

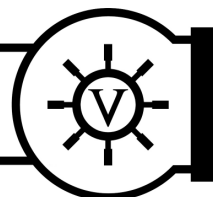
The Conversion Bureau

Blaze

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PONY FICTION VAULT



The pony race and humans have lived together in harmony for centuries. A peaceful race, the ponies never really felt the need for war or violence to solve world problems. Things always seemed a lot friendlier with the ponies involved. Only recently have ponies been integrating into the modern human society. Ponies have lived in isolated, calm lands for many generations, but with over-population becoming a risk for the equine communities, moving from Canterlot to Newark was a common occurrence in these times.

Through warfare and species-exclusive diseases, humans have begun a steady decline in population and general health. The ways humans have destroyed the world around them, through pollution, greed and unhealthy living conditions, have led the humans to realize the error of their ways, but it had been too late. Ponies, being a hardy, largely pacifistic folk, had slowly become the majority in world population (but only just so). It was becoming clear the time of the human was coming to a close. Soon, scientists of both human and pony worked together to create a formula to, in a sense, "ponify" a human, and hopefully keep society from collapsing. Their long term plan was to start a thriving, pony-centric world for generations to come.

In this interim period, humans were plagued with mass confusion and doubt as to what to do. Most humans understood the decline in the population, and would much prefer to be a pony. With a down-to-earth, carefree lifestyle, the possibility of flying or using magic to their advantage, and current human health problems a thing of the past, what could possibly go wrong? However, some people have shown some second thoughts.

People like Ethan McCullough.

Ethan rose from his bed on that warm Sunday morning in April to the sun beating down through his window. He knew today was the day. He was finally going to do it. Get it done and over with. He was going to be ponified, and he was going to move to the pony world. Most of his other friends have already gone through the ponification process, and now it was his turn. For a young adult still not quite done with his teenage years, this 17-year-old couldn't help but succumb to peer pressure. Ethan laughed quietly and got up to pack.

The newspaper talked about it last month. He still had the clipping of the article on the wall of his bedroom, "PONIFICATION CAMP OPENS; HUNDREDS FLOCK TO JOIN PONY SOCIETY". Ethan had skimmed through the article several times a day, looking over the regulations and the daily regiment of the 7-day camp; and as he packed the six sets of clothes, toiletries, and other essentials, he was confident he'd know what he was doing the moment he walked into the door of that camp.

Ethan hopped into his car and drove his way through the streets of his hometown. There were many memories attached to these streets, and hopefully they will stay with him when he comes back, a totally different species entirely. The once-crowded suburban complex he called home was now barren, with only a few of his neighbors still going about their business, and some ponies are seen bustling through the streets (and skies above). Ethan knew that this kind of living was soon going to come to an end, and the new society he will soon be integrated into will be much better. Or, at least, that's what he was reassuring himself with.

After about twenty minutes behind the wheel, following the MapQuest directions he'd printed out the day before, Ethan arrived at what looked like the cleanest building in the neighborhood. The camp looked more like a clinic on the outside, with what looked like a large greenhouse complex in the back, and a sprawling field of fresh grass even further back. The people-to-pony ratio in the general area of the building was about even, with nervous humans walking in, and ecstatic ponies coming out. Ethan parked his car, got his things, and headed inside.

The waiting room gave off a very noticeable vibe that would normally come from a doctor's office. It was awkwardly quiet in the mid-sized room, with only a few people sitting in comfortable chairs reading old magazines, and a unicorn pony at the reception desk typing on a computer with her magic, and sorting papers with her hooves. Ethan quietly walked up to the desk and wrote his name on the sign-in sheet, placing the

application he had filled out the night before in the basket with a few others, and sat down with the other people. The uneasiness in the room was palpable.

Suddenly, after what felt like hours, the door on the opposite end of the room opened, startling everyone in the room, even the secretary pony. A lime-green mare appeared from the other room and looked at the people in the chairs, including Ethan. After a minute, she spoke.

"Okay! All of you come with me!" she said, in that kind of peppy, cheery tone that would annoy the average schmo off the streets.

The aforementioned people rose quickly and started for the door, anything to break the monotony of sitting in that room. Something told Ethan that it brought back bad doctor memories for most of them.

"Now, I'm going to take you five to your living quarters," the pony said as they walked down the long hallway to the dormitories.

Even though ponies had been living in his neighborhood for a few years now, Ethan had never really gotten the chance to be this close to a pony before. They had always been either at home or work, and his friends and family didn't really have any pony acquaintances he knew of (at least, until they became ponies, that is). It was an odd experience being this close to a fellow sentient being, that looked nothing like him. It felt like he was following a talking dog.

Finally, the pony and her followers arrived at a small hallway. There must have been twenty rooms there, each individually numbered, like a hotel's rooms. The pony directed each of the people to their respective dorms, and Ethan was the last. He got room 526, or so it said on the plate on the front of the door. It was then he noticed the doors had no knobs, and just pushed open, like a public restroom. Ethan got self-conscious about his privacy, until he noticed the wooden door block placed tenderly at the edge of his room.

The dorm was simple, and warm. The first thing he noticed was the heater was on full blast, so he turned it down to a reasonable temperature, and put his stuff down on the bed. The bed was short and stocky, but still managed to be a full-sized bed with a fluffy, sleepable mattress and neatly made sheets. Before he had a chance to unpack his things, a knock unexpectedly came at his door.

"Ethan? Is this your room? The reception lady told me to come to 526, but I'm not sure if the signs got mixed up or anything, so I'm just making sure..."

The familiar voice babbled on as Ethan opened the door to his old middle school friend, Barry Gelsi. Barry was lanky with a messy brown jewfro on his head, and was wearing a grey, battered looking T-shirt with equally as battered cargo pants. The two friends man-hugged at first glance of each other.

"Hey, buddy!" Ethan greeted Barry with his first genuine smile of the day.

"Hi, there! I guess I was right about the room," Barry replied and let himself into Ethan's dorm, sitting enthusiastically on the bed. After a short silence, Barry continued, "So... I guess you're here for the pony thing, eh?"

"No, I'm here to exact revenge on one of the employees here. He killed my father, and he must die," Ethan replied with a dead-serious look on his face. Soon, both of them collapsed with laughter. "Sure as hell, I'm here for the pony thing, buddy! How long have you been here?"

"I just moved in last night. We're supposed to go for a seminar after dinner tonight, to 'inspire us to make the right choices', and all that junk," Barry said, using finger quotes where appropriate. "Half the reason I'm going is because my friend is giving the speech. She's a pony, too."

"You have pony friends already? Geez, I wish I did. Things are so weird around here," Ethan replied.

"Eh, you get used to it. I did, and I've only been here for 15 hours!"

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Ethan spent the next couple of hours looking over the papers given to him in the dorm room with Barry, and meanwhile catching up with his long-lost friend. Barry had moved out of the suburbs the summer before their first year of high school, and Ethan hasn't been able to keep in touch with him since. He was glad he had a friend at the camp to go through the ponification with, and he was sure Barry felt the same way.

"Well, I think the seminar is coming up soon. Did you have anything to eat before you came over?" Barry asked Ethan as he unpacked his things.

"Not really, but I'll probably grab something from the vending machine outside or something. Let's just get this over with," Ethan said, attempting to hide his anxiety. He was unsuccessful.

Barry seemed to pay no attention to Ethan's jitteryness. "Sounds like a plan. Let's roll!"
And with that, they set out on the short walk to the seminar hall.

The room the seminar took place in reminded him of a town meeting. The room was empty, save for about thirty chairs, half of which filled, and a chair up front for the presenter. Lots of small talk can be heard, and not a pony in sight, as expected. Ethan and Barry walked in and sat down quietly close to the front of the crowd, both joking about how they got front row seats.

"So, what is this thing about, again?" Ethan asked curiously. He was still a little jittery about being new.

"It's just to greet the newbies, like us. Relax, this won't take long," Barry reassured Ethan with a pat on the back, and the presenter trotted out from a door that Ethan hadn't seen before. The crowd fell silent immediately.

The unicorn pony was very calm and studious looking, but still looked like she'd be nice if you talked to her. She had a noticeably purple coat, with a dark purple straight mane with unique pink streaks. The symbol on her flank was a magenta six-pointed star surrounded by a few other smaller stars. She put the pile of papers she had been holding up with her magic down on the chair up front and started once the crowd quieted down.

"Afternoon, everyone. I'm Twilight Sparkle, and I'll be talking to you all for the next 20 minutes," the unicorn said uniformly. Ethan could hear a few people faintly giggle at Twilight's name, but she simply ignored them.

"Now, I'm almost positive all of you are here because you want to become a pony. This is a fact. You don't come here because you don't want to be a pony, unless someone forced you at gunpoint, but that's a different story." Twilight continued, casual, but serious, "I may not fully understand your reasoning behind your choice to become a pony, considering I was born one myself, but I can understand what we have been facing in the past few years. Humans such as yourselves have brought your world to shambles, all because of the selfish greed of big business, and the horrible health habits of the majority of the population."

Twilight pointed at a map of the world, with a small island just outside the east coast of the United States circled in red marker, "Ponykind faces overpopulation, in ways that the tiny isle of Equestria simply can't keep together for long. That's why we moved into your towns and cities." A small pause, while someone coughed near the back. "I'm sure you all know about this already, but what you haven't heard is why we're doing this. Why you

are here today, sitting in this cramped room with sweaty, tired people just waiting for me to stop talking.

"Our plan is to ponify you, the sooner the better. Expect this to happen when you least expect it. You'll get used to our culture, our food, and our lack of thumbs. Trust me, it's easier than it looks. Because humans can't handle the magic radiating from Equestrian borders, becoming a pony is crucial to expanding the peaceful, friendly aura that surrounds Equestria every day of every month of every year. Thank you."

A small applause followed, and most people got up and started to leave for their dorms. Barry immediately got up and walked up to Twilight, who hadn't moved since she stopped talking.

"Twilight! How's the new job treating you?" Barry asked hardily.

"Great, Barry! Good to see you finally caved in and signed up for the cause. And who is this?" Twilight gestured toward Ethan, who had just walked up to join Barry.

Ethan jumped a little at the attention, "Uh, I'm Ethan..." he mumbled nervously. He wasn't really that good at talking to ponies that much, and that coupled with his normal social awkwardness is a horrible combination.

"Ethan here is an old friend of mine from middle school! He's dorming next to me for the week!" Barry said enthusiastically, putting his arm around Ethan's shoulder.

"Er, yeah. Ha ha..." Ethan added, just as awkward as earlier.

"You remind me of another friend of mine, Ethan. It's nice to meet you," Twilight replied, smiling genuinely at him. Ethan smiled back, only glad that he didn't come off as a total creep.

"Well, we'll be heading back to the dorms, now," Barry started.

"Actually, I wanted to talk to Twilight for a minute, if you don't mind," Ethan said, finally growing a pair and speaking up.

"Oh, sure," Barry said, a little surprised, "Don't let him get on your flank, Twi. See you guys later!" And with that, he rushed back to his dorm, leaving Ethan and Twilight the only people in the room.

"What did you want to talk about, Ethan?" Twilight asked.

"Well, I hope I'm not wasting your time or anything. I don't want to seem like just some bum off the streets."

"No, no! Not at all. A friend of Barry's is a friend of mine. Now, what's troubling you?" Twilight got up from her chair and started cleaning up a bit.

"Well..." Ethan started, realizing he had not rehearsed this beforehand, "I'm a little apprehensive about the ponification. I want to go through with it, but I'm a little... for lack of better word, suspicious, of the anonymity of the process itself. I hope you understand my feelings."

Twilight, a little taken aback by how surprisingly wordy he is, despite how shy he was at first impression, stopped what she was doing and looked at Ethan, "There's no need to be suspicious. It'll be like getting a shot, or taking medicine. Plus, you'll be unconscious during the actual transformation, so you won't feel any pain."

But after all of that, Ethan was still iffy. "I don't know... I still don't feel right about it."

Twilight looked at Ethan in the eyes for the first time and smiled reassuringly. "You'll be fine. Now go see Barry, I think he's been waiting for you."

Ethan looked back out the doorway to see Barry waving his hands wildly in the air looking at Ethan in impatience.

"Thanks, Twilight. See you tomorrow."

"Doodoodoodoo, doo doot, doo doot, doo-doodoodoodoo, doo doot, doo doot, doo-doodoodoodoo, doo doot, doo doot! GOOD MORNING CAMPERS!"

