadn’t been there before, not that that meant anything. Finally, Scratch spoke.

“You know, I was joking before, but you really do remind me of my Mom. I don’t think anypony’s ever asked me that before.”

“You mean, what it was like?” Ziggy asked quietly.

“Yeah,” She answered, “I never even really thought about it. She asked me how I was doing all the time back then, how I felt, but...I wanted to be a big filly. I didn’t want her feeling bad about me at all.” She sighed, and took off her glasses. She rubbed her eyes, before saying, “It was terrifying. My eyes were never great, and I guess the doctors and my parents always new, but nopony ever told me. Then all of a sudden, things started getting blurry, even with my glasses on. I couldn’t see things far away anymore, and far away kept getting closer, and closer...I had no idea

what was happening. I was just a kid, I thought,” She laughed, and continued, “I thought the world was ending. But nopony else seemed worried.”

“I’m sorry,” Ziggy said, “that sounds awful.”

“Don’t be.” Scratched waved her hoof dismissively, “The world is still here. It’s just different now. I can picture it from how it sounds. It’s just not as concrete, now. It’s more fluid. It’s like music. I like it, kinda. That’s why I don’t listen, I guess. I like...noise. I like hearing things. I don’t like silence, there’s nothing there. No feedback. So, I make my own noise.”

“Well, I guess that explains how loud your music is,” Ziggy joked, trying to lighten the mood. It seemed to work, Scratch snorted and laughed.

“Thanks, Ziggy, I almost got emo there for a second.” She said, elbowing him gently. “So you heard my music, huh? What’d you think of it?”

“It was different from what I was expecting,” He answered, “But it was good. I gotta ask, though, that new song...‘Hobo Paintings’...”

“Ah, that...If your wondering if you ‘inspired’ me, somehow, well kinda. I had most of it worked out, but something just seemed off...you gave me the idea to make it so crazy, so I guess you did kinda inspire it, yeah.” Scratched laughed. Ziggy tried to laugh with her, but it was interrupted by a huge yawn. “Aw, Gee,” Scratch joked, “I’m not boring you, am I?”

“No, no,” Ziggy said, yawning again, “I’m just...tired. I guess I didn’t get enough sleep, I woke up early because I was starving to death.” Scratched giggled at him.

“Oh, so it’s just past your bedtime, huh?” She said. She fell backwards onto the grass, and said, “Have a lie down. The grass is soft here. It’s nice.” Ziggy did as he was beckoned, and made a happy noise in agreement.

“You’re right,” He said, “It’s nice...How’d you find this place?”

"My first coltfriend took me here." She answered, "He said it was beautiful...he was an idiot. Nice guy, really, but not all there, you know?"

"Yeah," Ziggy chuckled, "I get what you mean...he was right, though. It's nice here." The two lay there for a while, almost in silence, if not for Scratch gently humming. Then, all of a sudden, she spoke.

"Describe it."

"Huh?"

"This place. You're an observant guy, Ziggy. I come here all the time, but I don't know what it's really like. I can't get any feedback from it. Describe it to me."

"Well," Ziggy said, looking around them. He mulled over where to begin - it really was a beautiful place. He could see for miles in all directions, the hill stood overlooking Ponyville and all of the surrounding fields. "We're on a hill," He started simply, saying whatever came to his mind, "It's the tallest one around. Ponyville is on one side of us...you can see the town square, and sugarcube corner...and the club where we work, tucked behind this big, fancy building. The lights in the club are out - all of the lights in town are out. On the other side are fields. Lots and lots of fields...there's a forest of apple trees covering some of it, covering hills as big as mountains.

"Sweet Apple acres," Scratch chimed in, naming the orchard the trees belonged to.

"Sweet Apple acres," Ziggy repeated, "And the rest of it is open. There's some hay, and some wheat, but it's mostly just empty. There's a road coming here from Canterlot - you can see it, in the distance, on the side of the mountain. It's bright, like it's glowing. It's all white and gold...I think the light must be coming from the stars." He looked up at the stars, and had to stop. They took his breath away. "The stars are incredible," He told her, "They go on forever. There's thousands - no, millions of them. Sometimes they clump together, so you just get these...patches, of bright in

the sky. I never got to see any stars in Manehattan. They were always covered up by smog, or you couldn't see them for the streetlights. I saw them once, when I was young...just peeking through the clouds. That's when I got my cutie mark, I think. It was magical, almost, but here...that was nothing compared to all this. I can't even describe it."

"You just did," Scratch laughed. "No, really, you did. I can't see anything solid, in my head. It always drifts into something else, something it might be...but telling me it's amazing? That, that I can see."

"Really? I struggle to describe everything to you as best I can, and telling you I can't describe it is what you like?"

"Hey, Ziggy, listen: I can spend a month on a track, and put everything I've got into it, and it won't be worth listening to. But I can spin a track in an hour, and it'll be the best damn thing I've ever heard. You can't force music, and you can't force poetry."

"What, you thought that was poetry?" Ziggy asked, laughing feebly.

"Well, yeah," Scratch laughed back, "why, you think you can do better?"

"I...dunno. I've never tried before. I told you, I don't do the talking thing. I've never described something to somepony before. I've never done 'poetry'."

"I never did 'music' before I did it the first time," Scratch said, prodding Ziggy, "I told you already, it's not a thing. You just do it. Then you do it some more. Before you know it, somepony sees you doing it, and you're doing it every night."

"Oh come on, that's different," Ziggy insisted, "I mean, you can show ponies music. You can't just show ponies poetry. Who reads poetry?"

"So, what, the only thing between you and poetry is that nopony ever reads it?"

"I...guess so?"

"Then I'll read it," Scratch told him. Ziggy rolled onto his front, and looked at the mare beside him. "Really?" He asked, "You'd read my poetry, if I made it?"

"Sure," She answered, "Artists need feedback, right? Besides, poetry is kinda like music. It's got a rhythm, and a beat. Would you make poetry, if I would read it?" She asked. Ziggy rolled back onto his back, and hummed to himself.

"On my back, in a field,  
who knows what tomorrow yields?  
stars above and dirt below,  
maybe these two things might know?  
I can't ask and they can't tell..."

Ziggy paused, scrunching up his face in concentration, before concluding,

"So I'll wait for morning's bell." There was a moment of silence.

"Don't worry, Ziggy," Scratch said, "My first tracks were awful too." The two ponies laughed, and Ziggy nestled deeper into the grass. He smiled, and Scratch started singing. She was soft at first, just singing to herself, but it soon grew enough that Ziggy could hear it too. There weren't any words to the song, just a tune. It was slow, and gentle, and Ziggy felt like it was rocking him as he lay in the grass.

"Hey, Ziggy?" Scratch asked when she finished singing, but he didn't answer. She listened carefully, and heard gentle breathing coming from beside her. Ziggy was still there. She flopped onto her side, and said his name again. "Ziggy," She asked, "Are you alive?" Ziggy continued to breathe slowly and deeply, and a small snore escaped his throat. Scratch smiled sweetly. She leaned over to the source of the sound, careful not to disturb

the sleeping colt beside her too much, and kissed his cheek. "I like you, Ziggy," She said, "My Mom is going to kill me for falling asleep outside, but you're worth it. You're nice." She shifted closer to him and snuggled into the grass, adding, "And your voice sounds cute."

# Sing the Night's Song

The sun rose over a new day in ponyville, spreading it's golden light across the sleepy little town like honey. At the same time, it's light spread over two sleepy little ponies, happily dozing through the morning hours. Ziggy probably would have been breathtaken by it, if he had been awake. As it was, though, he didn't wake until the sun was high in the sky - and in his eyes. It pierced through his eyelids, and he remarked in the half conscious way waking ponies will do that it seemed to be becoming a pattern. He mumbled something incoherent and rolled onto his side, finding himself none-to-nose with Vinyl Scratch.

He wasn't completely aware of it at first, of course. He lay on his side for a while, wondering vaguely who this pretty mare beside him was, and why they were outside. He figured it out just in time for Scratch to wake up herself.

"Hey there," She said, smiling at him, "Sleep well?"

"...Scratch?" Ziggy asked, "What?" Scratched laughed at him. They were so close that he could feel her breath against his nose. It was warm, and made him blush faintly.

"You fell asleep out here last night," She told him, "I wanted to keep you company...You're new in town, after all, and you never know who you might meet out here." She smirked at him, and he squirmed awkwardly, rolling onto his back and away from Scratch. Despite himself, he smiled.

"Well...thanks," He said. Scratch reached over and nudged him.

"You're not making this any fun," She goaded, "C'mon, you were joking with me last night."

"Well...I had been drinking last night," He said, bobbing his head back and forth. Scratch grinned, and nudged him again.



“Oh, so I have to get you drunk, huh? Alright, I think I can deal with that.” Ziggy blushed as Scratch laughed, and rolled away from her. “Geez,” She said, “Are you always like this when you wake up beside a mare?” Ziggy stayed silent, eliciting a mocking gasp from Scratch. “Oh, those poor fillies,” She laughed, “They must feel so snubbed!”

“Well,” Ziggy said, flopping onto his belly, “The circumstances were a little bit different...” He grinned awkwardly.

“See, there you go, a joke!” Scratch said, rolling onto her stomach as well.

“Are you always so excited when you wake up?” Ziggy asked, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. Scratch smiled at him.

“I dunno,” She said happily, resting her chin on her hooves, “I’m in a good mood. It’s a good day.” Ziggy looked at her, and a slow, earnest smile came over him.

“Yeah,” He agreed, “I think you’re right.” He rolled onto his back again, basking in the midday sun. Scratch stood up slowly, and took a few unsure steps.

“Where’ you at, Ziggy?” She asked, “I don’t wanna step on you.”

“I’m right here,” He told her, “A little bit to the right of you.” Scratch nodded, and ran her hooves through the grass around her, probing for her cane. When she found it, she sat down and sighed.

“What time do you think it is, Ziggy?” She asked, levitating her cane.

“Ummm,” Ziggy said, looking up. The sun was close to the middle of the sky, making it an easy guess. “About noon?” He said, “What’s the matter?”

“Ah, It’s nothing,” Scratch Sighed again, “But I should get back home...my Mom is gonna explode if I’m out any longer.”

"You shouldn't have stuck around, if you were gonna get in trouble," Ziggy said, sitting up. Scratch shook her head and smiled.

"Nah, don't worry about it. I'm a big filly now, it's not like she's gonna ground me. She just worries. I'll see you tonight, right Ziggy?"

"Yeah," Ziggy nodded as Scratch stood up and began to walk in the direction of her house. As she passed him by, her swinging cane caught him lightly on the flank.

"Oh!" She said, "Sorry, was that you?"

"Yeah," He said, rubbing where her cane hit, "but don't worry about it - you didn't hit me hard."

"Alright," Scratch said. She paused briefly, before trotting off. "See you tonight!" She called back to him. He called the same to her and she turned away, grinning slyly to herself.

