

This story is dedicated to all the writers of erotic fan fiction out there, both in this and other fandoms. Specifically the ones who suck at it. No, I don't care if you're a fourteen year old girl in a school in America's most sexually repressed state and Sirius and Harry's forbidden love is the only means of emotional outpouring you have, there is no excuse for failing to get basic anatomy right, and what's worse is the way you treat what should be at the heart of any sexual relationship: the *relationship!* Sexually active adults are not automatically promiscuous. Sexually active adults do not automatically go both ways. If an individual who had, up until that point in canon been heterosexual suddenly finds that they are attracted to a member of the same sex, that is a big issue and would trigger real soul-searching, and not a random gang-bang. Non-con is not okay, and no, making it something other than male-on-female does not make it suddenly okay. That said, people can get help or help themselves after abuse and go on to be happy and fulfilled not suicidal bundles of gothic angst. And whilst it adds Pathos to a backstory, if you don't do it horribly, don't go overboard: one character, and a major one, and it should be shown to have consequences on their life and drive the plot, otherwise what's the point in including it other than plain nastiness? Adults in a sexual relationship do not feel the need to talk about their genitalia all the time, especially not in either medical terminology or excruciatingly bad simile. Adults in a sexual relationship do talk about things other than graphic depictions of their own sex life, especially in public, and Adults in a sexual relationship most certainly do not suffer some form of pseudo Tourette's syndrome where every other word out of their mouth is "Fuck." Love is not easy or automatic, nor does it come out of nowhere just so you have an excuse for incompatible characters to fu... to shag. But it shouldn't be forgotten either. Romance is not yet dead, despite your best attempts astronomytower.net

That is not how erotic fan fiction should be done. That's not how ANY fan fiction should be done. It's fan fiction, so it's a story. It should have a story with a plot; one with a beginning, middle and end. If it also has horribly written sex, well then that's something I'm willing to forgive so long as that sex serves a purpose in the overall plot. If you're going to do it, and I'm not saying you should unless you have some actual story you're trying to tell, do it right.

So here, dedicated to you, is my offering. Individuals who are sexually promiscuous exist, Bisexuals exist, but these groups do not make up 100% of the population and do not automatically overlap. If a character finds their established or implied canon sexuality called into question, it will be a big deal. Sexual and emotional abuse is traumatic and never played for laughs or titillation, but with help and

strength people can get past it and live full lives. Sexual acts will be within the realms of anatomical possibility for their parent narrative universe, carried out “off-screen”, and it’s highly unlikely any of the participants will bother to describe body parts or recount the off-screen acts in graphic detail, especially not to third parties. All the plot needs is enough for the reader to get the general idea. There shall be little foul language and one, and exactly one, use of the word “fuck” because if you overuse it it loses all shock value. And individuals will occasionally be smitten with something closely resembling love. Plot matters, and not just that kind of “plot”.

Do rule 34 properly, or don’t do it at all.

Love and tolerance,

BunnyRock

Prologue

“Well kids, It looks like Sweet Apple Acers might have to sell up.” Sighed Granny Smith.

“No, we’ll find a way granny!” yelled Applejack, indignation showing as strongly as her still-new cutie mark. Granny Smith sighed. Things had not been going well for Sweet Apple Acers, and goodness knows, she’d tried her best to get her head around the accounting, but she was a farmer and not an accountant and that was that. The days of her youth, when all you needed to be to run a successful orchard was good at growing fruit, were long over, and the unexpectedly high tax return looked like the end for them. She’d expected AJ to take it badly, but horror would have been better than denial.

“Well sugar cube, I’m not saying we can’t try sometin’, I’m just saying that, perhaps we’d better prepare ourselves for the worst.” She looked to Macintosh. He stood silently, watching. “I’m just saying kids, that after everything else that’s happened, I don’t know what there is we could do. “

“But we’re not short by that much!” said AJ incredulously. “Just two hundred bits or so would tide us over for another year, I mean, we’ve got to be able to make that somehow... to close up now, after all that’s happened this year.. we just gotta find a way!”

Granny Smith nuzzled her, as she started to cry.

“Oh, hush, hush now sugar cube. Harvest is over. We’ve got nothin’ more to sell, and what we did, we baked as many pies and made as much cider as we could to add to the value of those apples. It was a bad harvest, is all. We... we just didn’t make what we should have this year, is all. It’s not the end of the world... we’ll manage somehow.”

