

# Equestrianet

By Story Birth



# Table of Contents:

<b>Chapter 1</b>	<b>A Night to Remember</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Chapter 2</b>	<b>Another World</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Chapter 3</b>	<b>Road to Canterlot</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Chapter 4</b>	<b>The Failed Trick</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Chapter 5</b>	<b>Losing Memories</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Chapter 6</b>	<b>Trouble Back Home</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Chapter 7</b>	<b>Visitors</b>	<b>69</b>

# Chapter 1

## A Night To Remember

"So you were just giving her a chance?"

The show unicorn grinned. "Yes. A chance to fail in front of all of her friends, but of course, that didn't work out very well."

Inkblot did see how it could have been considered a flaw, but didn't consider it. "Are you kidding? She took care of it so that the magic of the Great and Powerful Trixie could be preserved."

Trixie smiled. "Of course! Why waste my raw power on a silly little Ursa Minor when there are other wonders to be performed?" As if on cue, she shot a shower of shimmering sparks out of her horn, with the other unicorn's mouth gaping in awe. The sparks were all colors of the rainbow; each color was shimmering against the hill the two were on.

"Woooooow! Amazing!" the white colt squealed. His pupils were greatly enlarged in awe of the event. They were so large, his left eye would have blended in with the black birthmark around his eye if it wasn't blue.

"Thank you. Thank you," the blue unicorn said as she gave a theatrical bow. Inkblot gave an accompanying applause.

"So, are you staying in Ponyville tonight? I know that the Ursa Minor destroyed your trailer, so maybe you could stay at my place?" the colt asked anxiously. What he wouldn't give for her to say yes...

Trixie could detect the anxiety. "I'm very sorry Inkblot, but the Great and Powerful Trixie always has places to be. I need to be in Canterlot by tomorrow to prepare for my spectacular show for the princesses."

The black and messy-maned unicorn almost stepped back in surprise. "You're doing a show in Canterlot?! That's amazing! They deserve talent like you!" He was upset that she couldn't stay, but he had a better idea. "Do

you think I could come, too?"

Trixie scoffed as she started to walk away. "Please. I know you too well. You're a child at heart. You would be bored by all of the sophistication in a matter of seconds."

Inkblot followed loyally, still keeping up the conversation. "Well, I probably would be bored to tears, but that doesn't mean I won't try to make it. When's the show?"

Trixie smiled. "The Great and Powerful Trixie will be performing at the Royal Theatre at 9 PM this Saturday. Tickets are a pricy 80 bits, but it is without a doubt worth every last bit. Come and be amazed!"

Inkblot planned out his weekend. He had to turn in his article for the Ponyville Post by Sunday, which was in three days. He'd be able to turn it in beforehand and still have time to see Trixie's performance. "Alright! I'll be there!"

The show unicorn looked at her fan with a smile. Something she normally never wore in front of fans. Then again, her other big fans just let an Ursa Minor loose into Ponyville. "Well, the Great and Powerful Trixie departs from this town and makes her way to Canterlot. Next time I see you, I want to see that cutie mark, Inkblot."

The white unicorn cringed. "Please don't bring that up." It was a touchy subject that he preferred to avoid. Even though he was an almost fully grown colt, he still lacked a cutie mark. It was embarrassing in most cases, but when Trixie said it, his blood seemed to freeze.

Trixie chuckled, then leaned in and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek. Inkblot's cheeks turned into a rosy red as he was frozen in place. His heart seemed to skip a beat as it happened. The unicorn wished he could feel this feeling for every second of his life, but after a breif moment of bliss, it was over.

Trixie gave another quiet laugh as she saw the look of complete shock, yet blissful joy on the unicorn's face. "Farewell, Inky."

Inkblot tried to say something as Trixie trotted away, but the kiss had

jumbled his mind so much, he could hardly think straight, much less talk straight.

As Trixie disappeared over the hill, the dumbstruck unicorn only stood there comprehending what happened. He was just kissed by the Great and Powerful Trixie. Just the idea of it made his heart skip a beat or two. And as she left, she called him "Inky". It was like a pet name. Inkblot always thought lovey-dovey nicknames were just mooshy fake romance, but the name "Inky" just made his heart explode.

When he finally unfroze from his trance, he let out an elated holler while he bucked his back legs. For the next twenty minutes, he celebrated his kiss on the hill, partying to himself harder than Pinkie Pie could ever party.

-----

Inkblot trotted his way home from the hill, still wearing a smile he never knew he had. He was so possessed by the joy of Trixie's kiss that he hadn't even thought about getting sleep. It was 3 in the morning, but the unicorn figured he was better going to bed late than never.

He followed the dirt path to Ponyville. Despite the recent destruction, the town was very quiet. Almost everypony seemed to be asleep in their homes, given the exception of two young moustached unicorns.

Inkblot was just about to cross the "Welcome to Ponyville" sign when he heard a voice come from behind a tall set of bushes. "Alright, and the message is sent." The voice was definitely from a stallion, but it was sort of high-pitched and weak. It shook in anxiety often like an uneven chair with springs attached to the bottoms of the legs.

Another voice responded to the first one. This one was deeper, rougher, and had a sense of authority, but it still seemed to be fun-loving and light-hearted. "Good. Now we just hope that the HPIRT comes in and takes away the problem tonight. Knowing how the NPIRT has been doing lately, they'll be more likely to deliver us a pizza than clear a pony's memory." The deep voice laughed. After listening a while, Inkblot notices that he had a slight Manehattan accent.

The weak voice answered his apparent partner's voice. "Why do we have

to do that, though? I mean, memory removal seems sort of flawed. That pony won't remember ANYTHING that happened today."

The deeper voice chuckled. "Well, if you're so worried about the ponies, then be glad we caught that one when we did. If a pony knows about us for over a week, we don't have the ability to wipe that much memory, so we have to take them out instead."

There was a pause. It gave Inkblot a brief second to think about the situation. A handful of questions flew to the front of his mind. Who were these ponies? What was the message? Who did it go to? Whose memory was being wiped? Was his memory going to be wiped tonight?

The pause subsided when the one with the smaller voice spoke up softly "W-we have to kill them? Like....KILL them...?"

The deep voice behind the bushes groaned. "This again? Yes. If they know about us for too long, it'll be implanted too deep into their memories for us to erase. The erasers can only erase up to about a week long of memory."

"Can't we just ask them to not talk about it? It's a lot better than just slaying the things."

"Well, that would defeat the purpose of us being secret. Some of these ponies want to be adventurous and travel to our world. Show ponies would just hog the cameras. Pranksters would dunk the hidden cameras. If they could know, then we would've told them already."

"K-killing them is just wrong, though. If I'd known we'd be k-killing them, I wouldn't have taken the job. In fact," a thump was heard as something hit the ground, "I quit," he exclaimed with a sharp tone, but clearly little to no confidence.

Suddenly, the smaller voice let out a yelp. Inkblot couldn't see behind the bush, but judging by what he heard, the voice was being strangled. The lower voice became threatening and vile, suddenly having his voice so rough it sounded like sandpaper. It had lost all of its fun and joy. "Listen! We came here to do our job. I have no problem with you leaving, but we're gonna finish the job before you leave. Alright? Cuz your little hissy fit isn't going to put the show at risk. Got that?"

A choked whimper responded. Inkblot knew he had to take action, but he was hesitant. He took a step, but took it back quickly considering the scenario. He didn't notice he stepped on a small pile of dead leaves, making a noticable crinkle.

The unicorn finally decided to act. As he charged into the bushes, he heard the light scampering of feet making their way into the cover of another set of shrubs. Inkblot was alone in an opening surrounded by big bushes. His heart darted from side to side to find the source of the voice, but found himself to be alone.

He turned his head right to find something else. It was the thing that the guy who quit dropped. From just looking at it, he didn't have a clue what it was. It was a sleek, black, rounded box with a crease down the center. On the top of it was a grey rounded rectangle that featured the letters "hp".

Inkblot looked at it with confusion. Using his magic, he lifted the box up and inspected the thing in full. The crease was grey, and seemed to be able to open. The bottom of it was also black, but had strange grids and textures. Under the crease on the sides, there were a large number of holes. Most of them were either rectangular and circular, each with a mysterious symbol next to it.

He used his magic to open it up. It was divided into two parts. The first part was just a simple blackness. Nothing much about it. The second part was divided into at least fifty of it's own parts. There were a ton of tiny squares neatly aligned in three rows. Some of them showed letters. Other were numbers with symbols on top of them. Under the set of squares was a rectangular pad with an oval cut in half under it.

Suddenly, the top half sprung to life. It didn't even transition from its total blackness to a bright white screen. This bright screen had words on it. On the top left was a logo that said "Gmail". The large area that took up most of the screen contained a huge bundle of words, but there was one message that was obviously the most important. It was a message that stated,

"Was the recording successful?"



Under that was another cluster of miscellaneous words, but led to another message that was an answer to the above question.

"Yes, but we were spotted by one of the ponies. Get the HPIRT to Pony #167. Aside from that, we're golden. We'll have the town clear in fifteen minutes.

-Franklin"

Inkblot took a moment to decipher what was going on. This black box must have been a communication device used by whoever those two were. Franklin was probably the one who got strangled. The HPIRT wiped memories. Somepony was getting his memory wiped tonight.

Their lives were being recorded.

That gave him a shock. How much of what they were doing was being recorded? Could they see him right now? Why were they recording the events in Equestria? What did they record?

He also asked himself another question. This one had to be decided quickly. Was he going to take the box? On a related note, was he going to turn himself in? Ironically, in order to come to a decision, he had to answer a ton of other questions. For example, did they know about him? Did they know where to find him to wipe his memory and take the box back?

Suddenly, more words popped up on the screen. Underneath it's miniature wall of text, there was another message. Inkblot read the message in hopes of finding some answers.

"This is Hopkins. Franklin decided to quit in the middle of the job. In order to ensure the completion of our mission, I had to use some force. Said force caught the attention of one of the town's locals. In order to protect our interactions, we had to flee. We didn't get a look at the pony, so we can't send the HPIRT to a second home until we do.



Also, during our retreat, Franklin accidentally left his laptop behind. Whether or not the pony who interrupted intends to keep the laptop or not is unknown to us. During the sweep in ten minutes, we can check the spot to see if it took the laptop.

At this moment, Franklin has gone completely rogue, threatening to tell all of the ponies in Ponyville of our existence if I interrupt this pony. Due to low supply of memory-erasing chemicals, that would be catastrophic. I'm left with no choice but to hope that this pony doesn't take the laptop.

-Hopkins"

Inkblot read it and read it over once again. A wave of relief swept over him. They didn't know what he looked like. Whether or not he took the laptop (that's what they called the thing), if he was found, he was going to just lose his memory anyway. If he took it and DIDN'T get caught, he would find out how this odd object worked. So, he decided to take it.

But there was a third option: Turn himself in. It seemed like the last thing they wanted was for ponies to know about them. Maybe it would just be a good idea to cooperate with them so they don't have to go through a huge ordeal. But then he remembered something Franklin had said from behind the bush.

"Memory removal seems sort of flawed. That pony won't remember ANYTHING that happened today."

Anything...

That meant his kiss with Trixie...

Losing his memory was no longer a option. For the sake of remembering the fateful kiss between the two unicorns, Inkblot had to remember every event that happened to him tonight. That would mean that he was not going to turn himself in. He was going to go back home without encountering the mysterious duo and continue to the next day as usual. And he was taking the laptop with him.

The pale unicorn's horn glowed with a dark aura. The same aura

enveloped the laptop as it was lifted off of the ground. The floating device followed him as he approached the edge of the bushes.

Inkblot barely stuck his head out and looked both ways. He was looking for anything suspicious. He was looking for anything that wanted to take his memory. After a good half of a minute, he concluded that the coast was clear, so he dashed through the street as quietly as possible.

The pony was fortunate because his house was nearby, but that fortune didn't prevent him from noticing that a part of one of the destroyed roofs snapped beneath his feet. He silently cursed the pieces of wood that made noise as he galloped across them. As he sped around the nighttime town, he saw that he was the only pony awake. Every house seemed to be shut down and full of sleeping ponies. Even the mustached duo that had been forced to work were asleep.

It wasn't long at all before he arrived back at his humble abode, a simple straw house with a printing press as the basement. He owned the novelty printing press because his father ran the town newspaper, "The Ponyville Post", which Inkblot usually wrote news articles for.

Inkblot entered the building panting. He had only sprinted a short distance, but the unicorn wasn't really in shape. He carried the laptop with him as he rushed up the wooden stairs. Although he seemed to be completely out of energy, the colt managed to lock himself in his room at top speed.

When he had shut the windows and ensured that the door was locked, he released a sigh of relief as he collapsed onto his plaid bedsheet. He had made it back to his room before anything spotted him. He was in the clear.

Or was he?

Inkblot thought to himself that maybe the thing had seen him run by with the laptop. He looked outside to see the moon shining brightly. It would have been easy to spot him. What if they did spot him?

The pony did the first thing that came to his mind. Write the night down. Not only was it something he loved to do, but it was also a precaution. If he were to lose his memory, then he could reread the message he was writing and he'd remember.

Inkblot sat down at the desk in his room. It was carved out of a big tree from the Everfree Forest, making it look maroon and almost luminescent. Using his favorite blue quill, he did what he did best. He wrote. His writings were recorded in a leather journal that his father gave to him a couple years ago.

*"Dear Journal,*

*Tonight's entry is a special one. I hope that one day, I will look back on this entry and remember tonight. Whether the HRPI whatever catch me or not, I want to remember tonight..."*

And so he continued writing in his journal. He probably would have fallen asleep, but he realized that he had to stay up for as long as possible. That way, if they tried to get into his room to take his memory, then he'd at least be able to put up a fight. So Inkblot spent the entire night not getting a wink of sleep, but jotting down every last detail of the night he had, right down to the everlasting second that was Trixie's kiss.

# Chapter 2

## Another World

Inkblot woke up with his head leaned against his desk. He was dead tired, and the morning sun hurt his eyes as he opened them and surveyed his desk. The first thing he saw was his favorite blue quill, which was right in front of his eyes. Underneath his head was the note that he had started to write the night before. Finally, in front of him on the desk, was the strange device he had picked up in the bushes.

The colt closed his eyes and tried to remember the night he had. He remembered the attacking Ursa Minor. He remembered Trixie coming to town. He remembered Trixie's kiss. He remembered the two ponies arguing in the bushes. He remembered picking up the laptop. They didn't take his memory.