Ziggy stayed sitting on the hilltop for a while after she had gone. He watched her leave, staring idly in her direction as she walked away. He didn't really know why, he just stared, even after she was gone from his sight. A breeze picked up after a while, tingling his scalp as it pushed and pulled on the stiff hairs in his mane. Eventually he found it in him to move from his spot, and he started down the hill.

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Another ball of paper bounced off the rim of the wastebasket. That was the third one in just shy of an hour. *well, at least I've got speed*, Ziggy mused, flopping back onto his sofa, *the worlds fastest hack*. He lay his front leg over his eyes, wondering what he was doing. He had started writing as soon as he got home, but he had only the vaguest memory why. He remembered something about poetry last night - he couldn't remember whether he had brought it up or Scratch had, just that poetry had been involved in the conversation somehow, and even that was fuzzy, to be

honest. He groaned, and rolled off the sofa onto the floor. One of his poems lay in front of him, wadded-up. He smoothed it out and read it.

*a moonlit mare sits on a hill,  
of the night she drinks her fill,  
her mane vibrant against the sky-*

He crumpled the paper again, flicking it away from him. He grumbled off-handedly to himself, getting back up. For a brief moment he considered taking another crack at writing, but decided against it. He walked into his kitchen to pour himself a glass of water. His head had been pounding on and off all afternoon; he was beginning to think he had had a bit too much to drink last night, and the summer heat wasn't helping at all.

"No drinks, tonight," He told himself, downing the water. It helped, if only a little. At the very least, it settled his headache enough that when his alarm went off a few minutes later, it was not especially excruciating.

"Already?" He asked to no pony in particular, trotting into his bedroom to turn off the alarm. Sure enough, the clock read 5:00, exactly when he had set it for. "I guess time flies when you're..." He looked out into his living room, which was now strewn with several wadded-up papers, each and every one filled with half-finished snippets of poetry - though to call them such would be a bit of a stretch. He floundered to find a word for exactly what he had been doing, eventually giving up and settling on, "...writing." He sighed, and set about getting ready for work.

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The club was unlocked when Ziggy arrived, but no club-goers were there just yet. He poked his head inside and was greeted by an empty hall, save for Salty, who was already set up behind his bar.

"Afternoon, Ziggy!" The bartender greeted the colt, "You're here early, aren't you?"

"I guess I got here faster than I was expecting," Ziggy answered, walking the rest of the way in, "You're here early too, I though I'd be the one to open up, like last time..."

"Nah, you only opened last time 'cause the manager was with you. He asked me to come in early until your trial is up...you know how it is, can't exactly trust a new employee with the important stuff. Plus, I just got some new drink shipped in, had to unpack them before the club-foals show up." Ziggy nodded.

"Yeah, I guess that makes sense." He said, "Say, could I get a glass of water before my shift starts? My headache is coming up again."

"Sure thing," Salty replied. He took a glass and began to fill it from the small washing sink, making small talk as he did so. "What's got you're head hurting?"

"I probably just had a bit much to drink last night," Ziggy answered, taking the water from Salty, "I can't really hold as much as I look like - that's Pegasus genes for you."

"I think even a Pegasus can handle more than a few Rum and Coke's," Salty laughed, "But if you insist." Ziggy was about to reply when the club doors swung open, followed by the tap-tap-tapping of a can across the floor.

"Hey, DJ, so good of you to show up," Salty called to her. Scratch replied by blowing a raspberry in their direction.

"You're lucky I made it here at all," She said, "I swear my Mom tried to chain me to my bedpost." She trotted up on stage and shrugged off the saddlebags she had been carrying.

"What'd you do?" Salty asked her.

"What makes you think it was something I did?" She asked indignantly, starting to unpack her equipment, "It was mostly Ziggy's fault!"

"Is that so?" Salty asked, peering at the earth pony at the bar, "so what did YOU do, huh?" Ziggy shrugged defensively, and Scratch looked up from her turntable.

"Wait, Ziggy's here?" She asked.

"Yeah," Ziggy piped up, "Sorry I didn't say hi." The stage was a ways away from the bar, so it was hard to tell, but Ziggy thought he could see her shuffle her hooves.

"Don't worry about it," She said, "But...Shouldn't you be outside? I mean, the club-ponies are gonna start showing up soon, if they haven't already." Ziggy looked at the clock by the bar, which read 5:49.

"Oh geeze, you're right!" He said, getting up, "I'll talk to you later tonight!"

"Yeah, sure thing!" Scratch said. Ziggy trotted out of the club, and heard Scratch start up her conversation with Salty again, before door closed and the sound-canceling spells drowned them out. No ponies had arrived at the club just yet, but Ziggy didn't have long to wait until a line started to form. Ziggy launched into work with his usual dull-eyed attitude, silently checking the young ponies' IDs and letting them through - or turning them away, on the rare occasion that their cards had been faked and the even rarer case when they didn't even feel the need to try that hard. It was easy work as always, and it gave Ziggy plenty of time to think to himself. Unlike any ordinary day, however, where he would have admired the scenery or observed the ponies in line, he found himself sighing internally.

*One colt, two fillies, all dressed up and looking silly...* he thought two himself as a unicorn with a gaudily-dressed pegasus at either flank checked into the club. He blinked, wondering just where the thought had come from. He shook his head, chasing the words away, and kept working. There didn't seem to be many ponies attending the club - no surprise, Ziggy supposed, considering the size of Ponyville compared to Manehattan, and the line had already begun to dwindle as Scratch started to play. He could hear her music in brief snippets as the door swung open, but the sound-cancelling spells did their job well, and drowned out any hint of the powerful music when the doors closed. He enjoyed those brief snippets while they lasted, but it didn't take long before then last of the line disappeared, leaving him alone in the late summer night air. He sat down and leaned against the wall, thinking about propping the door open so he could listen in, but he didn't want to disturb any of the ponies around - although the club was on the outskirts of the tiny town, there were still more than a few houses nearby. Instead, he settled for listening to the sounds of the night. He was having less trouble with it than earlier, and was perfectly content with the sounds of softly blowing wind, the swaying of leaves, and the quiet, omnipresent chirping of crickets. It wasn't long, however, before something distracted him from the night, and it came in the form of a mare.

"Well, fancy meeting you out here," The mare said as she pranced up to him, "What's a colt like you doing outside all the fun, huh?"

"Uh...Evening, Miss," Ziggy said, jumping up.

"Miss?" she asked, laughing at him, "Don't tell me you don't remember me? I know I found you at the bar, but you danced way to good to be drunk."

"No," Ziggy said, "No, I remember you. But, well, I'm kinda working right now."

"Is that so?" Sweet Stuff asked, "You're a bouncer?" She looked him up and down, and smiled. Ziggy gulped. "Yup," She said, "You definitely look like the type."

"Thanks?" Ziggy said, "Ah, I'll need to see your ID if you wanna head into the club."

"Oh, in a little while maybe," She said, "But bouncing looks like lonely work...are you sure you wouldn't rather have someone to talk to while you're out here?" Ziggy shrugged, and looked away.

"It's not so bad, really," He told her, "Or I guess I've just gotten used to it. I've never had any problem with it."

"Aw, c'mon," She insisted, "It's not like you have anything better to do...and it's not I'm gonna be distracting you from anything." Ziggy hesitated, and looked around. She was right enough, there certainly wasn't anyone around.

"Well...alright." He said finally, "I guess there's no harm in it. But it seems like you'd have much better time inside the club."

"Maybe," She said, sitting beside him, "But then where'd you be, huh big guy? Sitting out here all alone? What would you do all night?"

"Same thing I do every night, I guess," Ziggy shrugged, "Listen. Watch. Think."

"But you can't hear the music from out here," Sweet Stuff said, "What are you supposed to listen to?"

"There's plenty to listen to," Ziggy told her, "Just try it." Sweet stuff stared at him, but furrowed her brow, listening for whatever he was talking about.

"Nope," She said after a disappointingly short time, "I don't hear anything. Seriously, what, did you bring your own music or something?"

"There's crickets, and stuff," Ziggy told her. She snorted, asking,

"Crickets? You can hear those all the time, there's nothing interesting about them."

"Sure there is," He insisted, "I mean...well...they rub their legs together, right? So maybe they're like...tiny violins, or something." This comment only elicited an odd look from Sweet Stuff.

"I've heard Violins, Ziggy. Crickets don't sound like violins."

"Well, no," Ziggy said, "But...they're kinda the same, aren't they?" Sweet Stuff shook her head.

"I just don't see it," She said. Ziggy shrugged half heatedly, and Sweet Stuff nudged him. "Hey," She said, "How about propping open that door, huh? That's some music, right there. We can dance to that."

"I shouldn't," Ziggy said, "There's a few houses around, and Scratch can get LOUD...well, you were there last night. I wouldn't want to wake anypony up by leaving the door open." Sweet Stuff sighed, and stood up.

"Well, *I'm* going inside," She said, "Sorry Ziggy, but crickets just don't do it for me. This filly needs something she can dance to."

"Alright," Ziggy said, standing himself. "Just show me some ID, and I'll let you in." Sweet Stuff pulled a card from her mane, and Ziggy checked it. Seeing that she was a mere year younger than himself, well old enough to be there, he held the door open for her. "Enjoy your night, Sweet Stuff." He said. She smiled, and flicked her tail at him as she walked past.

"Such a gentlecolt," She giggled, "I'll do my best - for you." She trotted into the club and Ziggy let the door swing shut behind her, cutting off the music - which, Ziggy noticed, didn't seem quite as pounding as it had last night - and once again leaving him alone with the subtle sound of the night. He sat against the wall and closed his eyes, listening. Celestia's sun had sunk below the horizon completely now, replaced by Luna's night and all the sounds that came with it in full chorus. Ziggy sighed contentedly, and took in the sounds.

*Like tiny violins,* He thought, listening to the crickets, *a whole section of tiny violinists.*



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It may have taken a full day inches away from falling asleep on his hooves, but Ziggy noticed that he was starting to get used to working nights. He was still tired, of course, but when the club goers started to head home, and Ziggy entered the hall to clear out the stragglers, he at least had clear head. He shoed them out the door without incident, save for a pair of drunk colts. It wasn't that they were giving him trouble, but simply that they were having problems finding the door. He eventually got them out, and when he turned back inside he found Scratch waiting for him at the bar.

"Hey, Ziggy," She said, waving in his general direction. Ziggy walked over and sat on the stool beside her. "Care for a drink?" She asked him.

"I don't think so," He shook his head, "I think I had too much last night, I don't want another hangover."

"Aw, but tomorrow's your day off! That's the perfect day to have a hangover," She insisted, "And besides, what do you mean *another* hangover? You weren't even drunk last night...were you?"

"Well, not drunk drunk," Ziggy admitted, "But drunk enough, I guess. The whole night is a little fuzzy. I think we were talking about your music, or something?" Scratch stared at him, but her glasses masked her expression, except for a hint of a frown playing at the corners of her mouth.

"You...don't remember last night?" She asked him. Ziggy scratched his head, trying to bring his memories into focus.

