

White Box

Chromosome



The lights hurt my eyes.

They're always too bright. I tried asking the guards to turn them down once. They just ignored me and hit me when I insisted. So the lights are still too bright, and they sting reflecting off the walls of the white box.

Were they always this bright? I can't remember. I can't remember much nowadays. I can't even remember how many steps it takes to get from the cot to the wall, even though I just counted.

The lights really hurt my eyes.

Suddenly, I bolt upright. Name? Name!? Rolling out of my cot, I trot anxiously to the opposite end of the white box, and peer down into the corner. Squinting my eyes against the painful light, I try to read the rough scratch marks.

Canvas. Canvas. Canvas. I read it several times, just to make sure that I get the word in my head. No, not a word. It's a name.

Canvas, my name is Canvas. I try to say it out loud. Instead, a feeble croak leaves my throat. I cough out the dust and try again.

"Canvas," I say out loud, and I flinch. My own voice scares me. I suppose I deserve it though. I'm a bad pony, after all; I don't deserve any comfort, not even my own. Because only bad ponies end up here.

I read the word scratched into the wall one last time, and then, satisfied, trot back over to my cot. The sound of my hooves striking the floor is like hollow bones, the noise echoing off the walls as I take exactly twelve steps from the wall back to my bedding. I've counted those steps so many times, trying again and again to make sure I'd gotten it right. But I'm still not too sure. Maybe I'll go back and count them again later. Or maybe I should make sure that I remember my name, if only for a little bit longer. Or I could sleep, or eat, or drink, or do nothing at all.

There's too much to do in the white box.

My ears perk involuntarily as a series of bolts and latches are pulled back, and I turn to face *that* corner. A small rectangular hole that never seems to be in the same place slides open perfectly against the wall of the white box. Then, gliding from the void beyond the corner, a metal tray filled with packaged plastic food slips through and clatters to the floor. And then the hole is gone.

And it's just me and the tray and the white box.

I don't eat yet. There's too much to do.

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"...Yes, all of them! Don't question it, just do as you're told!"

"Right away sir. Prisoner 167! Get up immediately!"

I'm ripped from the bosom of deep, dark sleep as a hoof strikes me sharply in the ribs. The pain is nothing compared to the loud voices. I look up into the disapproving eyes of a scowling pegasus guard dressed in a tight-fitting white vest and leg band.

"I said *immediately!*" repeats the guard angrily. Another sharp prod and I gingerly uncurl myself from my cot and put my hooves on the ground. His voice is too loud to ignore.

Being pushed forward, I realize in my numb, muddled state of half-sleep *that* corner is now gone, and opened wider than when the trays come through. Another guard, somehow perfectly identical to the one pressing me toward the gaping, unfamiliar doorway, stands there impassively, his cold stare locked with mine. I look away from him as I'm forced out of the white box. The commotion hurts my head. There's far too much to do to deal with this now.

I'm led to what the guards like to call "the roundup". It's just another big white box where all the little white boxes attach. The lights here aren't so bright, so it's not too bad. But now I'm not alone out here. I'm shoved into a line alongside several other ponies I vaguely recognize. There's the stallion with the guitar on his flank whose name I think is Smooth Song. He has distant, sad eyes and a bandanna tied over his mouth. He told me once that he played music. I didn't know what that was. I still don't.

Then there's the blank flank. He's a tall, handsome pony with fur and a horn that's as white as the boxes. I don't remember his name, but I do remember the guards calling him an albino unicorn or something along those lines. His eyes are scary. But they're blindfolded right now anyways.

And the pony next to me, her name is Forte. I've never heard her say a word before, and that doesn't bother me at all. We've met each other briefly before, but I can't remember when. I feel like I'm about to remember when one of the guards starts shouting at us again.

"Listen up you lot!" he barks. "And listen well! You sorry sacks are going to be meeting someone new, and you better be polite, or I promise you that your life here will be getting far more miserable than it already is!"

None of us say anything. It's not smart to talk when guards are talking unless they ask for it. But I'm not sure what he means by "miserable". What's there to be upset about?

With a satisfied grunt, the noisy guard steps aside, allowing somepony to step forward.

She isn't white like the boxes. I immediately don't like her.

The pony has a straight cut mane with streaks running through it. A horn protruded from her neat coif. She wears a white saddlebag, with a strange-looking shape on it that I've never seen before. It only made me like her less. She gives us all a polite nod. Her eyes turn to mine, and I pretend I don't notice, looking past her at the white wall instead.