Macintosh watched his little sister cry as Granny stared to tear up as well. Now this on top of everything else. It wasn’t un-expected considering: the insurance pay-out had only gone so far, and what with an extra mouth to feed and all. He’d also looked at the tax return. He was young, he knew, on the very point between Colt and Stallion, and he was quiet, but he wasn’t stupid. He knew they’d not get the money. He also knew that they’d been had.

He spotted the tax inspector walking away from the farmhouse, and quietly slipped out after her. He didn’t know what he was going to confront her with, but confront her he would. She spotted him, and kept walking for a while. Once out of sight, she stopped and let him catch up.

She was the Mayor’s younger sister. They didn’t get on, and Mac could guess why. She was older than him by a lot, but not old. He felt nervous approaching her, but he did anyway.

They looked at each other for a long time.

“Well? She asked “I haven’t got all day.”

“That tax return was a cheat. You’re trying to put us out of business.”

“And why would I do that?” she smirked. She had a part share in a rival orchard, but Mac didn’t feel the need to point it out.

“You cheated the figures. After all we’ve been through this year, you cheated them figures.”

“Can you prove it?” Macintosh hesitated. He was very, very good at maths, but he didn’t like to draw attention to it because it made AJ feel bad about her problems counting. He could see the numbers were wrong, but he’d never prove it unless he got a look at the tax inspectors notes. Not before they went bust. He shook his head.

“No, I thought not.” Said the Tax collector. She looked him up and down. “Go home, kid, this isn’t any place for you. You’re going to go bust here, and you’ve got nothing to offer me to get be to re-examine those figures, have you?”

Mac hesitated, hating her, hating every moment, but then shook his head. “No.”

She paused, and cocked her head on one side, looking him over again.

“Let me re-phrase that, you haven’t got anything to offer *me* have you?”

Mac stared, unsure as to what she meant. She sighed.

“How old are you kid?”

Mac’s mind raced. He added a year and a half to his age and told her. She laughed, once.

“Yeah, right. Well, young as you are, you certainly look like a big, strong stallion. Perhaps if you could act like one, just for me, I could give you a little more time to find the cash...” she looked at him for a long time, and nervously bit her upper lip. “If... if you know what I mean.”

Mac thought he did, and nervously pawed at the ground. He knew that he had reached the first big decision of his life, and what he did now would define him. After a long, slow moment of soul searching, he turned to leave. As he did, he caught site of the farmhouse and the sunset. This farm had been in the family for seven generations. He sighed, but didn’t look back right away.

“You know we’ll never get two hundred bits in time.”

“The farm? No ... *you* might.”

“I... I’ve never done this before.”

“So, what are you, gay? Look, you don’t want to do this it’s no skin off my teeth. I just thought you might want to make a little money, maybe save your family farm. I’m going now. I’ll be walking back the back way, the quiet way, where no one ever goes, if you catch my drift. Where you go is up to you.”

Macintosh stood for a long time, looking at the farmhouse. After a while he shuddered, and followed the mare into the orchard.

Chapter one. Ten years later.

Mac finally finished working the field, and unhooking himself from the plough walked over to the water butt and drank a little. He then ducked his head quickly, to cool off. He caught sight of his sister Apple Bloom heading out to visit her friends, and nodded to her.

"AJ's lookin' for you." She said.

"That so?"

"Eyup." Said Bloom, grinning as she imitated her brother. Mac smiled and nuzzled her affectionately before walking back to the farmhouse to look for his other sister. He found her by the barn, struggling with a letter.

"Macintosh! You come an' take a look at this will you brother? Ah ordered five new barrels for the cider we're makin' at two bits twenty each, with a ten per-cent dis-count because it was five-or-more items an' Ah paid a month in advance, and they've gone an' charged us nine bits ninety. That's got to be too much, hasn't it?"

"Nope. Ten two twenty's are twenty-two bits, so half that is eleven bits, and take away one tenth of eleven, one bit ten, gives you nine-ninety."

"So... is that more or less than what we were paying before?"

Mac thought, but only for a moment.

"Less: before we paid two bits per barrel, but no discounts. With ten per-cent off, each two-twenty barrel is only one ninety-eight."