"I remember it..." He said, "Sorta. I remember the early stuff, in the club, but like I said, after the middle of the night it's all...sort of fuzzy. I don't remember any real specifics." Scratch frowned, and drank from the tumbler of Vodka in front of her.

"I dunno," She said, putting it down again, "You seemed pretty lucid last night."

"He should," Salty chimed in, "He only had a couple of drinks."

"Whaaaaaat?" Scratch asked, laughing, "A couple of drinks, and you don't remember anything?"

"Well, I was pretty tired too," Ziggy insisted, "And anyways, I'm part pegasus, so..."

"Sorry, Ziggy, but I don't think that cuts it. I've known some pretty heavyweight pegasi." Scratch laughed. Ziggy put his head on the counter, and Scratch nudged him playfully. "Aw, I'm just kidding Ziggy. Nothing wrong with not drinking."

"Thanks," He said, lifting his head up, "but it doesn't give me a whole lot to do now, does it? It's either hang out with you and drink, or go home and sleep."

"You make it sound like drinking is the only thing I do!" Scratch objected, "Didn't I say you seemed like a cool colt to hang out with?"

"Well yeah," Ziggy said, "But it's not like there's a whole lot to do this late."

"So why don't we hang out before work, then?" Scratch asked, "Or in the middle of the week - club traffic slows down, so they give me time off and let a couple of other artists play."

"Yeah?" Ziggy asked, "I guess that explains why there were less ponies tonight than my last shift."

"Yeah, not too many ponies are going to be out on a Sunday night," Scratch laughed, "I'm a city filly too, I know how weird it seems."

"Weird is right," Ziggy laughed, "Ponyville is a lot different from Manehattan. So, you want to hang out before work?"

"Of course!" She said, "Only...I kinda can't. Not right away, at least."

"Why not?" Ziggy asked, "Your mom didn't ground you, did she?"

"No, she didn't ground me!" Scratch said, rolling her head dramatically, "But she wasn't too happy either. I just want to stick around for a while and spend some time with her, you know, get her to chill out a little bit."

"Makes sense," Ziggy nodded, "sorry if I got you in trouble - "

"Oh please," Scratch said, "You don't even remember what I'd be in trouble for!" She laughed, and finished off her drink. "You apologize too much," She told him, "I thought bouncers were supposed to be tough."

"I'm off the clock," Ziggy shrugged, "I can apologize as much as I want."

"Oh, no you can't!" Scratch said, "You're on MY clock now! And I say, no more apologizing." She lowered her glasses so he could see her eyebrows furrow in parody of seriousness, and Ziggy saw the tops of her eyes. He blinked, staring in the milky pools, which stared back, fixated on him despite their sightlessness. "Ziggy?" She asked, knocking him out of his trance, "You still there, Ziggy?"

"What?" Ziggy asked, shaking his head, "Y-yeah, still here. Sorry - "

"Hey!" Scratch interrupted, "What'd I just say, colt? No apologizing."

"Oh, right," Ziggy said. He smiled, and asked, "So what am I getting paid, to not apologize, huh?"

"You're getting paid with my glorious company, of course," Scratch laughed, putting a hoof to her chest with pride.

"I dunno," Ziggy said skeptically, "That doesn't seem like whole lot."

"Well, if you don't like it, you can always quit," Scratch said, folding her hooves and pretending to be offended.

“Would I still get to hang out with you?” Ziggy asked.

“No. Do you get paid to sit around doing nothing?”

“Well, kinda...”

“That's different! That's your job!”

“Well, what if hanging out with you was my job?”

Scratch laughed. “Who would hire you to hang out with me?” She asked. Ziggy laughed as well, and shrugged.

“I guess you're right,” He said, “It's kinda like someone hiring me to take their money. I guess I'm just going to have to settle for not apologizing anymore.”

“That's-” Scratch started, but stopped. She smiled sweetly, and drank from her tumbler. “That's right,” She finished. Ziggy chuckled, and Scratch finished the rest of her vodka. “You sure you don't want anything to drink?” She asked.

“Definitely,” He said, shaking his head. “So - er...”

“You wanna get out of here, then?” She asked, “Since you aren't gonna get anything?”

“Yeah, alright.” He said. He got down from his stool and Scratch did the same, putting a few bits on the counter for her drink and pulling out her cane. As they left through the front door, beckoning the bartender good night, Ziggy remembered something that had occurred to him in the lull of his shift.

“Hey, Scratch,” He asked the unicorn, “I heard a bit of your music earlier tonight – it sounded different...or were you just going crazy last night, or something?”

“Eeeh...” Scratch groaned, lowering her head, “Yeah, I was kinda weak tonight. I mean last night was pretty big anyways, but it's never really

a noticeable difference. Well, not to the club ponies, anyways. They heard it, too..." She shook her head, and said, "I just had stuff on my mind tonight."

"Like what?" Ziggy asked, "Must've been something big."

"Pff, like you would know," Scratch said, "You heard, what, a show and a few seconds?"

"Okay, fair enough," Ziggy rolled his eyes, "But you don't seem like you let a whole lot get to you. I mean, especially on stage last night, you looked like you were on top of the world, or something. I just figured it must take something big to make you play differently."

"Yeah, well..." Scratch said, "I guess I was just thinking about my mom. I swear, she worries so much about me, she makes me worry about her!"

"Maybe you just take after her like that," Ziggy said. Scratch made a strangled noise, and cringed.

"Oh, Celestia, don't even go there, Ziggy!" She said, laughing. Ziggy laughed as well, asking,

"Oh come on! She's you're mom, how bad could it be?"

"Do you want to be your parents?" She asked him. Ziggy laughed again.

"Okay, that's kind of a fair point," He said, "Not that I have much choice in the matter. I pretty much am my dad."

"Oh yeah?" Scratch asked, chuckling. She paused for a moment, then said, "Okay, I got a question. You're part pegasus, right?"

"Yeah," Ziggy said, "half, from my dad."

"How does that work?" Scratch asked, "I mean, what's it like, being half-pegasus?" Ziggy blinked, and tilted his head in thought.

"Huh," He said, "Well, I'm not as strong as most full earth ponies my size would be," He said, "But I'm stronger than a full pegasi, too. I guess I'm sort of in between the two. Like, I'm lighter than most earth ponies, too." He thought for a bit more, and concluded, "And I can walk on clouds, if I can get up there. But that's pretty much it."

"How'd you figure that out?" Scratch asked.

"My dad took me and my brother to visit our grandparents in Cloudsdale," He said, "My brother's pegasus, so he could fly up, but they had to carry me. They just set me down on a cloud, and I stayed up. I'm pretty sure they knew I wouldn't fall through."

"I hope so," Scratch laughed. The pair of ponies continued to make idle chatter as they walked through the night, until they came to Scratch's home a short while later.

"Well, this is my stop," Scratch said, "Sorry, Ziggy, but you're going to have to go on without me."

"Hey, I thought we weren't apologizing," Ziggy said.

"No, you're not apologizing," Scratch clarified for him, "I can still apologize if I want."

"Aaah," Ziggy said, "Well, thanks for clearing that up."

"I wouldn't want you getting confused," Scratch teased, smirking. She started to turn away, but turned back and asked him, "Are you going to be at the club tomorrow?"

"Umm...yeah, I think so," Ziggy answered. Scratch nodded.

"Alright, well," She said, matter-of-factly, "I'll see you tomorrow night, then." Ziggy nodded, and smiled.

"Have a good night, Scratch," He said. Scratch looked back again, and smiled at him.

“Goodnight, Ziggy.” She replied, before turning away and trotting into her home. Ziggy headed for his home as well, strolling through the vacant streets. The night was clear and the moon nearly full, illuminating his path as he walked. He smiled faintly, taking in the sights and sounds of the town, and it didn't feel like long at all before he was back in his room, settling down for the night.

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Ziggy walked through the streets the next evening with his head hung low. He wasn't in a bad mood exactly, but he was frustrated. Once again, he had spent most of his afternoon writing, or attempting to write, poetry, and once again he had no idea why he had done it. He had spent so long on a single poem, staring furiously down at the sheet of paper, that he hadn't even noticed his alarm going off, and had continued to fight with the miserable stanza he had written for a full hour after the club had opened. He wasn't in much of a rush to get to the club, though – the evening was still fresh, and he didn't need to worry about it filling up on a Monday night. At least, if Scratch was to be believed.

It was probably a fair bet that she was right, Ziggy surmised when he arrived at the club. There were still a few latecomers passing through the doors, but for the most part Rusty had little to do aside from look mean – and bored.

“Evening, Rusty,” Ziggy said, flashing his ID to the red-brown bouncer. Rusty nodded to him, and gave a grunt.

“Looks like you got here just in time,” he told the young earth pony, “Your friend just showed up a while ago.” Ziggy paused, and tilted his head.

“My friend?” He asked, “You mean Scratch?”

“Naw, naw,” Rusty said, shaking his head, “The little blue one, with the pink mane.” Ziggy furrowed his eyebrows, thinking hard.

“Sweet Stuff?” He asked, after a while. Rusty shrugged.

“I dunno,” He said, “But I figured she must be a friend of yours – she was asking about you.” He shrugged again, and Ziggy did so as well.

“Well, thanks,” He said, opening the door and heading inside. He was greeted by Scratch's music, thumping across the sparsely populated dance floor. She hadn't been kidding when she said that the club slowed down during the week. Most of the ponies there were dedicated clubbers, Ziggy could guess from their wildly styled and coloured manes, but there were still a few average ponyvillians around, hanging on the the last remnants of a long weekend, or just meeting up with friends before moving on to some other venue for the evening. Despite this, Scratch still seemed to be putting her all into the music, always moving up on stage adjusting dials and settings, and scratching her namesake disks, producing a twisting, soaring song that almost sounded like it was dancing itself. A smile spread across Ziggy's face, and he tapped and swayed to the fluid beat as he headed for Salty at the bar, who was serving a unicorn colt.

“You look like you're in a good mood,” Salty commented to Ziggy, pouring a mixed drink for the unicorn. Ziggy plunked himself down on a stool and shrugged.

“I dunno,” He said, “I wasn't feeling that great before I got here. I guess it's just the music.” Salty smiled knowingly, and nodded.

“Yeah, she's in a pretty good mood tonight, I think.” He said, “You can always sort of guess from how she's playing. She usually just plays tracks when she's down, but I don't think she's just let anything sit the way it is tonight. She's been messing with everything she's been playing.”

“It's working for her,” Ziggy said, looking up at the stage. Scratch looked like she was taking a breather; she was playing a more rhythmic,



beat heavy song, but she was still bobbing along to her own beat enthusiastically. "But she can't keep it up all night, can she?"

"You'd be surprised," Salty told him, "She's been working here pretty much since she was old enough to get in herself – probably been doing this for even longer. She knows how to pace herself. It'll probably slow down near the middle of the night, but she'll be back for a grand finale."

"I'll take your word for it," Ziggy said, "but It'll have to be something pretty big. Her stuff is pretty great all the time." Salty grinned.

"Hah, you'd get an earful if you tried to tell her that," He laughed, "she'd have you up until sunrise talking about everything she did wrong."