"This is Ms. Twilight Sparkle," continues the noisy guard, introducing the strange new pony. "She's a student under our great Princess Celestia, and for *some* reason she's decided to volunteer her valuable time to deal with you scum. So I don't want to see any sort of bad behavior from any of you towards her, and you better appreciate this honor.

"Anyways," says the noisy guard, clearing his throat, "she's going to start paying the lot of you visits in your cells. Any question she asks, you answer! Anything she wants to know, you tell her! Are we understood?"

There was silence, to which the noisy guard gave a satisfied nod and a low grunt. Some invisible signal was given, and the other guards started prodding us away back to our boxes. I cast a lingering glance to the new pony that was now talking to the noisy guard. She wasn't white like the boxes. I didn't want her to come into mine.

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Time passes, and I forget about the strange pony, at least for a while. But eventually, *that* corner opens again while I'm busy counting the number of steps from the wall to the cot, and a guard enters. Not saying a word, he simply jerks his head toward my bedding, telling me to sit down. I do so, and he takes a pair of cuffs and slides them around one of my hooves, with the other one anchored to the bed's frame. Stepping back towards the wall, he watches me carefully as that pony, Twilight Something-Or-Other, trots into the room. She gives me what seems a forced smile, and waits for a moment. Turning her head to the stoic guard, she gives him a slight nod. Reluctantly, he leaves through the doorway. I hear him mutter something about a vegetable before it seals behind him.

And then it's just me and the pony I don't like and the white box.

The lights hurt my eyes.

She glances around the room, and when our stares meet, she gives me another fake smile. I don't say anything, nor do I look at her. I'm trying to remember how many steps it takes to get from the cot to the wall, because I didn't get to finish counting. She introduces herself.

"So... Hello there! I'm Twilight Sparkle! And you are..." Her expression turns to one of concentration as she levitates a clipboard from her saddlebag with her glowing horn and flips through it. "Ah! Prisoner 167, am I correct?"

I nod. But I don't look at her.

With a nervous cough, she flips through the clipboard again, levitating a quill out of her bag as she takes a seat on the white floor. "Now then, let's start off simple. How are you feeling?" she asks me, trying to stir some kind of conversation.

I don't like this pony, but I don't forget what the noisy guard had told us.

"Fine," I answer. My voice almost makes me flinch again, but I control myself this time. I stare at my hooves and impatiently wait for her to finish questioning me.

"Fine? Okay then... Prisoner 167, would you like to tell me why it is you're here?" she asks, apparently oblivious to my blunt response.

"I'm here because I did something bad."

"Something bad? Can you remember what that was?"

"No." That's the truth.

"How can you *not* remember how you got yourself in here?"

I don't know how to answer that. It's just a fact, there's no explanation for it. I shrug.

"So... how long have you been here?" Her voice sounds a little more strained this time.

"I don't know." This is sort of a lie. But that's only because I don't really know what "long" means.

Her nose wrinkles in frustration as she blows a strand of her mane back into place.

"Well can you at least tell me what you did before you got here?" she asks, not disguising the annoyance in her tone.

Now this is a question I don't know the answer to. I don't understand what this pony means. Before? There is no before, it's always been white boxes. And what does she mean by "here"? There's nothing *but* the white boxes. This pony makes no sense and I hate her more and more and I just want her to leave.

So I tell her no.

The pony heaves a sigh of heavy frustration, and looks like she's going to ask me another question. But instead, she just gets up with an irritated expression on her brow, and slips the quill and clipboard back into her saddlebag. Knocking on *that* corner, it opens briefly, and swallows her up. The guard comes and takes off my cuffs. Once he's gone, I get up and start counting the steps again.

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I don't see that strange pony for a long time, and I'm very happy about it. Her questions were pointless and didn't make sense. They made my head hurt, too.

I almost forget my name again. But I run to the corner and read Canvas again over and over to make sure that I remember it a little longer. My brain scares me sometimes. It's like it wants me to forget, but I can't let it forget my name. I don't know why I care. It's just a word isn't it? And yet, something brings me back to that corner every time I fear that I'm about to lose it. I repeat the name under my breath a few more times. Suddenly, I feel something, and I jump with surprise as a hoof pokes me in the side.

In moments, I'm cuffed to my bed as that annoying pony walks in again. She looks about as happy to see me as I am to see her. Her expression indifferent, she sits on the ground without saying a word. Taking out the same clipboard and quill, she starts asking me meaningless questions again. Do you like the food? Do you know the ponies around here? Are the guards nice? I answer them all in succession with complete nonchalance, but they don't stop coming. I keep hoping that she'll give up and leave like the last time, but she's determined to stay for some reason, even as my answers become mumbled and indistinct.