"Right, right, that's what I thought." Said Applejack, huffing slightly. She still got a little defensive about her counting. "Anyways, can you move that hay bale for me? That's what I called you over

for.” Mac looked at the bale. It was big, but she could easily lift it herself. For such an honest pony, she sure was good of thinking of excuses as to why she needed him around whenever math was involved.

“Sure.” He said, hauling it up the ramp into the hayloft. He glanced down. AJ was still struggling with the letter, unsure as to how it fitted into the farm’s finances. In many ways it was for the best that AJ wasn’t as good with numbers as him. There were certain things in the finances he didn’t want seen.

“Hey AJ, I’m going out. Be back late.”

“Oh? Sure, whatever.” Called AJ, trying to work out where to file the letter. As Mac walked down the ramp, nuzzled his sister behind the ear and walked off, he mused that most Stallions in his profession would have to make up some reason for why they were often away for long periods late in the day. Neither Granny or AJ had ever questioned it, and although Bloom had, he’d just told her it was a personal matter and he’d like her not to pry, and she stopped asking. He guessed nopony ever questioned what the pony who was always there when you needed him did when you didn’t need him.

The afternoon was fading, but fading well. It would be a beautiful evening, and in the cooling air Mac felt happier than usual as he walked to Ponyville to work on his other job.

His first stop was, as ever, the Mayor’s office.

“Enter. Oh, it’s you Mac.” The Mayor said as she put down the letter she’d been reading with some distaste, and pushed it across the desk to him, he glanced at it, questioningly.

“My sister.” She said darkly “Writing to me saying how horrible the fact finding mission Celestia has sent her on is and begging me to see if I can get her transferred back to the Inland Revenue Brach.”

“You told her where she could stick her letters?”

“No, but I will.” Said the Mayor. “What she did to you...”

“Got any work for me?” asked Mac, changing the subject. The Mayor sighed.

“Mac, I wish you’d quit this. I don’t need the money, and I’m sure you could make good money in government or accounting with your talents...”

“Any work for me?” Mac repeated, without anger or upset. He didn’t feel strongly about the work either way: if he did, he wouldn’t have been very good at it. The Mayor sighed. She’d found out what her sister had been doing to Mac about two years after it had started, and made it clear then and there what would happen to her sister if she continued with it. She’d been quietly transferred to a different branch of government, and then transferred abroad anyway, not long after, but it was still hard for the Mayor to do that to her own sister, to threaten her. She’d got Mac some therapy, but it hadn’t taken. She felt she had to make amends for what her sister had done, and that was the reason, and the only reason she went along with Mac’s idea to become his handler.

The facts were simple: when he was a young stallion, barely more than a colt, the Mayors sister had taken advantage of Sweet Apple Acers financially, and then use that to leverage Mac into sleeping with her and some of her paying “friends”. She’d only been caught when she foolishly tried to suggest to her sister that they pimp him out at a government party, and the Mayor, utterly utterly horrified to learn what had been happening, had put a stop to it. She’d kept the police out of it, at Mac’s instance, and advised her sister to get out of Ponyville before something unfortunate happened, like the information being leaked to an angry mob. But by then Mac was full-grown and, worse, more than smart enough to see that the farms financial problems hadn’t gone away and that this *was* the only high-paying job available to him that wouldn’t entail him leaving the farm. The Mayor had contacts, many of whom were wealthy, lonely mares, and Mac had the goods. It wasn’t an arrangement either of them was proud of, but the Mayor *had* promised to do anything she could for Mac, and Mac knew this way he could make enough money to keep the farm afloat and still work

there in order to stop AJ's number blindness getting them in genuine trouble with the tax-pony. Plus the legal issue with the farm...

"Yes, I have work, Mac. Here's the address." She sighed, handing over a note. "Usual drill: back door, don't be followed, keep track of time because if you're caught there when you shouldn't be there'll be trouble. Just... juts take care Mac. You're a good soul. I'd hate to see anything happen to you."

"Eeyup. Thanks." Said Mac. He left and closed the door quietly behind him. He regretted what he did, but he was pragmatist. It wasn't like he had anypony in his life he was romantically involved with, so as long as he could get money for this, he would. For the farm.

He just wished it didn't leave him feeling quite so empty.

"... and so, with proper police enforcement, Majesty, we could end this social scourge in, at our estimation, six to eight months."