"Oh, I don't know," A giggly voice said from behind Ziggy, "she does a pretty good job here – even if you can't dance to some of it." Ziggy turned around, finding a familiar blue-and-pink mare gazing at him.

"Like this, for example," She said, sitting at the bar beside Ziggy, "It's just way too hard. There's no way you can flow with it, all you can do is stomp, like those metal-heads." She gestured to the dance floor, where a group of ponies were jumping, stomping and bucking to the beat. The song almost seemed to be egging them on, as Scratch turned the bass up and sped up the rhythm.

"Sweet Stuff?" Ziggy asked, blinking, "Rusty said you were looking for me. How did you know I would be here?"

"You're a bouncer," She answered, "You sort of work here. Or at least, I thought you did. What's up with that?"

"Oh...well, I part time," Ziggy told the mare, "I work one day on, and one day off."

"Work one day, drink the next? That sounds like a pretty cushy job, Zig," Sweet Stuff said, resting her chin on her hooves, "Where does a pony find work like that?"

"I don't really drink that much," Ziggy protested, before Sweet Stuff cut him off.

"Yeah, sure," She said, "That's why the first thing you do when you get here is go right up to the bar, without even having a chance to get thirsty, huh?"

"I was just saying hi to Salty-" Ziggy said, turning to gesture at the bartender, who had gone off to serve another customer. He stared at the empty spot where Salty had been a moment ago, before turning back to Sweet Stuff, who was smirking at him.

"Well," She said, "It looks like he's a little busy, so you can come dance with me!"

"I thought you said you couldn't dance to this song," Ziggy said. Sweet Stuff giggled at him.

"She won't be playing this all night, now will she?" She said, taking a hold of his front leg and tugging him down from his stool, "Besides, we can warm up a bit, while she does!" She pulled him out onto the dance floor, where he was forced to bob to the beats, if only just to avoid the other few thrashing ponies. After a while Scratch changed songs, moving on to a much wilder song. Sweet Stuff laughed in earnest glee, swinging her head along with the first sweeping notes, and jumping and bucking along with the dueling beat lines. The dance almost threw her across the floor, and she bumped flanks with Ziggy, shaking him into a dance as well. The two ponies weaved through the song, a grin plastered across Sweet Stuff's muzzle as a similar one started to form on Ziggy. Just like the last time he had danced with her, Sweet Stuff slowly managed to coax Ziggy into a full dance, swaying, hopping and shifting his hooves to the rhythms that Scratch made. They danced for hours, easily. Ziggy was exhausted when, halfway through the night, Scratch called out over the mic.

"Man," She said as the song she was playing ended, "Are you guys lazy tonight, or did everypony get boring and stay home? I can't hear *anypony* dancing out there!" The ponies on the dance floor erupted into

noise, clattering their hooves and yelling out to the DJ. She laughed, and addressed them all again.

“There you are! Well, since you're all obviously so tired, here's something slower for you all!” She switched around a few plugs, and sat back. As the lights on stage turned away from her and the song started to play, Ziggy saw her wiping her brow. The song was certainly slower than some of her other things that evening, but to call it slow would be an exaggeration. A steady, pulsing rhythm was starting to form like a newborn foals heartbeat as Sweet Stuff hooked a hoof around Ziggy's.

“Come on,” She said, “*Now* you can drink.” The two trotted to the bar and Salty, who had a shortage of customers now that many of them had left for the night.

“Hey, Salty,” Ziggy said as the bartender pony approached them, “Could I get a Rum and Coke?”

“Sure thing,” Salty said, “You want me to start calling that your regular, or are you planning on getting bolder any time soon?”

“Aheh...” Ziggy laughed weakly, “I think you should just call that the regular.”

“The regular it is,” Salty grinned. He turned to the mare beside Ziggy, and asked her, “How about you, Sweet Stuff? You want something?”

“Mmmm, gimme a cooler, Salty,” She said. The bartender nodded, and set about mixing the drinks. As he did, Ziggy turned to Sweet Stuff, and asked her,

“You know him?”

“I come here a lot,” She laughed, “and a lot of colts seem to need help.”

"Help?" Ziggy asked, as Salty passe their drinks to them. He took a sip from his, and asked again, "What does helping ponies have to do with you and Salty?" Sweet Stuff smiled at him and sipped her drink.

"Well, what do you think I'm helping them with at a club, huh?" she laughed. Ziggy tilted his head and furrowed his brow in concentration.

"Uh..." He said slowly, "I...dunno? Helping them with problems, or something?"

"Helping them *relax*" Sweet Stuff told him. "If a pony's at a club, they should be having a good time!"

"You want them to have a good time..." Ziggy began, "So you get them drunk?"

"Well, not drunk, drunk," Sweet Stuff said, "But, you know, a drink or two. Just to loosen them up. Sometimes I don't even need to, like with you!"

"I dunno, I just don't really see drinking-" He paused in mid sentence and cocked an eyebrow at Sweet Stuff. As if it had only just registered, he said, "Wait, what?"

"Wait what what?" Sweet Stuff smirked at the baffled earth pony.

"Wait what, what do you mean, like me?" He asked.

"I mean I don't have to get you to drink to cheer you up," She smiled coyly at him, "You're easy, you just need to dance!"

"That's because I don't usually need cheering up," Ziggy chuckled, still a bit confused. Sweet Stuff raised an eyebrow at him.

"Really," She said, "You don't need cheering up. So that's why you were sitting at the bar alone, staring off into space on Saturday?"

"I wasn't staring into space," Ziggy told her, "I was looking at the bottles on the shelf."

"You know what I mean, smarty-pants," Sweet Stuff giggled, rolling her eyes, "You were just sitting around, not doing anything."

"No, really," Ziggy insisted, "Look:" He pointed at the bottles across from the pair. "See, that one has a neat design on the label, and that one has a funny name, and that one has something floating at the bottom of the bottle..."

"Oh, Celestia, it's worse than I thought," Sweet Stuff teased, "If you think bottles are more interesting than meeting ponies, you *really* need to loosen up."

"What's wrong with bottles?" Ziggy asked, frowning slightly.

"They're bottles!" Sweet Stuff told him, "The only thing interesting about them is what's inside! You're at a club, Ziggy, you're supposed to be talking to ponies, or dancing, or hanging out with friends! You really need to relax, and have some fun."

"Well..." Ziggy said, fishing in vain for some sort of comeback, "...Why are you so worried about me having fun, anyways?" Sweet Stuff winked at him, and patted her cutie mark.

"You know what ice does, don't you Zig? It cools ponies off, and it numbs them – it helps them relax." She grinned, and added, "And it's great in drinks. I can't just sit around and watch ponies mope, especially not a cute colt like you." Ziggy blushed faintly and looked away, and Sweet Stuff asked him, "How about you, huh? What's your cutie mark mean?" Ziggy blinked, and looked at the three stars emblazoned on his flank.

"Uh..." He said, "I like stars, I guess?"

"Like celebrities?" Sweet Stuff asked, "I guess that explains why you became a bouncer, huh? Get to hang out and see all the stars."

"No, I mean, the actual stars," Ziggy clarified, "The stars in the sky."

"That's it? You just...like stars?"

"I guess so," Ziggy shrugged, "I mean...I saw the stars one night when I was little, and the next morning, there was my cutie mark, so..."

"That can't be it," She insisted, "I mean, why kind of a talent is liking stars? And what's it got to do with being a bouncer, anyways?"

"Well...nothing, now that I think of it. I mean, I didn't even used to work nights or anything until I started here." Sweet Stuff stared at him and rubbed her chin, puzzled.

"Well," She said, "Maybe it isn't a job thing. What do you do for fun?"

"Um. I read?" Ziggy told her? "and I play video games too, and stuff, and I've...kinda been writing poetry lately, if you can call it that."

"Poetry?" Sweet Stuff asked, snickering, "Really. You write poetry?"

"Well, sorta," He said, "Why, what's wrong with poetry?"

"I don't know," Sweet Stuff laughed, "It just doesn't seem like your thing. Poets are always spry, scrawny little unicorns sobbing and pining over some mare, aren't they? Besides, what does that have to do with stars?"

"Well, you did ask." Ziggy sighed. He looked down at his flank for a while, before Sweet Stuff interrupted his thoughts.

"Ziggyyy..." She said, "You're doing it again..."

"Huh? Doing what again?"

"You're being all mopey," She said, "Come on, lets go dance some more!" She barely gave Ziggy enough time to finish his drink before she pulled him out onto the dance floor again. The two ponies danced for a few more hours, excusing a few more breaks, but Ziggy was never quite able to keep pace with Sweet Stuff again, who had gotten right back into the swing of the music, moving with what Ziggy guessed must have been long-earned experience. As the moon passed it's peak and started it's crawl back down the sky, Salty's prediction came true.

“Hey, all you colts and fillies!” Scratch shouted over the microphone, “I hope you're all having a great time!” The meager remnants of the audience shouted their approval to the DJ, who was busily moving around jacks and switching records. “That's what I like to hear,” She said, “We're almost done here for the night, but I got one last track for you! I hope you're all feeling nice and rested, 'cause it's a doozy, and I expect you all to dance NICE! AND! LOOOOUUUUD!”

The crowd erupted into cheers as the last song started up, instantly launching into a machine-gun flurry of beats. The ponies all danced wildly, Sweet Stuff and Ziggy included. It lasted only a few minutes, but all present were exhausted when it was done. Laughing ponies left the hall as Scratch called her goodnight, and Rusty entered the hall to clear out the more difficult, or inebriated colts and fillies. Ziggy sat at the bar and wiped sweat from his brow.

“What are doing, Ziggy?” Sweet Stuff laughed at him, “That bouncer is gonna come and kick us out soon.”

“Nah, he let me stay last time,” Ziggy told her, “I wanna stay and talk to Scratch.”

“Who's this Scratch you keep talking about anyways?” Sweet Stuff asked, “And what makes you think she'll be sticking around?”

“Scratch is the DJ,” He said, “She always sticks around afterwords, right Salty?” The bartender nodded in agreement. Sweet Stuff just looked at Ziggy in awe.

“You know DJ P0N-3?” She asked.

“Well, yeah,” Ziggy said, “I mean, we work at the same place, and she's cool. Why wouldn't I know her?”

“She just seems so different from you,” Sweet Stuff said, “I mean, she's always so cool up on stage, and you...well...”

"I listen to crickets and look at bottles?" Ziggy finished for her. She shrugged apologetically, and said,

"Well, sorry, but you two just don't seem like you'd have a lot in common."

"I dunno," Ziggy said, "You're probably right. But we don't really have to. I mean, she's a lot of fun offstage too, we always find something to do – why don't you stick around and meet her?"

"Well, if that bouncer is going to let me stay, I just might!" Sweet Stuff declared, "if she's as fun as you say, we might just get along!"

Rusty came and sat beside the two ponies at the bar, not even bothering to ask if they were planning on leaving soon. Scratch came offstage soon as well, carting her heavy saddlebags across the floor.