There's a light snapping sound as her quill presses into the paper, and a black smear drips onto the floor. Seeing that black spot on the floor of the white box made me want to hurt

this pony. I decide it's smarter to just bite my lip and not get in any trouble. The guards would be merciless.

Cursing quietly, the strange pony levitates a small glass bottle and another quill from her saddlebag. From the bottle emerges a tiny stick covered in something white, and she rubs it on the clipboard, as well as onto the black stain on the ground. It becomes white.

I can't remember the last time I've been so amazed.

"What was that?" I blurt, as the pony put her quill to the paper again. My voice makes her flinch.

"What was what?" she responds, confused, but more so surprised that I had spoken out of turn.

"The white thing that you put on the stain."

Puzzled, she raises the glass bottle. "What, this? This is whiteout. It's for correcting mistakes."

"I like that," I say quietly, mesmerized by the bottle. "I like that a lot." Something that *makes* white. This is magic beyond my imagining.

The pony smiles, amused. "Do you really like the color white or something?"

Finally, a question I want to answer. I tell her yes.

She asks me why I like it. I ask her what reason there is to not like it. She doesn't have an answer for that.

"So tell me, Prisoner 167, why do you like white, but not me? Why won't you be more cooperative?"

I feel I have no choice but to answer honestly, although the answer seems self-evident.

"You aren't white."

"Well... no, I'm not white, I'm sort of... purple, I guess," she says, looking at her fur. She then points at me. "But you aren't white either. Do you not like yourself?"

"No, I don't."

"Maybe you're being unreasonable. I mean after all, most ponies aren't white."

"That tall one is."

"Who, Princess Celestia?"

"No. Not her. Don't say her name," I say harshly, feeling something rise in me. "I mean the one with the scary eyes."

"Oh, Clarity!" exclaims Twilight, remembering the prisoner. "Well, that isn't the same. He's an albino, and doesn't have any pigmentation. So yes, he is white. But that doesn't make him better or worse than anypony else."

I try to tell her that isn't true, but for some reason the words die in my throat, and I look down and stare at my hooves again. The pony coughs and tries to continue the conversation by returning to a familiar topic.

"What about your cell? It's white. Do you like it as well?"

"Yes, I like it very much," I tell her, but then I change my answer. "Actually, not always. The lights hurt my eyes. They're too bright. But otherwise I love it here. I have everything. I have white, I have my name written in the corner, and I have so many things to do."

The strange pony doesn't say anything. She simply looks at me curiously. This time, instead of looking away, I look right back at her. Her eyes are strange and alien, yet... alluring. I can't put my hoof on why that is, but I hadn't seen it before. Sheepish, the pony with the strange eyes looks away and begins packing her things.

"It was... lovely to speak with you, Prisoner 167. I look forward to doing it again."

"Canvas," I state, as she's about to knock on *that* corner.

She stops and turns. "Sorry?"

"My name is Canvas."

She gives me another awkward smile. "Very well then, Canvas. Thanks for the talk."

"You're welcome, Ms. Twilight Sparkle."

After she leaves, I don't move for a while. I just sit and think about that magical whiteout. And then I think about the strange pony's eyes. I spend so much time lost in thought that I don't even have time to count the steps from the wall to the cot.

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I sleep strangely that night.

I have a dream. It isn't like the rest at all. It isn't blackness and whiteness and silence like it usually is. Somewhere in my mind there's a pulse, a vibration. It's something I can't describe, like the words needed are just out of my reach, coursing through the billowing emptiness of my mind. It's familiar and comforting. But just as I'm about to remember, just as I'm about to know what those words are, I wake up.

Blinking slowly, my neck muscles strain as I look around the white box. Everything is the same, of course, and yet something feels amiss. Slowly shaking off the thick pastiness of sleep in my eyes and legs, I stand and walk around the white box. My name is still in the corner (I memorize it again quickly), and it's still twelve steps from the cot to the wall. Then what's wrong?

I blink again. Then it hits me. The lights don't hurt my eyes anymore.

In wonder, I step backward and my hoof kicks into something. A tray. My stomach growls for the first time in ages as I admire the plastic-wrapped contents. I've forgotten what it feels like to be hungry. Gently picking up the tray with my teeth, I take the food to my cot and relish every bite.

I finish eating just as there's a familiar sound of bolts from *that* corner again. Pushing my tray off the bed, I sit patiently and wait for the guard. But as he's about to slip the metal cuffs around my hooves, a voice interrupts him.