The incessant singing over the loudspeakers woke Ethan up with a start, and he began groggily putting his second set of clothes on. Once the short song ended, the obnoxious pony began reading the morning announcements.

"Um, um... okay. Alright. Okay." Ethan could hear the shuffling of papers. "The cafeteria menu for the day of Monday, April 16 is chicken... 'lo meen'? What's that? And for you ponyfolk, hay fries and the flower of the day sandwich. Also, can... James Thompson mosey on over to the ponification room? You're up, Jimmy! This has been Pinkie Pie with your daily announcements! Have a fun-erific day!" And with that, the loudspeaker crackled off.

The second the speaker turned off, an audible "Woo-hoo!" was heard from a few rooms down, then heavy, sprinting footsteps. The footsteps were soon followed by more noises of people in the dorm hallway thundering to their doors. Ethan joined them, to see a person they don't know for the last time as a human.

The scrawny, auburn-haired 20-something made his way out of his room, wearing nothing but a ratty tanktop and boxer shorts, and walked triumphantly down the hall, with applauding campers at each side of him. Each step his last on human feet, the smug look on Jimmy's face showed that he was most certainly ready to be ponified. The clapping and cheering didn't end until he was out of sight. When the noise finally died down to a hush, people began sitting down in their doorways. Ethan turned to his dorm neighbor Barry.

"How long do these take?" Ethan asked curiously.

Another person near them answered his question. "Give or take, around ten minutes. It's really short, I'm surprised. Technology is amazing..."

Leaving that guy alone to his thoughts, Ethan decided to join the sitting group as they started making small talk and discussing their own pony aspirations.

"I want to be a pegasus! Flying like that must be so cool," one boy said to the girl next to her. A few people near him nodded in agreement.

"Too extreme for me, I think I'll just stick with living the simple life of an earth pony," The girl replied. Others nodded.

Ethan had never really put much thought into what kind of pony he wanted to be. After seeing so many ponies around the building, he was surprised he hadn't decided what he'd look like. He assumed that your physical appearance all depends on genetics, but is the pony type chosen? Ethan was afraid to ask more questions, he didn't want to feel like a newbie with the other campers.

A four-legged's footsteps were heard by every camper simultaneously. They all looked down the hall intently, hoping to finally see the ponified Jimmy. The trotting sounded slow, and careful. A loud thud was heard once, then a pause... then the trotting resumed.

Jimmy turned the corner, fully ponied. A peach-colored earth pony, the most prominent thing he kept was his auburn hair and stubble around his muzzle. The other obvious trait he seemed to have kept was the smug expression on his face, albeit with a little nervousness over his new legs. Jimmy was trotting very slowly, almost to a crawl, attempting to get used to his new center of balance. The thud was heard again, except this time Ethan knew it was Jimmy falling on the floor, then getting himself up immediately and continuing to walk. The campers were going crazy, patting his back and head as he walked by (which seemed to create more troubles for his balance), and some just poked him. Ethan watched carefully as the new pony walked to his dorm's doorway, give a loud cheer of triumph, and trot inside. Everyone resumed their daily business, with some people crowding around Jimmy to ask questions.

Ethan's mind had been wondering for the last few minutes of Jimmy's first trot. He had been thinking about what will happen when he becomes a pony. Will he enjoy being a herbivore? What if he hates flying? Who will he meet when he goes to Equestria, if he does? Will he miss his feet and opposable thumbs? Ethan felt like he had taken up a much larger commitment than he had expected. But, he knew it must be done eventually, and got it off his mind come lunchtime.

"Hey, dude, you gonna eat your salad?" a passerby pony asked him at the lunchroom.

Ethan snapped back into reality. "Huh? Oh, no, you can have it."

"Thanks, brah. Not a big fan of dandelions, myself." The pony chuckled, and started to shovel the salad onto his tray with his snout.

"Hey," Ethan asked, with blinding curiosity, "how long have you been a pony? How does it feel?"

"I got ponified yesterday morning. It's a little awkward for the first hour or so, but it gets way easy afterwards. Moving things is still a problem, but I'm sure I'll get used to it. Take it easy, brah." And with that, the pony trotted away, with tray in tow on his back.

Barry retired from his bountiful lunch and turned towards Ethan. "You gotta calm down, man. You're getting all tense over nothing. I know! I'll take you over to the greenhouses! That oughta calm you down."

"There are greenhouses?" Ethan asked, only to realize immediately after saying that, that he had seen the greenhouses when he first walked in the other day.

"Of course, stupid! Didn't you see the big glass things outside?" Barry said jokingly. "Let's go!"

Barry energetically grabbed Ethan by the wrist and dragged him out of the lunchroom, just barely leaving Ethan time to throw the rest of his lunch away.

The greenhouse was massive. Despite being an isolated glass case filled with trees, the ceiling was nowhere in sight, or at least to Ethan's sight. The trees towered over the rest of the nearby structures, and many pegasi were seen flying overhead, with a look of sheer elation plastered on each of their faces. Anyone could tell from where they were standing that these ponies were having the time of their lives.

"Isn't this calming?" Barry asked, hoping to get a positive response from the dazed Ethan, who had been staring up at the pegasi the whole time.

"Yeah, yeah. Really peaceful," Ethan said, trying his best to pay attention to Barry over the sound of the forest's wildlife. It looked like an amalgamation of every woods that Ethan walked in. There was a muddy creek, a plethora of bugs and small rodents, low- and high-hanging branches, and a very humid, post-rainstorm atmosphere throughout.

Finally done with looking up at the winged ponies, Ethan lowered his head with a noticeable crack. "Hey, Barry..." he started, only to see that Barry was distracted talking to a unicorn friend of his near the river. Ethan decided to go on his own and sat down lazily on a nearby rock.

A bush rustled nearby. Not right next to Ethan, but within earshot where he was curious. He heard it again, followed with some light mumbling. From the rock, he rose to

investigate. The bushes nearby were bare, but he could still hear the mumbling. It was clearly a someone, as it sounded like the mumbling was in English.

The source of the mumbling came from a pegasus pony in a thicket just behind the rock. The pegasus had a long, wavy pink mane and a sunny yellow coat. Her blue-green eyes looked distressed and nervous.

"Oh, no. Mr. Squirrel, you shouldn't sneak into those thorn bushes like that. It's not safe." The pony said quietly, slowly removing a baby squirrel from a thorn bush.

"Excuse me?" Ethan greeted the pony, not as quietly, but just as shy.

The pony gasped, clearly frightened by Ethan's sudden appearance. After hyperventilating for a minute, she looked slowly over to where Ethan's voice came from.

"Um... hello..." the pony mumbled.

"Is something wrong?" Ethan asked the pony, worried he'll hurt her feelings.

"Oh, no. Just... um... nothing..." the pony replied, trailing off near the end of the sentence.

"Do you need help at all?" Ethan said, noticing the animals she had previously had in tow running off into the bushes.

"No, no. It's fine... but, you can help... I mean, if you want..."

"Uh, sure."

Ethan and his new friend spent the next hour or so gathering up the animals. It was a lot easier than Ethan had expected, and all of the animals seemed very harmless and friendly; very odd behavior for animals that Ethan had been raised to know carried rabies and weren't afraid to bite humans in self-defense. After the last chipmunk was found in a patch of tall grass, Ethan and the pony walked to the rock where they met and Ethan sat down.

"You know, in all of this excitement, I didn't catch your name," Ethan said quizzically.

"Oh, I'm Fluttershy... I'm sorry, did I get your name?"

"No, you didn't, don't worry. I'm Ethan. Nice meeting you, Fluttershy."

"Nice meeting you, too. I guess..." Fluttershy replied. Ethan couldn't shake off the fact that Fluttershy seemed to always be so quiet. Even with how friendly they've gotten, where she could finally speak full sentences to him without squeaking in fright, she seemed to be perpetually reclusive.

Suddenly, a blue pegasus pony flew overhead and stopped about ten feet above their heads.

"C'mon, Fluttershy!" she shouted impatiently, "Quit talkin' to your new friend and help me greet the new pegasi! We still need to teach 'em to fly, you know!"

"Oh! Um... coming, Rainbow Dash!" Fluttershy called out to the pegasus, then turned to Ethan and smiled at him, as if to say 'bye' without actually saying it, and gently flew away.

Barry arrived seconds later, but unbeknownst to Ethan, had been there the whole time.

"Dude, she totally has the hots for you," he said, making Ethan jump off his rock and onto the dirt road.

"Shut up!" Ethan joked as they left the greenhouse.

From the moment Ethan gained consciousness, there was noise. The sights were calming, from the sun beating down on his bed from the nearby window, to the warm spring wind blowing lazily into his open window. The sounds, however, were anything but peaceful. Raucous cheering and shouting were heard immediately outside his dorm room, the kind he had heard the day before when Jimmy was being ponified. After finally realizing what he was about to miss, Ethan shot out of his bed, bolted to the door, and yanked it open.

Whoever was being ponified had already walked down the hallway, so people began quieting down. Ethan sat on the hallway floor, curious as to who was being ponified, and if he knew them.

But suddenly, Ethan noticed something. The door adjacent to his was wide open, with its bed and doorway unoccupied, Ethan could have sworn the loud footsteps he heard were much louder than when it was Jimmy's turn, and he hadn't gotten a tap on the shoulder, or a silly remark yet today from a certain friend of his...

"Oh, no," Ethan said out loud to himself. No one heard him, but it was the only way he could vent his anger towards himself. He just missed seeing Barry as a human for the last time. While this may not be a big deal, considering at least he'd still see him, this was still a life-changing event for Barry, and Ethan felt horrible for missing the beginning of it. All he could do was sit and wait for his friend to return.

The inevitable cheering commenced again, after what seemed like centuries for Ethan, as pony Barry trotted down the hallway. His coat was an odd mixture of orange and yellow, making it seem like he might have had a scent like an air freshener. His brown hair had been almost directly transferred to his mane, even keeping his perpetual bedhead intact. The next thing Ethan noticed was that Barry was a unicorn, and thus would receive training from Twilight sometime today. Ethan pictured Barry attempting magic, and failing horribly, which made him laugh a bit.

"What's so funny? Never seen an attractive pony before?" Barry had just reached his dorm room door, and was sitting next to Ethan.

Ethan hadn't noticed Barry's presence, and jumped a bit at the sight of him, "No, and I still haven't." They both laughed, then Ethan asked for what seemed like the umpteenth time this week, "How does it feel?"

"I knew you were going to ask me this," Barry said. Ethan still had trouble putting Barry's voice into the pony's mouth, but it seemed to fit the look nicely, "It's... new, I'll give ya

that. Walking is easier than it looks, but still takes some getting used to. I feel like I'm a midget with four legs, with how short I am now."

"A midget with four legs, and a horn," Ethan corrected Barry. "Have you used it yet?"

Barry looked straight up at his forehead, where the orange appendage stared right back at him. "Not yet. I'd like to, though."

"Try opening that guy's door," Ethan suggested, pointing to a door across the room.

Barry concentrated. Much more than Ethan had ever seen him concentrate on anything, really. His horn began to glow a little, lighting up the area around him. The doorknob of the door Ethan suggested began turning slowly, as if it was struggling to open. Suddenly, the door thrust itself open, and slammed against the adjacent wall as it opened. Barry panted heavily, and numerous people clapped and cheered and patted him on the back in congratulations.

• • •

"Are you sure you want to commit to this?"

"Yes, I'm absolutely sure. I'm confident in his abilities."

Twilight Sparkle looked confidently into the princess's eyes. In all of her years following Celestia, she had never been this willing in her life. She stood her ground before her teacher, who was sitting sternly in her massive throne. While Twilight was almost like a daughter to her, this was a serious discussion, and they treated it as such. Celestia fidgeted in her chair as she thought the plan over.

"This is not normal for a ponification camp, you know. Normally they have to spend another week there to learn how to be a pony, even after the transformation. Why do you want to pull this unicorn out so soon?"

"I think he's much more in touch with his magic than most unicorns I've seen go through this camp. He can already move objects, and control the strength of the magic used, to an extent. I think I should take him... for lack of better saying, under my wing... because we could use him to our advantage."

Princess Celestia thought for a minute, then surrendered. "Alright. You can bring him. But... what about the other one? Surely you don't want him to come here as a human, do you?"

"Oh, no. I have plans for him. You'll see," Twilight responded.

