The Midnight ship to Zezzick

The ship pitched and turned drunkenly as it moved through the storm broiled sea. The dull thump of water hitting the hull sounded throughout the ship with a steady rhythm. The clank of the chains that held the zebra to the bed kept time with the music of the sea. She tried to sleep and found it difficult. Memories were crowding into her head. Some memories were old wounds opened now by more recent regrets. She pulled her coat closer to herself and wallowed around on her cot bolted to the wall. Rough hooves scrape at her face, trying to rub sleep into her skull or at least rub the thoughts plaguing her out. The thoughts don’t leave; they settle in for the night and prop their metaphorical feet up.

~

Ten years ago Calliope came back from a whaling job and went carousing. This ended, as it usually did, with a night of heinous debauchery with whoever wanted to, “Get to the root of her exotic fruit.” The only difference was this particular pony, a blueberry maned mare with warm hazel eyes, still slept in the bed when Calliope awoke. Calliope knew that she should leave. That getting involved in a relationship would lead to nothing but trouble. That her father would disapprove of her not carrying on the genealogical line. Calliope kept thinking this, but the thoughts grew less and less insistent as she continued to watch the chest of the blueberry maned mare rise and fall. It looked so soft, so alluring, so fluffy. She wanted to bury her face in it and stay there for a long while. She cuddled closer to the gently snoozing mare in the bed with her. Fuck her father and not getting in a relationship. She deserved this. When the mare with the blueberry mane woke up she felt strong legs tangled with hers and a pair of lips gently nibbling at her ear and the nape of her neck.

~

Calliope eventually found out that the blueberry maned mare’s name was Dewberry.

“Dewberry.” Calliope said. Tasting the word. It tasted sweet. Sweet like something else that Dewberry had let Calliope taste. A pink tongue flicked across the zebra’s lips. Maybe there was a little bit of her flavor left on them. “Good dreams doth you ferry gentle Dewberry.”

Dewberry blushed at this and stammered something unintelligible. Calliope thought she looked cute when she blushed. Calliope thought Dewberry looked cute whatever she did. Calliope hoped, really and truly hoped, that Dewberry would turn around to check the oven again so that she could get another gorgeous view of her backside. She did. Calliope stared and stared and bit her lip when Dewberry bent down to take the tray of muffins out of the bakery oven.

“I hope I’m not being crass, but dear, you have a luscious ass.”

Dewberry quaked with nervous energy again and Calliope felt certain that her face was more red than blue at this point even without being able to see it. Calliope felt the smile that had been present ever since she woke up intensify a little bit. It was threatening to crack her face in half at this point. Dewberry finished making cute noises like ‘Ah!’ and ‘Oh, um, hoh dear.’ “Do you…” Dewberry paused for a moment to consider if she was really going to say what she was thinking about saying, then continued. “Do you want to take a closer look?” Calliope’s toothy grin was interrupted for a moment by a blur of pink tongue wetting her lips as she pushed herself up from where she leaned against the counter and started forward toward Dewberry’s sweet cheeks.

“MOM!” An unruly colt yelled.

Calliope froze for a moment with Dewberry’s butt pressed against her face. The clanking and shuffling of Dewberry pushing herself off the warm metal oven padded out the time before the room fell into a stark and poignant silence. Dewberry looked at the colt with embarrassment still plastered across her features and her lips working soundlessly as they chewed through potential words. Calliope knelt next to Dewberry with her face pressed into the warm flanks of her lover. Her tongue sat out of her mouth. The colt’s silver and gray mane flopped back and forth on top of his head as his eyes strolled from Calliope, to Dewberry, squinted at Calliope, and then he all but squinted them closed when he looked back to Dewberry. The silence continued.

“Dewberry dear, could you explain away my feeling wary? Because this tableau is looking quite hairy.” Calliope said after she, reluctantly, pulled her tongue back into her mouth and stood up from her position next to Dewberry’s posterior. Fooling around more would have to wait until after this issue was resolved.