The delegate finished speaking, and bowed. Well, half bowed. Somewhere between bowed and nodded, Celestia noted. She smiled with well-practiced polite enthusiasm and nodded back, before replying.

"Oh. Thank you, delegate for such a well thought out and... enthusiastic... presentation. I am, as ever, pleased to see so many high-profile figures from Canterlot society come together on this issue. It always pleases me to see my subjects take such a *personal* interest in the running of Equestria and the care and best-interest of Equestrian society. However, as with your previous proposal submitted though the Canterlot Appellate Court, I fear that you may have overlooked certain details with regards to the implementation and enforcement of any such legislation."

The lead delegate looked to the others before replying.

“With... with the greatest respect your majesty, we seemed to have covered all angles. Our proposal is comprehensive. What exactly have we overlooked?”

Celestia smiled. “Pony nature.”

“Majesty?”

“Outlawing an activity does not, in my experience, deal with the activity because the underlying behaviours are still present. Ponies still want to do it, they just find the lawful avenues for it closed to them. I fear that your proposal will just make criminals out of law-abiding ponies.”

“Our plans to deal with the criminal element are detailed, Majesty.”

“No, your plans to deal with the law abiding element you will criminalise with this law are detailed. If you outlaw it, real criminals will see the market and try to cash in, and they will use violence and intimidation to protect their markets. I feel you have not planned for this sufficiently. *This*” she said without raising her voice but said at just the right time to cut the speaker off “Was the opinion of the Appellate court when you tried to enforce this ... this *Prohibition* by re-interpreting existing laws in the *Sugar Spoon vs. Canterlot* case, and lacking any legal precedent for what was suggested, and because of the constitutional issues involved, it was for these reasons the Appellate Division declared they could not enforce your proposed ban without new legislation compelling them to.”

“And hence our delegation: if we cannot do this through the courts it is our right to come to you and seek new legislation, Majesty.”

Celestia smiled sweetly.

“And I am glad you did, it is a right I have allowed for generations.” She said. The delegate froze. If it was anyone other than Celestia, he would have sworn that she had put a very slight stress on the word “allowed”. But Celestia didn’t do things like that. He shuffled nervously.

“You agree, majesty, that we are right to want to end such activity?”

“I agree it causes certain problems” she said, sighing “But what doesn’t? What would you have me do, sir? I respect your delegations intent, but I simply cannot bring about legislation that criminalises any of my subject’s behaviour or encroaches on their private affairs and time honoured liberties without clear evidence it is in the public’s interest, and won’t end up making the situation worse, neither of which I feel you have provided sufficient proof for at this time.”

The delegate stared. Then bowed, stiffly. Formally.

“Very well majesty. I had hoped we could manage this without the expense and delay of taking the matter to the Supreme Court, but if you feel unable to rule on the matter yourself at this time, we will ask the Supreme Court to overrule the Appellate Court’s decision.”

“As is your right.” Said Princes Celestia, bowing back. Her two unicorn guards begun to walk forwards, indicating that the audience was over.

Celestia remained smiling for a moment after the delegation was gone and the doors were closed. Alone in the high, echoing throne room she picked up the bill the delegation had proposed, and looked at it for a moment, her face blank. A second latter it bounced of the wall at the opposite end of the room, and slid crumpled to the marble floor. Celestia slumped in her throne and put a hoof to her forehead. It was a job, a job she did well, and had done for a long time. It was a job that needed doing.

She just wished it didn’t leave her feeling so frustrated.

“In your own time son.” Said the Pharmacist half-jokingly as Caramel went thought his saddle bags for the third time, increasingly aware of the line of ponies behind him.

“I...I KNOW I’ve got that prescription in here somewhere...” he pleaded.

“Yeah, right alongside the grass-seed.” Somepony joked from the back of the line. There was a ripple of laughter, yes, but there was an edge to it. The Pharmacist responded to it.

“Look.” He sighed “You’ve been after that darn thing for five minutes: I propose that anything you can’t dislodge from that there saddle bag after three is either gone, or stuck there for good. You’ve probably just lost it again son. Like last week. Re-trace ya’ steps and I’m sure you’ll find it. Or failing that, go back to Doc Whooves, I axed’ him to keep a spare copy of your prescription back at the clinic after the last time.”

“But I know I put it here-” he caught the look the pharmacist was giving him over his half-moon spectacles. It was sympathetic, and proportionally worse for it. He gave up.