Inkblot silently cursed himself for falling asleep like that. If the HP guys found him, they wouldn't have had a problem erasing his memory. While he was disappointed in himself, he was also relieved that he still had his memory of the events. That meant they didn't know it was him. For now, he was in the clear.

The colt looked down at the page he had started writing before he fell asleep. After a minute of analysis, the writer concluded that it did a sufficient job summarizing the night before. It wasn't exactly lengthy, only covering half of a page, but it got its message across. He put his note underneath his bed. It wasn't a brilliant hiding spot, but it would work for the time being.

"Now, let's see if I can find out how you work," Inkblot said to the laptop. The pale pony used his magic to open the lid of the foreign device. The black screen of the laptop was dormant and unchanging, but he kept in mind that the first time he found it, it took a while to start. So he waited.

And waited.

And waited.

After about a minute of waiting, the unicorn realized it was taking longer than it should. Maybe he had to push some of the buttons in order to get a response. So he brutishly and randomly pressed the buttons with his hooves, as if he was trying to squash a bucket of grapes.

The unicorn was right. The screen lit up subtly from black to a very dark grey. The top half flashed a symbol that was unmistakably a lightning bolt. Then it returned to the unresponsive black.

Inkblot tried pressing the buttons again, but there was no response from the laptop. There wasn't even the lightning bolt from earlier. The alien device seemed dead.

The colt assessed the situation. The laptop flashed a lightning bolt, and then turned off. Maybe it needed lightning in order to work. Sure, it didn't make a lot of sense, but it was a possibility, and other possibilities weren't rearing their heads.

Now how would he get lightning? He could ask somepony on the weather team to pull up a thundercloud and give a jolt. But then that pegasus would see the laptop and would have to have his memory wiped, too. Inkblot didn't want to have anypony else's memory cleared because of him. Not to mention that pegasus would probably tell someone else about it. From there, the news would spread like the plague, when Inkblot would've preferred to deal with this problem himself. The last thing the town needed was the chaos of knowing that they were being spied on.

Maybe there was a spell that could create lightning. That was a safer idea that would involve less spreading of the news. Worst case scenario was that there wasn't a spell for creating lightning and he could try something else.

So it was settled. Some time during the day, he would drop by the library and see if there was a lightning spell. As Inkblot planned his day, his stomach churned. First thing was first. He had to get himself some breakfast. Knowing his dad, he was in for a good meal.

The black-maned unicorn closed the lid of the laptop and hid it under his

bed with the note as he ran out of his door. He could already smell what his dad was making.

"Hey dad! Is that what I think it is?" Inkblot called down the stairs.

The gruff voice of his father responded with "Yep! Toasted Bermuda Grass Sandwich! Your favorite!" as Inkblot made his way down the stairs. When he arrived at the bottom of the stairs, he went immediately to the kitchen, led through the halls by his nose. The unicorn was led straight to the table where he had a seat at one of three chairs. His dad was still preparing the food in the kitchen. "You're up a little late, aren't ya?" the brown stallion said.

The unicorn closed his eyes and inhaled deeply from his nose to smell the sandwiches. "Yeah. I had a bit of a late night last night."

His father chuckled as he turned around, using his magic to bring the sandwiches with him. "Really? I'm sure I'd be up late too if I were doin' what you were doin'," he said while stroing his messy beard.

The younger unicorn was confused and worried at the same time. There was no way he could have seen the laptop. Then again, his dad's bedroom window overlooked the front door. Inkblot took the safe approach and played dumb. "What are you talking about?"

His dad saw right through him. "I saw you follow that show pony when she ran out of town. It's okay. You don't have to hide the fact you like mares. So long as you didn't...you know-"

"Dad!" Inkblot was blushing furiously. He was relieved, but it was still pretty embarassing. "We didn't, like, make out or anything!"

The unicorn flinched as his dad wiped his cheek. When he retracted his hoof, a visible blue smudge was seen on it. "Yep. You keep tellin' yourself that. Also, you might wanna check your face for lipstick next time," the old gray-maned pony said with another chuckle.

As Inkblot took the first bite of his sandwich, desperately trying to avoid the subject at hand, the sound of the door opening echoed down the hall. The call of a little filly followed. "Inkblot! Headline!"

The old stallion answered the call. "In the kitchen, Snapshot!" A couple seconds passed before a little light blue earth pony came running in the room. She took a seat at the third chair. "Hey boys! How's it going?" she said with her ever so sweet voice.

Headline went to the stove to get the drinks he had left next to it. "I thought you said somethin' about not hangin' out with us stupid boys yesterday."

Inkblot joined in on the accusation. "Yeah. You wanted to spend more time with your fillyfriends."

"Yeah, but...um," she paused mid-sentence to fix a hair out of place in her straightened white mane. "...you guys always make the best breakfasts."

Headline gave another one of his signature chuckles. "Well, you're always welcome here. And believe me, you've been here so many times, you're basically family."

The little filly let out a big smile. "Thanks, you guys. By the way, my mom said that I was allowed to give you guys my pictures for the Ponyville Post."

The pale unicorn clapped his hooves in celebration. "Wow! That's great news!"

The older pony wore a look of concern. "You can take pictures all you want, but I can't pay you for it. You're too young. In fact, why is someone as young as you workin' anyway? Aren't your parents concerned about you goin' to work?"

"Well, ever since I got my cutie mark yesterday, I've been positive that my special talent is being a photographer, which is super, cuz I LOVE taking pictures." She showed off her new cutie mark. It was a camera with its bulb flashing. "I figured that I'd use my skills to help out Ponyville, and since I'm friends with you guys, here would be a perfect place to do that. So, I told this to my mom and dad and they agreed with me."

The old stallion nodded. "Alright. You can work here, but again, I can't pay you for it. Child labor laws and all."



"Yippee!" The blue filly jumped for joy, but stopped quickly to make sure her mane wasn't messed up.

Inkblot sighed before he asked, "So, about the new cutie mark. How's it doing?"

"Oh my gosh! It is so great! Everypony I know LOVES it!! In fact, Cheerilee told me that my cutie mark represents cherishing the greatest moments of my life!"

Inkblot smiled. He loved hearing his little friend talk about the joys that came with getting a cutie mark.

"And then, yesterday after class, Sweetie Belle and I tried to guess what her cutie mark was gonna look like. By the way, what would a forgetful cutie mark look like?"

The black-maned colt's ears perked up. His father responded to the filly with a question. "That's a peculiar question. Why do you ask?"

"Because I made this joke about how her cutie mark would be something forgetful since she forgot about how I got my cutie mark, which was really weird because she was there. Anyway, I said it would be a goldfish, cuz she once told me they only had three second memories."

Inkblot almost spat out the bite of sandwich in his mouth. The voice from the night before resounded in his mind. They said one pony was losing its memory, and that pony wouldn't remember ANYTHING that happened that day.

Less than a second later, the unicorn was out of his seat and running for the front door. His alarmed parent yelled, "Where are you going?"

"I'm going to the library! I'll be back soon!" the running pony called back. He had to find out what was going on, and he had to find out now.

-----

After a few long minutes of running, Inkblot finally made it to the library. He used to go there all the time to read when he was a kid, and sometimes still

went there for writing tips for his articles in the Ponyville Post. Although he goes there from time to time, he hadn't been there since the new librarian started working there. Inkblot was curious to see what he or she was like.

But that was at the back corner of the unicorn's mind. His mind was racing about what he had just heard. Apparently, the HIP or whatever guys took the memory of an innocent little filly. That was nearly intolerable. He had to find out why they were there, and the secret was in that strange device he found on the ground.

Inkblot approached the door and gave it a couple knocks between pants and gasps. Exhausted as he was, he was determined to get power to the laptop. Fortunately, the door was opened only a couple seconds after the anxious pony knocked.

The little purple dragon that opened the door looked up at the unicorn. "Welcome to the-"

"I need to find a lightning spell!" Inkblot interrupted. Despite how tired he was, he still managed to sound urgent.

The baby dragon flinched in surprise. After a brief pause, he yelled. "Hey, Twilight! Some guy looking for a book!"

A mare's voice followed, "Alright, Spike I'm on my way downstairs." Inkblot saw the lavender unicorn as she descended the staircase. She had a purple mane with a hot pink highlight, and a cutie mark with a star on it. The colt knew exactly who she was.

"You!" he said involuntarily. How dare she make herself look better than the Great and Powerful Trixie? How dare she humiliate Trixie in front of all of Ponyville?

Twilight wore a look of confusion. "Me?" she asked innocently.

Before he could let out his onslaught of accusation, the pale unicorn thought about what he was going to say. Apparently, this neighsayer was the librarian, so if he wanted to learn that lightning spell, throwing insults at her wouldn't be the best idea. Putting his priorities in order and his grudges aside, he tried to recover from his previous statement. "You... uh... must

be... the new librarian! I've heard a lot of great things about you!"

Twilight blushed as the little reptile in front of her started talking. "You mean like how she's the talented unicorn in all of Ponyville!"

"Spike! I told you to stop showing me off!" The mare's cheeks were still red as she scolded the baby dragon.

But Spike continued anyway. "Oh, come on! You just defeated an Ursa Minor last night! You might be one of the greatest unicorns in all-"

"Anyway, I need to find a lightning spell." Inkblot interrupted before he followed his urge to kick the dragon in the face.

This elicited another puzzled look from the librarian. "A lightning spell? What do you need a lightning spell for?"

Inkblot suddenly felt stupid. He forgot to find an answer to this question. He had to draw an answer from out of nowhere. "Because it would be cool."

Twilight gave the colt an unimpressed stare. Spike also gave him a stare, but it was one of wonder. Twilight spoke first. "Well, lightning isn't exactly a force to be tampered with."

Her little friend cut in. "Are you kidding?! The guy is right! Shooting lightning would be so cool!"

The pale unicorn added to his fabrication. "And my friend is a pegasus. We've been fighting about who's better: unicorns or pegasi. And I thought since they had lightning clouds, we could have lightning, too."

"And just imagine shooting lightning! It'd be like a superpower!" the purple dragon added.

Twilight groaned. "Fine. But it won't be an explosive lightning bolt like you'd find from a storm cloud. It'll just be a little jolt," she said as she used her magic to retrieve a book from one of the shelves.

A little jolt would most likely be enough. A box that small probably couldn't take a lightning strike. "That'll do."

As she placed the heavy book on his back (causing him to buckle slightly), the librarian said, "I believe your spell is on page...1367. If it's not there, try the index."

Inkblot took the unneeded weight off his back using his magic. "Thank you. When should I bring this back?" he asked with a smile.

Twilight returned the friendly smile. "Whenever you're done with it."

The colt gave a neighborly wave before saying "See ya!" and trotting away. He didn't get the chance to see the cheery mare wave back. Once he was far enough from the tree house, he uttered something under his breath.

"...neighsayer..."

-----

Inkblot was positive he was alone in his room. If anypony saw what he was doing it would mean their memory would be wiped, and he didn't want that happening. Either way, he wanted to keep this to himself until he had more information in what was going on.

He opened the goliath of a book called "Directory of Spells" in front of him. The thing must have had at least 3000 pages. After flipping through entries entitled "Teleportation", "Flower Generation", "Telepathy", "Creating Wings", and many others that he didn't even know there were spells for, he finally came across page 1367: "Electricity".

It was a very simple spell. In fact, it took the monochrome unicorn less than a minute to learn, and he was terrible at learning new spells. After only a couple minutes, he was shooting sparks like a master.

Once he was confident in his new magical ability, Inkblot opened up the laptop to see if it would respond. After mashing a couple buttons, it was evident that the device didn't even have enough power to show the mysterious lightning bolt symbol it showed earlier.

He turned the box on its side, showing him a plethora of little holes, each one having its own symbol. After spying a headphone symbol and symbols

that he couldn't even guess what they meant, he found the lightning bolt symbol.

"Here goes nothing!"

He released a set up sparks into the hole, making a quiet sizzling sound. It didn't sound harmful. It sounded like it might have been working. Checking to see if the hypothesis was true, the unicorn reopened the laptop to see if it would respond. The laptop's dark screen remained dark for a moment, only to reveal the lightning bolt symbol once again. That was a good sign. It meant that the laptop got a bit of power from it. He just needed to give it more power.

Inkblot gave it five sparks this time. He figured it ought to be enough. He looked to the screen, hoping for a response other than the lightning bolt. Fortunately, he got one. Like the night before, the screen jumped to life. He was back to the white screen labeled "Gmail". It looked the same as it did when he first booted it to life, except there was a message with thick words: "To the Pony on The Laptop".

His eyes darted to the message. He needed to read that, but he didn't know how to use the laptop. So he inspected the bottom half of the device. There was the field of letters, numbers and symbols, and the small indentation with two buttons that made an oval. Why was there an indent?

He put his hoof on the indentation and felt around its ridges. The crater didn't feel any different from the rest of the surface, which confused him. As the unicorn continued rubbing, he checked the screen to see if there was a response. At first, he didn't notice anything, but after a couple seconds he saw a little thingy flying around. He stopped moving his hoof, and as he did, the thing stopped. It looked like a tiny, white, lopsided triangle with a stumpy little tail. He stroked his hoof downward to see how the thing would respond. As he did, the thing went down, too. Then, he got an idea.

Inkblot used his hoof to drag the thingy over to the words "To the Pony on the Laptop". He looked down to the indentation again, and tried pressing the button under the crater. When he pressed the left button with his hoof, the entire line turned blue. Aside from that, nothing happened. Inkblot's deductive reasoning led him to try the right button. When he pressed that button, a box appeared next to the thingy. It said things like "Open", "Open

in New Tab", "Open in New Page", "Properties", "Copy Link Address", "Save Image As...", and others that just reading them made the unicorn's mind hurt. Confused by all of the choices, he figured "Open" would be the best choice. As he moved the thingy over to the word, the "Open" turned into a blue rectangle with "Open" in white. Instinctively, the colt pressed the left button.

Suddenly, the entire screen went white. Inkblot nearly panicked, afraid he had messed it up. Fortunately for him, the screen showed the Gmail screen again. This time there was a message visible.

"Hello. If you are reading this, it means that you have a basic understanding of how the computer (what you're using) works. Not only that, but you're reading it before I have to delete it (can't let anyone else read this, or I'll be in more trouble than I'm in already). That is beyond incredible, but that isn't the reason I'm sending you this message. I'm sending you this message to let you know of some things.