Dewberry put a hoof to her chest and smoothed it against her rolling chest. Her breaths became calmer, and soon she spoke. “Calliope this is. This is my son, Keel. Keel this is Calliope, mommy’s.” Her face scrunched with remembered pain. She didn’t finish her sentence. Her hooves reached up to her face in a vain effort to push the tears already streaming down her cheeks back into the ducts releasing them. She only succeeded in scrubbing them into her blue coat, darkening it with streaks and spots of liquid. Her breathing went back to labored and transitioned to coughing sobs. Calliope tried to put a calming foreleg around her neck but Dewberry shook her touch away. The small earth pony mare stumbled over to one of the cabinets, flailed at it with blind need until it opened, and clamped her lips down on a large, squat bottle of something unquestionably alcoholic. She lifted her head and the bottle turned up to pour into her throat; the tip of it still clenched between teeth and lips. She drank until she couldn’t anymore. The bottle fell to the floor of the bakery. It bounced and rolled and made the rumbling noise of glass on stone. Dewberry breathed slower now and her chest had stopped heaving with sobs. Now it heaved because she was gagging from sheer volume of cheap, hard liquor in her stomach.

The colt stood there for a second, then two, and then three and four and on five he stopped staring at his mother and ran from the room. Calliope heard the sound of hooves on stone as she walked over to Dewberry. The clopping almost drowned out Dewberry’s ragged HURK HURK HURK. As the zebra moved closer she could hear the beautiful blueberry maned mare mumbling to herself. “Fuvving, fugging whores from Port Street ad Luna Boulevard and every pussy in between.” Dewberry rocked herself back and forth and kept dully thunking her head against the wooden cabinet. Calliope picked Dewberry up and settled the smaller mare into her lap. Her forelegs wrapped around Dewberry’s middle and held her close as the blueberry mane thumped with rhythmic poofs against her chest. Calliope cooed to her. Stroked a hoof through her mane to feel the warmth and the delicious velvet texture of it. “Not good enough for him.” Dewberry whispered to herself in between difficult breaths. The zebra shushed her and kept stroking a hoof through her blueberry mane.

Keel came back soon with a bucket held in his teeth. He sat in front of his mother and transferred it to his hooves so he could hold it underneath her chin. Calliope put a little pressure to her arms that were about Dewberry’s middle and she felt the organs underneath them give a lurch that could curl noses. Something that was mostly alcohol hit the bottom of the bucket with a metal clang. The process repeated until nothing slopped into the already slop filled bucket. Keel sat it down adjacent to the kitchen’s entrance and grabbed a wooden mug from one of the shelves. He filled it with water from a barrel in the corner and brought it over to his mother. Her hooves scrabbled at the mug until they found a grip. Four long greedy gulps later and the mug was empty. Keel, Calliope, and Dewberry all laid on the floor of the bakery wordlessly for a long while.

~

Trying times reared their head for Berry Good Bakery and the exotic addition to the little family within. Dewberry, still struggling through a mire of self-hatred and bottle spelunking kicked off by the departure of her husband, was the main patient. Calliope, a zebra whaler whose family had left her in the port city to find fortune while they made their abode inland with her brother, gave the poor mare the care she needed. Keel helped where he could and worked diligently in the bakery. He and Calliope never quite grew close. Perhaps the zebra was too strange or perhaps he resented the mare for stealing his mother’s heart away. Neither Calliope nor Dewberry could rightly tell and neither were inclined to ask. Time drove on for them all. Healing came inexorable and implacable.

“Keel, you bake with righteous zeal. Could you help an old zebra to get a feel for molding ground meal?”