"Excuse me! I don't think that's going to be necessary, thank you," says Twilight Sparkle as she enters the white box.

The guard looks like he's going to give a retort, his eyes switching between myself and Twilight Sparkle. But instead he shrugs, puts the cuffs away, and steps out of the white box. As the strange pony sits down on the ground and begins preparing her things, I look at her questioningly.

"What was that for?" I ask her, uncertain.

"Well, to be honest Canvas, I don't think you're a dangerous pony. I think you're just confused, and treating you like a criminal isn't the right thing to do."

"But I *am* a criminal."

A flicker of doubt crosses the pony's eyes. A second later, it's gone, and I wonder if I just imagined it. After all, the lights are different now, and everything feels unfamiliar. I mention this to her.

"Yes, I asked the guards to lower the amount of light in your room when you complained to me last time. Is it better now?"

I nod, and she seems pleased with herself. She puts her quill to the board again.

"Now then, Canvas. What would you like to talk about today?"

That's a strange question. Up until now, she had been the one leading the conversations; I just followed along. And yet without thinking, I know what I want to talk about. This pony has stirred something in my brain.

"Ms. Twilight Sparkle, I had a dream when I slept."

"Is that so? Would you like to tell me about it?"

"Yes. It was like the rest at first. There was white and black everywhere. It was very quiet, like it always is. But then I... saw something. Something in my dream that I can't explain."

I'm silent as I try to think of the right words to say. They come to me.

"Ms. Twilight Sparkle, what is 'purple'?"

The pony puts her quill and clipboard down and gives me a long, confused stare. I try to explain.

"Last time you were here, you said you were 'purple'. What does that mean?"

The pony stutters, scratching her head. It's confusing to see this pony that seems to know so many things at a loss for words.

"Purple...? Well, purple is a color. It's caused by light reflecting back into your eyes. Everything has a color."

I give her a blank look.

"A color is something that isn't white or black. It can be green or blue or pink. It's... it's a part of what something *is*. I don't know how to explain it."

I'm starting to get a headache. Something that isn't white or black? Colors? Green, blue, pink, I don't know what any of those words mean at all. And the pony doesn't know how to explain it. I moan slightly in pain as things feel like they're moving in my skull.

She points to her own fur. "Can we both agree that this is **purple**? The fact that my fur is not white and looks like this is color. And this color is **purple**."

Her words seem to become more distant and indistinct, and I can't pick them out. I stare at her fur as my headache gets worse and worse and becomes some furious throb that threatens to split my skull. Her fur seems to expand, shimmer, and pulsate through the room and my head. The feeling of something massive and powerful courses beneath my skin, like there's some static power that's making my fur stand on end. Mystery and magic and things unexplainable start flitting through my mind, words that I don't understand, thoughts that scare me, noises that are so loud that I fear I might go deaf. I can't breathe, I can't move, and this color... this **purple** leaps from the pony's fur into my eyes. I feel a pressure building in my throat so powerful that it's impossible to ignore. Everything slides back into focus as I release it and speak without thinking.

"**Purple. The color is purple. It's the incomprehensible, the magic, and the beauty. Deep things that mean nothing to us which cannot be explained. Purple.**"

Twilight Sparkle doesn't say anything. She's quiet for a very long time, simply staring into my eyes. I'm afraid she's going to be angry, that she's going to call the guards and have them hit me. I don't know why. But instead, she nods slowly.

"Yes, Canvas. **Purple**. I think you understand," she says softly.

As if snapping out of a trance, Twilight Sparkle shakes her head, scribbles a few things onto her clipboard, and then slides it back into her bag. "You are a very interesting pony, Canvas. You have something I can't exactly describe. I look forward to talking to you again tomorrow."

"Ms. Twilight Sparkle..." I croak hoarsely, suddenly exhausted, as the pony stands. "Can you teach me more colors? Like the ones you said, green and blue?"

She gives me a kindly look with her perfect purple eyes, and nods. It's only after she's gone that I realize I'm sweating furiously. My heart is pounding in my chest, and my hooves tremble something terrible as I try to stand up. I stumble to the corner of the white box and look down at the name scratched into the wall. Canvas.

My name is Canvas and I love the color purple.

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I wake up eagerly the next day. Snatching the food that's sitting on the tray, I gobble it quickly and push the rest away. Then, I sit down on my cot and stare at that corner. And I wait. It isn't long before my ears rise to the sound of the bolts sliding open. In strolls the purple pony, with a pleased look on her face. We talk for a long time about myself and colors, and she pulls something out of her saddlebag. It looks like a stone, but it shines like the lights that don't hurt my eyes anymore.