First, I should introduce myself. My name is Steven Franklin. I was the one being attacked last night. I quit my job last night, and the reason he took me quitting so seriously was because of the laptop you are holding right now. I won't go into too many details since I could be found at any point in time and I want to have this sent to you. (by the way if you need to move the screen to read the rest of this move the cursot (the white thing) over to te side of the screen and drag the blue bar)

Now, one important thing you should know about us is we are not ponies. In fact, I'm not even sure if our species is known in your world. It was by sheer coincidence yours existed in ours. We are called humans.

Now I suppose you have questions:

How did I get here?

While our scientists were playing aroun in the labs, they accidentally found an odd sort of wormhole, moving objects to an alternate universe. Recently, they have sent humans through a wormhole via a remote control hologram. You're world to us is some sort of a parallel universe that is still very unknown to us. (I apologize if you don't understand some of these terms. I

hope one day I can explain this to you better.)

Next you're wondering, why is the computer important?"

Inkblot, transfixed on the message, moved the cursot (now that he knew what it was called) to the blue bar on the right, and pressed the left button to drag it down, exposing the rest of the message.

"The reason that computer is so important us because it's the way to get home. Put simply, the computer locates where my hologram is and takes the hologram back to my home. If you don't understand, don't worry. It's difficult to understand.

Who was the guy strangling me?

That was my former partner, Hopkins. He works for the same company I used to work for, and we had slightly different opinions. He's gone now, don't worry. When the HPIRT came to wipe the memory of Pony 167, he went back to our world. I personally have no intention of going back yet, but either way I can't without the laptop.

Who is the HPIRT?

I know you're probably intimidated by the acronym, so I'll start with this. HPIRT stands for Human Pony-

Suddenly, the screen went completely black. Inkblot was so focused on the message, he nearly flinched. Then the dark screen showed the lightning bolt symbol. The colt cursed the computer as he gave it another set of sparks.

The laptop reacted to the sparks immediately, showing a bright white screen. He was back at Gmail, but the screen show a message that nearly enraged him.

"[MESSAGE HAS BEEN DELETED]"



Inkblot let out an audible groan. The answer was right in front of his face, only to be yanked away immediately. Human Pony IRT. What did that IRT mean? What did it mean?! His anger spiked every time he asked himself.

After his anger died down a little, he thought about the rest of Franklin's message. One thing that hit him hard was that Franklin and Hopkins weren't ponies! They were those human thingies, or whatever. It was like an alien invasion. But wait, they weren't really invading, were they? They were just sending holograms, whatever those were. Were holograms like death robots or something? Then again, Franklin seemed friendly. Inkblot didn't dismiss the idea of an invasion, but put it in the back of his mind.

And apparently the laptop he was holding was incredibly important. Returning it wasn't even an option, since he didn't know where to find Franklin. Besides, Franklin wanted him to know about his world, so he may as well learn about it through the laptop.

Suddenly, the colt remembered something. He got his saddlebag out and packed it up with bits and snacks. He folded the laptop and put it away into a concealed pocket within the saddlebags. It was better to take it with him than to leave it at his home unguarded. When he thought about it, he didn't need that much more.

Inkblot ran down the stairs and called to his dad, "Hey! I'll be back on Sunday! Goin on a trip!"

His father gave a nonchalant, but loud response. "Alright, just be sure you have your article done when you get home."

The article! Inkblot had forgotten about that completely. "Don't worry. It'll be done!"

"Where are you goin' anyway?"

Inkblot opened the door. "Canterlot. There's a show tomorrow night. Tickets in Canterlot sell out quick and it's a long trip. See ya!" He closed the door behind him and went on his way to Canterlot.

# Chapter 3

## Road to Canterlot

Before he left for Canterlot, he stopped by the Silver Stable, his favorite restaurant, and bought some hay fries. He figured he'd get some food while it was still cheap in Ponyville. He also stopped by Sugarcube Corner to pick up some sweets for his trip to the royal city.

The trip to Canterlot wasn't too long. The city was on a mountainside near Ponyville, and climbing up the mountain took only 3 hours. For a trip on foot, that wasn't long at all, but still no delight. Fortunately, he had packed snacks.

On his way up the mountain, he searched for a spot where no one would see him. He eventually found the cover of some bushes on the side of the road near the top of the mountain, which he hid behind as soon as he found it. Inkblot was determined to learn at least something about the laptop, and where else would be better than hidden away on the side of a road, and judging by the number of people he had seen, it wasn't a very busy road.

When he was surely hidden behind the bushes, he pulled the laptop out of his black saddlebag. The area behind the bushes was an enclosed space that seemed to be an air bubble in a sea of bushes. The unicorn opened the box to reveal the familiar black screen. In response, Inkblot gave it a couple shocks to bring it to life.

The screen showed Gmail again, with the same walls of text he had read before. Nothing new. No message "To the Pony on the Laptop." Just the same text he had seen earlier. While he looked at this page, he had to wonder if the laptop he held could do more than deliver a message.

Suddenly, Inkblot noticed an area of the screen he hadn't noticed before. There was a bar on the bottom containing a series of words. There was "Gmail", "Untitled-Not...", "CamSystem", and "HLRS" (another confusing acronym). Gmail was darker than the rest of them, so he assumed that meant he needed to click on another one of the bottom words to get

anything different.

He started by clicking on the "Untitled- Not..." button. A box appeared on the screen that was labeled "Untitled- Notepad". The box featured another wall of words, except Inkblot could understand. It seemed to be a list of some kind, sorted into different sections. The top part of it said:

*"Episode 6*

*Possible Episode Titles:*

*New Pony In Town*

*Boast Busters*

*Major Problems*

*The Best Around"*

"Episode"? As far as Inkblot knew, an episode was like a part of a journey or something. It wasn't exactly a common word. Maybe it was some sort of slang in the human culture. He continued reading.

*"Outline:"*

Outline. There was a word that clicked with the pony. He knew an outline as the framework for a story or an article. His dad made him use outlines when he was making his earlier articles for the Post. Maybe an episode was like a story. As he read on, his thoughts were confirmed. Underneath it was a list of events that made a story:

*"Twilight hears about Trixie via Snips/Snails*

*Trixie appears*

*Main 6 challenges her and all lose*

*Twilight is afraid of looking like a braggart like Trixie*

*Spike tries to convince Twilight to use her magic*

*Snips/Snails worship Trixie*

*Spike talks to Snips/Snails*

*Dummy Duo wakes up the Ursa Major*

*Trixie admits she couldn't vanquish the Ursa*  
*Twilight takes out Ursa (Was a Minor all along)*  
*Trixie flees*  
*Letter to Celestia"*

Inkblot's heart dropped when he read the outline. That was only a couple days ago. He knew that they had apparently seen what happened, but they knew about it more than he did. It was almost scary how they were making a story out of the chaotic day in Ponyville.

Anxious to learn more, he continued down the page, using the scroll bar as if he had been using the laptop for years.

*"Cameras used:*  
*TownSquare 2, 5, 7, 9, 12, 13, 15, RC1, RC3*  
*Sky 3, 6, RC2*  
*Windmill*  
*Library 1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 12, 13, RC1*  
*EverfreeForest 13, RC1*  
*GeneralPonyville 3, 5, 6, 7, 14, 15, 16, 19, 24, 28, 45, RC3, RC5"*

Inkblot's stomach dropped again. Cameras? Judging by the list here, they were everywhere, and this was only a partial list. How did he know there wasn't a camera looking at him right now? How many cameras were there and how much could they see? Considering the next button on the bottom bar was called "CamSystem", he had a feeling he was going to find out. Inkblot clicked on the CamSystem button.

The screen was suddenly full of rectangles. Each rectangle showed a different sort of video. He recognized every single place shown on the cameras. He saw a pair of foals talking around town square. He saw a lavender librarian reading a book. He saw a couple animals creeping around in the Everfree. He even saw Snapshot getting a cupcake from Sugarcube Corner. It was scary how much he saw, and this was only a small percentage. Each video was labeled with a name and number, like "Town Square (23)", "Sugarcube Corner (17)", and "Everfree Forest (69)", which he assumed meant the area and the number of cameras. Not to

mention there was an arrow visible on the side of the screen, which he guessed opened up more group, and more cameras.

Before he could take in the camera system further, Inkblot heard a "Ping!" The Gmail button on the bottom was blinking orange. The pony moved the cursot to the icon and clicked on it, reopening the page.

Gmail hadn't changed much given the exception of a small box that appeared at the bottom right. The unicorn read what it said:

*"You: Just put up the cameras in Canterlot. I don't think any of the ponies noticed."*

For a second, Inkblot was confused since the message implied that he had written it. Then again, everything else was confusing him, so he decided to assume it was someone who wasn't him. Another message popped up, followed by another "Ping!"

*"Thiessen: Great. How about the laptop? And Franklin?"*

*"Ping!"*

*"You: The laptop is gone. The pony apparently took it. Franklin dashed away about two hours after my last email to you."*

There was a pause, giving Inkblot a while to organize the few facts he had. "You" was that Hopkins guy. Thiessen is the guy he sent the email to and his boss. If Hopkins is bad and taking orders from this guy, then Thiessen was bad.

*"Ping!"*

*"Thiessen: Alright, well in that case, you'll have to wait it out in Equestria for a while. We'll put you on the IV."*

*"Ping!"*

*"You: Sounds good. And what about Franklin?"*

*"Ping!"*

*"Thiessen: He will be put on the IV, too. We cannot legally take him off of the IV until he returns. Murder is still illegal."*

*"Ping!"*

*"Thiessen: By the way, I've been meaning to tell you this. There's been an explosion on the internet. A bunch of older men (ages about 16 to 30) seem to adore the show."*

A pause from Hopkins gave the pony another opportunity to think. The "show"? So their lives were being recorded for some sort of entertainment for humans. A little sick, but maybe that was normal for them. And as for the IV, Inkblot made the decision to not even think about it. He just added it to the melting pot of confusion.

*"Ping!"*

*"You: Don't take it too seriously Jayson. The internet is full of jokesters who'll poke fun at anything they can get their grubby little hands on. They're probably playing it for kicks. After all, it's a girl's show. There's no way they're serious about it."*

*"Ping!"*

*"You: Wait a sec... I think the laptop is nearby."*

A chill charged through the unicorn's spine. Did he know where it was?

*"Ping!"*

*"You: I can hear it!"*

Of course! It was the "Ping!" coming from the laptop! Hopkins was using the laptop as a bell of some sort to track down the pony carrying it. The chimes came from the laptop and echoed through the space, seeming to be louder than his own thoughts.

"Ping! Ping! Ping! Ping! Ping!"

Constant messages were sent, each one containing gibberish, but emitting the cursed "Ping!", which drew Hopkins closer to the laptop. Inkblot's hairs stood on end. He had to think quickly or else who knows what would happen to him. He'd lose his memory of that kiss! He'd get in Celestia knows how much trouble. He had to act quick.

When Inkblot heard a rustling through the bushes behind him, he slammed the laptop shut, put it in his bag, and immediately ran for his life. He hadn't a clue where he was going, but as long as it was away from there, he would be fine.

The unicorn galloped through the bushes, each little branch stinging his face as he sped by them. Behind him, he could hear the heavy footsteps and unsteady grunts from the pursuer. Occasionally, he heard Hopkins saying things like "Gotcha." or "You got this." to himself. Inkblot didn't dare look behind him.

The two ran through the bushes for at least a minute and not a foot of ground was gained or lost. The pony had a feeling this would last forever unless he did something. He instinctively used his magic to throw anything he could into the path behind him, hoping that it would slow the human down, but the branches and leaves didn't even seem to break Hopkins' stride.

After a few tries of mindlessly throwing debris behind him, Inkblot threw a rock about the size of an apple behind him. He could tell it hurt based on the yelp given by the one following. Inkblot felt bad hurting him like that, but he was slowed down, and that was vital to his escape.

The pony ran out of the shrubs and found the road to Canterlot again.



There was an old moss-ridden stone bridge that went over a stream coming from a waterfall only a hundred feet away. Despite his hurting haunches, he continued to dash away, knowing that a little stone wouldn't stop Hopkins.

The unicorn galloped full stop across the bridge, feeling the sensation of mist of the waterfall on his coat accompanied by the waterfall's roar. Halfway across the bridge, he finally had the courage to take a look behind him. During his glimpse, he couldn't hear the human's groans and heavy footsteps over the waterfall, but he could see the staggering figure coming out of the brush. There was a problem. They were out in the open. Inkblot would be identified in seconds if Hopkins got a good look at him. Panicking and searching for something to do, he decided to once again rely on his gut, which had done a good job of keeping him out of trouble so far.

He could feel his magic push over a huge object behind him. An object so huge that the unicorn had to stop in his tracks and clamp his eyes shut. His horn was pushing this thing so hard, Inkblot clenched his teeth. Whatever it was, it seemed stuck. Normally there would be no way he could move it, but the adrenaline seemingly multiplied his power.

Suddenly, the unicorn felt the release. He moved whatever it was he tried to move. Before surveying what he did, he searched for a spot to hide. In the twitch of an ear, he found a rock and hid behind it. When he poked his head out, he let out a gasp.

The bridge was gone! Completely gone! The only sign showing that it used to be there were two ditches on the riverbank. All it took was a look downstream to see where the bridge (or at least what was left of it) went. The bridge was in at least ten parts tumbling downhill, following the river.

The pale pony couldn't watch for long since he still had to hide. He ducked behind the rock and made sure to leave nothing exposed. He had no idea how long to stay there, since Hopkins could always still be watching. He could be waiting there for hours. At least he had some time to think.

Did he really just unearth a bridge? Granted it was an old bridge that was probably older than Celestia herself, but did he really just do that? Was he THAT powerful? It must've been the adrenaline, but either way, moving an entire bridge is impressive to say the least.

After getting over his disbelief, he started to come up with a plan for how to escape. First of all, how did he know Hopkins couldn't just swim across?

"You're lucky these holograms can't get wet, otherwise I'd turn you to glue!" Hopkins threatened over the rumbling waterfall.

Well, there was the answer to his first question. Second, he had to know how much Hopkins saw. If he knew every last detail of what Inkblot looked like, he might as well walk in front of his enemy's face and pose for pictures. Recalling all of the information he knew about the human, he inferred that Hopkins would send a report to his boss. Inkblot opened the computer.

The unicorn was back at the Gmail page, ready to continue reading the conversation between Hopkins and Thiessen. It appeared that during their chase, the boss sent a message to his employee while he was giving chase.

*"Thiessen: What's going on, Hopkins?"*

*"Ping!"*

Inkblot wasn't worried about pings anymore. Hopkins couldn't get to him. In fact, he enjoyed it considering how much they tortured his new enemy.