The colt rubbed white flour onto the red apron hanging about his dark blue neck. He gave the zebra an askance glance and tapped a spot on the counter next to him with one hoof. Calliope moved across the room with her pipe in her lips and left a bisected smoke trail behind her. Her hooves met the counter close to Keel’s with a clack. The colt continued to knead more dough for croissants. He shot a glance at Calliope, more precisely at her lips wrapped around her pipe, and scowled.

“Put that out if you’re going to be in the bakery. We’re already having trouble enough as is without losing customers to tobacco tainted muffins.”

Calliope reached up to her mouth and removed her pipe. Her eyes darted around for a few moments trying to find somewhere to dump the ashes from her pipe as her left hooftip put out the smoldering tobacco. Her eyes landed on a windowsill that looked out into the back garden of the bakery. With a little tip and a tap the pipe’s contents were left amongst posies and petunias and periwinkles. The zebra stowed the pipe in her coat’s black wool pocket and returned to the counter. The colt looked the zebra over again and pointed to her coat sleeves.

“Roll those up or they’ll get covered in flour and dough and sugar and spice and everything else that isn’t nice to get out of clothes.”

Calliope dutifully rolled up the sleeves of her coat well above the elbow and laid her hooves back on the counter. Now there surely wouldn’t be anything more that she needed to do before they could get to baking and bonding.

“You’re going to need to wash your hooves before we can get to any baking.”

Calliope stifled a curse and the accompanying rhyme.

~

Breath, hot and heavy. Lips, locked and loving. The only sounds in the room that either of the inhabitants could hear.

“Are you sure you have to go?”

More breathing, getting faster and faster and culminating in a throaty moan easily audible through the walls of the room.

“I am afraid that I must, though in my return you should trust.”

A wet, slippery sound followed the words. It did not sound fit for young ears.

“HAAAAAAA hunh ah, Celestia this is so much better than the rolling pin.”

~

The morning after their night of passion Calliope and Dewberry had to say their goodbyes to each other, for a while. The zebra would be coming back to the bakery to get more of Dewberry’s ‘goods’, but for the moment she needed to return to her whaling job. They knew that the night last night was going to be the last one for a month or more. They embraced that morning and let the hug linger for a long while. To let go to Dewberry meant that Calliope could leave, and she didn’t want that. To let go to Calliope meant that she would be trading the warm love here for the cold love of the sea, and she desperately wanted to stay, wanted to go back to the bedroom with Dewberry and bang her so hard that no one in the bakery or the surrounding houses could get any sleep. It was not to be. The door shut with a peculiar heaviness when Calliope left. The bakery felt empty in her absence.

“So, would you happen to be interested in a deal?”

Calliope turned from where she stood facing the Harbor master’s office to look at who addressed her. A stallion stood behind her. He had a stocky frame that bordered on adjectives less flattering than even that. His clothes consisted of a red scarf tied around his neck and tucked into a brown vest. Simple clothes. Stylish in their own way and well taken care of. Calliope met his eyes and paused for a moment. He had one eye, on the right side of his face. The other one was a milky unseeing white that had no pupil or iris to mar the glistening white perfection of it. Calliope scuffed her hooves on the cobblestone ground of the wharf.

“My interest depends on the deal and if its proposition can be made real.”

“One for the old rhyming tic eh? Never met one of those before, rest of the zebs I’ve talked to ‘ve gone native.” The pony paused for a moment to adjust something at his side. “I like it.”

“While I appreciate the sentiment, I have an appointment. Speak your piece so I may hear or my hooves will get carried away I fear.”

“Right, right, I was wondering if you might want to join up with Pendulum and Fenwick company instead of the one you’re with right now.” The pony smiled. “The profits can be quite nice and they always take care of their own, got me?”

Calliope narrowed her eyes to the pony. “I have no desire to throw in with Fenwick. You’ve raised my ire, get out of my face you prick.” She turned back to the Harbor master as the aged pony finished writing up some paperwork for her.