She explains that it's called a sapphire, a gemstone, and that its color is blue. It's incredible to experience. Only recently, I didn't even know what a color was, and now here I am learning about TWO colors!

Blue is almost like purple, but slightly different. It's something deep and powerful and mysterious much like purple, but that course of static power that I had felt before isn't there. Instead, there's something quiet and peaceful that comes from the gemstone that makes my heart become slow and heavy. It's a silence completely unlike the silence in the white box. It's something glorious and ancient that fills my chest with majesty and megalithic size. It's a pulsing vibration that thrums in my lungs with graceful force and limitless compassion. Blue stays with me for a long time after the purple pony leaves.

And so every day is like this. Wake, sleep, and await Twilight Sparkle's arrival. Each visit is new and magical.

She brings me a small round object that looks like nothing I've seen before. She confuses me by saying that it's an orange, and that its color is orange. It takes me a while to grasp the concept, but I suppose that since colors are so beautiful, there's no harm in naming things after them. Orange is alive and full of zeal. It's a boundless energy that makes me want to run around and yell at the top of my lungs. It's freedom. It's youth.

The next day, she brings me something smooth and glossy, and Twilight Sparkle calls it an apple. Its color is red. Red is close to orange like the past two colors were close to each other. But its energy is something deeper and more terrifying than orange. It has a

malignant aura that can't be explained. It's life itself; it's turbulence and pain, and it's fear and anger. It's pure existence with all its vitality and anguish. I like the color red, but at the same time I'm deathly afraid of it. It has a strength and lustful allure that I dare not test.

I learn so many things from Twilight Sparkle. Every day now has something new. It has a *purpose*, a purpose that isn't counting steps or sitting or eating. Now, every time Twilight Sparkle leaves the white box, my heart is heavier and heavier all the while she's gone. But even then, I keep something that I didn't have before. I'm no longer just Canvas. I'm Canvas, and I have colors. My mind is fresh and alive, and I'm starting to hate white.

Twilight Sparkle shows me a lemon, tells me that it's yellow, and its radiance is joy and contentment and being carefree. It feels warm and comfortable, casting a glow that the white lights never could.

She shows me something called chocolate which tastes so amazing that I ask to keep the bar. I eat it slowly over the days as I remember its color: brown. It's comfort and protection, strength and firmness. It's like a guard, but one that shelters and guides instead of hitting.

She shows me a balloon, a mesmerizing translucent sphere that bobs and bounces so much like its color, pink. Pink is nothing short of fun, and it makes me smile. There's no seriousness or consequences. It's laughter and ecstasy, companionship and love. Some of the things that these colors make me feel don't make sense, but Twilight Sparkle always explains them to me.

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One day she brings me something that changes everything. It's flat and elaborate, and she tells me it's green. I fall in love with green. There's a clean, fresh smell sleeping inside the color, a boundless wisdom and perfection that none of the colors have even come close to. A feeling of excellence and softness emanates from the regal color. Then Twilight Sparkle tells me that it's a leaf, and that it comes from a tree. I ask her to tell me about them.

"A tree is a sort of plant. It's like a tall, solid pillar with rough skin and thick branches that come off its sides. It stretches upward and the tips of its wood are covered in these leaves. Sometimes there aren't just leaves in the tree though. There can be apples, or oranges, or even lemons!"

"What about chocolate? Can trees have chocolate, too?" I ask excitedly.

She laughs a beautiful, scintillating laugh that feels like pink. "Well, not exactly. There can be beans that make chocolate on trees, but not chocolate bars."

That disappoints me slightly, but I still really like the idea of trees, and all the colors they contain. I ask her where one can find trees. She tells me that trees grow outside.

I had heard Twilight Sparkle speak many times of 'outside'. I don't know what it is though, only that it's where she comes from. I imagine it's a beautiful box that's covered with all these colors that she has shown me. It'd be full of lemons and gemstones and balloons. I tell this to her, and she laughs again.

"No, that's not quite right either. Outside isn't a box, because it doesn't have walls or a ceiling."

I thought I had learned so much from this pony. But when she explains to me what outside is, I'm staggered. Colors had been one thing for sure, but no walls? No ceiling? That made no sense! Where would the colors go? Where would one write their name? What told a pony where they could and couldn't go? I relay these queries to Twilight Sparkle. Thankfully, she's now quite good at explaining.