"Roll call!" She announced as she approached the bar, "Salty!" The bartender greeted her with a laugh, "Rusty!" The red-brown stallion grunted to mark his presence, "Ziggy!"

"Hey Scratch," Ziggy said, "We've got someone else tonight, too."

"Someone else?" Scratch asked, surprised by the news, "Rusty, did you finally decide to bring your 'special friend' to meet us?" The bouncer grumbled into the beer that Salty had brought him, and Ziggy laughed carefully.

"No," He said, "She's a friend of mine. Scratch, this is Sweet Stuff. Sweet Stuff, Scratch.

"You can call me Sweets," She said warmly, offering her hoof to the DJ.

"Nice to meet you, Sweets," Scratch said. Her voice seemed a bit subdued to Ziggy, but her brow furrowed, and when she began to reach out gingerly with her hoof Ziggy realized that she was only vaguely aware of Sweet Stuff's handshake. The two mare's hooves met quickly enough, and



they shook firmly. Scratch took a seat on the opposite side of Ziggy, and asked the newcomer,

“So, Sweets...You're a friend of Ziggy's?”

“That's right,” She said, “We just met, oh, a couple of days ago, right?”

“Yeah, I think that's right,” Ziggy said, “I remember earlier that evening, yeah. When we danced.”

“Still don't remember anything?” Scratch grinned, nudging the earth colt, “Lightweight.”

“It's starting to come back,” He laughed, “I remember bits of it. Still nothing solid though, just a bit of music...were you singing, or something?”

“Pff,” Scratch dismissed him quickly, “I doubt it. I don't sing.” She leaned over the counter to talk to Sweet Stuff, telling her, “Mister Stardust here only had a couple of drinks, and he doesn't remember a thing!”

“No way,” Sweet Stuff laughed, “how is that even possible?”

“I'm part pegasus!” Ziggy insisted, “And I was already tired!” Sweet Stuff snickered.

“I dunno, Zig, I've known some pegasi who could drink a *lot*.”

“Why does everyone say that!?” the beleaguered earth pony objected, resting his chin on the counter. The mares on either side of him both laughed.

“Aw, don't go all emo on us, Ziggy,” Scratch said, patting his back, “We're just having some fun!”

“Yeah,” Sweet Stuff said, leaning in beside him, “I just need to train you not to get drunk...you'll never learn how to have fun if you can't remember it,” She said slyly. Ziggy lifted his chin and rested it on his hooves.

"Yeah, well." He sighed, rolling his eyes, "Whatever." Scratch turned away from the two, and tapped the counter top idly. She got down from her stool suddenly, lifting her saddlebags onto her back.

"Sorry, Ziggy," She said, "I gotta run."

"Already?" He asked, "You usually stay around for a while, don't you?"

"Well, yeah," She said, tilting her head, "But I should get home earlier tonight...well, you know why, right?"

"Yeah," He said, "I guess so. I'll go with you - "

"Nah," Scratch interrupted, "Don't worry about it. You can hang out with Sweet Stuff, if you want." She turned to the mare in question, and said, "It was nice meeting you, Sweets."

"Yeah," Sweet Stuff agreed, "I should hang out after hours more!" She giggled. Scratch laughed quietly and grinned back at her, before heading out the doors. Ziggy stared at the doors for a while after she had left; she had seemed a bit off to him. He shook his head, deciding that it must just be she was worried about her mother, or something like that.

"You know," Rusty said, peering at Ziggy and Sweet Stuff, "You two aren't actually allowed to be here right now..."

"Oh," Ziggy said, "Uh, I guess I should go anyways, yeah."

"I'm getting a bit tired anyways," Sweet Stuff said, getting down from her stool. Ziggy followed suit, and the two headed for the door, with Ziggy pausing only to bid farewell to Salty, who returned the gesture. Despite having not left that long after her, Scratch was nowhere to be seen.

"Which way do you go from here?" Sweet Stuff asked him.

"I head that way," Ziggy told her, nodding the direction of his apartment. She stuck out her lip, pouting.

“Aw,” She said, “I can't walk home with you. Oh well, I'll see you later, right Ziggy?”

“That's right,” Ziggy nodded, “I work again tomorrow night, so I'll be right out here.”

“Well,” she said, “I'll look forward to it, then.” She batted her eyelashes at him, before turning and walking away. Ziggy headed for his home, thinking about nothing in particular. His thoughts drifted over the whistle of the soft breeze through the leaves, and the cool night air, and over the brilliant twinkling stars in the sky. His thoughts even drifted over Scratch once or twice. He could never really put a hoof on why, though, she just sort of popped into his head randomly from time to time. Before he could figure out why, he found himself at his door. Like he had done through the quiet streets of Ponyville, he navigated his house on autopilot, and slipped comfortably between his sheets and into a warm, though not a completely still slumber.

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Ziggy woke the next afternoon with two things on his mind: Breakfast, and the moon.

Breakfast was easy. He still had plenty of cereal left in his cupboards; after his first morning in Ponyville he had thought ahead, and stocked up on fast breakfasts. After filling a bowl and setting it down on the table, he went searching for something else. It was only when he put the object in question, a lined and well-used notepad, beside his breakfast that he realized that he had done it.

“...Wha?” He asked groggily. He was slow to wake as usual, and he just stared at the notepad. He shook his head, and sat down to eat. He

munched on his breakfast slowly, letting the dull taste of it ease him into wakefulness, and continued to stare at the pad in front of him. He even made an attempt to write before he was completely lucid, nearly dribbling on the table as he forgot that he had a mouthful of milk and grains. He pushed the notepad away from himself after that, and focused on his breakfast until nothing but a bowlful of milk stared back at him. He slurped the milk down and deposited the now-empty dish in the sink, sitting back down and turning his attentions to the pen and paper that had stalked his meal. He took up the pen in his mouth and stared at the blank sheet, trying to piece together something in rhyme. All he could manage, though, was to spit out the pen and glower at the sheet of paper.

“Man, what the heck am I even doing?” He demanded of the notepad, “I’ve doing this for two days, and what have I done? Jack all, that’s what! I don’t even know why I’m doing this stupid stuff in the first place!” He sulked away from the kitchen, flopping onto the couch in the living room. He buried his face in the cushion, groaning a muffled groan, and his hoof brushed a ball of paper. He opened it slowly in peeked inside, half-afraid of what he would find. Not for no reason, he had only managed a couple of lines before he had gotten sick of that one. He tossed it back down, and pulled himself off the couch, catching a whiff of himself as he did so.

“Bleugh,” He grimaced as the pungent scents of sweat and alcohol played through his nostrils, “I need a bath.” He trotted into his bathroom and filled up the tub, slipping in as soon as it finished. The hot water stung, but before too long his began to feel it gently numbing him, easing away a stiffness and soreness he hadn’t even realized was there, from dancing all the previous night. He made a happy noise and sunk deeper into the water, staring up at his ceiling. He took in the imperfections of the ceiling almost unconsciously, his eyes darting from blemish to dent, scouring the topography of it, like it was some strange new land, and he was looking on it from high above. In fact, in his mind he imagined it was a place far, far above him, a place that he was blessed to have the fortune of visiting.

*The last true unknown, He thought to himself, a real mystery, the last unmapped world. More forbidden than the Everfree, farther still than the*

*lands beyond Equestria's borders. We know what's in the Everfree, so we dare not go, and the world beyond our mountains at least somepony knows...but there! Nopony has ever been there! How amazing it must be, untouched by hooves, a plain truly free! I...*

Ziggy was jolted back to Equestria as he slipped lower into the tub, stirring up the water and splashing it into his nose. He snorted the water out of his sinuses and sneezed, the violent movement stirring up the water further and forcing him to sit up, lest he drown himself. He gave a coughing laugh and let his forelegs hang out of the tub, staring up at the ceiling again. The thought was gone, and it probably wasn't coming back, but the words weren't forgotten. He smiled faintly, and remembered to write them down when he was finished. That could wait though. For the time being, he closed his eyes and enjoyed the feeling of the water as it slowly calmed, playing over his coat and tugging his fur in its flow.

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It wasn't long before Ziggy found himself out of the bath, and staring at his notepad again. Now that the words were on paper, they just didn't look right to him. He tore out the page and wrote it again, rearranging the words, changing their order, taking one out, putting a new one in. He scanned the page again and grumbled – this one was even worse! He ripped it out and began again – and again, and again, and again. He re-wrote the words easily four or five times, but he simply couldn't settle on one that he liked. He shoved the notepad aside and lay his head down on the table, sighing.

“Sweet Stuff must be right,” He said, “This is dumb. A guy like me just doesn't make poetry.”. He let his thoughts wander, weaving their ways through the events of the past few nights. After a while, they settled firmly on that one fuzzy morning. He concentrated on the images he could see, trying to find some sort of clarity in them, the summon up the events that

surrounded them, but the harder he tried the less he could remember. He wondered what had happened that night. It must have been important, because something from that night was responsible for his poetry. He glanced at the notepad again and, sighing, pulled it back in front of him. There were only a few pages left, most of the rest of the notepad was strewn around his living room floor. He gave the paper his best death glare, trying to scare the words out of it, and it stared back.

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Sadly, the paper had not yielded.

Ziggy sat in the cool air outside the club. He had stared at that page for hours, until his alarm went off and told him it was time to work, but he hadn't managed to wring a single syllable out of it. What he was doing now was the same thing that he had been doing all evening; there were even fewer ponies at the club than last night, and they had all been checked in to the club within an hour or so. They had filed out throughout the evening, and he had needed to go in to break up a fight once, but it was still a slow evening. Now, though, the club was closing early, and Ziggy had to go in to shoo out the ponies that were still there – all four of them. They all cleared out without a fuss, leaving Ziggy in the empty hall with Salty at the counter, and Scratch taking down her equipment. Ziggy wandered in her direction, and called up to her.

“Hey Scratch,” He said, “How's it going?” The unicorn mare continued to work diligently, unplugging several machines and packing them into her bags without ever acknowledging Ziggy. “Scratch?” He asked again, tilting his head. “Scratch! Is something wrong?” The DJ continued to work in spite of Ziggy's calling. She finished working and pulled off the headphones she was wearing, just as Ziggy prepared a third greeting.

"SCRATCH!" He shouted. She jumped violently, dropping her headphones.

"JEEBUS!" She screamed, "Celestia almighty, Ziggy, what!?"

"Sorry!" Ziggy said, "I said your name three times, but you didn't hear me, so..." To his surprise, Scratch started to laugh.

"That's because I had my headphones on, Ziggy!" She told him, "I can't hear a damn thing with these on! They're noise canceling."

"Really?" Ziggy asked, puzzled, "Why would you wear noise-canceling headphones? I thought you didn't like not being able to hear stuff?"

"Man, I'm up here all night," She told him, "If I didn't wear these things I'd go deaf! I pump the music through them so I can hear it and not kill my ears, but I can't hear anything outside of it."

"That makes sense," Ziggy nodded, "But why were you wearing them when you were taking your stuff down? Were you still listening to something, or something?" Scratch looked away.