“What the fuck did you say to me you striped who-” The one eyed pony didn’t get farther than that before Calliope turned and made him swallow about three of his teeth. He fell to the ground spluttering and trying to say something through torn lips and a mouth filling with blood. His hooves scrabbled to his side where he had adjusted something a few moments before. The zebra reached down and gingerly took his foreleg in her grasp, flipped him around, and started bending it in a way that it didn’t.

“I think he’s had enough dear.” Said the harbor master gently. He hadn’t moved an inch in expression or from where he proffered Calliope’s paperwork. “Let him learn his lesson, and take your form please. Captain Fargo was feeling itchy to get back onto the sea. Must’ve lost too many hooves of poker.”

Calliope nodded after a moment and let go of the one-eyed pony’s leg. It flopped back to the cobblestones and stayed there with the panting, bleeding mess it was attached to. A moment of hesitation from the zebra, perhaps deciding if she wanted to spit on him or kick him in the ribs for good measure. She went up to the harbor master and took the papers from his elderly hoof. He relaxed back into his chair on the other side of the hole in the building that he conducted business through.

“See you in a few months Cal. Don’t go hunting any trouble bigger than you can handle.”

The zebra chuckled. “Good master of the harbor, you know I’m a whaler by trade. So, anything smaller than them and I’ve got it made.”

The harbor master nodded sagely as Calliope walked away. The gibbering mess of a pony still lay there bleeding into the cracks of the cobbles. He seemed to be way of getting up now. Wary of moving at all around the zebra. She brushed a hoof against his back and he skittered away on his face. She gave a grunt of approval and left him to crawl back to his boss. She had whales to hunt and blubber to cut.

~

When Calliope returned to the bakery it was not right.

“Dewberry, my rose cheeked maiden of the fairy?”

No answer

“Keel, you querulous little heel?”

No sound came from the bakery to the zebra standing in the doorway. She pushed further into the shop, past the chairs and the display counter. There were loaves and pies and pastries still in the display. They must have stepped out to go get something. Calliope tucked the key to the door back into her pocket and eyes the baked goods set out to entice customers. One little bit couldn’t hurt, could it? She leaned down to nick one of the lopsided croissants that the customers were sure to look down on. The shape made it taste no less delicious though. She would be doing them a favor.

Something caught her eye after she had the delicious buttery bread of the croissant betwixt her jaws. A piece of paper laid out on the counter. She took it and held it up to her eyes to see if she could make anything out. It was written in Equestrian. She sighed to herself and thought about how she still needed to learn Equestrian. Nothing here was written in her native tongue and without the help of some kind ponies like the harbor master she wouldn’t be able to function at all.

“Callie?” Came a timid little voice from the entryway. Calliope twisted her head to get a look at the speaker. Dewberry stood there with a faded brown rucksack over one shoulder. It bulged in a few places with what looked like apples and other tasty fruits. The blue maned mare in the door tossed the rucksack inside and rushed over to the zebra.

“So good to see you again.” She said with a longing in her voice. Her hooves began to wander around as she hugged the zebra, but they stopped cold in a moment. She sniffed loudly. “Callie, you smell like rotten…” Another sniff. “Everything.”

“The sea has not been kind to me.” The zebra’s voice purred as hooves sent sensuous strokes along a blue back. “That’s why I came here, to my lover dear.” The stroking is well received and Dewberry’s back arches against the hooves running along her with need. During Calliope’s ministrations, the terrible twosome managed to jostle the counter and send the paper laid there fluttering to the floor. Calliope reached down to pick it up but her hoof was outpaced by Dewberry’s. The smaller blue mare bent down and snatched the paper with unexpected deftness. She held it to her chest and nervously smiled as Calliope turned an eye to her, not clouded with lust, but clear with curiosity.

“Pray tell what those words upon the paper spell?”

“Nothing, just some, business transactions that’s all. No need to worry Callie.”

“Read me what is on the paper child, my interest has been riled.”