“Well, okay, thank you Mr Withers. I’ll go back to the clinic and come around latter.”

“That you will. Be seein’ ya then son.”

Caramel got his things, and walked out of the store, head down. One of the other stallions who he vaguely recognised as having gone to the same school as him, shoulder-bumped him as he tried to walk out, aiming to upset the bag he was trying to re-pack. He hesitated for just a moment, but then walked on, avoiding eye contact.

Outside, in Ponyville mane-street, he leaned against the wall, and raised a hoof to his closed eyes. Two mares walked past giggling, and although he knew they weren’t laughing at him, that still made him feel bad. He knew insomnia and a knack for loosing things was the least of his problems, because he knew the root of it. He knew he was a screw-up, that he’d disappointed his parents and left school with no real plan for what to do next, and he knew he was different, he knew *how* he was different to: at least in that one area he was honest with himself, if not with other ponies.

He just wished it didn't leave him feeling so lonely all the time.

He sighed, got his bags together, and started walking back down Mane-street, alone.

Walking up Mane-street, Big Mac closed his eyes for a moment, enjoying the quiet and coolness of the evening and the moments of solitude before his job. He took a deep, calming breath, and slowly blew it out as he re-opened his eyes. That he might bump into somepony walking along like that never even occurred to him. Every muscle on his body moved like oil on water, and his hooves went exactly where he wanted them to, but sure-footedness wasn't it. No-pony bumped into him, because he was Big Mac. You couldn't not see him coming. He was vaguely aware that he radiated an aura that made passers-by wave and say hi, but he didn't think much on it. It made him more noticeable, which was a down-side given what he was doing, but it did help attract customers, and the very fact he was so noticeable all the time, meant that no one noticed him at any specific times. He was always there in the background, so why notice him one time over another?

Passing along the opposite side of the street to the drug-store, he reached his turning and, after a quick look around, turned into a side street. No pony noticed.

Reaching the house a few minutes later, moved through the back garden and then checked under the doormat, as he had been told. Taking the kea, he unlocked the door, and slipped in.

Alone, in a stranger's house, in the dark, he felt no fear. He was alert, but not fearful. He picked up the small sounds of the building right away, as well as the smells of cooking and a very large and somewhat conspicuous area of darkness and soundlessness on the opposite side of the kitchen from the door he's just entered though.

He smiled.

"Ya paying by the hour, you want to sit there in the dark like this, it's your call."

A light flared into being.

The mare was wearing a somewhat... impractical cook's apron, and stiling at a table. The table was set for two, and heavily laden with fancy looking dishes. She lit a candle standing in the centre of the table, and the raised one immaculately made-up eyebrow at Big Mac.

"Oh no. An intruder." She said with an utterly, utterly flat voice. "Oh what ever shall I do?" she asked nonchalantly, raising the still glowing match to her lips.

"Have you come to ravish me, stranger?" she asked, blowing out the match in what she no doubt fondly imagined to be a seductive manner.

Big Mac snorted with laughter, just once, and then got his game face on.

"That costs extra" he said, easing into the seat opposite her.

Time passed.

They were upstairs in what was left of the master bedroom when Big Mac heard the front door open and went from sleeping deeply to wide awake . He turned to the mare next to him, who had gone as white as the sheets.

Whiter.

"Away on business, huh?" he asked softly, sliding out of bed and listening carefully, nerves starting to rise. He moved gently, surprisingly gently for such a big stallion, and made it to the hook he'd hung his horse-collar over, and picked up the money-bag with his teeth. Ducking his head, he slipped his collar on and considered his options. Surprisingly, given how wealthy the owners were, the cottage was old. Big Mac guessed that as the Rich family were 'new money', they'd bought the old manor cottage in some vain attempt to try to fit in with the 'old money' Canterlot elite. It was a posh house, but it was old, from the days when glass was expensive and so the windows were small, opened only at the top, and made of tiny panes leaded together. No escape there. If he could make

it to the stairs before the husband began to suspect anything, it was right down the stairs and across the kitchen to the unlocked back door...

A creaking on the stairs. He paused, now quite nervy, right at the bedroom doorway, and looked around. The mare stared stunned, tharn, barely able to move. He coughed gently to get her attention and she flicked her eyes towards a cupboard. It would do as a hiding place... for about five seconds. Cursing under his breath, he, with some difficulty forced his way inside.