"Uh," She said, pawing at the stage, "Not really...I was just kinda trying something new."

"Cool," Ziggy said, "So, ah, are you heading straight home again tonight?"

"Yeeeah..." She said, rubbing her neck, "Sorry, I totally have to ditch you again tonight."

"You don't have to ditch me," Ziggy chuckled, "I can walk home with you, like usual. I've got nothing to do here, after all."

"Really?" She asked, cocking an eyebrow at him, "What about Sweet Stuff?"

"Sweet Stuff? She was here for a while, but she's gone now. She tried to sit outside with me, but she got bored because we couldn't hear your music. Why?" Scratch smirked a bit.

"Ah, I dunno," She said, "I kinda figured you'd be hanging out with her, like last night."

"Nah," Ziggy shook his head. "She's a nice enough filly but I don't think I could hang out with her all the time. She's just kinda...exhausting."

"Exhausting?" Scratch asked, grabbing her bags and stepping down from the stage, "what do you mean?" The two ponies walked out of the club, waving a brief farewell to the bartender.

"She's just...going, all the time." Ziggy explained as the cool night air struck them full in the face, "It's not just the dancing – I mean she wants to dance a lot, but she doesn't seem to want to sit still, even when she isn't dancing. I mean, she's nice, but..."

"But a squirrel can be nice too?" Scratch suggested. Ziggy laughed.

"Yeah," He said, "That about sums it up. She means well, she just doesn't quite get it."

"Oh, we're talking about 'its' now, huh?" Scratch grinned, "What's 'it'?"

"You know," Ziggy said, "'It'..." he floundered, looking for the words to describe it. Scratch cut in, saying,

"No, I don't know. If I knew, I wouldn't have bothered to ask."

"It's like...She doesn't look at things. Or for things. She just takes stuff as it is. She never looks deeper."

"The term is 'shallow', Ziggy," Scratch told him, smirking wryly. Ziggy shook his head.

"No, no, that's not right," He insisted, "She's nice, shallow is an insult. It's a bad thing." Scratch rolled her head.



"So puddles are bad things?" She joked. Ziggy gave her a sideways glance, but smiled.

"Well, do you like puddles?" He asked, "Does anypony like puddles?"

"Foals like puddles," Scratch said, "They like to play in them! I remember playing in puddles all the time when I was a little filly. Didn't you?"

"Eeh..." Ziggy bobbed his head around, "Okay, yeah. But that doesn't count, foals are little, so the puddles are deeper for them."

"So when you're little, shallow things seem deep," Scratch giggled. Ziggy chuckled as well.

"Sure," He said, "I should show you some of the comic books I used to read when I was a colt," He said, "I thought those things were great."

"You used to read comics?" Scratch asked, grinning, "Like, superhero comics, like superpony and stuff?"

"Yeeeah," Ziggy admitted, "But I mean, I was pretty young, and -"

"Why do you sounds like I just accused you of listening to Sapphire Shores, or something?" Scratched laughed, "They're just comics!"

"But...they're so dorky..." Ziggy said awkwardly. Scratch laughed again.

"I used to make remixes of cartoon theme songs, Ziggy," She told him, "We all do dorky stuff when we're little. Heck, it can still be fun when we're older!"

"Yeah?" Ziggy asked her. She smiled earnestly at him, and nudged him gently.

"Yeah!" She said, "Don't you ever read any of those old comics anymore?"

“Well, Yeah,” Ziggy admitted, rolling his eyes and laughing, “Yeah, I do.” The pair had come to Scratch's home, but she didn't seem to notice – she walked past her gate, only stopping when Ziggy pointed out, “I think this is your stop, Scratch.” The white mare paused, and her brow furrowed in concentration. She swung her cane out, knocking it against a metal ring around the mailbox out front and producing a small tinging sound.

“Oh yeah!” She said, “I didn't even notice. Thanks Ziggy, I woulda just kept on walking!”

“Don't worry about it,” Ziggy laughed, “Just get some rest, maybe – if you can't even find your own house, you might need it.”

“Thanks,” Scratch said, sticking her tongue out at him, “Get some sleep yourself – I don't want you forgetting about tonight too, Mr. Lightweight!” The two laughed, and Scratch trotted through her gate and up her walk, until Ziggy called out to her.

“Hey Scratch!” He said, only just remembering what he had wanted to ask her earlier that evening. She turned around, and trotted back.

“What's up?” She asked over the fence.

“We're, uh,” Ziggy pawed the ground and looked over her head, “We're still on for tomorrow, right?” Scratch smiled at him.

“Of course,” She said, “Why don't you swing by here at noon – we can start with lunch. I know a great place I'll bet you haven't tried yet.”

“Yeah,” Ziggy smiled back, “That sounds great. I'll see you tomorrow, then.”

“Looking forward to it,” Scratch told him, turning back up her walk, “Goodnight, Ziggy.”

“Goodnight Scratch,” Ziggy replied, before turning and heading home himself. His smile spread into a grin, and stayed that way all the while he

walked home. It was still on his face when he crawled into bed, setting his alarm for the next morning, and drifted to sleep.

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The grin was gone when Ziggy awoke. His alarm sounded harsh in the morning air, ringing like a thousand birds chirping all at once, right beside his head. Ziggy groaned and pulled his pillow over his ears, but the sharp noise pierced through. He dropped his hoof on the clock, silencing the screech, and propped himself up on his elbows.

“Why did I set my alarm?” He asked himself, “I don't have work today.” He stared at the alarm clock through half closed eyes, barely thinking as his brain caught up with his body. “10:00,” He said, “That's early...because I need to be out at noon...because I'm meeting Scratch for lunch!” He flopped back down and smiled sleepily, having figured out why he was awake. After a few minutes of convincing himself to get up, he rolled out of his bed and slowly walked into his kitchen.

He wasn't sure if he had slept enough that night, but he was prepared anyways. One of the items he had picked up on his 'emergency shopping trip' the other day was a tin of instant coffee. He pulled it out of the cupboards and stared at the instructions for a few minutes, repeating them in his head until they were memorized, and finally making himself a hot mug of the strong black drink.

“Blech!” He winced at the bitter taste. Still, he could feel it waking him already – if only because of the stinging heat on his tongue – so he soldiered on, taking sip after sip of the drink. He was well awake by the time he was finished, and after washing out the mug he found himself with about an hour to kill before he would leave to meet Scratch. He mulled around his apartment for a while, picking up the stray bits of unfinished poetry in the living room; he even spent a bit of time in front of the mirror.

Ordinarily he didn't give much thought to his mane – he had learned long ago that it was far too stubborn to do anything with – but he ran his hoof through it once or twice, only to have it spring back into place the moment his hoof left his head. He sighed and turned his head to the left and right, inspecting the jagged blue hair.

After an hour of that sort of thing Ziggy finally set out, trotting through the cheerful town. He arrived at Scratch's house just before noon and walked slowly up her path, knocking on the door. To his surprise, it wasn't Scratch who opened the door, but an older looking unicorn Mare with a white coat and slightly graying mane to match, and spool of fabric cutie mark.

“Hello?” She said slowly, “Can I help you?”

“Ah,” Ziggy said, “I'm Ziggy. I work with Scratch...she said to meet her here today?”

“Oh!” The mare said, smiling at him, “Ziggy! Please, come in!” She stood aside for Ziggy, beckoning for him to come in. He did so, and she continued, “I'm Scratch's mother, you can call me Velvet, if you like. Or Ms. White, if that's more comfortable.” She trotted through a archway briefly, and Ziggy heard her call upstairs, “Scratch! Ziggy's here!”. There was a clatter, followed by Scratch calling back,

“Okay! I'm fine, don't worry!”

“Scratch told me a lot about you,” Velvet said to Ziggy as she came back, “you're the new bouncer at the club, huh?”

“Yeah,” Ziggy nodded, “Well, sorta. I'm only working part time right now. One day on, one day off.”

“Oh, my,” Velvet said. She took a seat on a sofa across the room from Ziggy, and asked, “money must be tight, then.”

“It's enough to get by,” Ziggy shrugged, “If only just. I'm on a trial period right now at the club.” Velvet nodded knowingly.

"I suppose you have to start somewhere, don't you?" She said. "So how do you like our little town, so far? Scratch tells me you're from Manehattan."

"It's nice," Ziggy told her, "Different, but nice. It's pretty peaceful around here." Velvet looked like she was preparing another question for him, but the sound of hoofsteps pulled her off the couch to look at the stairs. Scratch was making her way down, feeling for each step with her cane before moving again.

"Hey Scratch," Ziggy said when she reached the bottom. Scratch turned her head in his direction, and smiled at him.

"Hey, Ziggy!" She said, "How's it going? You ready to eat?"

"You bet," He said, "How about you?"

"Oh man, you have no idea," She laughed. She walked for the door, looking back over her shoulder. "Bye, Mom." She said.

"Goodbye, sweetie," Velvet said, "Don't be back too late, alright?"

"Sure thing," Scratch smiled at her, "Come on, Ziggy." Ziggy followed after her, closing the door behind him. "Sorry about my mom," she said to him.

"Why?" Ziggy asked, "She was nice."

"I could hear her from upstairs – she was interrogating you, Ziggy."

"Are you sure?" He asked, "It didn't seem like it to me."

"She's my mom, Ziggy" Scratch said, raising an eyebrow at him, "I think I can figure out what she's up to by now. She was totally grilling you. She always does that – I told you, she's sorta overprotective." Ziggy shrugged.

"She's your mom" He said, "That's sorta their job, isn't it?"

“Yeah, I guess,” Scratch laughed, “Still, she does that every. Time. I bring someone over.” She laughed again, and Ziggy chuckled. A third party kicked in as well – Ziggy's stomach, growling audibly. Scratch laughed again.

“So, uh,” Ziggy laughed, “How close is this place?”

“Don't worry,” Scratch said, “It's close. It's a good thing that you're getting something big there, too.”

“And what makes you so sure I'll get something big?” Ziggy asked her.

“Duh,” She said, rolling her head, “Like I'm gonna let you order at some place you've never been to before? No way, I know exactly what you're getting.”

“Alright...so what's this thing you're making me eat?”

“Oh, you'll find out,” She grinned slyly at him. She lead him another couple of blocks before they came to a small cafe. A middle aged pegasus came out of the cafe, grinning ear-to-ear, and greeted the mare.

“Scratch!” He said, “How's it going? Dropping in on me for lunch?”

“Brought you a new customer!” She responded, laughing at the spirited pegasus, “This is Ziggy. He's new, so I figured I show him the best place in town.” She tapped Ziggy gently with her cane, and the pegasus laughed again.

“Two of the usual, then?” He asked. Scratch grinned and nodded.

“You got it,” She said.

The pegasus rushed back inside, leaving Scratch and Ziggy to take a seat at one of the tables outside the cafe.

“So are you going to tell me what this mystery meal is now?” Ziggy asked.

"Nope," Scratch grinned at him, "It's a surprise."

"Fantastic." Ziggy sighed. Scratch stuck her tongue out at him.