"I hope you know, I don't like it when you hide things from me," Celestia replied sternly.

"Don't worry, Princess. My intentions are anything but bad. It's just I... haven't really planned what to do with him yet," Twilight said, embarrassed at her lack of organization.

"Well, be sure to get him here safely. We don't want any humans running around Equestria willy-nilly like this. Make sure he's a pony when the time comes for him to be."

"Of course."

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Ethan couldn't help but be a little sad. He knew this was a good thing for Barry, and to an extent, Earth, but he couldn't shake the fact he'll never see human Barry again. There were certain things in his mind that made human Barry unique that they can't replicate in a pony. Barry's choice in clothing, for instance. Last year, Barry was infamous for going to the prom in nothing but gym shorts and a Led Zeppelin T-shirt. His girlfriend was mortified, to say the least. However, Ethan had to embrace this new look for Barry, and he was glad that at least he kept his personality.

At dinner that afternoon, Barry sat next to Ethan at their usual table closest to the garbage can. Barry visibly had some difficulty sitting in his new quadrupedal form, but an earth pony next to him helped him to sit up straight. It looked awkward at first, but Barry seemed to get more comfortable as time went on.

"First pony meal. You ready?" Ethan teased Barry, who was staring nervously at the hay fries before him.

Barry gulped loudly, and silently lifted the bundle of hay with his magic. Moving it towards his mouth, Barry took a small nibble, just enough to get the taste out of it. Suddenly, Barry's eyes widened.

"...Why..." Barry said, shaking in his seat.

"Barry? You alright?"

"Why... do I like this so much?!" And Barry kept eating the hay, visibly enjoying it.

Ethan gagged a bit, and resumed eating his beef jerky.

The loudspeaker turned on with a start and caught the attention of the entire lunchroom. Humans and ponies stared up at the speaker near the doorway to wait for its message.

"Err, howdy there, ev'ryone," the speaker began in a noticeable southern drawl. "Now how does Pinkie do this again? Oh, right. Can Ethan Mc...McCullugg, please come to the pony-transformification room? I think it's yer turn, or somethin'. Thanks."

Barry elbowed Ethan as hard as he could with his front hoof. Ethan was frozen for at least thirty seconds before slowly getting up. Every single thing with eyes was using them to stare right at Ethan at that moment. It was as if Ethan were naked right now. It was his worst nightmare.

There was no cheering. Usually these announcements are made in the mornings, and for one to happen this late is very odd. Ethan walked quickly out of the room, so as to avoid anymore unnecessary attention. The lunchroom's conversations started up again as soon as he left.

Everyone (and everypony) was staring at Ethan as he walked down the empty hallways and into the atrium, where the small, unnoticeable door to the ponification room was visible next to the receptionist's desk. The door was labeled "AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY". Ethan could only assume he was 'authorized' enough to go in, so he did.

On the immediate other side of the door was a bright pink earth pony with an equally pink curly mane. She seemed to have a perpetual smile on her face.

"SHHH! This way!" she whispered. Ethan could recognize the voice from somewhere, but he couldn't put his finger on it. As they walked down the dark, claustrophobic hallway, Ethan got more and more curious as to what was going to happen. He had already come to terms with the fact that these will be his last moments as a human, but he still needed some reassurance that he'll be safe, and it won't be a risky procedure.

"Um..." he began, almost sounding like Fluttershy.

"I said 'SHH!' We have to be quiiiieet!" the pink pony replied immediately, startling Ethan.

"Can you at least tell me where we're going?" Ethan persisted.

"To the pony room, silly! Where else would we be going?"

Ethan soon realized she was right. The pony pushed open the knobless door to reveal what looked eerily like a doctor's office. There was a small, cushioned bench with sterile paper on it, and a desk opposite the bench with numerous doctor's accoutrements laid out in a very neat fashion. A pony-sized, clean doctor's robe was draped on the hanger on the door. The silence in the room was ominous.

"Wait here," the pony said, sounding like she was in some sort of infiltration mission. Ethan obeyed, and sat quietly on the bench. Thankfully, it wasn't long before the doctor came from the door next to the desk. The doctor was a unicorn mare with flowing violet-blue hair and a light-gray coat. She looked very well-groomed and clean.

"Right. Let's get this over with. I have a salon appointment at 7 that I simply cannot miss." Before Ethan could speak, the pony continued, "I'm Rarity, and I will be your ponificator today. Are you feeling any stress at this moment?"

Ethan, taking the cue, started talking, "Err, no. I'm a little nervous, but..."

"Oh, darling, that's normal. There's nothing to worry about. This will be quick and painless, and it'll be over before you can say 'fabulous!'" Rarity laughed at her own joke, then began to use her magic to summon some doctors tools to her side. She began looking into Ethan's eyes, ears, mouth, and (oddly enough) his nose with a light, and started making awkward small talk.

"So, you are being ponificated awfully late. Any idea why, Ethan?"

"Uh, well, no. I was just called down here during dinner. I thought these things usually happen in the mornings."

"They do. I'm not even sure myself why you are here. But, alas, here you are." Rarity put the tools down and retrieved a paper cup filled with a purple, viscous liquid, and a syringe. Ethan cringed at the sight of the needle, as he was deathly afraid of them.

Rarity got uncomfortably close to Ethan. "All right, now lay down on the bench, and drink this," she said, handing him the cup gently.

"What is it?"

"It's a sedative to help you sleep. Think of it as anesthesia in a cup. It will make this whole process so much easier for both of us, trust me."

Ethan nervously took a gulp of the liquid. It tasted like grape jelly, and was about as goopy, but he soon emptied the cup. He could already feel the sedative kicking in as he set the cup down on the table nearby and laid his head on the bench. Rarity walked up to him and lightly prodded the needle into his upper arm. Ethan didn't feel a thing, and a few seconds later, he was unconscious.

Grass. He was laying in grass. He could feel the cold, damp dirt on his back, and his face was being tickled by the soft breeze. Ethan opened his eyes to nothing, realizing it was the dead of night, and he was still human. What had happened, he had no idea what. All he knew was that he wasn't a pony, and he was nowhere near the camp. He rose to investigate.

There was a highway nearby, with cars zipping past. The once-soft breeze now felt a lot stronger when Ethan stood on his two feet, and he almost fell a few times while trying to walk. The sedative Rarity had given him was probably still affecting his movement, he suspected, and walked deeper into the grass.

As he plunged deeper into the grass, Ethan could hear voices echoing. He wasn't totally sure whose voices they were, but they sounded familiar. They were calling his name, but not in the cliché mysterious, spooky, ghost-sounding way; in an urgent, rushed, and even scared way. Ethan felt like he needed to come after these voices, as they grew louder as he ran deeper into the now waist-high grass.

"ETHAN! WAKE UP!"

Ethan felt a hard slap to his face as he woke up from the dream. His eyes shot open and he looked around. He was in a huge library, with books lining every wall, and the ceilings reaching higher than any library he had ever seen. A familiar purple pony was looking at him, annoyed, but worried.

"Oh, thank Celestia, you're awake!" Twilight said, relieved that Ethan was alive. The unicorn trotted to her desk across the expansive main room.

"Wha...? Where am I, Twilight?" Ethan mumbled. His voice sounded slurred, as if he had been on novocaine from the dentist's office.

"You're in my library. I've brought you to Equestria."

After hearing that, Ethan drew his own conclusions as to what had happened to him. He struggled to raise his head, and look at the body that he now had.

He had a light navy blue coat, with a blonde tail to match his mane. Again, his mane was almost identical to his hair as a human, and had kept its light blonde hue. The next thing he noticed was his wings, which opened at Ethan's will as he stared at them, mesmerized.

Twilight walked back to the bed Ethan was laying on, and started poking him in different random places.

"Well, the ponification seemed to have worked like a charm," Twilight said astutely.

"Why am I here? Shouldn't I be back at the camp, or something?"

"I'll explain in a minute, I need to wait for the others to get here," she responded. Twilight sounded a little rushed at this point, as if she really didn't want to talk right now.

Ethan could faintly hear snoring in another room, but he paid no attention to it, assuming it was another roomie of Twilight's. He got up slowly, landing on his stomach in the process. He put one hoof on the ground, then another. Soon he was standing, albeit very rigidly, afraid to move. The standing was very easy to get used to, and Ethan compared it to learning to skate or ride a bike in his head. Walking was a different story. Having four legs to worry about now was the biggest difficulty, and he sometimes forgot to move one of the legs the first few steps he took. However, learning to walk was a breeze after a few minutes of pacing around the library.

Twilight looked back at Ethan and noticed he was finally walking. She nodded with approval. "Don't try flying yet. I don't want you knocking over any books. Spike just cleaned up," she warned him, before returning to the big book laid out on her desk.

Ethan, kind of distraught that he can't fly yet, resumed walking around the library. Suddenly, Ethan and Twilight heard a light tapping on the door, much too quiet to be a knock. If it had not been deathly silent in the room, they would not have heard it. Twilight trotted over to the door and opened it softly. Fluttershy came in nervously, then noticed that Twilight and Ethan were the only ones around, and was a little relieved.

"Oh, um... hello, Twilight. Who is this pony?"

"That's Ethan, remember?" Twilight said, hinting at something Ethan couldn't make heads or tails about.

"Oh, I see it now! I'm sorry, the last time I saw him, he was human... Ethan, how is it being a pony?"

"It's... odd. I'm getting used to it, though."

"Good! That's wonderful." Fluttershy seemed much more comfortable knowing the pony was Ethan.

"Do you know when the others are coming over?"

"I think they're all coming in a group. Rainbow Dash is probably going to come here first, because she's so fast," Fluttershy said matter-of-factly.

After a short pause, Fluttershy looked off into the distance, then focused on Ethan's wings. "Oh! You're a pegasus?"

"Yeah, I guess I am," Ethan said, almost boastfully.

"That's great! We should fly sometime... oh, I mean... if you're free... um..." Then Fluttershy let out a little squeek.

The door knocked again, breaking the increasingly awkward silence between the two ponies. The door opened, then four other ponies trotted in one by one. Ethan recognized three of them from the camp, but the fourth was a complete mystery, and the look on his face made it obvious. The fourth pony, an orange earth pony with a straight blonde mane and a cowboy hat, walked up to Ethan, firmly gripped his hoof and shook it.

"No need to be confused, mister. I'm Applejack. You must be Ethan. Pleasure to make your acquaintance," the pony said, and Ethan finally realized who she was.

"Oh! You're the one who called me down during dinner on the speaker!" Ethan said.

"Yessir. Pinkie Pie normally does that stuff, but she was helping Rarity prep the pony-transformin' doohicky, so I had to do it. Glad to finally meet you."

The rainbow-maned pegasus flew up to Ethan, seeming to prefer flying than walking, and stared at Ethan's wings.

"Awesome! You're a pegasus, too! I should totally teach you how to fly, I could show you all of my awesome flying tricks!"

Twilight got up from her desk and turned on the lights in the library. "Now, now, Rainbow Dash. Let's not rush our new friend. Everyone take a seat while I wake Spike up."

As the six ponies quietly found the closest chairs and took a seat near Twilight's desk, they could hear a rather annoyed Twilight waking up what Ethan assumed was Spike from upstairs.

"Spike... Spike... SPIKE!" Twilight said loudly, and a thud was heard.

"Hunh? I'm up, I'm up... jeez..." a second voice replied groggily.

"Ethan's here, we're going to do the thing."

"The thing?" Spike asked, dumbfounded.

Twilight let out a heavy sigh. "The mission briefing."

"Oh! That thing! Why didn't you just say so? I'll be right down."

Twilight came down the ladder, and a purple and green baby dragon followed, holding a pillow in one arm, and his nightcap in another. Spike took a seat next to Ethan, and Twilight returned to her desk, shuffling a few papers before beginning.

"Alright, I'm sure you all know why we're here."

A silence followed this statement, only to be broken by Pinkie Pie.

"Oh! Oh! I love guessing games! Uhhh... are we here to have a tea party? No! Are we here to... eat cupcakes and tell spooky stories? Waitwaitwait! Are we here to -"

Applejack muffled Pinkie's speech by putting her hoof in Pinkie's mouth until she shut up.

"Go on, Twilight," Applejack said, before removing the hoof.