*"You: Found the pony with the laptop. Didn't get a great look, but I know that it's a white unicorn and no cutie mark."*

Inkblot's heart skipped a beat as a chill zipped down his spine. His blank flank would be a dead giveaway. Aside from that, it's still pretty vague, so the white unicorn concluded that Hopkins didn't get a good enough look to identify him.

*"Ping!"*

*"Thiessen: No cutie mark? So that means it's just a little filly or something, right?"*

*"Ping!"*

*"You: Not a girl. It's a male. And a strong one, too. Never seen a unicorn move a bridge before."*

That was a problem. At first he was given the benefit of the doubt and was considered to be younger, which would take them off the scent, but with power like that, it was obvious he was more grown, and there aren't a lot of adult blank flanks, so he'd stick out like an Ursa Major in Ponyville.

*"Ping!"*

*"Thiessen: Holy cow! Do we know where he's going?"*

*"Ping!"*

*"You: For now, nowhere. My guess is he won't come out from behind the rock until I'm gone. I don't know where he was going in the first place, but I found him on the road to Canterlot from Ponyville. Since he's a Ponyville resident, he's probably gonna go to Canterlot."*

*"Ping!"*

*"Thiessen: Well you're gonna have to leave soon, cuz we need someone to set up some cameras on a mountain north of Ponyville. Celestia says a dragon might be staying there soon and may stir up some problems."*

Inkblot nearly gasped. The princess was working with the humans? She was helping them out even though they're spying on our lives and showing it to their world for their amusement and profit? It was despicable! But he didn't have any more time to think about one of the many things on his catalog of confusing questions. Another message appeared with a "Ping!"

*"You: If I do that, he'll get away. When's the latest I can leave?"*

*"Ping!"*

*"Thiessen: Have them set up by Sunday morning, so judging by the process, I'd recommend leaving tonight."*

*"Ping!"*

*"You: Judging by the process? I can take a simple shortcut that'll literally take less than an hour to get there. How long does it take to get there and set up cameras?"*

*"Ping!"*

*"Thiessen: Pretty long considering that we can only drop off the cameras at the last recorded location, which was in Ponyville. They would be dropped off where you are right now, but as you said, we don't have the laptop. Stay the night in Ponyville. It's an order."*

*"Ping!"*

*"You: Fine. I'll just stay here until then and keep an eye on the rock."*

Well, it was good news for the hiding unicorn that Hopkins was going to leave before the night was over, so he didn't need an epic plan to escape unnoticed. But he needed a plan to wait behind the rock for a while, because Hopkins wasn't gonna budge for a while.

-----

It was nighttime in Equestria. Luna's moon was up in the sky and darkness enveloped a majority of the land. There were a few lit places found in Equestria. Most of these areas were towns and cities. One of them was the fire made by Hopkins next to what used to be the bridge. He had been sitting there, watching the rock intently, waiting to identify the white unicorn behind it. The eerie part is that the human didn't move unless perturbed by the world outside his focused mind. He never ate. He never drank. He

never went to the bathroom. He just sat there.

Inkblot was still hidden behind the rock, tinkering with the laptop and how the internet worked. Around him were the discarded wrappers of snacks he had used as a substitute for supper. During his prolonged wait behind the boulder, he had learned about how to type and what all of the letter keys did. He wasn't spectacular, but it was a new skill. The pony also learned about websites and the whole "www" thingy. He also found a pinball game, which he played to pass some of the time.

At around midnight, the pony realized that he was starting to feel tired. Even with the bright screen shining in his face, he still felt sleepy and had to fight to stay awake. If he were to fall asleep, then maybe Hopkins would use that opportunity somehow to take away his memory. He couldn't forget Trixie's kiss, so he had to find a way to stay awake. He figured he would try writing a journal entry on the computer using his new half-baked skills. Exhausted from the lack of sleep the night before, he wrote his half-awake ramblings in the Notepad.

*"dear journal,*

*today was very interesting to say the least. i had a wicked encounter with the hopkins guy. i think he still might be trying to take my memory, but i put up a good fight and he still doesnt know who i am. but the weird thing is that i moved a whole bridge with my magic, which waa really cool. so long as he isnt there tomorrow ill be off for canterlot. i dont know what ill do w"*

# Chapter 4

## The Failed Trick

"Um...excuse me..."

Inkblot heard the voice as a light shove was sent to his undersides. Despite the light push, Inkblot woke up as if someone had pricked him with a needle. His eyes went straight to the laptop, which was wide open for anyone to see. The colt followed his first instinct and jumped on the laptop like it was a gem that nopony else but he was allowed to see.

The awoken pony looked up to the unicorn who disturbed his slumber. He was a crimson stallion with a fine-groomed gold mane. On his back was a suit folded nicely strapped delicately to his back to indicate that he had just returned from a fancy ball of some sort. His cutie mark was a fireplace. This fancy unicorn was clearly taken aback by Inkblot's outburst, and Inkblot feared for the worst of questions. "...Anyway, would you mind telling me why the bridge is out?"

The pale unicorn felt his tension slowly ease away. He dodged the bullet. This new pony apparently found it to be rude to ask about personal problems of other ponies, much to Inkblot's advantage. But now, he had to come up with an alibi. "I was...uh...hoping YOU could tell me."

The well-groomed unicorn took a step back. "What? What makes you think I would know anything about this bridge suddenly being gone?"

Okay, so it was a stupid alibi, but he bought it. Inkblot could still weasel out a story. "Oh! I'm very sorry! I thought you were the...bridge repair...pony...you know, cuz I've been sitting next to this river expecting such an amazing city like Canterlot to know the problem as soon as possible and send somepony to fix it."

The crimson pony looked offended. "Young man, I am not some 'bridge repair pony.' I am Hearth! And yes, I mean THE Hearth, as in the owner of the famous Hearth Hotel in Canterlot!" He struck a dramatic pose to match

his monologue. "I wouldn't DARE get my hooves entangled with simple repair work when I could be pursuing my special talent and providing an ever-so-comfy roof over the heads of ponies. Speaking of which, why were you sleeping on the ground anyway when you could have just stayed in Hearth Hotel?"

Hearth Hotel? Inkblot had never heard of it, but after hearing how much pride this pony had put into his speech, he didn't have the heart to tell him. Either way, he had another problem at hand. He couldn't say what had happened the night before! "Well, you see-"

"No! Don't say another word! It all adds up!" Hearth interrupted. "You had spent the night outside, getting your beautiful pale coat all dirty," he cooed as he pointed at Inkblot's dirty coat, "and I have my trip to Ponyville postponed by a missing bridge. Say no more, because it takes a foal to not realize that this is a sign! You were destined to stay at the Hearth Hotel!"

Inkblot rolled his eyes at the hotel owner's eccentric performance in an attempt to get another customer. "Look, I'm sure that destiny would be certainly glad to let me stay at your hotel, but I'm a little short on cash, so destiny will have to-"

"Oh, but that is why I'm going to give you a night at the hotel free of charge!" the unicorn interrupted gleefully. "I apologize if I seem pushy, but it's just that I can't STAND to see a pony without a roof over his head."

"Pushy? Are you kidding, I'll gladly take a free night!" Inkblot refuted as he stood up on all fours, being sure to move the laptop out of his acquaintance's view and into his saddlebags as quickly and subtly as possible. He decided to start moving and avoid any discussion about the laptop. "So, let's get going so you can move me to my room. How far are we from Canterlot?" he said quickly as he started to walk away. Suddenly, his stomach rumbled silently. It was early in the morning and he was hungry.

"Only about a half-mile. Honestly, I'm surprised nopony else noticed the bridge going out since we're so close to the city. In fact, it's right up the waterfall. I'm beginning to think that it's full of short-sighted fools. All caught up in their galas and personal lives when there's so much of the world out there to experience!"



Inkblot increased his pace, hoping to get to Canterlot before he had to answer any questions he preferred not to answer. "Yeah. I always thought sophistication was overrated. I mean, this city itself to me is just full of pretentious, snobby ponies who think that anypony who doesn't have a fancy tuxedo and a heaping sum of bits is some sort of inferior." He took a peek back at his new acquaintance, who was wearing a face of slight shock. "No offense." The ranting unicorn added.

"Oh! None taken! I understand what you're talking about. The only reason the hotel is in Canterlot is because of opportunity. As much as I may have a...disliking toward them, you'll learn one day, that you need bits to be successful, my good lad," said the successful businesspony.

Inkblot gave a disgusted groan. "That's not fair!"

"Life isn't fair. I'm sure you've heard that a couple hundred times already, but it's true. And you can't change it. So, I say that if I can't change it, then I should just take advantage of it." The other pony sighed. He couldn't argue with Hearth. It made sense. "By the way, what WERE you doing sleeping outside?"

Inkblot panicked. If Hearth was right about the whole destiny thing, then destiny was shooting him in the hoof. "Well, you see I...uh...was really tired. You see, I was on my way home to Ponyville and I saw that the bridge was out. I couldn't move another step, so I sorta crashed. You know what I mean?"

Hearth looked at the younger pony understandingly, but skeptically. "Sometimes fatigue CAN get the best of us, yes. Also, what was that thing that you were-"

"Hey! Is that Canterlot?" Inkblot interrupted intentionally. He had to hijack the conversation and send it somewhere else completely.

"Why yes. Beautiful, isn't it?" the elder unicorn said pretending he had never asked the previous question. Fortunately, the city gave the two a lot to talk about. They were a good distance away, but the two could still see its beauty. Inkblot had never seen Canterlot up close before, and this was surely a sight for him to see. The castle seemed to completely envelop the

whole city, its odd shapes being a goliath standing out among the other buildings, and being downhill from the city made it look even bigger.

"Beautiful? That doesn't even begin to describe it. This place is enormous compared to Ponyville."

"Ponyville?" Hearth suddenly said with a sense of surprise. "You're from Ponyville?"

Inkblot didn't look away from the city to answer the other pony's question as he started to walk through the gates and into the city. "Yeah. I'm from Ponyville. Why, have you ever been?"

"Why yes, as a matter of fact, I have family there. It's a quaint little town with very nice features. In fact, this suit was made at the Boutique there." he arched his back to lift the suit on his back, but was ignored by the starstruck colt.

Who could blame the smalltown pony for gazing at the city? Even early in the morning, its bustling streets were nothing like the calm roads of Ponyville. And while the nice little Ponyville had a nice library, bakery, and boutique spread across the town, there seemed to be something everywhere you looked in Canterlot. After a single glance, he could already see at least four restaurants and three boutiques along with a library seemingly towering over the rest.

"Tell you what." Inkblot nearly jumped when he was patted on the back by the hotel owner. "You look distracted, so I'll leave you be until tonight. Just drop by and say that you're...erm... I don't believe I ever got your name."

"Inkblot. My name's Inkblot," the pale pony said with his eyes still wide as plates staring at the city.

"Yes. Say your name's Inkblot and I'll let the deskpony know to give you your key. In the meantime, enjoy the city of Canterlot! For breakfast, I'd recommend the Comfy Stable Hotel's complimentary breakfast bar for anypony with this card." He slipped a white card into his saddlebag. Inkblot nearly flinched, hoping he wouldn't see the laptop. "I'd invite you to the Hearth Hotel, but after a little accident in the garden a few days ago, we can't serve any food. See you later," and with that, Hearth walked away into

the crowd.

As if on cue, the unicorn's stomach rumbled. In his panic to keep Hearth from asking about the laptop, he forgot about how hungry he was. His stomach led his brain to find the Comfy Stable almost instantly, despite it being farther down the road. He made a beeline to the hotel, passing through enormous crowds and tons of other buildings, such as "Joe's Donut Shop" (which he kept a mental note to visit some time later), the Royal Theatre, some boutique, and a huge fountain with dancing ponies. All of which were bypassed by order of his growling stomach.

There he was at the revolving doors leading into the red brick tower that was the Comfy Stable Hotel. As he walked through, he was immediately met by an elegant lobby. The Front Desk was labeled with gold letters and held a well-groomed red mare with a white uniform and a matching white mane. The white tile floor had a gold painted "CS" written in cursive on the center. From the inside, Inkblot could see balconies piled on top of each other, stacking up at least twenty floors. Needless to say, this was one fancy hotel.

But his mind wasn't set on seeing the beauty of the hotel. The hungry unicorn followed his nose to the breakfast bar, which was nearby. His stomach was even more ravenous than it usually was in the morning because he never ate dinner the night before.

The counter was fully stocked with grasses, flowers, sandwiches, fruits, and some sweets. Inkblot could feel his mouth watering up, trying to decide what to eat first. Maybe the bermuda grass sandwiches like his dad made. Perhaps some sweet honey-glazed daffodils. Or maybe even some pears. He couldn't wait to get started, so he didn't hesitate.

A plate was quickly pulled up in front of the unicorn and all at once at least one of each food was piled onto the plate. No more than a few seconds passed before a hastily thrown together pile of apples, bananas, daffodils, grasses, and at least twelve other foods stacked about a half-foot high was being carried away to one of the tables.

Inkblot stared at his creation with more awestruck wonder than the inside of the elegant hotel. In fact, he took a moment just to let the gorgeous sight linger in his eyes. It was beautiful in the eyes of a hungry colt. He was sure

that it would taste even better.

Right as he opened his mouth to dig in, he felt a tap on his shoulder, which made him jump. He snapped his head toward the tap to see the pony who was at the front desk earlier.

"Excuse me. Would you like to leave some food for the rest of our guests? As in, the ones who are allowed at the breakfast bar."

Inkblot blushed and gave an embarrassed laugh. Apparently his food rush had caught her attention. After surveying the rest of the room, he could tell that it caught everypony else's attention. "Sorry. I guess my belly got the best of me. Here, I'll get the card out of my bag," he said weakly as he took off his saddlebags. His horn glowed as the ticket floated out of the pocket and into the receptionist's field of view.

After quickly inspecting the card, the mare looked up from it and skeptically lifted an eyebrow. "You're Hearth? The owner of that other hotel down the street."

Inkblot, already half-submerged in his creation, responded with a generic "Oh, yeah," without even listening to the mare's question.

Even though the response was hardly audible and nearly incomprehensible, the attendant's eyes went from the colt chowing down on breakfast and the card in front of her. Apparently, she bought it. Inkblot had accidentally, but successfully stolen Hearth's identity.

"Well Hearth, it says on this card that your membership happened to expire about a week ago."

The unicorn's muzzle kept on relentlessly ravaging its way through the pile of food. He cared about breakfast too much to even stop to listen to the pony talking to him. However, a sound rose over the sound of his chewing, and it was more effective than anything the uniformed mare could've said.