“Honey? I’m home! Last train out to Canterlot broke down, so I’ll head off tomorrow, miss the first morning of the conference, but seeing how our little princess is sleeping over with that friend of hers Silver Spoon, I thought, well, with her gone and us all alone for once, I thought I’d come home and slather you with Zap Apple jam and...Mother Of Celestia what happened in here!” the voice yelled from right outside the cupboard.

Big Mac took that as his cue to leave.

He burst from the doors and had made it most of the way to the stairs when to his utter utter amazement, he was tackled from behind: for a rich older guy the husband moved pretty fast when he wanted to. Big Mac felt his front hooves slide of the top step, shifted his weight to try and get a better gip with his back, and realised his mistake in doing so at about the point where the husband kicked both his back legs from under him.

There were, as it turned out, twenty one steps back down to the kitchen. Big Mac got to know each of them intimately.

The husband came for a ride too, but gave up half way. Big Mac, freed from the sterling work the husband had been doing at keeping his hindquarters weighed down, flipped over at the bottom of the stair-case and found himself winded and wincing, flat on his back on the kitchen floor. This was bad enough on its own, but given he’d been in pretty much the same position an hour or so ago was, he felt, somewhat unfair.

Scrabbling up, and swearing though the money bag still in his clenched teeth, he heard as the Mare begun wailing at the top of the stairs “Oh my baby, hubby, what happened to you!” She ran to the husband, surprise surprise, and despite that fact he looked no more that slightly bruised, begun to

cradle his head and kiss him. "Why, if you hadn't got back when you did, who knows what that mad intruder hiding in the cupboard could have done!" she crooned, clearly a believer in getting one's alibi established as soon as possible.

Big Mac made it thought the back door at approximately the same time he realised he was trailing coin. The money bag had split. Spiting it out, he ran.

Moving parallel to Mane-street, he starred heading back to the Mayor's office.

Well he thought that was quite a close call...

Big Mac saw the mayors light still on, shining around the edges of the door as he approached. That was of itself not unusual, he thought, she often worked late.

He pushed open the door, and seeing her, blew a sigh of relief and moved in, keen to unload following his near-miss.

"Well. You'll not believe tha' night I've had." He said pushing in, the mayor looked at him shock, no doubt surprised to see him back so early.

"Mac! I.."

"The mare's husband walked in on me! Walked right in! Had to bail, lost the money, got tackled down the stairs... Ah sure hope the husband is all right, he took a tumble and I'd not like to think he got hurt on my account-"

"Mac!" yelled the mayor, looking outright frightened. Big Macintosh became aware of a presence behind him. His heart fell, He kept looking at the mayor. Her face had gone white, and she was biting her lip. She caught his look, and her eyes widened, then she nodded, very slightly.

Big Mac turned around.

Sitting on the pair of chairs by the door, the really uncomfortable ones the mayor kept for visitors she didn't really want to see, were two Ponies. Snow white Pegasus, in golden armour. Palace Guard. Big Mac froze, and for a second, and only a second, considered running. But his parents and Granny Smith hadn't raised their young to run from their responsibilities. You did wrong, you made up for it. Besides, there would be no point trying to outrun them. Not with Pegasus.

"Macintosh Apple?" said one of the guards.

He nodded. He hadn't been called that in years. *Stupid name* the parts of him not frozen solid with guilt idly thought.

"I am Guardspony Wedge, and this is my partner Guardspony Biggs, Equestrian Royal Guard, First Dawn Regiment, Civil Gendarmerie Detachment." Said the pony on the right. Big mac nodded, unable to speak. The white Pegasus continued.

"We were carrying out a routine aerial patrol over Ponyville and its environs this evening when we detected an apparent domestic disturbance off public bridleway fifteen, at approximately twenty-two hundred. Do you have any information you feel you could share with us on this matter?"

"Um. Ten o'clock?" Mac asked. The guard nodded. Mac looked to the clock on the wall. It was ten fifteen.

"Well, I guess that would have to be me, then, wouldn't it?"

The guard nodded. "We saw a figure fleeing the scene. My partner here decided to shadow the suspect at high altitude, whilst I landed to interview the apparent victims and gauge the nature of the offence. Do you have anything to say in your defence at this time?"