"Thank you. Well, that was the answer I was expecting, anyway. I haven't informed anyone about what we're doing today except Spike." Twilight then retrieved a map of the world from her desk, and presented it to the ponies, much like she did at the seminar when Ethan first met her. "Now, we all know that the humans are trying to get their people turned into ponies, so they can move in with us here in Equestria." She pointed to the small island adjacent to the east coast of the United States. "Does anyone know why?"

"Sure I do!" Rainbow Dash blurted out, "It's because they didn't know how to control their greedy, fat butts from getting too greedy and fat for their own good, and now

they're gonna dump all of the people over here!" Rainbow then looked at Ethan, who was a little shocked. "Er, present company excluded, of course."

"It's fine, Rainbow Dash. I know us humans have trouble controlling their stubborn pride. All they want is more of everything. More money, more food, more industry and pollution. There's no reason behind it but blind greed and hatred."

"Exactly, Ethan. Very well put." Twilight added, "And that's why they want this happening. Now, there's nothing wrong with turning into a pony. You lose that 'human nature' that keeps you greedy and selfish, and you become more carefree and friendly. Ethan and Barry would understand this more than anypony here, since they were humans only yesterday."

"So, what is our problem with them? Can't we just simply let them come here? I see nothing wrong with that," Rarity said, genuinely curious.

"Well, no one is volunteering to be ponified. People are too afraid to abandon their fleshy ape-bodies to live the pony life. They feel like the process in itself is way too risky to give a shot, even though tests have been made over the past ten years to confirm to the public that the process is completely harmless."

"So, how is this bad for us?" Rainbow queried. "Let them stay in that manure-hole they live in, and we'll just hang out with all of the cool new ponies comin' in!"

"That's the problem. They don't want to stay in their, quote, 'manure hole'. They want to live in Equestria, without going through the effort of becoming a pony, and abandoning their pride."

Pinkie Pie piped up, "But what's so bad about that? Human bodies are icky and big and ugly and...and mean! Humans are mean!"

"Well, they are," Ethan said, "but you have to put things in the humans' perspective. Lush, green fields perfect for farming? Nice neighbors? Weather always under control? Think of the money they could rake in from selling houses in Equestria!" The other ponies looked at Ethan with a look of disdain. "Oh! I think I got a little too into that, I'm sorry. That's not what I think, it's what they think!"

"He is right. And that's exactly what the humans plan on doing. They want to move into Equestria, human form and all, and ruin the sanctity and peace-of-mind that this land has come to embrace over the last century!" Twilight was clearly getting riled up about this conversation.

"Woah, woah there, sugarcube," Applejack said, attempting to calm Twilight down. "Isn't there some kinda magic force field thingy protecting Equestria from the humans?"

Twilight took a few breaths, regaining her composure, "Yes, Applejack. But the technology the humans have made over the last few decades may be able to counteract the magic surrounding the land. Think about it, if they can turn humans into ponies, they can get humans here no problem."

Ethan could hear the collective gulp the other ponies made, including him. Finally, he mustered up the strength to break the silence in the room.

"So, why am I here?"

"I'm glad you asked, Ethan. You're here because you know the ways of the humans. You know how they think. You can get into their heads in ways that us ponies just wouldn't be able to."

"What about Barry? Should he be here?"

"He already heard all of this. In fact, he helped me bring you here. At the moment, he's in Whitetail Wood practicing his magic abilities. I brought him not only because he's very competent in magic for a pony, let alone a former human, but because I felt like you needed a friend to accompany you. Another human."

Ethan couldn't help but feel emotionally charged from that reasoning. But he was still confused as to what his job was.

"Do you have a plan in mind? How will we go about stopping the humans if we don't know when they will come after us?"

"Well, I haven't come up with an exact plan yet, but I think what we should worry about now is you getting your pony legs. Spend tomorrow learning the ropes of being a pony, and a pegasus at that. Rainbow Dash, I'll leave Ethan with you to teach him how to fly..."

"Can I help, too?"

Everypony in the room turned to look at Fluttershy in disbelief.

"Um, I mean, if it's o-okay with Ethan, that is... um..."

"It's fine, Fluttershy. You can help Rainbow teach me how to fly," Ethan said reassuringly.

"Oh, okay," Fluttershy said, with more confidence.

After a short silence, Ethan got up from his chair dramatically.

"Let's do this."

Pinkie Pie got up in a similar fashion. "Oh, boy! Here we go!"

Ethan and Rainbow Dash trotted out to the open field the next day to begin Ethan's pegasus training. Ethan, still getting used to walking, let alone using his wings at all, was still apprehensive.

"Oh, jeez," Ethan said out loud. He looked at his wings, twitching at the thought of flying, then looking up at the clear sky above them. He could feel the pit in his stomach growing more and more upset with him, the more he thought about flying.

"So, you ready for your first lesson on flying?" Rainbow said, seeing the fear in Ethan's eyes.

"Uh, y-yeah. S-sure." Talking about it didn't seem to help the situation at all, much to Ethan's dismay. Fluttershy not being there for moral support didn't help either, since she had to run off and care for her baby animals.

"Okay, to start things off, open your wings. You kinda need them open in order to fly, you see," Rainbow said, pretending to be her least favorite flight school instructor in the process.

Ethan stared at his wings as they instinctively opened, showing their full feathered glory. He looked at Rainbow with a toothy smile, now a little more confident he won't crash.

"Good. Now, this next part is hard to explain." Rainbow thought for a second. "Just start running as fast as you can, flap those wings of yours, and jump. Honestly, that's as simple as I can put it."

Seeing Ethan's fearful look returning, Rainbow decided to tease the new pegasus. "Hey, you ain't nervous, are ya?"

"N-no! Not at all! It'll be like r-riding a b-bike!" Ethan stammered back, pulling off the most fake-sounding laugh Rainbow had ever heard.

Rainbow Dash put her hooves on the sides of her head, massaging her temples. "This is going to be a long day..."

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If Twilight read another word from one of her books, she was pretty sure she would explode. Spending all of last night reading up on humans seemed to have put her mind up in a bunch, and her bed seemed to beckon to her like a muffin to Derpy.

Twilight closed *The Egghead's Guide to Primates* and piled it up with the other books to her right. Seeing the desk this empty was a rare sight, so she decided to seize the opportunity by putting her head down on it in frustration, drawing an audible groan as she did so.

Spike walked in, very much awake, having returned from his morning stroll to Rarity's boutique.

"Is something wrong, Twilight?" Spike asked, more curious than concerned.

"Ugh. I can't read any more," Twilight replied from the desk bluntly.

Spike gasped. "What?! This is inconceivable! Sound the alarm! Call a hospital!" he shouted, before falling into a heap of laughter. Twilight got up from her seat and magiked Spike up to a standing position again and waited for him to finish.

"Yeah, yeah, I know. But listen, Spike. This reading is integral to the safety of the pony race. I need to put as much effort as I can to helping Equestria."

"I still don't see the problem here. Humans don't seem that bad to me. Those two guys seem nice."

"They are, Spike. But the people we're up against aren't."

"And who are they?"

"I... I'm not sure. I know that it isn't just all humans. It doesn't seem right."

"But, that's what it seemed like you were saying to everyone last night. You were pretty excited about it, too."

"That was just to get people riled up. I was tired, I didn't know what I was saying."

Spike could see Twilight was looking for excuses. "Are you sure?"

Twilight surrendered, and gave a heavy sigh. "I don't know, Spike. That job at the camp really got me thinking. With the amount of people willing to just out and abandon their former lives like that, you can't help but feel bad for them, you know?"

"I... think I know what you're saying."

"I mean... humans aren't all bad. Some just need to be pointed in the right direction, is all. Whatever that direction is, I'm not sure. But I think I need some time to think about this on my own."

A loud, heavy object slammed into the frame of the library. The crash shook the door open, revealing a disoriented Ethan laying near the doorstep. He wobbled to get up.

"Did I do it?" Ethan shouted, clearly very dizzy.

"Almost! Just work on the steering!" Rainbow Dash shouted back, holding back laughter.

"Got it!" he replied, and flew off.

Spike walked over to the door to shut it, but was interrupted by a distressed Rarity who galloped up to the doorway faster than either of them have seen the unicorn gallop in their lives. She looked frazzled and annoyed, but at the same time very worried.

"I've lost Barry!" she shrieked, before collapsing onto the library floor.

"What?!" Twilight said in disbelief. "What happened?"

Ethan, hearing the distressed Rarity from outside, galloped inside to listen in.

Rarity regained her composure. "Well, we were practicing magic near my boutique, and I had mentioned how simply horrifying the Everfree Forest can be. I told him not to go there, because it was filled with horrid, disgusting creatures, and it's far too dangerous for a beginner unicorn such as himself. And then... and then..."

"Then what?" Twilight said, desperate for an answer.

"Then he ran into the forest!" Rarity said, having difficulty comprehending the situation at hand. "He said something about 'fighting all of the cool monsters in there', and just... stormed off! He was rather rude about it, too!"

Ethan chimed in. "'Cool monsters'? That definitely sounds like something Barry would enjoy. He loves putting his life at risk like that." He then turned to Twilight. "What's so dangerous about this forest?"

"Everything. The creatures in there are unimaginably violent and dangerous, and the forest itself is so dark and big, it's incredibly easy to get lost in."

Before anyone could say anything else, the group set off into the Everfree Forest. They didn't want to waste any time, because another minute wasted could be another mile deep Barry could be in the forest.

The forest, compared to the other sights and sounds of Equestria he had seen, was very different. The plant life was overgrown and unkempt, and seemed to want to block off the easiest ways out of the forest. There also was a perpetual fog around the area, and no matter how bright and sunny it was outside the forest, it was dark and spooky inside.

Twilight, Rarity, and Spike were on foot, trudging through the thorny bushes and tall grass, while Rainbow Dash and Ethan stayed in the air. Ethan was just barely keeping up, but he seemed to be getting the hang of flying.

Ethan, for one, was elated. While hovering carefully above the ground, flapping his wings slowly like Rainbow showed him, he pictured the potential things he could be doing with these wings. He can soar through the clouds, and travel anywhere faster than most anything else. Ethan loved this feeling of freedom flowing through him, but he was still iffy about the lack of thumbs. *Just something else to get used to*, he thought.

"GUYS! CHECK THIS OUT!"

The group immediately heard the enthusiastic shouting of a certain unicorn coming a short distance ahead of them, and they ran towards the noise.

Barry was standing near a tall, endlessly steep cliff, and using his magic to fire sparks into the air.

"Look at what I can do! Now when those weirdo animals come after me, I can zap them with this magic stuff! Isn't this awesome?"

"Barry, what are you doing?! Let's get out of here before you get yourself killed!" Twilight said, sounding like an overprotective mother.

"But isn't this cool?" Barry said, totally oblivious. Every sentence he said sounded like famous last words to Ethan, and the thought of Barry falling to his death made him cringe.

Soon, his visions came to a reality. Barry fired a particularly large bolt of magic onto a nearby tree, causing two massive branches to fall from it. The bigger of the two hit Rainbow Dash, pinning her to the ground. The other hit Barry, whacking him off the cliff.

Ethan's mind was racing. He just learned to fly an hour ago. Does he have the kind of skill needed to save his friend from dying? Can he still save him in time? What if he doesn't save him? What will happen then? Ethan looked to his new friends quickly, but they were watching Barry falling down the seemingly bottomless ravine, and didn't notice Rainbow Dash at all. Everything seemed to be happening in slow motion. Barry falling, Rainbow Dash struggling to get out from under the branch pinning her down, and Ethan just standing there, watching his friend fall to his doom, all because he wasn't there for him in the first place...

What happened next was a blur. He felt like he wasn't in control of his body anymore, and the only thing that kept him going was his gut. Ethan hopped off the edge of the cliff and spread his wings. Soaring like a professional would, Ethan put his hooves at his sides, like a bullet, and shot down to Barry. At the speed he was going, he was sure he couldn't have possibly been able to grab his friend in time, but somehow he did, catching him just before he hit the ground below. As he carefully flew back up, friend in tow, he realized that they both had been screaming the entire time. Ethan was just as afraid for his friend's life as Barry himself was. The ponies cheered as the hyperventilating pegasus carried his friend to safety in the grass.

"I... I d-did it!" Ethan finally said, taking short, staggered breaths. He set Barry onto the ground.

Barry slowly opened his eyes and looked up at his savior.

"You alright, buddy?" Ethan said nonchalantly.

"...I can be such an idiot sometimes," Barry joked.