"Why is there no alfalfa here? I can't stand to eat breakfast where my favorite grass isn't even served!"

Inkblot's head popped out of the homemade concoction as the employee

responded to the blue showpony. "I'm sorry ma'am, but-"

"Sorry?! I'm sorry?!" the Great and Powerful Trixie interrupted. "Not even my level of magic can produce alfalfa out of the words 'I'm sorry'. I'm sorry but I simply can not eat here."

"Hmph drph oof!" Inkblot yelled with a mouthful of various foods.

The red mare managed to ignore both unicorns' outbursts. "Now that I have your attention, Hearth, your membership expired last week, which means that you are not eligible to eat anything at the breakfast bar. Including what is currently in your mouth."

Inkblot paused for a number of reasons. One reason was fear. This was going to cost a lot of bits, and he didn't have a lot of bits. Another reason was confusion. Why was she calling him Hearth? It must've been the name on his membership card. He could have fun being Hearth for a while. The third reason he paused was because he was trying to swallow.

After successfully swallowing the heaping mass, he responded to the attendant with incredulity. "Are you serious?"

The attendant looked at the card, but before she could verify the expiration date on the card, she got a scream to the ears.

"Hey! How dare you have the NERVE to ignore the Great and Powerful Trixie? Well, counting the lack of alfalfa at your breakfast and the hard pillows, that is three strikes. I am leaving."

Inkblot got out of his seat to follow Trixie out the door of the Comfy Stable Hotel, but was pinned to the ground before he even knew what hit him. He looked up to see the white-maned mare on top of him, simply saying, "Pay up."

The colt, still pinned, responded with a quiver in his voice and a blush on his face, secretly wishing the other mare could take this one's place. "How much?"

"Fifteen bits."

"Fifteen bits?! A little pricy, don't you think?"

"Or I could report you for stealing food from the Comfy Stable breakfast bar.

He groaned as he took fifteen bits out of his saddlebag with magic and gave them to the red pony in front of him as she unpinned him. This wasn't good news. He needed money to go to Trixie's show and to feed himself. Granted he still had snacks, but he couldn't live off of the alfalfa sandwiches he brought. Alfalfa. Alfalfa! That's it!

"Trixie!" Inkblot called as he got up and ran toward his idol. Trixie noticed the call and turned around to meet the pony with a food-covered muzzle. As soon as she saw the grass and flowers stuck to the honey around his mouth, she couldn't help but giggle to herself.

Inkblot ignored her giggling and cut to the chase. "I have some alfalfa sandwiches in my bag. Do you want one?"

Trixie smiled at what she heard. "Of course I want one. Only the best for the Great and Powerful Trixie! And it is quite obvious that alfalfa is the best species of grass available in Equestria. So let's go back to my room for our feast."

"Of course!"

Inkbot hated alfalfa.

-----

Trixie's hotel room was scattered, to say the least. There were two beds, one of which was unmade, with the sheets thrown almost completely on the ground. Inkblot could've sworn he even saw a pillow on the windowsill. The other bed was made and looked completely neat. There was upside-down blue suitcase featuring Trixie's signature cutie mark laying on the bed which is what marked its untidiness. The suitcase's contents were spread out across the floor, which wasn't much since the only clothes she had to wear was her show uniform, but it was still a hassle to step over alarm clocks and makeup kits and autographed pictures of herself (Inkblot was unsure if they were for handing out to fans or for Trixie's pleasure. He

assumed the former.). The only thing that was organized was her cape and hat, which was hung up unnaturally neatly almost as if it were to be worshipped.

The two ate the sandwiches (along with cola that Trixie had prepared, even though they weren't thirsty) on the more unkept bed facing the window, giving them a view out the ninth story of the hotel (after they removed the pillow, of course). Despite being fifty feet above the ground, the castle and a bunch of other buildings in Canterlot still towered over them. Then again, the two of them towered over the ponies in the streets.

Inkblot figured that it was time to catch up with Trixie. "So how's life been going?" he asked after swallowing a lump of healthy, but odd tasting, alfalfa.

"My life hasn't exactly changed over the last few days, Inkblot." Even during normal conversation, Trixie maintained her overdramatic, theatrical tone.

"Well, you're about to perform at the Royal Theatre tonight. I mean, it's THE Royal Theatre," Inkblot said before he took a sip of his drink. He wanted to bring out some emotion in her. As great as her inflated ego was, seeing more than that was always nice.

"Indeed I am. As I believe I told you a couple days ago, the people here deserve talent such as myself." The colt was hoping for a sign of nervousness in her voice, but her voice was just as strong as before. She took a bite of her sandwich.

"Well, aren't you nervous about that?"

There was a pause to let Trixie swallow. "Nervous? Ha! The Great and Powerful Trixie being nervous is simply an image that can not be imagined!" she exclaimed stoutly.

"But this is arguably-"

"Just another theater," Trixie cut in to avoid thinking about the crowd. Inkblot knew that somewhere under that towering ego was a little bit of stage fright. Her reassurance was proof.



"Just hope they don't know about the Ursa incident," he said, meaning to tease.

Trixie gave a heavy sigh. "Most of them do," breaking her theatrical tone. She had transitioned to a more solemn tone, full of regret. It was almost alien. Trixie was sad.

Surely enough, her mood whiplashed back to theatrics, once again veiling her vulnerability. "But that doesn't matter, because the Great and Powerful Trixie has a new trick that will blow everypony's mind!"

"That sounds amazing!" Inkblot nearly shouted, not even trying to contain his enthusiasm. "What is it?"

Trixie got up from the bed, took a couple sips of her cola, and cleared her throat. What followed was clearly one of her rehearsals for that night. She began by striking a dramatic pose. "Fillies and gentlecolts! What you are about to see has only been attempted by few unicorns, and some say that only the immortal can pull it off." Inkblot was already entranced by the show pony's performance, and the show hadn't even started yet. "I give you, the ability to play back memories in an amazingly realistic fashion, as if you could see through my eyes."

"So it's like a video camera!"

"Yes! Exactly like a video camera. Now stand back. Replaying something this realistically requires large amounts of magic. I will play..." Pause for both dramatic effect and to think of something. "...my wonderful experience yesterday!"

"Oo! This is gonna be good!" the pale pony said to nopony in particular.

Trixie closed her eyes as her horn glowed with the familiar blue aura. A plume of blue smoke came out of the unicorn's horn. Inkblot stared in wonder as the blue smoke formed into a cloud that seemed to have a faded picture in the center. Trixie closed her eyes tighter.

The picture faded in to show outside the hotel on the clear day. She was next to a nice stream that was set closer to the boundary of the city, where the inhabitants rarely visited. One thing was for certain, she was right when



she said it was realistic. Inkblot thought that he could just hop into the cloud and be at the stream.

Inkblot gave a short applause as Trixie's eyes clenched shut, focusing as hard as she could to pull off the amazing trick. Suddenly, the picture was moving, and a voice, Trixie's voice, came from the cloud. "Hello to whoever will be watching this in the future. Most likely a wonderful crowd of fillies and gentlecolts. You can see the astounding beauty of that land that you know, conjured up by magic itself. But please, hold your ravenous applause. We have more to see." Trixie bared her teeth.

The image moved down the river until it met a small cliff. The point of view looked down the waterfall, creating a realistic and breathtaking view of the land. You could see the lit cities of Manehattan and Trottingham and the dark void of the Everfree Forest. You could even see the quiet little town of Ponyville. The point of view looked down to see the spectacular roaring waterfall. At the bottom of the waterfall was another stream that flowed steadily down the mountain and a bridge. Inkblot's heart skipped a beat when he saw the bridge. That was the bridge that was destroyed the night before. This was recorded the night before. Inkblot suddenly felt uneasy.

Trixie started to sweat as she continued to play back her memory. The narration spoke on behalf of the strained mare. "Isn't this view simply beautiful? And realistic, too! Behold the grace delivered straight to you by the Great and Powerful Trixie!"

'Yes, that's wonderful now please move along before I show up,' Inkblot thought, sweating almost as much as Trixie.

"Huh, what's that?" The point of view looked down to the bridge, and surely enough, there he was, running across it from his pursuer. This meant she knew. It shook Inkblot's mind, and made him feel almost guilty for not telling her earlier.

Suddenly, the clouds all sunk to the ground. The picture of him running across the bridge was gone, and the room was covered in a ridiculously dense blue fog, which made the colt cough. After a couple coughing fits, the colt decided to try opening the windows. He used his magic to try to feel the window doors. After hearing a potted plant and a lamp fall to the ground, he finally felt himself open the window, letting the smoke billow out.

After a while, the smoke subsided to reveal Trixie lying on the ground, unconscious.

"Trixie!" Inkblot called to the knocked out unicorn, but she didn't respond. He called again, expecting the same results, but hoping for different results.

Inkblot fumbled across the room to call the hospital, fearing the worst for his beloved Trixie.

# Chapter 5

## Losing Memories

Inkblot had been waiting next to the hospital bed for hours already. If anything, he hoped that Trixie would just wake up. It was only three o' clock, so he figured that if she woke up, then she'd still make it to her show.

In the time that it took for a diagnosis to come in, Inkblot had plenty time to think. She was there when he was running from Hopkins. She saw him as he ran across the bridge and managed to destroy it. It all fit into place. He knew there was no way he could've destroyed the bridge all by himself. Trixie did it. She must have known he was being chased. Maybe she just saw his desperate attempt to destroy it himself and helped out. Either way, it put a dent in his ego, but it gave him a sense of gratitude for Trixie.

Also, when she moved the bridge, she must have seen Hopkins. He probably saw her too. That's bad. What will Hopkins do to her?

The nurse walked into the room with a clipboard, which held the diagnosis. She noticed the visitor in the room still hadn't left, which was no surprise since he didn't leave even when she strongly recommended him to leave. "Well, the diagnosis has arrived. The issue is attributed to an overload of magic."

"That would make sense. She was doing a really big trick," Inkblot said, marking the first time he had spoken for at least an hour.

"Well, that big trick knocked her out for quite a bit," the nurse said with her eyes still fixed on the clipboard in front of her.

Inkblot looked down at the sleeping Trixie, who looked fine, but he knew that something had happened. "So is she alright?"

The nurse pony, who greatly resembled Nurse Redheart, responded kindly, "She'll be...fine."

The pause perturbed the blue eyed colt. "Why did you pause? Are you sure

she's alright?"

"As far as health is, she's just fine. No major physical or mental damage except for one little thing."

"And that is..."

The nurse looked at the show pony, and then back to Inkblot. "A small amount of memory loss."

The news hit him like a train. Before, just thinking of memory loss sent a shiver down his spine, but this was devastating. They got Trixie. The HPIRT got Trixie.

"Are you alright, sir?" the nurse pony asked in a concerned tone.

Inkblot realized that he shouldn't be freaking out as much. Otherwise, ponies would get suspicious. Such as this one. "Oh, I'm fine. Just thinking about what she could have forgotten. How much memory did she lose?"

The nurse looked back down at the clipboard. "I've seen many cases of memory loss while I've worked here," Inkblot shuddered at the thought of all those ponies getting their minds erased. "and compared to most cases, this one isn't as bad. Only about three days of memory loss."

Inkblot backtracked. One day ago, Trixie was probably already there in Canterlot. She also recorded that memory for her trick, and most likely perfected it. Two days ago was the incident with the Ursa Minor. It might be better if she didn't remember that. After the incident, there was the kiss. Should he tell her about that? It would be up for debate later. Three days ago, she had just arrived in the town. It had been forever since they had seen each other, and Inkblot still had the little colt crush from when they met in the Ponyville schoolhouse.

So the last thing she would remember is arriving in Ponyville. She'd remember sleeping in her travel trailer and waking up in a Canterlot hospital. She would definitely have questions. Counting out trivial questions, she would first ask how she lost her memory in the first place. Inkblot couldn't tell her about the HPIRT, otherwise her memory would just be wiped again. So he went with the diagnosis from the nurse. He'd just tell

her that when she tried the trick that pulled something from her memory, she went unconscious. Her going unconscious messed up the part of memory she was accessing with her magic.

The second question would be more difficult. The show mare would ask what she missed and expect Inkblot to give a detailed report on the last three days. The problem was that some of the things are so far from the truth, she'll think he made them up. So he decided to leave their kiss out to avoid a hoof to the cheek. He also decided to leave out any of the Ponyville residents' response to the Ursa incident to avoid the same hoof to the cheek.

The nurse pony began to leave the room, but was interrupted by Inkblot. "Do you know how long it'll be before she wakes up?"

The mare looked to the ceiling as if counting in her head. "About another hour," she answered. "You're not going to stay in here with her for another hour, are you?"

Inkblot sighed as he looked down at Trixie. "I've been here for three hours already."

"Four," the nurse corrected.

"What's another hour?" He marveled at the mare he had feelings for as if it were a magical flower that cast a hypnotic spell on him, making his mind's first priority to marvel at each of the show pony's features. Her deep blue coat looked like the beautiful ocean, while her light blue mane almost shone like clustered field of stars in the sky.

The nurse noticed Inkblot's adoration and decided it would be best for her to leave, so she closed the door as she left.

The second he heard the door shut, the ink-maned pony approached the door and locked it from the inside. While he was next to the door, he pulled the laptop out of his saddlebag, and moved to the corner of the room where nopony in the halls could see him.

With any luck, he had some time before the nurses returned with the key. He used every second of this time, energizing the laptop with his magic on

the way to the corner. The device lit up, indicating that it was working.

Inkblot was greeted by the journal entry he had created the night before. The first thing he did was go to CamSystem. He needed to make sure he wasn't being watched. Offered with many choices such as "Everfree", "Ponyville", and "Mountain", the pony clicked on the folder titled "Canterlot", which opened up to reveal more folders. His eyes scanned the names: "Royal Castle", "Royal Garden", "Exterior View" (he was glad he didn't read "Road to Canterlot"), "Canterlot Streets", and "Royal Library", but considering the colossal size of the city, very little was covered. No cameras in the hospital. He was safe.

Inkblot moved his cursot to the bottom where he click the Gmail icon. The page opened with a message written in bold, which the pale pony by now knew that it was a new messge. It was labelled "NOTIFICATION: MEMORY SUPPRESSANT DISPENSED"

A chill went down the colt's spine. He was right. The HPIRT got Trixie. Despite his wrenching gut, he clicked the message, opening it.