"Oh, don't worry so much," She laughed, "It's not like I'm going to be feeding you poison or something. Trust me, this is gonna be good."

"Alright," Ziggy said, "I believe you. So how'd you find this place, anyway?"

"It's not like Ponyville is big town," Scratch said, "There's only so many places to eat. But I pretty much found it the same way you did. A filly that I knew in school took me here once. I liked it, so I eventually just found my way back here." She giggled and added, "It helped that the owner is always so happy about everything. It made it easy to remember."

"So he's always like that, then?" Ziggy asked with a smile, "I thought you and him were just friendly."

"Oh, a bit," Scratch conceded, "but he's like that with everyone who comes here more that twice, I think. I don't know how he manages to keep track of everypony."

"Well, like you said, Ponyville's not a huge town, is it?"

"Yeah, but," Scratch said, waving her hooves, "He knows everypony by name." As if to provide an example, the pegasus burst out the door again, shouting to another couple of ponies walking by.

"Honeysuckle!" He cried happily, "Misty! Filies, filies, how are you?" The two mares laughed at him, and engaged in small talk as he led them inside the cafe happily.

"See?" Scratch smirked, "I'll bet you those two haven't been here in ages. I've been here like, five times in the past couple of weeks and I've never heard of 'em."

"Okay, I'll give you that one," Ziggy laughed. The two chatted back and forth for a while until the pegasus came back out, his wings spread

wide and supporting two plates. He set them down in front of the pair, and Ziggy finally got to see what he was having for lunch – a heaping pile of hayfries, drowning in melted cheese and steaming gravy.

“Oh, what in the name of Celestia is this?” Ziggy asked, staring at the mess in front of him.

“Poutine!” The pegasus declared proudly, “House special recipe, passed down from my grammie, who got it from her grammie! Enjoy, you two!” He laughed heartily and headed back inside, leaving Ziggy to stare at the plate.

“Okay, really,” He asked, “What in Equestria is this?”

“It's good,” Scratch laughed, have a bite.” Ziggy stared at the mass of fries in front of him, but any reservation he had about it disappeared when his stomach cried out again.

*Oh, alright, he thought, how bad can it be? Scratch seems to like it.* He took a small bite out of the pile, and raised his eyebrows.

“Wow,” He said, “You're right, that's really good;.”

“See?” Scratch said, “What'd I tell you?” She levitated a few dripping fries into her mouth and chewed happily.

“You know,” Ziggy said, taking another bite, “Nothing that tastes this good can be good for us.”

“Yeah,” Scratch laughed, “What's your point?” Ziggy paused for a moment, thinking.

“I don't know,” He said finally. The two laughed, but fell into silence again as the both filled their mouths with the gooey meal. Scratch chewed hers quickly, swallowed, and declared,

“Okay, is it going to be like this the whole time we're here?”

“Be like what?” Ziggy asked, swallowing his mouthful as well.



"We talk for like, 20 seconds," Scratch said, "Then we stuff our faces. Then we talk, then more face-stuffing."

"Um," Ziggy said, "Isn't that generally how it works?"

"No, no," Scratch insisted, "Usually we talk for a little bit, then one of us takes a bit while the other one is talking." Ziggy frowned.

"Sorry," He said, "But I'm really hungry..." He chuckled, saying, "I'm not sure I can wait that long."

"Me neither..." Scratch said. She rubbed her chin, before perking up suddenly. "I know!" She said.

"What?"

"We'll have a race!" Ziggy tilted his head at her.

"...Could you run that by me again?" He asked.

"A race," Scratch repeated, "To finish first. We just stuff our faces now, and get that over with!" Ziggy laughed.

"Seriously?" He asked, "Just plow through this as fast as we can?"

"Sure, why not?" Scratch asked, "I'll tell you what: The loser has to buy the drinks. Trust me, We'll need something to drink after this." Ziggy smirked slowly.

"Alright," He said, "You're on." The two ponies tensed up over there plates, as Scratch began to count down.

"Ready?" She asked, "Three...Two...One...GO!" The two ponies dove into their plates, scarfing down the poutine with gusto. Strangely, Ziggy found himself eating for more than the sake of eating, he actually wanted to win. He almost choked from laughing at the thought, but swallowed hard and carried on. The race lasted a few minutes before Ziggy straightened up.

“Done!” He declared, leaning back in his seat.

“WHUF-” Scratch exclaimed through a mouthful of fries. She swallowed, and continued, “No way!”

“See for yourself,” Ziggy laughed, pushing his plate forward. Scratch reached out and probed the plate gently. Her jaw dropped when she found no fries left.

“Ho-ly, you eat fast!”

“I was hungry,” Ziggy said, smiling shyly, “And anyways, you haven't got that far left to go yourself. I bet it won't even take you a minute.” Scratch felt around her plate as well.

“Yeah, I think you're right,” She said, “Let me finish up and I'll go get us something to drink.” She finished off her plate and moved to get up, before Ziggy stopped her.

“You, uh, might want to wipe you're face off before you go in,” He said.

“Why, have I got some gravy on it?” She asked. 'Some' would have been an understatement. His muzzle was absolutely coated in gravy, and some had managed to splotch up around her cheeks.

“Yeah,” Ziggy said, “I can get it for you-”

“Pff,” Scratch laughed, “Thanks, mom, but I can get it myself. Just tell me where it is.” Ziggy thought for a moment, before slowly saying,

“Everywhere...” Scratch stared at him for a while, before laughing.

“Guess we shoulda seen that coming, huh?” She asked. She took a wad of napkins and began to wipe her face.

“Yeah,” Ziggy said, doing the same. No matter where he wiped, he always managed to find a bit more gravy – he must have looked even worse than Scratch. The two were soon left with clean faces and a pile of

filthy napkins, and Scratch stood up. She levitated the plates with her, and said to Ziggy,

“I'm gonna go grab the drinks – what do you want?”

“Eh...do they have Coke here?”

“Coke it is,” Scratch laughed, “I shoulda guessed!”

“What's that supposed to mean?” Ziggy called after her as she walked into the Cafe. She emerged not long after with two large glasses.

“Here you go!” She said, putting one down in front of Ziggy, “One Coke Milkshake!”

“Coke...milkshake?” Ziggy asked.

“Come one, you didn't think I was just going to let you be boring and have a coke, did you?” Scratch asked, nudging him and sitting down herself. Ziggy sipped at the drink, and smiled.

“That's twice in one day,” He said.

“Twice in one day what?” She asked, raising an eyebrow at him.

“Twice in one day you've gotten me something weird and good,” He explained, “I'm going to have to return the favor somehow.” Scratch giggled.

“That's not really the sort of favor that needs returning,” She said, “But if you really want to, “Why don't you show me those comics you were talking about last night?”

“What, really?” Ziggy asked, “you wanna read comics?”

“Well, not read them, obviously,” Scratch joked, “But why not? You said you would show me them anyways.”

“Well, I was kinda joking,” Ziggy said, blushing faintly.

"I wanna see them anyways," Scratch said, "It's been a long time since I've been able to do stuff like that...and you're really good at describing stuff, so I might be able to actually get a picture of them." looked away, and sipped at her drink. Ziggy smiled, and said,

"Alright," he said, "But we might have to wait a while. I think that poutine is starting to fuse...I don't think we're going to be going anywhere for a while. He took a sip from his drink as well, and rubbed his belly. Scratch smirked at him.

"Yeah," She said, "That'll happen. Good thing the owner doesn't mind people sticking around for a while – it never gets too busy here." The two sat, happily chatting for a couple of hours. The owner occasionally came out of the Cafe, but only to greet new customers or clean off tables, never bothering Scratch and Ziggy. Eventually Ziggy's glass was empty, and his stomach didn't feel so much like a brick of lead anymore.

"I think I'm good to go," He said, "How about you?"

"Hey, I was waiting for you to be ready," She smiled, "I'm good whenever."

"Alright then," He said, "Let's pay and head out." The two headed inside the Cafe and payed for their meals, handing over a few bits apiece to the eager owner, before heading back out.

"Lead the way," Scratch said, and Ziggy did so. He headed back the way that they had came for Scratch's house, beckoning her to comment,

"We're going to your place, Ziggy, not mine."

"I know," Ziggy said, "But my apartment isn't too far from your house. I just need a bit of a frame of reference."

"You come from a city," Scratch laughed, "You should be able to get anywhere from anywhere in a little town like this!"

“Well, I've only been here for a week!” Ziggy defended himself, “We can't all have this internal GPS like you.” Scratch laughed again.

“Ah, that's nothing special!” She said, “You just...pick it up after a while. It's not like I've got any other way to find my way around.”

“So you just remember the layout of the town?” Ziggy asked.

“Pretty much. It took a while to get used to.” She chuckled, and and told him, “When we first moved here my mom tied this metal thing around our mailbox – so when I was coming home I would hit the mailbox's with my cane, and the one that went ‘ting’ was my house.”

“That's pretty clever,” Ziggy said, “But I'm sorta surprised – for how much you've said your mom is over-protective, I would have figured she'd walk you home every day, or something.”

“She tried,” Scratch laughed, “But I wouldn't let her. She made me after a colt pulled this one prank on me, though.”

“A prank? What happened?”

“Well, he lived nearby me, so he knew what the thing on our mailbox was for,” She explained, “And he thought it would be funny if he put one on a few other mailbox's too, so I'd go into the wrong house.”

“What?” Ziggy asked, “That's awful!”

“Well, it seems like it now,” Scratch shook her head, laughing gently at Ziggy's indignation, “But we were both just little. I think he just thought I'd be confused, not that I'd be scared.” She grinned, and added, “And I don't think he was expecting my cane to hurt so much either.” She swung it back and forth a few times, producing a whipping sound through the air. Ziggy laughed.

“Well, at least your mom let's you go out on your own now,” He said.

“Yeah, she's cooling down lately,” Scratch laughed, and joked, “She might even let me move out, by the time I'm, oh, Forty or so?” The two laughed, and Ziggy Stopped Scratch.

“This is my apartment,” He said, unlocking the door. He went inside and held the door open for Scratch.

“Thanks,” She said, “So this is your place, huh? It's...well, it's pretty much the same as every other place I've been too.” She grinned, and Ziggy smiled back.

“Yeah, there's nothing too special about it,” He said, “But it's a good place. What do you wanna do first?”

“Well,” She said, “I think the nickle tour would be pretty much wasted on me. How's about those comics, huh?”

“Sure,” Ziggy chuckled, “You sure are eager for them, aren't you?”

“I wanna know what my friend does in his free time,” Scratch said, mock-pouting, “So sue me. You know what I do.”

“What, music?” he asked, “That's all you do?”

“Yeah, pretty much. DJ at the club, make music, talk to my mom – I'm a boring, boring girl, Ziggy. I need those comics to entertain me.”

“Well, I guess I've got not choice then,” Ziggy laughed. He led her to the bookshelf where the issues he brought with him rested, and ran his hoof along them, producing a rippling noise. “I've got a few different series,” He said, “An issue or two of superpony, maybe four of Deadpink – I stopped with those when my mom read an issue – but I used to collect The Crimson Wonder pretty religiously back when I was a little colt.”