"Outside is nothing like the inside at all, Canvas. This here is inside," she elaborates, tapping a hoof on the floor of the white box. "Outside is beyond these walls and floors. It isn't restricted or restrained. The only thing above anypony is a sky, and it's so high up that one never minds it. There are no walls except the ones we make ourselves. The outside has forests full of trees and oceans full of water, and towns full of other ponies."

"A town? What's a town?"

"A town is a place where many different ponies come and live together in houses. They have friends and family. They talk to each other, buying things, sharing things, having parties and working as one. There are many towns all over Equestria. Equestria is where we are now. It's where we live. Outside and inside is a part of Equestria."

"So... ponies live in houses? Are those like boxes too?"

"Well, almost. They have a wall and ceiling, but they usually have several colors and aren't always square. They're all different, and they make up a town."

"I don't see why anypony would want to live in a house when outside sounds so amazing. But what town do you come from?"

"It's a small place called Ponyville."

"And you have friends there? Other ponies with colors?"

"Yes."

"Tell me about them."

And so she did. Each day now, instead of colors, Twilight Sparkle regales me with tales and stories of her friends, and of their adventures and lessons together. She tells me about her little dragon named Spike, who's always there when she needs him. Scowling playfully, she tells me that sometimes he was rather lazy, but I don't understand why anypony can be lazy in a world where there are so many colors to see.

She tells me about Fluttershy, a **yellow**, soft-spoken pegasus pony who is friends with the animals and afraid of many things. Twilight has to stop for a while to explain to me what animals are.

There's also Rarity, a unicorn whose mane is a majestic **purple** while her fur is an ugly white. It perplexes me how two opposite things can come together as such, and I tell this to Twilight. She warns me that if I ever meet Rarity, I should probably avoid repeating that.

I really want to meet Pinkie Pie, with her gambits and games, after Twilight tells me about her. Funny how, like the orange, she too is exactly like the color she's named after, **pink**. Twilight laughs as she recalls the parties that the lively pony would throw, and it made me crave cake and music and confetti, even if I'm not completely sure what those are.

Then I hear about Applejack, a hard working **orange** farm mare who has the most beautiful job of tending to apple trees. She tells me that it's from her that she had gotten the apple. The thought of so many of the powerful plants together in an 'orchard' gives me shivers. With all those trees and colors, she must surely be the most powerful and important mare in Ponyville.

But then, she speaks with eyes wide of the amazing feats of the **blue** pegasus pony Rainbow Dash. Her mane is not one color or two like the rest, explains Twilight Sparkle, but an entire spectrum of all the beautiful colors I had learned about. I want nothing

more than to be able to see this pony, even if only once, just to see her mane, and to see the fabled Sonic Rainboom that Twilight Sparkle tells me of with such eagerness. Seeing the explosion of colors spread across the immense sky... I can't even begin to imagine it. These stories could last forever, and I wouldn't care. But these things come to an end.

As Twilight finishes taking her notes one day, she stands and faces me.

"By the way Canvas, I pulled up your file. I found out what it is you do, what your cutie mark means."

I look at my flank in contemplation. I had never understood what it meant myself. It's a little stick with a mane on it that's white. I don't like it at all, not anymore.

"Canvas, you were an artist. A painter."

She leaves me alone. I stare at my cutie mark, and my flank, and at the walls.

A painter.

That word means something to me, like my name. It means something like the colors mean something. I want to be outside more than ever now, to meet these ponies, to see the trees, to bask in the colors.

But instead, I just sit where I am.

On my cot.

In the white box.

Inside.

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Since Twilight Sparkle's visits started, I've experienced more joy and relish for life than ever before. Questions, wonders and thoughts barrage my brain, and everything feels alive and vibrant. I want to ask Twilight so many things, and I'm eager to begin talking when she walks out of the doorway in that corner. But before a single question can leave my lips, I stop. The purple unicorn seems... different.

Her normally sparkling eyes and upturned grin are now dark and cold. She doesn't greet me, she doesn't ask me how I'm feeling. She just sits down, silent, and takes out her quill and clipboard. Before I can even open my mouth, she asks me:

"Do you know why you're here?"

I'm surprised at the question. I had already heard it once before, hadn't I?

"I'm here because I'm a criminal. Don't you..."

"No! That's wrong."

"I'm sorry?"

"Around a week ago I told you that you were a painter. Do you remember?"

"Of course. But what is a painter?"

"A painter is someone who uses a brush and paint to make pictures with colors."

My eyes widen with excitement. This was the most wonderful news I had ever heard! Although I had never heard anything about brushes or paint or pictures, the words seem more familiar than anything, like they're something I had known in my heart and only now by hearing them can I remember.