"NOTIFICATION: MEMORY SUPPRESSANT DISPENSED

AMOUNT: 24g  
DATE: 9-4-10  
TIME: 10:03:24  
SUPPLIED TO: ID4672  
TARGET: N/A

REMAINING MEMORY SUPPRESSANT AVAILABLE: 40g"

It wasn't much, but each bit told a lot. For example, it helped that Trixie hadn't been labelled by the HPIRT before the memory wipe. It also revealed something that was helpful. They were running out of the memory wiping stuff. If they only had 40 "g" left, and it took 24 to wipe out Trixie's memory, it meant that their numbers were declining. Inkblot looked up at the message. It was supplied to "ID 4672". Apparently, ID 4672 was Hopkins, so that was something to remember.

Suddenly, Inkblot heard the doorknob jiggle. Needless to say, he was surprised. He expected at least a couple minutes before the nurse returned

so that he'd have more time on the laptop. The black-maned unicorn quickly, but carefully threw the laptop into his saddlebag and returned to his post next to Trixie, as if he were still admiring the showmare.

As the nurse pony eventually opened the door, she spoke apologetically. "I'm sorry, I must've forgotten that I had locked the door." Inkblot gave a sigh of relief to himself. "Anyway, I looked at the recent results, and, after getting permission from the head doctor, I decided that Trixie could be woken up."

"I thought you said it would last an hour." Not that it was a problem or anything.

"Well, that would be if she were to wake up naturally. It's always possible to wake her up manually, it's just that the mind needs rest after an incident such as memory loss. After review, I concluded that her mind has received more than enough rest. That and I didn't want to keep you in this room for much longer," she said smiling.

The unicorn smiled back at the nurse. "Thank you." He was about to give her the polite "You didn't have to," but his mind was changed when he remembered that Trixie had a show that night. If she was in good enough condition to perform magic, that is.

The nurse shook Trixie's shoulder, causing the mare to stir in her slumber. It took a second shake to cause her eyes to slowly open, as if her eyes had to adjust to the light first. She looked around with a predicted look of confusion. "Where am I?"

Inkblot answered her question just as he'd rehearsed it. "You're in the magical wing of Canterlot Hospital. Earlier today, you experienced some memory loss from trying to complete a really tough trick. You only missed about three days, which isn't that bad compared to most cases. At least, that's what the nurse said."

As the nurse left the room, Trixie let the news sink in. While she did, Inkblot saw a side of her that few others had ever seen and would ever see. It was a face that was well-hidden underneath the facade of the Great and Powerful Trixie. Gone was the show-stopping show mare whose tricks were adored by thousands, if not millions. Now, she was just a pitiful pony

who couldn't remember the last three days. She didn't know how she got there, and in order to find out, she had to be dependent. The thought itself seemed strange.

The blue unicorn released the question that Inkblot had been dreading. "So what happened over the last three days?"

Inkblot silently panicked to himself. 'Okay, it's just like you rehearsed it,' he thought. 'Wait! I never rehearsed this!' So, he went with the first thing that came to mind hoping that he wouldn't be the winner of a free hoof to the face.

"Well, what's the last thing you remember?" he asked.

Trixie closed her eyes to focus her mind on remembering. With her eyes still squeezed shut, she answered. "I remember arriving in...Ponyville. It was late, and I had just set up my trailer. I went to bed, then I woke up here."

Inkblot filled in the rest of the gaps for her, leaving out the parts not meant for her to remember. "The next day, you looked around Ponyville. You know, see the rest of the town before your show the next day. While you were out, you met up with me."

"Slipknot, right?"

"Inkblot," he corrected. "Anyway, so we caught up, and now we're friends. I don't know anything else that happened that day. To you, that is. The next day, you performed an amazing show in Ponyville."

"How did it go?"

Without hesitation, the colt returned with, "It went wonderfully. The crowd was amazed. Sure, there were a couple neighsayers, but needless to say, you shut them up quickly."

Trixie gave a weak smile, slowly transitioning back into the audacious Great and Powerful Trixie. This was the hard part. She was feeling genuinely happy, so telling her about the Ursa Minor would just drag her attitude down. But then again, she was bound to find out about it sooner or



later, since it was big news. But did he have to be the bearer of bad news. But wouldn't it be worse if she found out from some pretentious snob in Canterlot, and that would be accompanied with humiliation. He bit the bullet and decided to tell her.

"But, uh, after that..." Inkblot started, his optimistic tone changing to one of hesitation.

The blue mare turned her head toward her friend, detecting the shift in tone and preparing for the worst. Inkblot looked into her eyes, which spoke louder than most of her showy speeches. They told him that as much as she didn't want to hear it, she knew that bad news was coming. It might break her heart, but she was ready for anything.

"There was...an incident. Including an Ursa Major. You told two little dim-witted colts that you had slayed an Ursa Major. They went into the Everfree Forest and brought one into the town." Trixie's face was filled with horror. "Everypony expected you to take it out. But you didn't. Some local conquered it instead. You told the town you had never beaten an Ursa Major. Then, you fled," he ended with a voice filled with sorrow.

It was apparent that the news was hard for even the Great and Powerful Trixie to take. She seemed to stare into her own imagination, attempting to relive the forgotten memory. Her superinflated ego had vanished completely.

Inkblot, knowing the worst was over, continued to refresh Trixie's memory. "After the incident, the two of us caught up on a hilltop, and then you told me you were on your way to Canterlot. I had promised to see your show. Looks like there isn't really a show, though."

The show mare gave a sigh. "Using magic won't help this little issue."

Suddenly, the door opened. The nurse walked in, carrying a small, leather, book in her mouth. She placed it on the table next to them, exposing the golden letters written on the book. The letters spelled the word "DIARY".

"I apologize for interrupting, but the paramedics found this in her room while searching for things to jog her memory. I'll leave you two again." She said as she promptly left as quickly as she came.

Trixie used her memory to lift the diary in front of her face. "Um, Trixie, I don't think you should be doing ma-"

"It's okay. It's only small magic. Nothing that would hurt me," she interrupted, flipping to the most recent page as if Inkblot hadn't interjected.

As she read through the pages, the white pony could only imagine what she was reading. The question is did she write down how she saw him at the waterfall? If she did, then she'd know about humans again. Then she would get her memory taken again, making it an endless cycle. Or, less importantly, she wrote about the kiss. Either way, Inkblot noticed that every so often, she would look up from the pages and look at him with nearly a look of shock, which drove him crazy.

After a couple agonizing minutes of flipping pages and shocked looks, Trixie finally put the book down. Knowing that everything in the book was private, but still wanting to read everything in the book, Inkblot chose his words carefully. "So, did that jog your memory?"

The blue unicorn paused for a minute, as if to straighten out all of the information she had just taken in. "Yes. I remember the...important things."

-----

Inkblot spent the rest of the day in the hospital with Trixie, filling in the specific details to refresh her memory. Then they caught up and talked like two friends rather than a celebrity and an obsessed fan. It was different, but it was a good different. It seemed as if something had changed in her. Inkblot liked it.

The colt had a late dinner with Trixie in the hospital cafeteria. The mare didn't have to stay in the hospital any more, but it had surprisingly good food, and the food was cheap. After the dinner, they gave their goodbyes, planning to meet up some time later in Ponyville, since Inkblot had to go back home the next day. He never saw the diary.

By the time he was out of the hospital, it was dark and after the eventful day and the less-than-wonderful sleeping conditions of the night before, he was ready to hit the hay, so he was on his way to the Hearth Hotel. The

roads were still crowded with other ponies, and the city was lit up. In an odd way, it sort of resembled pictures of Manehattan he had seen, only not as showy. It was lit up in a tame sort of way, if that made any sense.

Last time he had walked through the streets, he was driven by getting Trixie to the hospital. The time before, he was driven by his stomach. This time, he was driven by the need to sleep. The unicorn was as tired as a workhorse, so his legs moved him as quickly as they could.

As he sped across the city, drawing looks from the sophisticated cityfolk, he noticed a big sign on the doors of the Royal Theatre saying that the show was cancelled.

Before he even knew it, he was at the Hearth Hotel, ready to crash for the night. From what he could see in the lobby, the Hearth Hotel wasn't nearly as fancy as the Comfy Stable, resembling the inside of a huge log cabin. He made a beeline to the reception desk to pick up his room key.

He approached the desk, where he was suprised to see Hearth talking with the desk pony. "Inkblot! Good to see you again! How was your day?"

"Exhausting. Can I have my room key?" he responded bluntly.

The crimson pony laughed. "Of course you can, my friend. I keep my promises," he said giving him

"By the way, your meal card for the Comfy Stable expired," Inkblot added.

Hearth gave another laugh. This one was more uncomfortable. "Sorry about that. Did you get a meal?"

"Oh, don't worry. I ate breakfast just fine," he assured his acquaintance as he gave back the now useless card and turned to go to his room.

"Good to know. Your room is down the first floor hallway and to your right. Room 152," the hotel owner called to his guest.

"Got it!" Inkblot called back, already on his way down the hallway. He followed the wooden hallway for a short period of time before the lanterns lit up the number 152 on a door. He used his key to open the door.

Cozy was the best word to describe the room. Like the rest of the hotel, it was a total contrast from the rest of bustling Canterlot, with most of its light emanating from the already lit fireplace. Other available lights were old-timey lanterns, which shone dimly across the wooden floors. Even the bed seemed to be taken out of an old log cabin.

As tired as Inkblot was, before he retired for the night, he wanted to check up to see if there was anything new with the laptop. He repeated the usual process of opening and powering the device.

The laptop revealed the Gmail page as it usually does. No new messages this time, but there was a chat going on. Most likely between Hopkins and his boss again. The conversation was already in progress:

"Me: Well, I have good news!"

"Thiessen: Is it about Franklin?"

"Me: No, but it's about the laptop."

Inkblot began to feel uneasy. Good news about the laptop for them was bad news for him.

"Thiessen: Go on..."

PING!

"Me: One of the spies gave me an ID on the pony that matched my description."

The unicorn reading nearly had a heart attack. Spies?! There were spies spread out doing the humans' work? Now he couldn't trust anypony, especially with a secret such as the one he had. Now who was the spy that busted him? Before he could answer himself, the computer gave another PING!

"Thiessen: Perfect! I'll send the HPIRT bots to the pony. Can you give me an ID number?"

PING!

"Me: Pony #501"

Completely freaking out and acting on instinct, he felt his magic type using the keys. He knew it was stupid, but they got him anyway. He might as well go down in some style.

"Me: well good job you found me. just so you know i wont go down easily. youll have to work in order to find this laptop."

Inkblot marvelled at his idiotic handiwork. He was going to go down heroically. So what no one else would know? Some of the best heroes are unknown anyway.

"Thiessen: So, you're the pony with the laptop. I assure you we'll find that laptop. Then you'll have your memory erased and forget this all happened. I can assure you, it's painless."

Inkblot typed again. While he did, he felt a strange sensation well up inside of him. One that he had never felt before. It felt like some strange breed of joy and excitement.

"Me: come and get me. you wont find the laptop. ill be asleep waiting for you to take away my sacred memories."

With that, he shut the laptop and put it in his saddlebags. The saddlebags were then forced behind the bedframe. It wasn't a good hiding spot, but it would be the last place they looked.

Now that he had everything settled, he slipped into his bed and used his magic to dim the lights. As tired as he was, he couldn't sleep knowing he would wake up without his memories. He would wake up without answers he still asked himself, such as "Who is the HPIRT?" or "Why us?" or "What was in Trixie's diary?" or "Who was the spy?". So many questions unanswered, but it didn't matter. He wouldn't remember them.

As he closed his eyes, accepting the approaching sleep, Inkblot thought of Trixie's kiss to the cheek one last time, wishing he could never give it up.

-----

The next morning was a peaceful one. The chirping birds woke up Inkblot, who was well rested and woke up without a problem.

He got out of his bed and looked around at the familiar log cabin hotel room, checking behind the bed to see if they took the laptop. They didn't.

"Wait. I remember everything?" he asked dumbly to himself. He paced in circles as everything came into his memory perfectly. He could remember the kiss as if it was yesterday. He could see himself in Trixie's room as clearly as glass. He didn't understand.

Inkblot froze in his tracks when he saw what was behind him. It seemed to be attached to his flank, and it was blue. He couldn't see it clearly, so he moved to the mirror. In the mirror, the colt saw himself the same as always with one difference. On his flank was a blue bridge. Inkblot had gotten his cutie mark. And it was a bridge?

As if his mind wasn't overloaded enough, before he could register the new cutie mark, he heard a knock at the door. Still hyped up by his new cutie mark, he sped to the door and opened it with near lightning speed. Standing at the door were two royal guards, which almost made Inkblot flinch.

The two stone-faced guards looked at the hyperactive, jumpy unicorn as the right one spoke. "When was the last time you saw a pony named Hearth?"

In front of the two statuesque guards, the colt took a couple deep breaths to calm down and get a handle on this situation. "I...saw him when I got back from the hospital. He gave me a room key, and I went to my room. Why?"

"Hearth went missing last night."

# Chapter 6

## Trouble Back Home

The news hit Inkblot like a slap to the face. Of course, his mind first jumped to the thought that the HPIRT took him away. But why would they do it? Did they think that Hearth was him? How could they make that mistake? And either way, he thought all they were going to do was wipe the pony's memories. Not steal him away from his home. He still had to at least try to get a grip on what was going on.

"Sir, do you know where this pony could be?" the guard said, snapping the dazed pony back into reality.

"No. Not at all." Inkblot was completely honest in his answer. He had absolutely no idea where the humans were taking Hearth, but he intended to find out soon. "But be sure to let me know if any news comes up."

With that, the two guards nodded in almost perfect unison and walked away to check out the next room. Inkblot, still standing in the doorway, had to continue taking in what was going on. Not just the news about Hearth, but also his new cutie mark.

He started with his cutie mark. It was simple, like most cutie marks. It was a blue, stone bridge that was similar to the one that Trixie destroyed, but with significant differences. The most obvious one was the fact that it was blue. A more subtle difference was that it looked like it was almost holographic as if it were being projected onto his flank. Inkblot just didn't know what in the hay his cutie mark meant.

The unicorn shut the door, figuring that he should probably get something done while he was deep in thought. It was Sunday, which meant he had to head home, which meant he had to pack. Then again, he never really unpacked, so all he really had to was turn in his key. The pale colt put on his saddlebags as he left room 152, locking it on his way out.

A bridge. What could a bridge mean? Well, what did bridges do? They

were mainly made for connecting two things. Did it mean he was a connection between the ponies and the HPIRT? That would make sense because it seemed like it would belong in the futuristic laptop. Was his purpose to be the bridge between his world and their world? If it was, then who were they to mess around with his fate? Was he invincible? Of course not. They were relentless. At least Hopkins was. If his grudge against him was that strong, which by now it had to be, Hearth was lucky to be alive.