Twilight and Rarity worked together to magic the branch off of Rainbow Dash, who looked particularly relieved to finally be able to move. She then looked at Ethan with the biggest smile he'd seen her give him all day.

"You know, I thought you were pathetic when you were learning to fly this morning."

"I thought so. I'm still pathetic, I just got lucky," Ethan said humbly.

"No! Don't say that! Listen, you have the potential to be a great flier, you just need some practice."

"I'm sure. Thanks for teaching me, Rainbow."

Twilight trotted up to the two pegasi with a smile. "Alright, everypony. We need to get back soon. It's getting late, and I don't want to get attacked by the Everfree Forest's nighttime creatures."

As Twilight and the gang trotted back, Ethan couldn't help but realize how much more peaceful it was in Equestria. Living 17 years in the hustle and bustle of a suburban ghetto he called home, he wasn't used to the hushed silence that fell upon Ponyville when night time started setting in. The environment around them was much cleaner, and it felt like one of the few places Ethan had known of that he wasn't afraid to drink the tap water. In town, the ponies were talking calmly about the events of the day, making idle chit-chat with their friends, and there wasn't a frown in sight. While some may see it as inhuman, Ethan saw it as perfect.

Barry could see Ethan drifting off into space, as he always did. "Earth to Ethan! Do you read?" he said, putting his hooves up to his mouth to put a walkie-talkie effect on his voice.

Ethan didn't reply. He was too busy staring at the moon.

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Princess Luna sat at her balcony, concentrating on raising the moon with her magic. As the moon casually listed its way into the sky to begin the night, Princess Celestia watched as her younger sister performed her duties as she had done many nights before.

"Another job well done, Luna."

"Thanks, sister. I'm glad you like it," Luna said, proud of her work.

"I love your nights. No matter how many times I had raised the moon, I could never have done it quite like you did."

"I think the same way with your days. Whenever I see you raise the sun in the mornings, I could never imagine me doing your job the way you do it. Your days are perfect."

Celestia smiled. Suddenly, breaking the silence between them, the door to the balcony opened with a start to a castle guard.

"Princess Celestia, there is a visitor from the United States. She says that talking to you now is urgent."

"The United States? How did they get into Equestria?" Celestia said, remembering the magical border separating the humans from the ponies.

"She didn't. She wishes to communicate through magic," the guard replied.

The princess paused, only to think about what to say. "Very well. I will talk to her. Thank you." And sent the guard away.

Luna looked up at Celestia with a nervous look on her face. "You are going to talk to the humans?"

"I have to. I think I know what she wants now."

Using the magic emanating from her magnificent horn, Celestia formed a glowing blue ball in the center of the balcony, glowing with a magical aura. After a few seconds, an image appeared on the other side, acting much like a television being turned on. The figure on the other end of the line was an imposing female human. Her features were hard to make out, and it was as if the lights were turned down on purpose for the sake of her identity being revealed.

"I thought I told you not to call from this number anymore," Celestia greeted the figure, half-joking.

"Yeah, well, I just couldn't resist," the figure replied, in a strikingly un-feminine voice. It sounded very dry, cold, and strict, but also very sinister.

"What do you want?" Celestia said immediately.

"Listen, Princess. This ponification stuff isn't going to last forever. I know you Equestrians started that whole campaign, but not everyone wants to be a pony."

"Okay," Celestia said, taken a little aback by the simplicity of the solution. "I never said they had to be a pony. Let them stay where they are."

"I think you misunderstand, Princess. We still want in. We just don't want to be ponies. I mean, four legs? No fingers? Who wants that?"

Celestia could tell that the figure had better reasons than that. "You've already done enough damage to the Equestrians, why must you be so persistent?"

"Because, the human world is dying. We can't go on the way we are now. And the only way we can is to move into your place for a while."

"What makes you think we'll greet you so easily like that? Your mixed messages a couple years ago made me believe that all humans are evil, and now most of Equestria believes that for a fact." Celestia lowered her guard, remembering her stupidity. "I know better now, and that's why I opened the ponification camps. So that the supporters of ponykind can finally be with their brethren in Equestria."

"Ah, but your ponies still think we're bad. That is quite a conundrum. That would mean they wouldn't like us invading your territory unannounced like this."

A silence fell between the two. Celestia thought about what the figure had just said. *Would she invade? How would she do it? Can we fight back?*

The figure reached for something off-camera. "We'll discuss this later." And the transmission ended with static, the blue aura faded away. Celestia gave a heavy sigh and turned to the silent Luna, still stunned from what she saw.

"...Now what, sister?" Luna said nervously.

"I don't know, Luna."

While Celestia looked like she just wanted to end the conversation there, Luna still had more questions. "Why is she so hurtful to us? Why does she have to be this way?"

Celestia turned away from her glassy-eyed sister, looking for the right words to say. Turning towards the door, she left the room solemnly, leaving Luna to tend to the moon. Celestia had a lot to think about.

The rain fell hard the next day. Pegasi ponies had scheduled the storm, and the citizens of Ponyville were more than ready for the torrent. Twilight sat at her desk, as she always did, skimming through a book about human nature. Spike noticed this, and walked up to her.

"More about the humans? Are you ever not reading about them?" Spike said, starting to get annoyed at his friend's constant research.

"Oh, Spike, calm down. What's so bad about it? I'm just... curious is all."

The dragon looked at the pile of books next to Twilight's desk, then gave her a bewildered look. "There can't be that many books about one species. At least, not any species I've seen."

"Exactly, Spike. You should have come with me to the camp, you would have learned a lot. Human history is very interesting, indeed."

Spike leaned over to look at the book that Twilight was looking at, *The Second World War - A Guide*. He noticed a grainy, black-and-white picture of a rather greasy, mean-looking human holding his arm straight out, as if he was giving some form of salute.

"One thing I have noticed," Twilight continued, "was that humans seemed to have much more battles and conflicts in their time than the Equestrians have had."

"Well, it just shows how mean they can be," Spike pointed out.

"Yes, but also... how mean they don't need to be," Twilight added, drifting into her thoughts halfway through saying it.

Ethan was sitting on his guest bed, staring out at the rainy day through his second floor window. The rain reminded him of home, and of how he likes taking walks on rainy days. Today, however, it would be a trot, and that's what kept him inside.

Despite his heroic efforts the other day, and his successful flying lessons, he couldn't shake off the fact that he wasn't a human anymore. He loved his new friends, and he was glad Barry was along for the ride, but he missed his human friends. His classmates. His family. He wondered where they were, and if they had even been ponified yet. All of these thoughts were rushing in his head at once, and taking the cue, he decided to take a

nap. Slumping over on his bed with a muffled thud, and resting his head on the soft pillow, Ethan fell asleep instantly.

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"BUURRRP!"

Ethan shot up from his bed, now hovering above it with his wings, and looked around to see where the loud belch had come from.

Barry, apparently having arrived during Ethan's slumber, was laughing his flank off. "Good out, Spike!" he shouted, congratulating the dragon, who was now holding a scroll in his previously empty hands.

"Twilight! It's a letter from Princess Celestia!" Spike said excitedly as the unicorn rose from her desk to where Spike had been standing. Ethan flew down to join them, touching down next to Barry.

Spike cleared his throat, and read from the scroll.

My faithful student Twilight,

It would seem that Equestria is on the brink of an attack from the humans. I plan to come to your library in Ponyville to we can discuss this further, because I'm sure you and your friends must have many questions about the task at hand. No need to reply, I will be there before you know it.

~Princess Celestia

Immediately after finishing the letter, Twilight got into her authoritative mode. She stood up straighter, and she seemed much more serious.

"Barry, I need you to get everypony else and come back here in 20 minutes. Ethan, stay here, and help Spike and I clean up. This may be a last-minute, informal visit, but that doesn't mean we can greet the Princess in a dirty library."

Barry stormed out the door, quick as a flash. *He may be reckless, Ethan thought, but he's reliable given the circumstances, I guess.* Ethan soon began picking up the heavy books, and flying them into appropriate shelves. The bookshelves seemed to have been labeled pretty obviously, so organizing them was easier than it had looked for him.

"Twilight?" Ethan asked from across the room.

"Yeah, Ethan? Is something wrong?" Twilight could hear the nervousness in his voice.

"No, no. I was just wondering something..." Ethan searched for the proper words to say, without trying to sound offending. "From the sound of things, you're the Princess's prized pupil, right?"

"Well, I wouldn't say that..." Twilight blushed, "but she counts on me to help her research the magic of friendship."

"Right, right. What I'm trying to say is..." Ethan now noticed that Twilight is paying full attention to him. "Is the Princess nice?"

Twilight laughed a little. "Oh, yeah. Of course she is. You don't need to worry at all about that. She'll greet you with open hooves."

"Okay, good. Sorry if that sounded stupid," Ethan said, picking up *The Human Anthology* and putting it in its place.

"No, you're entitled to ask that. You haven't met the Princess yet. You've only been in Equestria a couple days."

Ethan was a little surprised, to say the least. It had seemed like weeks since he was called down to the ponification room, and given that purple fluid that afternoon. It was amazing how much he had learned, and how much he had done in the past few days. He had probably done more as a pony in a few days than he had done in a few weeks as a human. Somehow, Ethan felt achieved because of that.

As soon as Twilight had put *Broadway Musicals of the 1940s* in its place under 'Human Culture', the door knocked.

Twilight looked at Ethan curiously, and Ethan returned the look. Twilight said, "Barry... wouldn't knock, would he?"

"No. I wonder who it is?" Ethan paced himself and trotted to the door. The only other noise besides his hoofsteps was the rain rapping against the windows, and that only made the suspense worse for him.

On the other end of the doorway was a rain-soaked white mare. Her mane was cotton-candy pink, much like Pinkie Pie's, but this mare's coat was a very pale white, much like a ghost's.

"C-can I come in?" the mare said, in the most innocent, adorable voice Ethan had ever heard. Twilight shoved Ethan out of the way, staring at the mare with a bewildered look on her face.

"Sure! Of course you can! Come in, have a seat!" Twilight said happily, but almost fake-sounding.

The mare trotted in slowly. "Th-thank you, miss..." And she sat down quietly at the table in the corner. Ethan was still confused as ever, but soon paid no attention, because the door burst open again seconds later.

"WE'RE BACK!" Barry shouted over the pouring rain, startling everypony already present, especially the new mare. The excitable unicorn trotted in confidently, with Pinkie Pie, Rarity, and Applejack following, all soaked from the rain. Rarity was in a fashionable purple raincoat, and she seemed pleased that she didn't get as wet as the other ponies. Fluttershy and Rainbow Dash flew in through the upstairs window.

The moment that the ponies gathered in the main room of the library, they all began bowing in the general direction of Ethan. Ethan looked behind him, and noticed that the mare from earlier had disappeared, and had been replaced by a magnificently large pony with a multi-colored wavy mane. Her coat was the same color, but her head was adorned with a massive unicorn horn, and two intimidating pegasus wings were on her side. Noticing the crown, Ethan assumed that this was Princess Celestia, and awkwardly bowed with the others.

"Hello, everypony."

Twilight approached the Princess, who was nearly twice her height, and spoke. "Princess Celestia, this is Ethan and Barry," she said as she gestured to the two timid ponies looking at her wide-eyed. "They're the humans I wanted to help us."

"Well, it's very nice to finally meet you two. Welcome to Equestria," Celestia said, greeting Ethan and Barry in a very motherly, amicable way.

Now a little less nervous, Barry stammered for a greeting. "H-hi, your Majesty."

"Please, just call me Princess, or Celestia. A friend of Twilight Sparkle's is a friend of mine."

Twilight giggled at Barry, then turned back to Celestia. "They've already met my friends, and we've agreed to go on with our plan."

"And that is...?" Applejack chimed in.

"That's why the Princess is here. We need to discuss what to do."

"Well, hang on, Twilight. There is something I need to mention before we go any further," Celestia said, a little less imposing and authoritative than expected.

"What's that, Princess?" Twilight asked.

"Listen. We can't just go on living thinking all humans are bad."

"Why not? I don't see the problem with that at all!" Rainbow arrogantly put in, only to be elbowed in the side by Applejack.

"I understand your sentiments, Rainbow Dash, but it simply isn't true. Humans are normally very kind people, and these two here are the prime examples of it."

Everypony looked over at Ethan and Barry, who were blushing at all of the positive attention.