“The Crimson Wonder...” Scratch repeated, tapping her chin, “He was...He was the one who was secretly a mailpony, right?”

“That's right,” Ziggy said, “He could-”

“Fly at Mach 7!” Scratch suddenly declared in a theatrical voice, “And lift a mountain with one hoof! He could beat his wings so hard, the wind could lift an earth pony to Cloudsdale!”

“Yeah,” Ziggy laughed, “Did you read them?”

“No,” Scratch said, “But There was an old cartoon that I used to watch...” She grinned sheepishly, trailing off.

“Yeah, I remember that,” Ziggy said, “The comics were a lot different from the show. Did you, uh...wanna hear some of them?” Scratch tilted her head at him, but smiled.

“Of Course!” She said.

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“...And then The Crimson Wonder bucked the Red Pegasus right in the face!”

“No way!” Scratch laughed, “Clean in the face?”

“A hoof in both eyes,” Ziggy said, “His neck stretches out, too – I think they were trying to be cartoony.” Scratch laughed again.

“It sounds like he broke the poor guys neck!” She said, “Whatever happened to not using his powers to hurt ponies?”

“I dunno,” Ziggy said, “Maybe it doesn't count when you're evil. The issue ends there, though – it was the last one I bought, too.”

“Aw,” Scratch said, “We're out of comics?”

“I'm afraid so. We burned a few hours, though.”

“Really?”

“Yeah – It's about five O'clock now,” Ziggy said, checking his wall clock to confirm.

“Man, time really flies, huh?” Scratch asked, “You can't just read these things every day, What else do you do?”

“Eh, I just sort of bum around, really,” Ziggy said, “I'm sort of working on finding a hobby. I listen to a bit of music, though.”

“Oh yeah?” Scratch perked up, “So what does Ziggy Stardust listen to? Rock? Techno? *Country*?”

“Oh Luna, no!” Ziggy laughed. He took a stack of CD's from a lower shelf and started to name them off. “Let me see...I've got a couple of 'RockSalt', most of 'Golden Hoof's' stuff, a 'Spiders From Mars' CD...which is *weird*, by the way, a little bit of 'Dream Valley' - “

“Oh, Ziggy,” Scratch cringed, throwing her head back, “And you were doing so well!”

“What?” Ziggy asked, staring at her.

“Dream Valley, Ziggy?” She asked, “Really? I mean, I just...Dream Valley? They're awful!”

“They're not so bad,” Ziggy said defensively, “I mean, they're early stuff wasn't great, but they got better later -”

“No, no,” She insisted, shaking her head, “Look – put one of those things in a stereo, I'll tell you what's wrong with it.” Ziggy did as he was told, putting the CD in and setting it to play. A soft, high-pitched mares voice came on, singing sweetly over the beginnings of a guitar riff. It sounded nice to Ziggy, but Scratch's face was furrowed to concentration. All of a sudden, she spoke up about a minute into the song.

“There,” She said, “Right there. Do you hear it?”

“Hear what?” Ziggy asked.



"The Bass came in. It *just came in!*"

"So?"

"So, the Bass is a supporting instrument. It provides a rhythm for the other guitarists, you usually bring it in first! They're hiding it!"

"Why would they hide it?" Ziggy asked.

"Because they're bassist SUUUUUUCKS!" She said, tossing her head back dramatically, "Listen – he's not even. He can't keep a steady beat, and it's screwing the rest of them up!" Ziggy concentrated, listening carefully. Sure enough, the deep, subtle bass was randomly changing tempo, just slightly, and the guitarist was following suit. Ziggy tried to snap out of his concentration, but he couldn't.

"Oh, Celestia," He said, "You're right! Now I can't stop hearing it!" Scratch laughed he covered his ears, whimpering, "Scratch, what have you done to me?"

"It's okay Ziggy, It's okay!" She said, patting his back gently, "I've fixed you! You're better now, you can listen to *real* music!" She sat down beside him, landing on a small piece of wadded up paper. "What the?" She said, standing up suddenly. Ziggy looked at where she had sat, picking up the ball of paper.

"Sorry," He said, "I thought I got all of these things thrown out...this one must have just fallen off a shelf, or something."

"What is it?" Scratch asked, "It sounds like paper."

"Yeah, it is," Ziggy told her, "It's, uh...sort of a poem." Scratch stared at him, her eyebrows raised in surprise.

"A...poem?" She asked.

"Well, sort of." He told her, "I tried writing a whole bunch of them – I don't even know why, I just...had this urge to write poetry lately. But none of

them are any good, and I don't think I ever finished one." Scratch sat back down beside him.

"Well..." She said, "Why don't you read it to me?"

"Huh?" Ziggy asked, "But it isn't any good."

"You don't know that," She said, "Trust me. When you make something, you always want to say it's no good. Sometimes you just need an outsiders opinion. C'mon, read it. I won't make fun of you, or anything."

"Well..." Ziggy said slowly, looking at Scratch, "Alright." He unfolded the paper, and read from it.

*One fine colt and two fine fillies,  
all dressed up and looking silly.  
One by one and two by two,  
all the fine ponies come through*

*the crickets stretch their legs  
like tiny violins,  
the trees all prime their branches,  
strings and woodwinds thin,*

He frowned, and put the paper down.

"Why did you stop?" Scratch asked him. He sighed.

"That's all there was to it," He said, "I couldn't think of anything else. Oh well, no big loss." Scratch sighed, and nudged him jokingly.

"Oh, stop moping," She said, "I bet it'll be great when you finish it!"

"Well, it doesn't seem like anything special right now." He said, tossing the paper aside.

"They never do," Scratch said, feeling for the paper. She found it, and put it in front of Ziggy again. "Actually," she said, "I'm working on a song right now – why don't we go over to my place and I'll play it for you?"

"Really?" Ziggy asked.

"Sure," Scratch said, "something doesn't have to sound great right from the get go, you'll see. Plus, I can show you some good music, too – I'll bet you could use it, after listening to Dream Valley."

"Ooh, I think you're right about that," Ziggy said. Scratch patted his back enthusiastically.

"That sounded better already," She said. The two left Ziggy's apartment, and Ziggy noticed that Scratch seemed less talkative than before. He wondered what was wrong, but he had to move quickly to keep pace with her, and before he knew it they were back at her home. Scratch led him up the walk and through the door, calling out into the house as they entered.

"I'm home, Mom," she said, "And I've got Ziggy with me! We're going to go upstairs, okay?"

"Alright," A shout came from another room. Scratch trotted up the stairs, with Ziggy following after her. They turned sharply as the stairs ended, and found themselves in a small room packed with music equipment, with a small bed shoved into a corner.

"So, this is your room?" Ziggy asked, looking around the cluttered space. Scratch nodded.

"Yup," She said somewhat absently, "Home sweet home." She went to a small bookshelf filled with records, and began to tap them, counting under her breath. She selected one near to the right, and pulled it out. Turning to Ziggy, she said, "I've been, uh...I probably seem sort of impatient, don't I?" Ziggy rubbed his neck awkwardly.

"you mean, since we left my place?"

"Yeah."

"Well...something like that, yeah..." Scratch nodded, and pulled the record out of it's sleeve.

"I'm kinda nervous," She said, "I don't usually show people stuff before it's done...and this one is sort of special. Do you...do you still not remember that night?"

"Not really, no..." He asked. "why?" Scratch shook her head.

"I don't know," She said, "Just...give this a listen. She placed the record onto a machine like the one on the stage in the club, but this one was hooked up to a much smaller speaker. The needle moved onto the record as it began to spin, and music slowly drifted out of the speakers. It was a slow, gentle tune, much different from what Scratch usually did. But it was familiar, somehow. Scratch tensed up as the song was playing, but Ziggy was too focused on the tune to notice. His brow furrowed, and his eyes squeezed shut. It was fuzzy at first, but he remembered a hill. As the song started to sway, he remembered more and more. No real words, but ideas. Poetry – he remembered that, now. And the stars, how beautiful they had been. The sound of the music was slowly changing; it was no longer synthesized, but it was a mare singing it. Now Ziggy could remember everything more clearly. He remembered describing the scenery for Scratch. And all of a sudden, like turning the corner into a brick wall, he remembered the end of the world. His jaw dropped.

"Scratch..." He said slowly. Scratch tensed up even more.

"Yeah?" She asked him nervously.

"Scratch, I remember...you were singing, weren't you? You were singing this!"

"You remember?" She asked him. She leaned in eagerly, and pushed, "How much do you remember?"

"I remember all of it!" He said, "I remember going to the hill with you, and describing everything...I remember you telling me that I should try poetry, and...ah geeze Scratch, I feel like such a flank-hole!"

"What? Why?"

"Because you opened up to me! It must have been so hard for you, and I didn't remember a word of it!" Scratch relaxed visibly.

"Aw, is that all?" She giggled softly, "Ziggy, I don't mind...it's not like it's your fault you didn't remember."

"Yeah, but-"

"No buts," She said, "Ziggy, you're a sweet guy. You shouldn't blame yourself for every little thing...you're way too nice for that." Ziggy blushed, and looked away.

"Thanks..." He said. The two were quiet for a moment, before Scratch spoke up.

"Hey, Ziggy," She said, "Do you mind if I take off my glasses? I don't usually leave them on in here, but I know people don't like to see my eyes, so..."

"No, I don't mind," Ziggy said, "I don't mind your eyes at all." Scratch nodded, and removed her heavy shades. Ziggy saw her eyes beneath them, those two pale, milky disks. His heart started to beat a bit faster, and he said, "Actually...they're kinda pretty." Scratch stopped dead, with her glasses levitating in mid-air.

“What?” She asked.

“They...I don't know. I like them...” Ziggy floundered, pawing at the floor nervously, “They're sorta like the moon. I mean, they almost shine, in a way...but that's only a bit of them. The moon doesn't glow like that on it's own, it's the light from the sun. But the real moon is down there too, somewhere...there's something amazing behind the moon that we see.” Scratch blinked a few times, and turned away from Ziggy sharply.

“How do you do that?” She asked. She giggled softly, and it soon turned into a full on laugh. Ziggy just stared at her. “You just...man!” She laughed, “You just say the tiniest little thing, but it's just so great! How do you do it?”

“I...don't know.” Ziggy said, leaning back in surprise, “I guess it's just a thing?” Scratch turned back around, and Ziggy noticed a hint of a tear in her eyes,

“It's a good thing, Ziggy.” She said. She walked over and sat down in front of him, leaning in close, “It's a good thing.” Ziggy blushed, and his heart began to beat even faster. He started to speak, vocalizing the thoughts as they came to him.

“Scratch?”

“Yeah?”

“We should...do you wanna go out some time?”

Scratch smiled at him. She leaned in closer, and whispered, “Ziggy...I think we just did.” Ziggy could feel her breath on his face. His heart beat fast, and he flushed a deep crimson. He felt like he was about to burst, when Scratch gently kissed him on the cheek.

“I'd love to,” She said.