By this point, Inkblot was at the front desk, turning in his key. "Thank you for your hospitality. Tell Hearth I said thanks of he ever turns up," he said to the mare at the desk.

"Thank you for staying at H-Hearth Hotel," she said with a shaken stutter. As the black-maned pony walked away, he thought of how she was probably friends with Hearth. She was scared because she had no idea what happened to him. Inkblot knew, but had a feeling that if she knew what was really going on, she wouldn't feel much better.

Following that train of thought as he left the hotel, Inkblot wondered why they took Hearth instead of him. Hopkins, aka ID 4672, sent out a description of Inkblot that wasn't even close to describing his hotel-owning friend. So it had to be somepony who didn't know his name and gave Hearth's name because apparently thought his name was Hearth. But who was the spy?

He went through the eventful day before. First thing he did was wake up and meet Hearth, who was straight out for obvious reasons. After he went into the city with him (he thought as he left Canterlot, ironically enough), he went to the Comfy Stable for breakfast. Maybe the waitress was a spy? Of course! That made perfect sense because Inkblot showed her Hearth's ID. Then she must have reported Hearth's name to the HPIRT. Well, now he knew who the spy was, and with his information, he left a mental note saying that he should avoid the Comfy Stable.

On to his last pressing order of business. How will he explain his cutie mark? It was big news, and Headline and Snapshot would definitely be talking about it. Of course, they couldn't know about the humans, so the bridge on his flank had to represent something else. Inkblot had to think up something as soon as possible, because, as effective as they were, his last minute alibis were also downright terrible.



After only a couple minutes of throwing out countless stupid ideas, he rehearsed his final draft of the story to himself. "This cutie mark? Oh yeah, I got it while I was in Canterlot. Just sorta woke up and had it. My guess is it came after I had a talk with this one citypony named Hearth. And I could actually understand all of his fancier speak. I fit in with the fancy crowd of Canterlot. And I also fit in here in Ponyville. So I figure I'm like a bridge between Ponyville life and Canterlot life." It could pass, and most importantly, it wouldn't arouse any suspicions regarding the HPIRT.

After his rehearsal, he looked ahead to see a river blocking the path. Over the river was a new bridge. This one was much more polished than the old one, without the moss and dirt, but it was still a stone bridge, just like the one before it. He crossed it, thinking once again how Trixie had saved him from Hopkins, and how her knowing made her lose her memory.

And so, Inkblot continued down the mountain on hoof, making his way back home to Ponyville.

-----

It seemed that nothing had changed in the small town of Ponyville. The streets were still quiet, with five ponies on the road at most. The quiet houses were nothing compared to the huge buildings Inkblot saw in Canterlot. Overall, the town was still quiet and unmoving, unlike the bustling busy city of Canterlot. Inkblot always liked that better, since he could always expect what was to happen next. Except for the occasional event that shook the whole town. Perhaps that's why he loved it. It was probably why the humans loved it too. Those events could be entertaining.

On the road, the black and white pony saw a familiar face. It was the neighsayer. The purple one that embarrassed Trixie in front of the entire town. While Inkblot kept any of his disdain to himself, the librarian was open and approached him in a friendly manner.

"Oh! Hello!" she said with a smile on her face. "You're the pony who wanted the lightning spell, right?"

"Oh yeah! That's me!" he responded. With all of the HPIRT business, Inkblot had completely forgotten about the borrowed library book. "I'll return the book soon. I managed to read up what I needed."

"Did you impress you pegasus friend?"

The colt was confused for a moment. He refreshed his memory to whatever fabrication he constructed back when the two met. Oh yeah. He wanted to learn the lightning spell so that he could prove that unicorns were cooler. "Yeah. He was impressed, but you know how pegasi are. He still thought pegasi were better."

The mare laughed. "Yeah. I have a friend just like that. She's really arrogant like that. And she's a pegasus."

Inkblot laughed along. For being a neighsayer, she wasn't really that bad. She was very friendly. The colt figured that he should be friendly back. "So, I realized that I never actually got your name a couple days back."

"Twilight Sparkle," the purple unicorn said with a friendly smile. "And yours?"

"Inkblot."

Suddenly, Twilight's face shifted to one of recognition. "Oh, you write the column in the Ponyville Post, right?"

"Well, that's one person who reads my stuff," he answered with a laugh.

Twilight returned with a laugh. "You're too hard on yourself. A lot of ponies around here read your articles. Oh, and you're Headline's son, right?"

He nodded. "I assume you know him. Does he talk about me often?" he asked with a chuckle.

"Oh, I've only met him once or twice. I just know you two are related because of what happened yesterday. Sorry about that, by the way. Is everything going alright?" she added sympathetically.

Inkblot started to panic. "What happened? I just got back in town from

Canterlot. Is...is my dad dead?"

"Oh no! Not that, thank Celestia. The news was huge around town, though. Probably the worst news of the week, not counting the Ursa attack. Your house was robbed." There was a pause. "If you need someone to talk to, I-

Before Twilight Sparkle could say anything else, the pale pony dashed away, expecting the worst back at his home.

-----

On the outside, Inkblot's home looked exactly the same. If his house was robbed, it wasn't broken into by force. No broken windows and no holes in the wall.

When Inkblot opened the door, it was revealed that the inside had changed quite a bit. Where there were pictures hanging on the wall of Inkblot as a foal and Headline as a younger colt, there were now only the nails that held them up. Further in the house, it was obvious that the kitchen table, sofas, and a majority of the other furniture was missing as well.

"Hello Inkblot." The unicorn jumped, surprised by the voice behind him. It was Headline.

"Dad! Are you OK?" he figured was the first thing to ask.

"Yeah, I'm just fine. Don't you worry. It's the house that's a little shaken up," the gruff old stallion said as he looked around the nearly empty room.

"So what exactly happened? Did he just waltz right in and take our stuff?"

Despite the context, Headline gave a hearty laugh. "Yep. That's pretty much what happened. I messed up and didn't lock the doors. In the middle of the night while I was asleep, he apparently came in and took the furniture. Woke up this mornin' and the house looked like this."

"How about the printing press?" Inkblot asked frantically.

"Untouched. The thief didn't have the sense to go to the basement. We can

still run the Post. I know how much you love writing your column."

Inkblot smiled, thinking optimistically. "Well that's good!"

Suddenly, the older pony's expression shifted to one of sorrow. "Actually, we might not be running it much longer."

The words themselves made Inkblot jump. "What?" he asked even more frantically. "Why not?"

Headline sighed. He was usually bright and optimistic, so breaking bad news was always difficult. "Everything costs money, Inkblot. We were just robbed of all of our furniture, and we need to get it back somehow. Royal Guard doesn't deal with common thieves. It's gone and the only way to get it back is to buy more."

The younger unicorn, now melancholy at what this meant, finished for his father. "And the easiest way to get money is to sell the press."

Headline patted his son on the back. "I know it's not easy to take, and I'm lookin' for other ways. I love makin' the Ponyville Post as much as you do, and givin' it up is hard for me too."

"I can live without furniture for a while."

"That was my plan. Make do until we get back up on our feet," Headline said, going into the kitchen.

"If we get back on our-"

"WHEN we get back on our feet," the bearded pony interrupted with his optimistic reassurance. It was strong, as if to say that the possibility of them going down was nonexistent. This elicited a pause which would have been silence if Headline wasn't pulling bread out of the fridge. "I got a new toaster today. Was about to test it out on some bermuda sandwiches. Want one?"

Inkblot took a second to respond. He was busy plotting to himself. "Of course I'd love one. Just gimme a minute. Need to finish something up upstairs." Without another word, he dashed up the stairs.

Fortunately for the unicorn, his room was untouched. The burglar wasn't dumb enough to go upstairs where Headline was asleep. His room was familiar territory where he could concentrate further than other places he had used the laptop.

Inkblot powered up the laptop and opened CamSystem, operating it more masterfully than the last time he had operated it. "Come on. It's gotta be around here somewhere," he said to himself as he opened the GeneralPonyville cameras. There they were. The 73 cameras that covered the streets of his town. He browsed through the camera screens, searching for one that showed the front of his home.

After a couple of scrolls, he saw Camera GeneralPonville33. It had a view down the street outside of about 6 houses. One of the houses was Inkblot's. There was a perfect view of his front door. "Perfect."

Now he just needed to find a recording from that camera from the night before. Inkblot figured that a complex system like this would be able to do that. There it was at the top. "Records". He moved the cursot over to the button labeled "Records" and clicked on it.

Suddenly, a box opened up on the screen. It said "Enter password:". Oh no! A password? How was he going to get a password? He was hoping to get the recording of the robbery and catch the foe red-hoofed. But now he had to know some password in order to get the recordings.

Let down by his first failed plan, he started to formulate another. In the middle of his plan, he smelled the aroma of toasting bermuda. He knew that his favorite meal was about to be delivered. This thought was suppressed by the sight of smoke on the computer screen. It was coming out of his house. Needless to say, this caused the pensive pony to rush downstairs.

The hallways were lightly fogged by smoke while the kitchen was completely flooded with smoke. Inkblot panicked. Last time he saw smoke, it was when the HPIRT took Trixie's memory. His newly created paranoia caused him to fear the worst.

"Dad! Are you alright?!" He heard the window open. Was Hopkins trying to

sneak in or something? Inkblot's mind was racing, and hearing a thud from outside the house definitely didn't help. "Dad!" he called again.

"I'm alright, Inkblot," Headline responded calmly, but still with a raised voice.

"Dad! Are you feeling okay?" he yelled as the smoke cleared.

His dad coughed a couple times, letting the smoke leave the kitchen. "Yeah. I'm just fine."

"What happened?"

"Oh, that new toaster kinda scorched our sandwiches. Dumb toaster. I never liked it anyway" Headline used his magic to pull the two burnt crisps that used to resemble bermuda sandwiches out of the toaster, which had been thrown out the window.

After giving a sigh of relief, inkblot shrugged his shoulders. "Meh, I always liked that burnt taste." With that, he took a bite of one of the shriveled up black things and immediately gagged. He quickly spat it out in the sink. "Okay, maybe not that much."

His father laughed loudly, but it was followed by another cough since the smoke hadn't completely cleared out yet. "Oh boy, this smoke isn't helpin' me out. By the way, did you manage to write that article while you were out in Canterlot?"

Suddenly, a lightbulb went off in Inkblot's head. His plan was complete and ready for execution. Step one of his plan: Fib to his dad. "Uh. I got most of it done. About half maybe. In fact, I was finishing up upstairs."

His father gave a scoff. "I'm sure you were. Just give it to me by the end of the day so I can print it tonight. Snapshot beat you to the deadline and she's not even getting paid!"

Inkblot played along with Headline's joke as he headed upstairs. "So when should I expect my salary?" he asked with a laugh since he didn't get paid either.

The second he got to his room, he summoned a scroll and quill and got straight to work.

"Conspiracy!"

I just got back in from Canterlot today, and I was hoping to find some news for the column. And, oh boy did I find some news. A day into my ventures in the big city (fantastic place, by the way), I came across a certain pony who at first sounded absolutely insane. It seemed he had conjured up a wild conspiracy theory. I was all ears, hoping for a well-done work of fiction.

He had told me of this alternate universe where humans live. They come down Equestria (specifically Ponyville) to record our everyday lives and broadcast them for the entertainment of our world. I was skeptic at first, but then I thought of how eventful our lives can be. For instance, we had the Ursa Minor attack only a few days ago. And what about when not one, but two stampedes threatened our town all in the same week? Maybe our lives could be entertaining.

Anyway, this pony talked about how these humans planted invisible cameras all over the town, which record us from almost every angle. He said there are hundreds spread around Ponyville alone. The idea intrigued me, but of course, this was so outrageous I felt like I had to prove him wrong with logic. I asked why I hadn't seen him. His response frightened me. He said that I might have. According to him, these people (he called them the HPIRT) had memory erasing chemicals that they apply on ponies who see them. It's an easy thing to do since unicorns (and other ponies, but especially unicorns) can suffer from memory loss by excessive magic or illness.

I still wasn't quite convinced. I parted with him, but as I left, this crazy pony said that he knew this thing for too long and that their memory erasers didn't go back as far, so they had to kill him instead. He had already admitted himself to the humans, but he wanted to go out with a bang, so he told me to tell everypony I knew. Still, I was skeptic.

The next day, I woke up to discover that Hearth, the owner of the hotel at which I was staying, had gone missing. I approached the insane pony once again who, clearly, was not dead. He assumed that they took the wrong

pony.

I'm still unsure about the truth of this. I just figured you should know since, according to my anonymous source, we are what the HPIRT are watching. Maybe I just want to appease some crazy pony who told me to tell everypony I knew. Either way, is this a conspiracy, or is something going on in Ponyville?

-Inkblot"

Inkblot immediately took the scroll and looked over it for spelling errors. Finding none, he headed downstairs and handed it to his father, who had recovered from the smoke bomb earlier. "Done. Ready for tomorrow's paper."

Without a word, Headline picked it up and skimmed over it. Most of the time he was wearing a look of confusion. "A conspiracy? Didn't think you were into that kinda stuff."

"I know it sounds strange, but can you post it? Please! I just want to tell people this," Inkblot nearly begged.

"Well...I dunno...It does seem rather shaky... Oh wait. It's your column. You do what you want," he said with a big hearty laugh to respond to his son's look of anxiety. "To the press?"

Inkblot smiled and nodded. "To the press."



# Chapter 7

## Visitors

While the Ponyville Post was being produced on the press downstairs, the two ponies had dinner. Since their toaster was a bust, they ordered a toasted bermuda sandwich to go from the diner. During dinner, Headline asked Inkblot how Canterlot was and about his new cutie mark. Most of what Inkblot told him was technically true due to his bending of the truth, a skill he had acquired from the HPIRT business. For instance, when his dad asked if he saw the show, Inkblot answered with "The show was cancelled. Some magic accident happened." Or when asked what his cutie mark meant, instead of lying with his rehearsed story, he just said that he wasn't quite sure.

The next morning, all the papers were printed. After hearing about the robbery, Snapshot recruited one of her friends named Pipsqueak to volunteer as a paperboy. Usually it was Inkblot's job to deliver papers, but he was more than happy to give it up to the little colt.

As soon as he woke up, which was hours after Pipsqueak delivered the papers, Inkblot went straight for the laptop as if he hadn't just woken up from a 12 hour slumber. He was just too interested in what the response to his article from the HPIRT would be. With breakneck speed, the now experienced unicorn opened and powered the laptop using magic muscle memory, so to speak.