"I supported the construction of the Conversion Bureaus, or 'ponification camps', as they are sometimes called, because I wanted humans to see the world through our eyes, and to help them get out of their dying world. It's clear that the human society simply cannot go on the way it is now, and that's why we encourage the integration."

"So, who has a problem with it?" Rainbow asked, a little more concerned after hearing the other side of the story.

"That's who we're up against. They call themselves the Human Liberation Front, and believe solely in the survival of the human race. They formed when we started the ponification campaign, as a way to prevent the humans from moving to Equestria."

Twilight suddenly turned to Ethan. "Ethan, did you know anything about this? Surely the humans had been talking about it before you left."

Ethan remembered reading about this in the paper he had clipped out mentioning the camps. "...the Human Liberation Front refuses to give up hope in the human race, even though the American human population as dropped 30% since the opening of the ponification camps two years ago..."

"I read about it a little in the weeks before I went to the camp. They threatened to bomb the Conversion Bureau in Wisconsin once, but I'm sure it was just an empty threat. I know you ponies probably don't get the news we do, but it was a serious crisis for the pony supporters in the area."

"Oh, yeah! I remember that!" Barry said, apparently proud he recalled the event. "That was a serious fiasco. I was vacationing near there during spring break, and the townspeople were going mad with protests on the streets."

"Er, Princess," Applejack said, changing the subject, "so when ya said last year that all the humans were bein' bad, was that just a load of hooley?"

"Well, yes, Applejack," Celestia replied. "The boss of the HLF had told me that, and I quote, 'the ponies have the entire human race to deal with.'" She used hoof-quotes to emphasize the comment. "I mistook this as humans being 100% anti-pony, and announced this to you ponyfolk. I had learned since then that, and I apologize for any confusion."

"Oh, it's fine, Princess." Fluttershy added, "We know how nice humans are. There are a lot of wonderful new ponies moving in, and they are so kind to us..."

"I'm going to have to agree with Fluttershy on this one," Rarity said. "I have a few new helpers working for me at the boutique now, and I simply could not go on without them."

Rainbow Dash surrendered her former views, "It's just... it's hard to imagine such nice ponies can come from where humans come from."

"Well, Rainbow, I don't think you should be one to talk. Walk a mile in a human's shoes, and you'll see why some are so cynical and mean all the time," Ethan said, being oddly protective. Even Rainbow was surprised from Ethan's sudden defensive manner.

"I guess you're right, Ethan," Rainbow said.

"So, what do we do to stop this, Human-uh, whatever thingy?" Pinkie Pie asked Princess Celestia.

"I was just getting to that. Ponies are very pacifist, as you all know, so we will not be fighting back. We will begin with defending our territory. I want to strengthen the magical barrier around Equestria that has kept it from humans for so long. The magic has been worn from decades of being there, and it's time we update the system. I want you ponies to look for the book that holds the spells we need to strengthen the shield."

"I guess it's not in the library..." Twilight joked.

"No, it's not. You will need to go to The Ruins of the Ancient Pony Sisters, and search there. The spells should be in a book of forbidden magic hidden deep in the ruins themselves. I will give you a couple of days to prepare, but only a couple of days. The HLF's attack could happen at any time."

"Got it," Twilight replied bluntly. And with that, the Princess teleported away in a flash of blinding magic.

Pinkie Pie shook with excitement, before beginning to jump around the room. "YAY! ADVENTURE!"

"Listen up, everypony! Only pack what you absolutely need. This will be a much harder trek than we are used to, and we need to pack lightly to survive. Spend these next couple of days resting up, you'll need plenty of energy."

The other ponies began to leave, including Barry. Twilight then tapped Barry on his back.

"Barry? Where have you been staying the past couple of days?"

"Oh, I've been staying at Fluttershy's. Why?"

"I will need you to come over tomorrow. I need to teach you some advanced magic, and fast. Lessons begin as soon as you get up tomorrow."

"Alright, alright," Barry said, pretending to sound nonchalant about the ordeal, but was actually very ecstatic.

Ethan had flown up to his bed, which was still as messy as he left it. The sky was pitch black now, but the rain pattered on the window incessantly. Liking the white noise while he slept, Ethan waited for everypony to leave, then drifted softly into a deep slumber.

The clock was ticking. After getting up at 6 AM and trudging to his bus stop on the cold Monday morning, Ethan just didn't want to put up with school anymore. United States History wasn't his strong suit, but he still passed it somehow, even if it was the first class of the day. Barely staying awake, he stared at the teacher in a daze. The textbook on his desk was open to a random page, and the paper he was given was filled with random doodles, but from a distance, Ethan looked like he was doing something, and that's all that mattered.

"Ethan, can you tell me what the name of that slave was?"

Ethan shot up from his head-leaning-on-hand position. He hadn't heard what the teacher was talking about, and the teacher knew that.

"Uh... uh..." Ethan thumbed through his textbook frantically. Suddenly, he felt a light tap on his back.

"Hey, it's Dred Scott, dumbass," the voice behind him whispered.

"D-Dred Scott?" Ethan said out loud to the teacher.

"Right," the teacher replied, defeated. "Now, in 1857..."

As the teacher continued his lecture, Ethan decided to turn around and thank the classmate that helped him through that sticky situation. Behind him, was what made him realize he was dreaming.

"Ethan," Twilight Sparkle asked the human staring at her, "do you have a pencil I can borrow?"

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"AH!" Ethan awoke with a start. He was startled not at the fact Twilight was his classmate, but that he was still human in his dream. It was weird being a human again. Ethan felt like he had already gotten used to the new equine body he was given. Looking outside and noticing the morning sun shining through his window, Ethan trotted downstairs.

The second Ethan climbed down the ladder from his room, a book came careening towards him. Ducking out of fear, the book crashed into a nearby chair, which fell. The book had come from Barry, who was practicing magic with Twilight in the main room.

"Good morning, sleepyhead! What kept you in there so late?" Twilight said, indicating the clock, which read 11:49 AM.

"Oh, nothing. Just had a weird dream, is all," Ethan replied, with the images from the dream flashing through his head when he looked at the familiar purple unicorn.

"Alright. You can tell me about it later. I'm busy teaching your friend here some magic that can help us through the Everfree Forest."

"...So you're flinging books?" Ethan asked, still a little thrown off from the book earlier.

"Well, these are just for practice. With the right training, Barry could use any nearby object as a weapon. It won't be enough to inflict too much pain, but just enough to hold off any creatures we run into there."

Hearing Twilight's voice made Ethan think about what she had said in the dream. She said 'dumbass'. To Ethan's recollection, he hadn't heard a single pony swear once in his life. Sure, he's heard his human friends spout out more curse words than a drunk sailor, but ponies never seemed to stoop that low. Ethan was never one to talk like that often, but recently he hasn't even felt the urge. The word 'ass' sounds foreign to him; like he had never heard the word before in his life.

"Oh! Ethan, I need you to do something for me," Twilight said, turning away from her student, and snapping Ethan back into reality.

"Sure, okay. What do you want me to do?"

"I need you to go to Rarity's boutique and check in on the order I placed for raincoats. I heard the weather in the Everfree Forest gets pretty feisty this time of year, and we can never be too prepared for a storm."

"Yeah, okay. Err, where is the boutique?" Ethan asked. He hadn't realized until now he didn't really walk around town too much in his stay in Ponyville.

"It's just outside the marketplace, next to the cafe. You can't miss it."

"Yeah, it's the fru-fruiest building in town!" Barry chimed in.

"Hush, you. Here's 20 bits, in case she wants to be paid up front." Then Twilight shoved a hoof-ful of gold coins into a little bag, and Ethan placed it under his wing.

"Alrighty. I'll get going, then," Ethan announced, and headed for the door.

The streets of Ponyville were as packed as ever. Even though he was used to going to New York City with his family on occasion, Ethan still couldn't help but look around at the hustle and bustle of the afternoon rush. Ponies were mingling with their friends, shopping at the grocery stands, and playing on the streets, each and every one of them with a warm and welcoming smile on their face. Ethan had to smile himself, despite him just getting out of bed not a half hour ago, and all of this concentrated happiness seemed to have been passed on to him.

Passing by the café, Ethan heard a small gasp from a table nearby. Turning around with a start, he noticed Fluttershy sitting at the outdoor restaurant alone, eating a plate of hay fries. Upon Ethan glancing at her, Fluttershy squeaked louder, and attempted to hide her face for a second. Surrendering to the attention, she finally calmed down.

"Oh, um...hi, Ethan," she mumbled, just audible for Ethan to hear it.

"Hi there, Fluttershy. What's going on?"

"Nothing, I guess...how has your day been?"

"Pretty good so far," Ethan said, surprising himself with his optimism, "I'm just getting Twilight's order of raincoats from Rarity's place."

"Oh, that sounds like fun...well, I'm sure you're busy, so I won't bother you any longer..." She seemed to be a little sad that Ethan didn't have much time to talk to him.

"Okay then. I'll talk to you later, Fluttershy!" Ethan said as he trotted away. Perking up at the sound of Ethan saying her name, Fluttershy waved 'goodbye' back, and went back to her eating.

After looking back to where he was walking, Ethan concentrated on the task at hand. Barry was certainly right when he said that the Carousel Boutique was 'fru-fru'. The lavish pink and lavender colored building towered over the other assorted shops that dotted the village streets, and, 20 bits still in tow, Ethan walked hesitantly up the pathway to the door.

Suddenly, a sharp pain. Nothing that he had felt yet as a pony. The back of his head was throbbing like it had just been kicked, and Ethan fell like a scared goat. With only enough energy to feel where he had been hit, Ethan looked around for what had hit him.

Ponyville was in panic mode, with the ponies that were just having fun and enjoying themselves screaming in terror and hiding in the nearest buildings. Everything went black, and the last thing Ethan heard before passing out was a shrill scream from nearby...

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He was on a swing. Swinging higher and higher, kicking his legs in the air, and soon he jumped off. Instead of hitting the ground, though, he sprouted wings, and soon he was a pegasus. Flying high into the clouds, he felt total bliss...

"Ethan? Ethan, are you okay?"

Ethan woke up. Opening his eyes, Fluttershy was looking back at him, her concerned face almost completely obscuring his view of where he was. Ethan was laying in a very comfortable bed, and the sound of chirping birds and other assorted animal noises was heard outside the window nearby.

"Oh, thank goodness! You're okay. Um, do you want anything?"

"Some water would be nice, I guess," Ethan said. He tried to move his head, but the back of his head stung as he moved it, and he cringed in pain.

"No no, don't move. I'll get it for you. Just wait here and get some rest..." Fluttershy said, motherly. Then she trotted quietly downstairs, leaving Ethan alone with his thoughts for a few moments.

It had happened again. Ethan had another dream where he was human. Why was this happening to him? Is his subconscious regretting becoming a pony? Is his human nature somehow still making its way out, and trying to communicate to him through his dreams? Or was he just slipped some bad muffins? Before Ethan could dwell on these questions any longer, Twilight rushed into the room, looking very concerned.

"Ohmygosh! Ethan, is everything okay? Fluttershy told me what happened, and -"

"It's fine. Really. I just got hit in the head pretty hard. By what, I don't know, but I'm alive, and I think that's all that matters."

Twilight calmed down. "Well, I appreciate the optimism, Ethan, but somepony told me you were attacked by a creature in the Everfree Forest!"

"What? I wasn't even in there! Ouch!" Ethan had rose from the bed too quickly, and his head injury acted up again. He laid back down, resting his head on the soft pillow.

"It must have been a creature from the forest, then. Nothing outside of that place ever comes close to causing that kind of damage to somepony. But what could a creature that dangerous be doing outside of the forest like this? In broad daylight, even!"

"Well, we'll investigate that later. I have a question, actually." Seeing Twilight turn to him in interest, Ethan continued, "It's... kinda related to this, but at the same time, it's not."

Twilight seemed a little confused, but still interested. "Okay...what is it?"

"Well, every night since I got here, I've been having these weird dreams. In the dreams, I'm a human again. But ponies somehow get into the dream. I-it's hard to describe..." Ethan gave up explaining, and assumed Twilight gave up trying to understand him.

Twilight, however, knew what he was talking about. At first, she looked worried and curious, but soon switched to reassuring and calm. "Just don't worry about it for right now. Your body is probably just getting used to being a pony, and having trouble adapting."

"I... guess that makes sense," Ethan said, as Fluttershy came in with a cup of tea for Twilight, and water for Ethan.