Dewberry sighed and took the paper away from her chest where she held it. Rough crackles of sound moved through the air as she smoothed it out and read. “The Port Authority reminds you that you owe two thousand five hundred bits to the various par-” Dewberry looked up to see Calliope walking toward the door and adjusting her hat with firm purpose. “CALLIE!” Dewberry yelled, springing forward so she could wrap her forelegs around the zebra’s midsection. The striped mare stopped walking. “Callie, don’t go please. I need you.” The blue mare sniffed, tears were fighting to come out. “I just do. I don’t know anything else to say. I need you a whole hell of a lot and if you go I don’t think I’ll be able to hold myself toge…” A striped leg curled around Dewberry and held her close to a chest covered by an old sea smelling sweater. It was warm.

“I cannot abide you being swallowed by a tide of debt, but back to the sea I must set. If I am to make things right and bring back to your face a beautiful happy light. I will be gone, but I will be back in short time to delight your ear with bountiful rhyme.” Calliope craned her neck down to kiss Dewberry and then she let her go. Calliope walked out of the door.

Dewberry cried.

~

“Pendulum and Fenwick, what’s your business?” Asked a stallion through a slat in a heavy door. He listened for a few moments to a melodic voice on the other side. “Alright, come on through. Boss is going to want to talk to ya direct.” The burly stallion replaced the slat with a Krrrclack and opened the door to let a zebra wearing traditional sailor’s garb inside. She tugged her cap to the muscled stallion and he bowed low to her. She walked past into the hall and into an expansive office. Plush carpets soft to the hoof lined the floor, looking like they were pinched direct from a palace somewhere. Wooden bookshelves made up the walls. There were occasional interruptions in the rows of books for a ship in a bottle or a model of a whale or something else of that variety. The desk, close to the back of the room, was of a wood equal in opulence to the rest of the room, something dark and solid. The pony behind the desk looked thin, hawkish, and very, very old. The kind of old where it becomes difficult to tell wrinkles from eyes if they squint. He inclined his head to the zebra as she entered and raised his hoof to gesture at a chair. The zebra stood.

“Should have known that my hospitality wouldn’t mean much to you, but I’m and old fool.”

“I won’t deny your age, but you are not a fool. You are an old and cunning and treacherous tool.”

“Flattery will get you everywhere dear. Why are you here then? You hate me, everything about me, and especially everything about the business I run.”

The zebra dug around in her coat and flung a piece of paper onto the shining top of the desk. The old stallion picked it up. His eyes widened enough that you could actually see them.

“Quite a number this is. I assume this is how much money you need, otherwise you wouldn’t be coming to a stallion like myself.”

“Not for me do I tolerate your knavery. For those at the Berry Good bakery. For Dewberry and Keel I come to the stallion who does nothing but lie, cheat, and steal.”

“Careful, might be in danger of complimenting me.”

The stallion tapped his chin for a moment and smiled. It was not a nice smile, not like someone finding out it was their birthday and that they got a surprise cake. This smile is like the smile of a crocodile with its jaws snapped shut.

“I think we may be able to make a deal.”

Calliope felt regret in the pit of her stomach.

~

Dewberry and Keel waited for Calliope to come back. She didn’t, but money started coming in. Enough money to cover the debt and then some. Both knew it must have come from the striped sailor. Both felt regret at not having her there.

They will be waiting a long while for the zebra’s homecoming.

~

On the ship to the prison island of Zezzick Calliope’s mind finished torturing her with the pain of nostalgia. She fell asleep. She fell into a sleep deeper than any she had fallen into before. So pleasant and warm and without memory.

Then she woke up in darkness with her back against grassy ground and the roll of the sea far away from her. The only thing she could recall at the moment was her name.

“I must be at the end of my rope, I can barely recall my name is Calliope.” She said her name as more of question to the dark air around her than anything else. Perhaps it new for certain what her name was. She heard something else in the dark, and then she truly realized that she was no longer where she should be.