The screen showed where he had left off, CamSystem. He moved the cursot to the bottom and clicked on Gmail, which opened, revelaing a pair of new messages. He started at the bottom bolde messages, since he had learned that the newest were on top, where it said:

"NOTIFICATION: MEMORY SUPPRESSANT DISPENSED

AMOUNT: 40g

DATE:

TIME: 5:40:16  
SUPPLIED TO: ID4672  
TARGET: Goodbye

THE SUPPLY OF MEMORY SUPPRESSANT HAS BEEN COMPLETELY DEPLETED. PLEASE RESUPPLY."

This news was good and bad for Inkblot. The good news was that they were out of suppressant. Now nopony else would get a memory wipe after this. The bad news was Hopkins drew it, and he drew enough to make Inkblot forget everything after the Ursa attack. Including the kiss. But one thing puzzled him to no end. What was "Goodbye"? Was that his codename or something? Was he saying goodbye? If so, then who was he saying goodbye to? Maybe he'd get answers later. Because he seemed to always get his questions answered.

He moved on to the email before it. It was labeled "Problem", and it was from "You" to "Thiessen". So it was Hopkins. Inkblot started reading again.

"I'm currently at the HPIRT base in Equestria, and I found who the spy spotted. He goes by the name of Hearth, and he claims he has no idea what we're even talking about. He doesn't know what it is, much less where it is. Believe him. He's the wrong pony. He doesn't even match my description.

This means that there's still a pony out there with the laptop. Whoever this pony is, I didn't think he'd take a pony's identification and let some other pony take the fall. He's clever, that's for sure.

Anyway, we have another problem at hand. I was going to get some memory suppressant when I got a nice little message from the notification service. It turns out someone took the last of it! We don't have any more of it, and we don't get stocked for another week. Since the suppressant doesn't work very well, We'll have to dispose of the "Hearth" somehow. In any other instance, I'd kill him, but he appears to be the owner of a hotel in Canterlot, and who knows how much press he could have following him. We can't release him for the same reason. Do you recommend the Power Leaf mixture? The HPIRT are telling me that's an option, but they won't tell

me what it is.

Just respond to me as soon as possible.

-Hopkins

PS The target on the notification about the memory suppressant was "Goodbye". What does that mean? Is someone leaving the team mid-mission?"

Great! More questions! If Hopkins wasn't ID4672, then who was? Whoever it was, he's the one who wiped Trixie's memory. And now he has enough memory suppressant to wipe his memory clean of anything HPIRT-related. What was Hopkins going to do to Hearth? Would he just kill him anyway? And if they don't get stocked for another week, would that suppressant save their lives? Finally, what's the Power Leaf mixture? If it was an alternative to death, it had to be something important.

Well, his day was open, so he could hunt for answers. Inkblot started with the Power Leaf thing. He had a feeling the Power Leaf was something found in Equestria, so its information was probably recorded somewhere. The unicorn shut down the laptop as he headed to the library. That librarian seemed quite friendly, so she was probably willing to help.

He headed down the stairs, but was interrupted at the doorway. As he opened the door, he was almost hit in the face by somepony who was about to knock.

"Whoops! Sorry about that!" Twilight said cheerfully. The purple pony smiled at seeing Inkblot, who was surprised at her presence.

"Oh! Hey Twilight! Funny, I was just about to head to the library. So what're you up to?"

Suddenly, Inkblot heard a voice behind him. "Well hello there. Who's this, Inkblot?" It was his dad.

"Oh, uh, dad. This is Twilight Sparkle. She's the librarian here." he said as Twilight extended a hoof.

"Pleased to meet you. You must be Headline," she said in her friendly voice.

"That's me. Pleasure to meet you, ma'am. So what brings you to our humble abode?" Headline asked after shaking the mare's hoof.

Suddenly, Twilight gave an anxious laugh. "Actually I need to talk to Inkblot. In privacy. If you don't mind."

Inkblot's father responded to her request by looking at his son with raised eyebrows. Being his son, Inkblot learned how to read Headline's looks. This one said, "Lucky colt. You must've caught yourself a nice one in Canterlot." Fortunately, while she was a librarian, Twilight couldn't read his looks. The pale colt just hoped she couldn't guess what it said from how red his cheeks were.

"Sure, you can use Inkblot's room. I'm sure he wouldn't mind it, right?" he said suggestively.

Inkblot gulped. His laptop was still out. "That sounds like a great idea. But I just got up and I really have to make my bed. You know, spruce the room up a bit."

"No you don't. You're gonna be getting back in it," Headline whispered jokingly.

"Dad!"

"What'd he say?"

"Nothing!" they both said at the same time. Inkblot picked up the conversation to avoid awkward questions. "Hey, I'm gonna go make the bed." With that, he left Twilight alone with his dad. He was unsure if that was a great idea, but his top priority was to hide the laptop.

The pony's room was messy, to say the least. It was more than likely the bed that gave this impression. He hid the laptop in a drawer as a temporary hiding spot until Twilight was gone. Then he used his magic to make his bed. Again, he wasn't one to lie. He just had a knack for stretching the

truth.

Rushing to ensure that his father wasn't telling Twilight any embarrassing information about him, Inkblot arrived to the bottom of the stairwell where the pair of unicorns were talking. "Hey! Made the bed!"

"Oh good, let's go!" she said anxiously running up the stairs, leaving Inkblot behind. The two colts were left surprised by the sudden dashing away.

There was a brief silence before Headline gave his son a nudge. "Go get 'er."

"Dad! You know it's-"

"I know, I know. I only tease. But be careful. When mares want privacy with a stallion, then that stallion's in for somethin'-"

"Yeah, yeah. Got it," he interrupted. He didn't want to think of that possibility. He still liked Trixie, and didn't want any drama.

Inkblot entered his room to see Twilight waiting for him. "So what'd you come over for?" he asked as he shut the door. The second the door shut, he felt his four hooves become attracted to the door. By the time he noticed that the purple unicorn's horn was glowing, he was pinned to the door. Unable to move, he merely struggled as the mare moved closer to him. He tried using magic, but her more powerful magic blocked his ability to use it. He nearly yelled the first thing that came to mind. "I have a fillyfriend!"

This made Twilight back away, blushing. "Oh! I wasn't going to, uh, you know, do THAT!"

"Oh. Well, could you, um, let me down please?" he asked, trying to break free of the awkward tension.

"Do you promise not to run away? No matter what?"

"Depends on what you're about to tell me," Inkblot answered, trying to get the information out as soon as possible.

The purple mare looked around, as if to see if anypony was watching. Then

she sighed, seeming to brace herself for however Inkblot might react. "It's about your article in the paper."

Sensing where this was going, he decided to play dumb. "You did all this just for my article? What is it, some-"

"There was no anonymous source you got that from, was there?"

Inkblot tried again to move, but kept the grunts to himself. He continued to stretch the truth by simply avoiding it? "Why do you care about the source so much? Is he some sort of target for-"

"Inkblot!" she nearly shouted.

"Can you please let me down?"

"Not until you tell me where the laptop is!"

"You're part of the HPIRT! Aren't you?"

"Listen! There's no point in lying! After Hopkins chased you halfway up the mountain, he sent out a description. A description of you! And now you're posting about the HPIRT in the paper! It's obvious you're up to something and I am NOT letting you go until you tell me what you're up to!" she spilled. The mare said it herself. There's no point in lying, and she followed that credo by telling him all of this. Inkblot was worried about how he might get his memory taken, and felt dumb for telling her so much about him.

Inkblot, still pinned to the wall, gave a large sigh, hanging his head. "I'm losing my memory, aren't I?"

"Actually," Twilight suddenly released him as he fell to the ground. "You get to keep your memory. This little encounter will have never happened."

Inkblot lit up, but still held a sarcastic tone. There had to be a catch. "Let me guess. In exchange for the laptop."

"I just want to know what you're up to. I'm not a part of the HPIRT division of the show, but I do know that you'd have to be crazy to actually call them directly to you."

She just wanted to come by to see why he put out the article? It seemed suspicious, but hey! Telling her would work just fine with his plan.

"Well it's a pretty simple plan," Inkblot started humbly. "The HPIRT will read the article, and try to find out who the anonymous source is I mentioned in the article. So they'll come into my room and question me. At that point, I'll show them I'm the pony with the laptop, and exchange the laptop for something I need."

"Well, what do you need?"

"A password. A password that shows all of the recordings from the cameras. If I could see that, then I'd be able to find whoever robbed our house."

Twilight frowned, preparing to give bad news. "It only records footage necessary to make episodes. You won't find whoever robbed your house on the cameras."

Well, that did it for his plan. "Perfect," he said with a clear sarcasm. "So now I just put up a sign in the paper telling the HPIRT to come and get me?"

"Pretty much."

There was a silence. It rang through the room as the two unicorns reflected on Inkblot's failed plan. In fact, the plan backfired. He could still always trade the laptop away for something else. Maybe just to keep his memory, or as a way to save Hearth. Or both. Inkblot broke the silence. "So, you said you're not a part of the HPIRT. What do you do?"

"I'm a main actress. Basically, the show revolves around the life in Ponyville for me and my friends," she explained as she layed down on top of the bed he made. The colt thought that it was a dumb idea for a show, but he didn't have the heart to tell her.

"What friends?"

"Promise not to talk to them about this?"

"I've been keeping secrets for a good amount of time already."

"Let's see. First, there's Applejack."

"The earth pony from Sweet Apple Acres?"

"Yeah."

This surprised Inkblot. He never really saw the orange pony as the star of a show. Then again, he didn't know her that well. He just saw the pony bucking apples every so often.

"There's Rainbow Dash."

"Don't know her," the black-maned pony responded as he walked over to the bed Twilight had layed down on.

"Rarity."

"Oh! Yeah! She seems showy, like she'd be center stage." He remembered going to Carousel Boutique once to fix one of his father's suits. Calling her showy was an understatement. In fact, he felt like he should watch the show to see if she was being dramatic for the camera as she fixed the suit.

"Fluttershy is one of them."

This made Inkblot laugh out loud. Fluttershy?? The pegasus who takes care of the animals? "You're joking, right?"

Twilight joined in with the laughter. "Actually, no. I'm serious. She's a part of it."

The colt's laugh died down. "She couldn't put herself in front of a camera if she tried."

"Well, believe me, convincing her wasn't easy. We had to tell her that the people watching would never meet her, and that they would all love her."

"Do they?"



"I don't know. It's still a new show. The first episode of it just aired on television."

"Telewhat now?"

"Oh, it's like a little box that shows movies on it. The humans have it in their home."

"Ah."

Suddenly, the purple mare got up from the bed. "Well, I'm done here. I did what I need to do, and as much as I love talking to you, there are just other things to do, you know."

Inkblot followed her as she approached the door, opening it for her. "Of course. So long."

"Bye," she said, waving as she went down the hallway, toward the stairs.

Suddenly, Inkblot remembered something that he meant to ask. The reason he was about to leave for the library. "Hey! One more thing! What's a Power Leaf?"

The librarian stopped in the hall, speaking loudly to ensure the colt with the black circle around his eye heard her. "It's a magical herb put in mixtures to intensify its effects. Very very powerful."

With that, she was off, leaving Inkblot to wonder what in the hay the Power Leaf would do. It was probably for the memory thing, so it just made the memory erasers stronger. Is that what they were going to use for him? Only time would tell.

-----

The remainder of the day was uneventful. Inkblot expected somepony in the town to maybe talk to him about his article. He assumed that everypony thought it to be a dumb conspiracy (if they actually read it), which was good. No pony believed it so no pony would get their memory wiped.

The night was much more eventful. Mainly because he had prepared to defend himself against any HPIRT members that would have reacted to the article. His original plan was to beat up whoever came in, tie whoever came in to the bed, take away any of the memory suppressant they could be carrying, then negotiate a trade where he got the camera's password in exchange for the laptop. Now that he knew that the cameras didn't cover the robbery, his plan was the same, except less negotiating and more improvising. He predicted it would fail miserably against his favor, but if it did, it wasn't like he'd remember such a failure anyway.

The unicorn spent the first half of the night awake, listening intently for any sounds. Since just sitting there was boring business, he pulled out the laptop to get another look at its capabilities. During his couple hours of tinkering on the laptop, he found a pinball game (which he found himself playing for a majority of his time), and a game called Solitaire. It had a bunch of cards along with a set of rules. As interesting as it seemed, the rules were simply too hard to follow. He stuck with pinball.

Every so often, Inkblot would hear a sound from outside, such as the wind blowing twigs around the street, and immediately panic, hide the laptop, and snuck himself next to the window, ready to strike. After waiting five minutes and not hearing another sound, he groaned and returned to pinball.

Later in the night, he heard another sound. The thing that made this sound different was that it came from the inside of the house. It was the sound of his front door opening. This had to be the HPIRT. They could probably open the locked doors that guarded the journalist's home. As he could hear the steps ascending the stairs, the tension rose. Who was it? Was it going to be Hopkins? Was it going to be ID4672? He had to know as soon as possible, and he was ready to find out with his legs bent, ready to buck.

The second he saw something enter his room, he bucked. Eliciting a sharp "oof!", the human fell over to the ground. Inkblot's mind raced as he nearly slammed the door. Fortunately, his father was a very heavy sleeper and didn't wake up to see this.

Inkblot, whose mind was scrambling to the next part of his plan, followed instinct and tried to repeat what Twilight Sparkle did to him earlier that day.

Unfortunately, it proved to be harder than he expected, giving him enough power to only pin the invaders hands to the ground with magic. It would have to work. He used magic to scour his pockets for any memory suppressant. Finding none, he began questioning. "Who are you, and why are you here?"

The frail human coughed as Inkblot got a good look at him. He was a very skinny human, with a short patch of brown hair on top of his pale head. His eyes were as brown as his hair. One thing for sure was that he was very frail and weak. Pinning him to the ground was probably far from any difficulty any other human would've produced.

After a couple brief coughs, the voice spoke. "My name...Franklin. And I have a m-message for Inkblot."

Franklin! He had been helping him get used to the laptop and helped him out against other members of the HPIRT. Still suspicious that he had just snuck into his house to deliver a message, he responded. "That's me. Who's it from?"

Franklin, probably not used to being pinned down, choked out the word. "Left...front...pocket..." as he looked over to a leather bag he had walked in with. Quickly, but without releasing the human, he opened the bag and pulled out a small book. He had seen it once before, and always wondered what it said. Now, it appeared he was going to find out. The book was labeled with the word "DIARY".

It belonged to Trixie.