"I'm sorry I interrupting anything?"

"No, Fluttershy," Twilight said to the pegasus. "Now let's give Ethan some time alone to rest his head. He should be fine for tomorrow."

But Ethan couldn't sleep. He had too many things to think about right now.

"Good morning, everyone. Today is Saturday, May 14. The lunch today is macaroni and cheese for humans, and the ponies will have the daffodil special. Would a Mr. James Fredrikson please report to the ponification room to be ponified? This has been Rainbow Dash, have a great day."

Rainbow Dash took her hoof off the button to turn on the intercom microphone. The various clamoring noises of the humans in the dorms downstairs started immediately, and the noise didn't help with the pegasus's early morning headache. She massaged her temples and turned around on the swivel chair she was sitting on. Rarity was there, looking at Rainbow oddly.

"What? What did I do?" Rainbow asked impatiently.

"You could have been a little more... I don't know, enthusiastic with the announcement readings, couldn't you?"

"Well, Pinkie Pie normally does them, but she's out working at Sugarcube Corner! What do you expect, an award-winning performance from me? Jeez..."

"Okay, I'm sorry I asked." Rarity replied, feeling insulted.

"...I'm sorry," Rainbow said, as politely as she could. "I just really didn't want to come in today. I mean, we're about to go on an epic journey! Why would we still have to work one more day?"

"Listen, Miss Hooves said that the interns filling in for us will be coming in tomorrow. Can't you just sit through this one shift without going off in a huff for once?"

"Miss Hooves can't even see in one direction at once! Why trust her?"

"Because she is our boss, Rainbow Dash," Rarity said bluntly. "Now, if you will excuse me, I have a human to ponify." And she strutted out of the office.

Rainbow Dash drew a heavy sigh, then slurped from the grape Slushee on her desk. If there was one job she hated the most, it was working in the main office. Sitting at a desk and answering calls all day is a nightmare for her, and training the pegasi can't possibly be awesome without her there. Cloudkicker can only teach the humans so much about flying, and Rainbow believed that under her wing, those humans will soon become the best fliers in all of Equestria... second to her, of course.

Having been stuck in her grumpy thoughts, Rainbow had not heard Applejack walking in, carrying her saddlebags to begin her day.

"Howdy there, sugarcube," Applejack greeted Rainbow. "Is somethin' the matter?"

"Oh, nothing, AJ. I'm just tired, is all."

"The desk work gettin' too boring for ya?"

"...A little," Rainbow reluctantly replied.

Applejack laughed a little, then put her bags down on her chair. Taking a thermos of apple juice out of the front pocket, she took one quick sip, then put it down on the desk with her mouth.

"So, what do you secretaries do for fun around here?"

"Play with this doohickey mostly," Applejack replied, pointing at the computer on her desk. Rainbow looked at her own, confused. After some thought about how a pony could possibly operate such a contraption, she turned back to Applejack, having thought this question out for some time.

"So, what do you think of Ethan, AJ?" Rainbow asked awkwardly.

"I suppose he's an alright pony. Why do ya ask?"

"Well... I've been thinking."

"Have ya?"

"Yeah. About what Princess Celestia said about humans not all being evil. I mean, Ethan and Barry seem kinda cool...are all humans like that?"

"...I don't think so." Applejack replied, a little afraid to get into this kind of conversation. She knew about Rainbow's tendencies to jump to conclusions about humans, and was well aware of what she might be getting into by answering.

"Then how am I supposed to know that Ethan and Barry won't turn on us, or something? Am I just supposed to assume they're nice guys?"

"No, not at all. It's okay to have suspicions about somepony you know. Just keep being nice to 'em, and you'll find out soon enough if they can be trusted."

"...Do you trust them?"

"Well, Twilight brought 'em here, and she thinks they're fine, so I think they are actually good ponies. Yeah, I trust 'em. I actually heard that Twilight has known Barry for a while now."

Rainbow was very unsure of herself right now. In the past couple of days, her opinion about humans has been turned upside down. She doesn't know who to believe anymore.

"I-it's just so... weird to see such nice ponies come from such a mean creature like a human."

"That's the thing, sugarcube. Not all of 'em are as mean as you think they are. We just got a bad first impression, is all. I'm sure there's a whole bushel of great humans out there who'd just love to meet ponies like you."

"Do you think so...?"

"I know so."

"...Thanks, Applejack. You've really helped me think about this."

"Anytime, hun."

Applejack turned in her chair and began hitting the buttons on the keyboard. Rainbow inspected her own computer, looking back and forth between her hooves and the small keys on the keyboard.

"So, can you tell me how to work this thing?"

"Sure can," she replied, trotting over to Rainbow's desk and hitting the big green button on the modem, "Ya see, it's all in the hoof."

"Well, I've figured out that much already. I see all of these humans working these things with their fingers, and I don't see how us ponies can do it without magic."

"That's why mostly unicorns run these things, but I've been workin' on a way to get these to run for us non-magic folk, too. You shouldn't use it too much, though. I hear humans put bad stuff on it sometimes."

"I've heard about that, too. I hope this thing can keep that kind of stuff from showing up," Rainbow said as the computer booted up. "Oh, and AJ?"

"Yeah?"

"What's a Facebook?"

There was a warmth on Ethan's right hind leg that he didn't feel when he went to sleep that night. Sitting up on the bed, Ethan saw a small bunny laying on the sheets, sleeping soundly. He couldn't help but let out an audible "Aww" at the sight of this, and thankfully, that didn't wake the bunny.

Ethan was still in Fluttershy's cottage, having decided to stay the night there. He originally suggested sleeping on the couch downstairs, but Fluttershy insisted Ethan take her bed, because he needs the comfort for his head. Her bed was indeed, very comfortable, and the fluffy layers of warm comforters draped on the full-size mattress didn't seem to bother Ethan too much, despite the summer-like weather outside.

Just as soon as Ethan had fully awoken, Fluttershy entered with a steaming cup of tea.

"Oh, goodness! I didn't know you would be awake so early..."

"Yeah, neither did I."

Fluttershy glanced at Ethan, then noticed the bunny on his leg. "Looks like Angel found a friend while you were sleeping."

"I guess so."

The yellow pegasus put the cup of tea down next to the bed. "How are you feeling?"

"A little better. My head doesn't hurt to much anymore. This bed is very comfy," Ethan said, bouncing a little.

"Oh, that's good."

"When are we leaving? Aren't we supposed to go on that adventure today?"

"Um, yes. I think so. We have to go to the library at seven, I think."

Ethan looked at the wooden clock on the bedroom wall, which read 6:32. That explained why the sun hadn't come up yet. Angel awoke with a start once Ethan moved his leg. The bunny quietly groaned, then ran downstairs. After a short pause, Fluttershy spoke up.

"Well, um, we should get going then, shouldn't we?"

"Sounds good. Let's go."

Walking in the early morning, Ethan noticed how quiet the town could get, compared to how loud it was when he was walking through the market the other day. The morning chill, coupled with the calm breeze that blew through the trees in the Everfree Forest next to Fluttershy's house, set the mood for things to come. Ethan thought of it as the calm before the storm, even though he had no idea what the storm would be, if any. Looking for Barry was one thing; they were lucky they didn't run into any creatures back there. This is different. They will be in the deepest part of the forest, where they will be sure to run into... Ethan had no idea, but he was sure it'd be dangerous.

Noticing how crushingly awkward Fluttershy looked walking next to him, Ethan attempted to start a conversation. "So, what do you think of the humans?"

"I think that th-the ones that are trying to, um, attack Equestria are very mean, and they sh-shouldn't be like that to us," Fluttershy responded, getting visibly more uncomfortable as she pictured this. "But you and Barry are very nice... I'm glad to have met you two."

"Well, thanks. I appreciate that," Ethan replied warmly, and Fluttershy blushed noticeably. Ethan didn't notice it, because he had turned away, realizing that they had already arrived at Twilight's library.

Remembering last time Fluttershy knocked on the door, Ethan decided to do so, firmly and loudly. Answering the door was Pinkie Pie, looking four times as awake as either of them combined.

"Hiya, you two! Glad to see you can make it!" Pinkie greeted the ponies, flashing a massive grin.

"Oh, good morning, Pinkie Pie..." Fluttershy responded kindly.

"Hi, Pinkie," Ethan said. He hadn't really gotten very well acquainted with the pink mare, and only remembers her a little, from when they were going to the ponification room. The voice was very recognizable, though.

"How're ya doing, Ethan? It's great to see you all... ponied up! Hahaha!" Pinkie said, laughing at her own joke as the two walked in, much more awake than when they were walking over there. Twilight was the only other pony inside, who was sitting at her reading desk as usual.

"Good morning, Ethan! Is your head okay?"

"Yes, much better, thanks."

"Great. We're leaving soon, but settle in while we wait for the others to arrive." And with that, Twilight returned to her reading, and the two ponies sat at the table in the corner.

Almost immediately after they had sat down, Applejack arrived, with a small yellow filly following eagerly behind her. AJ looked noticeably more awake than the others, but definitely not as awake as Pinkie Pie.

"G'morning, y'all. Hope ya don't mind, Twi, but Apple Bloom here said she wanted to come with us," Applejack said, gesturing toward the filly.

"Please, Twilight? Can I go? I wanna see if I can find my special talent in the forest!" Apple Bloom begged to the purple pony, giving the most irresistibly adorable puppy-dog eyes.

"Of course, Apple Bloom. Just don't get into too much trouble. The forest is very dangerous."

"I know. Don't worry none, Twilight. I'll be fine," Apple Bloom said confidently, sounding like she was trying to sound more mature than she was.

"Where's Rainbow Dash? Wasn't she with you at the Bureau yesterday?"

"Yeah, she said she might be a bit late, but I still figured she'd come by earlier than me. That's a might odd..." Applejack said, trailing off as she wondered where Dash might be.

"Okay. I just hope she doesn't take too long. We need to leave soon," Twilight replied as she closed the book on her desk and put it in the pile. "I need to wake up Spike and Barry, so I might be a bit."

Rarity arrived a few minutes later, donning an azure sun hat and matching saddle bags.

"Sorry I'm late, but I couldn't find the tiara that went with this bag. That's when I found this darling hat, and I thought 'I simply must wear this!'. So I did," Rarity explained quickly, almost sounding like Pinkie Pie with how excited she was.

"Fascinatin'," Applejack said dully, growing impatient waiting. "When's Dash gettin' here? I wanna get this over with."

As if on cue, Rainbow Dash flew in as fast as she could through the open upstairs window. After catching her breath, she touched down on the floor next to Applejack.

"Ms. Hooves kept me until late last night, so I overslept... I swear, she's out to get me sometimes!"

"She isn't out to get me!" Pinkie chirped, as she pranced up to Dash happily, "Well, maybe because I get her muffins every week, but I don't think that'd have anything to do with what I do at work! OH! One time, she called me down to her office, and she said 'Muffins!', and then I said 'Okay!', and then we..."

Losing track of the story, Ethan gave up trying to listen to Pinkie. Then, he turned his attention to Twilight, who was coming down from upstairs with a half-asleep Spike on her back, and an equally as half-asleep Barry coming down behind her. Spike mumbled something, and flopped down on the floor. Barry, for once, didn't say anything. He was probably too tired to care about anything right now.

"Good, good, everypony's here. Now we can go."

"Really? That's awfully blunt of you," Rarity asked, as surprised as the rest of the group at Twilight's sudden change of pace. "No lecture about what not to do in the forest? No silly presentation on the dreadful creatures we might encounter?"

"Nope. I think we've all frequented the forest enough to know where to go by now."

"Aw yeah! That's what I like to hear! Let's go!" Rainbow barked enthusiastically, and started for the door.

Walking down the same pathway as earlier bored Ethan, since they had to go past Fluttershy's house to get to the forest. Suddenly, Apple Bloom caught up with Ethan, now trotting side-by-side with him.

"So you used to be one a'those hoo-mans?" Apple Bloom asked nervously, as if she was talking to an alien.

"Humans'," Ethan corrected the filly, laughing, "and yeah, I was a human about a week ago.",

"Wow! What's it like? Is it any different than bein' a pony?" the little pony queried, really interested in learning about his home species.

"Oh, definitely. It's way different," Ethan said, then thought about how to go about describing a human to a pony. It was much harder than he thought. "Well, you walk on

two legs, first of all. And you have these weird thingies on the ends of your front hooves called 'fingers'. They help you grab stuff easier, but they look weird."