"Yes, you're a painter. You make things with colors and you draw pictures. But you aren't an ordinary painter. Because the things you paint come to life. You have a power that no one else has, a power that's so immense and filled with potential that you were brought here."

"That's incredible! I want to learn more about being a painter!"

"But you *know* about being a painter! You knew everything before you were brought here!"

"What do you mean, before? It's always been like this, and I don't know anything about painting. I've never even heard of it before!"

Suddenly I see a side of Twilight Sparkle that I had never seen before. Anger. She bolts upright and stomps toward me, pressing her eyes close to mine.

"Don't you *get it*?! This isn't all there is! You haven't always been here, just think! Everypony here is exactly the same, they're *all* like you! They all have talents, they all have reasons for being here, but it all comes down to one thing! Clarity, the albino unicorn, he can copy cutie marks when he sees them used! *Any* cutie mark! Forte, she can motivate ponies with speeches and her ideas are revolutionary and unheard of! And Smooth Song, his music touches something that can't be expressed, he creates feelings strong enough to instill thoughts that could cause complete chaos! *And you*! Anything you paint, anything you make becomes *real*! Can't you see the connection? Why don't you understand? Why don't you remember?!"

Panting hard, she slowly backs away, her eyes filled with an unspeakable fury and frustration that feels like **red**. Hot, raging, and unpredictable **red**. But more so, all the ideas, all the thoughts and wonders that had been poured into my mind over the time she had been here are starting to solidify. I'm scared.

No, I'm terrified.

"I've been coming here for months, trying to make you remember who you are. You've been locked in this cell for I don't know how long, being tested and tortured and experimented on and whatever horrible things these ponies have done to make you forget. To make you lose your mind and talent. But it just won't go away! So they're starting over, they're trying to make you remember what they've made you forget! So that you understand what's happened here and what you are! So that they can start this whole thing over again! Everything is going to be *gone*!"

Her voice cracks, and her beautiful **purple** eyes become rimmed with tears. She falls to the ground, breathing hard. I don't say a word. Everything falls into place in my mind, and I feel numb.

Finally, after what feels like an eternity, she looks up into my eyes.

"Do you know why you're here?"

I'm quiet for a very long time, my mind blank. And then I speak.

"I'm here because She's afraid of me."

And then Twilight Sparkle is gone.

It's too quiet in this white box. It scares me.

There are no colors here.

• • •

Twilight Sparkle doesn't come the next day. Or the next. Or the day after that. Every time I wake up, I eat my meal, sit on my cot, stare at *that* corner, and wait.

It's my fault. All my fault. The one thing that gave me purpose and meaning is *gone*. I want to weep and moan and feel pain to punish myself. But I don't do any of those things.

I just stare at *that* corner.

It never opens. She never comes. But I wait anyways, until I can't wait anymore.

...

I wonder how many steps it takes to get from the cot to the wall.

Twelve.

• • •

I've never felt so alone. There's no one here. No color, just nothingness and void. The white walls don't move, they don't let me see the outside or Twilight. There is no sky above, there is no ocean or town. There is no forest.

The sun doesn't shine here.

I think about Rainbow Dash and her colors.

I think about Applejack and her trees.

I think about Rarity, Spike, Fluttershy, and Pinkie Pie.

I think about Twilight Sparkle.

The walls feel closer than before. And the lights hurt my eyes.

I hit my head against the walls to push them back. They don't move, and there's a stain on them now that isn't white.

I can't remember what color it is.

I'm scared again.

• • •

I wake up after what feels like such a long time.

My head is numb and white.

I can't think or feel, and my legs barely carry me as I strip the plastic off the food in the tray and chew it. It doesn't taste like anything anymore. I don't care. I'm not hungry anyways.

Inexplicably, I'm angry, and that anger burns through the numb whiteness. Damn that pony and her colors. Damn her for showing me her fur, the gemstone, the leaf. Damn her and her outside.

Damn her for trying to give me meaning.

Damn her for making me remember anything.

Then suddenly, something cold grabs my heart, and the anger gives way to fear. Meaning? Remember?! I drop the food in my mouth and gallop twelve paces to the corner in the wall, and look down at the corner.

It's white.

White.

The word isn't there.

White. White. White.

I hear something in my brain crack. I do something I've never done.

I scream.

I scream and I buck and I kick, slamming myself into the white walls of this box that has kept me here forever. I scream in pain, I scream in fury, I scream in loss.

I scream as my brain feels like it's ripping itself apart.

I scream for color. But there's only whiteness.

I scream loud enough that suddenly I'm being carried backwards by thick, strong white hooves. The guards struggle to hold me as their whiteness gets closer and I kick and bite and fight them.

I need color. The whiteness is going to kill me.

And then I see a color, in *that* corner. I see Twilight Sparkle, her eyes full of shock and horror. She's scared. She should be. Pushing against the guards, everything in my mind goes perfectly white again.

And then it bursts with the majesty of colors.

"I was eight years old! I was with my mother by the fire and she was reading me a story full of pictures and words and colors! Then there was a horrible loud knocking noise! I heard my father scream my name, my mother carried me and told me to run as fast as I could! I ran outside, but it was so cold and there was snow so deep that I couldn't run any faster! I couldn't escape! I drowned in white and woke in white! My mother screamed my name but I can't remember it!"

I'm boiling, I'm red, I'm fury. My hate and my anguish focus on her, fusing circuits in my brain and exploding into a shower of hot sparks.

"I was eight years old! I've been here for *twelve years!*

"My mother screamed my name, and you *stole* it from me!"

There's no more to say. Everything becomes white, and I fall into nothingness.

• • •

When I awake, it's all gone. The guards, the anger, the strange pony.

I'm alone.

My head throbs something fierce, and I can't get up because my hooves are cuffed to the bed. There's nothing. Nothing at all.

The lights really hurt my eyes.

I can't remember my name.

I am as white as the walls.

I do something I've never done before.

I cry.

• • •

I don't know how she got in here. I don't know how she got the cuffs off. And I don't know how long it's been. The days stopped meaning anything a long time ago.

Twilight Sparkle looks at me, and doesn't speak.

Lying on my cot, I don't say anything to her either. I stare at her eyes. They're purple. They're magic and mystery and beauty. And they look like they're going to cry.

The unicorn's horn glows, and she levitates something out of her saddlebag and places it on the floor. I don't care to see what it is. I just stare into her eyes. I stare into her colors that make the white walls expand, and the box feels just a little bit bigger, even if for only a moment.

She steps away, trotting slowly toward that corner. She casts me one final look, a look of pain and regret and sorrow. Her eyes are purple. And they're pouring white tears.

Her voice trembling, I hear her speak one last time.

"Your name is Canvas. You're a painter."

She disappears from my life.

I look down at the floor.

Laying there, unmoved, eternal, and alive, is a palette and a brush.

• • •

I once thought white was the most beautiful thing in the world. Then I discovered color, and whiteness lost all meaning and importance. It became something ugly, something dead and emotionless. But now I realize that I was wrong twice.

Because whiteness is every color there is. Hidden. Waiting.

My strokes are light and wispy, hatching the surface of the white floor with precision and purpose. I'm careful, very careful to not step where the paint is still fresh. I've never done this before, but it feels like this is all I was ever meant to do.

The air smells clean and pure, and the hard floor softens.

My strokes are broad and wide, bathing the ceiling with deep, immense hues, and size that I can't even begin to fathom. I strain to recall everything I heard in stories to match its splendor. My paint could never do it justice though. It will never be the perfection I envision.

The ceiling falls away, and the sky is sprawling and limitless.

My strokes are light-hearted, jovial, and happy, creasing the walls with a intricate beauty. I don't know what houses look like, exactly. I wonder where Twilight Sparkle would live. I don't dare to try to paint it. The image is too fragile.

The world is filled with laughter and joy.

My strokes are strong, bold, and confident. These are now my keepers, my vanguards of peace and rest that shield me from the sparkling sun. Maybe Rainbow Dash would cover the sky with a few clouds, and Applejack would share with me an apple bucked from this strong, handsome tree.

The sun is warm and loving, and its light doesn't hurt my eyes.

It beams over immaculate pink and white houses, glistening on the lakes that cast an ethereal shimmer around this universe.

And I wonder if it looks anything like Ponyville.

Pressing a hoof against the bark of the apple tree, I realize that I'll never know. I'll never know if this is how a tree really smells, if this is how grass really looks, or if this is how warm the sun really feels. I'll never know outside. I'll never know so much.

It all still feels like the white walls. And yet, those walls have no power here.

...

Don't you dare, Canvas.

Crying will make the colors run.

So I resist the urge. And instead I sit in the shade of the tree I have made, and I don't think of anything. Nothing at all. I am at peace, and I know in my heart that this is the first time.

"I'll never know." My voice sounds warm and familiar.

I think one last time of all the friends I know that I'll never meet, of all the things I heard of that I'll never see.

Then I look up at the branches of the tree. And I smile.

One is thicker than the rest. Mightier.

Yes.

I think I'll look good there.

I pick up my brush.