"I'd like to see a human close up. They must be a might big in person..." Apple Bloom said.

"Compared to ponies, yeah. I'm probably about half the height I was when I was a human."

"They must be pretty darn big then," she said, clearly intimidated.

Applejack trotted up next to her little sister. "I'm sorry, is my sis botherin' ya, Ethan?"

"No, no, not at all. I'm enjoying myself," Ethan replied.

"We're here, everypony!" Twilight called out from the front of the nine-pony cavalcade.

This entrance was different from the entrance they had used to look for Barry. Gone are the wide, spacious pathways of the main forest entryway, and the group was greeted by a slightly more tangled path to the temple. Instead of dirt and sand, the ponies were trotting on the forest floor, riddled with tangled grass and tree roots poking up at any chance they get, tripping up the non-fliers quite a few times. Rainbow Dash, Fluttershy, and Ethan flew above the pack, but not too high, so they don't leave anypony behind. Rainbow had insisted on attempting to look above the trees to find the temple from above, but was only greeted with a dark cloud of smog, which blanketed the forest in a neverending night.

"It's a concentrated magical force field," Twilight explained to the others. "It's also the reason the plants and animals behave so strangely here."

"Well, it's not so strange to Ethan and I," Barry pointed out, "Plants always grow, and animals most of the time live on their own. The only animals we keep as pets are dogs and cats. Oh, and birds... and hamsters..."

As Barry continued rattling off the names of the aisles of the local pet shop, the group pressed on through the forest. Yet again, no dangerous creatures seemed to cross their path, and if any were seen, they ignored the group, and went about their business quietly. Ethan had never thought he'd see a manticore in person, let alone one that just sheepishly walked across the path, not noticing the tasty ponies trotting out in the open.

After crossing a wide, but shallow river, the ponies came across an old temple. Automatically assuming this was what they were looking for, Ethan inspected the ancient structure as he entered it with the others. The interior seemed just like the rest of the forest, mostly because the plantlife has made a home out of some of the less-traveled rooms, riddling former bedrooms with overgrown vines and trees. The main room upstairs consisted of six glowing gems of different shapes, each color-coded and sitting on a large, out-of-reach pedestal. Barry, Twilight and her friends seemed to recognize the gems, but Ethan and Apple Bloom were clueless.

"Here we are, everypony," Twilight announced after gazing at the gems, and capturing the group's attention. "We need to inspect every room we can, but be careful. This temple wasn't built yesterday. Remember, we're looking for an old spell book."

"Just think of an older version of any book Twilight would read," Spike explained, semi-jokingly. "Full of pictures and cool shapes and stuff."

"...Right. We'll meet back here in an hour."

"BREAK!" Pinkie belted out, like a football player before the big game, and with that, the ponies split up. Applejack, Apple Bloom, and Rainbow Dash went down the east hallway; Fluttershy, Twilight, and Rarity went down the west wing, and Ethan, Barry, Pinkie Pie, and Spike went downstairs.

"Thanks for letting me come with you guys. I was getting kind of tired of sticking to Twilight all day," Spike said to the three as they walked down the long stairway a second time.

"No probs, Spike," Ethan replied calmly. "You need to hang out with us more often. Us guys gotta stick together."

"Yeah!" Pinkie shouted from the back of the pack, cuing strange looks all around, then a huge laugh from them all that echoed through the cavernous hallway. Eventually, the gang went into the biggest, easiest-to-navigate room, and began to turn it upside down. Oddly enough, it was the pantry.

"Why would they need a pantry in a temple?" Spike asked the others.

"I thought you knew, Spike!" Barry replied from the other side of the room, laughing as he looked in a closet.

"Maybe the pony-monks get hungry, and go down here to bake their pineapple upside-down cake!" Pinkie chirped, licking her lips at the thought of the treat.

Then they heard a thud. It shook the temple, sending a few things in other rooms falling, and a table had almost collapsed underneath Spike, who was looking in a bread box.

"D-did you guys hear that bump?" Spike stammered.

"How that bump made me jump!" Pinkie replied, apparently not fazed at all by the sudden noise.

"Let's go check it out," Ethan said, with a sudden confidence that even surprised himself. The gang began to run down the hall.

"HEY!" Spike called out to Ethan before he left the room. "A little help?"

"Oh. Sure, buddy," Ethan said, allowing Spike to hop on his back. The extra weight was a little hard to get used to, but he eventually caught up with Pinkie and Barry outside.

Scarily, nobody else was outside but the four of them. It was as if they were the only ones that heard the noise, but none of them could deny that it was a real thud. Moving objects and crumbling temple does not a fake noise make.

"What made that noise? It was coming from out here..." Spike questioned, but soon got his answer. A pitch-black unicorn with fire-truck red eyes came out from the shadows of the edge of the forest, and shot a spark of magic at the dragon, sending him to the ground a few feet away.

"Ethan and Pinkie Pie, go tend to Spike! I'll fend this thing off," Barry shouted, trying his best to sound like an action hero. Using his newly-taught magic, Barry shot off three medium-sized fireballs, which the black pony dodged seamlessly. The shadow-pony fired back with a purple lightning spell. It looked painless, but Barry dodged it anyway, not letting his guard down yet.

Ethan got to Spike first, with Pinkie following close behind. The dragon sat up on his feet, massaging a burn mark on the side of his head.

"Omigosh! Are you okay, Spikey?" Pinkie said, in a concerned manner, but still retaining her Pinkie-ness.

"Yeah, yeah. I just feel like I was kicked really hard in the head - OUCH!" Spike yelled in pain as he tried to stand, and sat back down on the ground.

"Just stay here and rest your head..." Ethan said, spacing out a little watching his best friend fight the dark pony.

Suddenly, as he was about to slip back into reality, Ethan felt something on his head. It hurt, but only a little. It felt like a human hand was grabbing onto his forehead, and giving him the Vulcan "mind-meld" from Star Trek. He couldn't move, but he could see the source of the "grabbing" was the dark pony, who had cast a purple lightning spell directed at him. Everything went in slow motion, and eventually, Ethan passed out. He didn't feel himself hit the cold forest floor, though. He felt soft, wet grass, and a cool summer breeze...

"WEE! This swing is fun!"

"Pinkie, cut it out! I'm trying to wake up Ethan!"

"But it can fit two! Spike, come swing with me!"

"Not now, Pinkie... ouch..."

Ethan opened his eyes. Barry was looking right at him, and flashed a smile as soon as he woke up.

"Good morning, sunshine."

"Wh...where ar' wee?" Ethan mumbled, still very dazed from the spell.

"Oh, I think you know..."

Slowly getting up on all fours, Ethan looked around. They were in a fenced-off grassy area, with a massive tree covering the immediate area with its branches. Turning around, Ethan saw a two-story, sky-blue house, and a concrete patio with the swing that Pinkie Pie was on. Widening his eyes at the immediate sight, Ethan looked at Barry in disbelief.

They were in Ethan's backyard.

"WHAT?! H-how?! When? Why?" Ethan babbled in distress, clinging for an answer somewhere.

"Woah, woah... eeeasy there, cowboy," Barry said, soothing the savage, confused beast. "Spike and I have it all figured out."

The dragon stood up and walked to the panicked pony, clearing his throat. "That black pony Barry was fighting cast a 'Memory Transportation Spell', which brought us to the first location you thought of when he cast it. Um, Ethan, what were you thinking at the time?"

"Well, I was watching Barry battle the shadow-unicorn, and I thought about how far we've gone. And I remembered when we used to play in my backyard all the time as kids. I guess that explains why we're here now."

"Aww, that's adorable!" Pinkie said, getting off the swing and bouncing over to the group.

"So, what do we do now?" Barry asked, turning to his friend.

"We should look around. Find a way back to Equestria. But, let's go inside first. We all need some rest."

"Good idea. If the rest of the gang in the forest didn't find the book, then they would be looking for us," Barry replied.

"And I'm sure Twi and Rarity can fend off the shadow-pony, if they run into it," Spike added. "They're much more experienced in magic than Barry. Er, no offense."

"None taken. Let's go inside."

After a quick tour of the house, Ethan sent the others to bed. Pinkie slept on the couch in the basement, Barry and Spike slept on the couches in the living room, and Ethan slept in his old bed. Barry fell asleep the second he touched the couch, but thankfully, Spike was there to help open doors for the finger-impaired. Ethan fell into his bed, and fell right to sleep.

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He was all alone in a snowy field. The night was cloudy, but it wasn't too cold. Suddenly, a yellow pony with a blue snout popped up from under the snow and looked at him. Ethan tried to interact, but the pony simply popped back down the hole, like a gopher. Soon, the pony was popping up all over the place, making Ethan laugh so hard he fell to the ground. Before getting up again, the pony finally came out from its holes and trotted up to the human looking at it. Next thing Ethan knew he was face-to-face with this strange pony, both not blinking. The pony opened its mouth to speak.

"You're a strange one, aren't you?"

"WAKE UUUP! WAKE UP, EVERYBODY!"

Pinkie's shrieking sent the others flying out of their beds and onto the floor. After some grogginess, despite only having been asleep for a couple of hours, the group finally got back outside and sat in the front yard. The weather was as cloudy and humid as it had been earlier, but it was getting noticeably darker.

"That's, uh, quite the dream, Ethan," Barry said to him, as he finished recounting the vision to the others.

"I should tell Twilight about it. She always likes these kinds of dreams," Spike suggested.

"Maybe the yellow pony just wanted to build a snowpony with you! I know I'd build a snowpony if I had that much snow!" Pinkie said.

"Er, while that does sound like fun, I think we need to find something to do right now," Ethan said. "We need to find a way to get back to Ponyville, and fast."

"But how can we get to Equestria?" Spike asked. "It's thousands of miles away, and the barrier is soon to be under attack by those Liberation Front cronies!"

"...The Bureau!" Barry shouted out of nowhere, "We can go to the Conversion Bureau and get them to transport us there! They do it to the new ponies all the time!"

"Well, yeah, but how do we get there without my car?" Ethan added, indicating his hooves, "I can't possibly drive it with these things, and I think Spike here would need a booster seat to get to the driver's seat, let alone drive the dang thing."

"Yeah, I don't think I can operate one of those things. Way too big and metal. Pretty... scary lookin'," Spike said, looking at the beat-up car in the driveway.

Ethan turned to Barry, and Barry turned to Ethan. "Who do we know that can drive?"

After a short pause, they both came up with the answer at the same time.

"Jimmy."

"Jimmy?" Spike asked.

"Yeah. It's a long shot, since he's not a big fan of us ponies, and I quote, 'trotting around like they own the place'."

"He doesn't understand our motives, but he can drive," Ethan said, thinking while he talked. "I'm sure he'll understand if we talk to him a little."

Barry gave Ethan a look, and Ethan corrected himself. "Okay, if we talk to him a lot. He's pretty stubborn."

"Let's go to his house already! I'm getting excited!" Pinkie barked.

Jimmy's house was a little bigger than Ethan's, but it only had one floor, and a garage. The muffled sound of guitar shredding came from an open window, which Pinkie heard and began miming holding a guitar and playing it. Ethan nervously walked up the path to the doorway, with the others following, just as nervous.

"Remember, everyone. Play it cool," Barry whispered from behind Ethan. "Don't make it seem like we're going to the land of sunshine and rainbows to save magical talking horses."

"...But we *are*. In fact, we're doing *exactly what you just said*," Spike said blankly.

"Yeah, but I don't want him to know that. He's a little... apprehensive about our kind."

"Hey! What do you mean, 'our kind'?" Pinkie jokingly added, before being viciously shushed by the other three.

Spike hopped onto Ethan's back and rang the doorbell. The second the 'DING-DONG' rang through the house, the shredding ceased, and footsteps drew closer and closer to the door.

If Ethan were human, Jimmy would be a little shorter than him. He sported a pair of glasses, and a few pimples on his face. His hair was in a jew-fro similar to Barry's, but shorter and black. He was a little pudgy around the midsection, but could still get away with being 'svelte'. He wore basketball shorts, and a baggy band shirt with an incomprehensible metal band's name on it, and a gruesome picture of a monkey cutting its head open with a scalpel.

Jimmy looked down at the ponies (and dragon), all a little intimidated, with Ethan and Barry the only ones fake-smiling. He let out a heavy sigh.

"You have got to be kidding me."