Oh god, she's going to say I broke in. Big Mac realised. I'm gonna get arrested for housebreaking, and if I'm very, very lucky she didn't say I raped her.

"I'm guessing she said I broke in?" he asked. The guard nodded.

"I didn't, for what that's worth." Mac said. *Oh Celestia, how am I gonna tell AJ? Who'll look after granny? I what'll my prison name be? Or will I get banished?*

The guard nodded. "We know."

I suppose getting banished to the moon would be the worst; if you're banished to the sun at least you don't feel anything- Huh? "I'm sorry?"

"We know. We saw you enter the building some three hours before, with a kea left out for you not long before that. We also noted there was no... disturbance... until the Husband, a mister F. Rich, returned unexpectedly. We're not stupid, Mr Apple, we have dealt with these cases before. That's why rather than confronting you and arresting you in the street we just waited to see where you were going and beat you to it. What we were more worried about is the dossier that the mayor, in an admirable and very misguided attempt to clear your name of potential housebreaking charges, gave to us." Mac noticed the other guard leafing through the mayor's appointment book, the one she kept to keep track of HIS appointments. He looked to her, and she sat down hurriedly, a hoof over her eyes.

"I'm sorry Mac, I didn't think. I just wanted to prove that you were expected at that house, and that anything that went on in there was completely consensual. Forgive me."

Mac shrugged, and laughed nervously. "Well, better booked for this than for the alternative, right?"

“Harrumph.” Went one of the guards. “We’ll need to fill in some paperwork and get you version of events, and we will have to inform the husband so he knows why we’re not pressing breaking-and-entering charges, but I think this can all be resolved at the level of local policing and the local cour-” the other guard nudged him. Both guards turned.

Spike, wearing an old-fashioned nightcap and sleeping-gown wandered in carrying a candle and rubbing at his eyes, yawning. In the claw rubbing at his eyes he held a scroll.

“Well if it ain’t wee will-o-the wisps” one of the guard joked. The other shushed him hurriedly.

“Celestia’s Dragon, fool!”

“Huhgg. Sup.” Said Spike sleepily. “Evening lady Mayor, Sir guards... Oh, hi Big mac.” He yawned.

“Hello Spike.” Said Big Mac, realising how surreal this was getting. “Twilight want to see me?”

“Nah, she’s with Owlowiscious recording parallax details on the observation of a comet when viewed under blah blah blah conditions. I just got woken up because Celestia decided to send me a letter in the middle of the night! Doesn’t she know growing dragons need their sleep?”

“You nap most afternoons, Spike.” Mac pointed out.

“Exactly! Anyway, It’s for you. Whatever it is, she didn’t want to wait for morning.” He said, thrusting the scroll vaguely in one of the guards direction, before yawing and shuffling out of the door.

“Night guys.” He said pulling it shut after him.

“Goodnight Spike.” Big mac found himself chorusing with the mayor and the guards. They spent a good moment of acute embarrassment glaring at each other after this, and then the first guard, Wedge, opened the letter. He read it quickly, and with no show of emotion. He then handed it to the second guard, who read it a lot more slowly, with his lips moving, and then his eyes bugged and he swore.

“Is this for real?” the second guard asked. Wedge ignored him.

“Macintosh Apple, also known as Big Macintosh, and Big McIntosh, and Big Mac, resident of Sweet Apple Acers, Ponyville, I have just received an executive order bearing the royal seal, instructing me to bring you to Canterlot immediately for questioning. You are not at this time under arrest, but if you refuse to cooperate with a lawful executive order you can be arrested under section twenty-three of the Equestrian penal code, and if found guilty of malcompliance, held at her majesty’s pleasure. Do you understand?”

Big mac nodded, stunned. “Eeyup. I understand.”

The guard nodded curtly, and then turned to the mayor.

“You will surrender any and all records you have relating to Big Mac, and you will prevent local law enforcement from investigating using article seven of the containment of sensitive information act. Placate the husband, tell him anything you wish, keep Big Mac’s other clients from talking, and tell the Apple family Big mac has been called away to deal with a flash flood on a side road off the Canterlot turnpike that’s left heavy debris only he is strong enough to clear, and that he will be back soon. If anypony talks arrest them under section seven, but try to convince them to go along with the cover story willingly. Spend whatever you need to do this, and bill Canterlot. Do not mention this letter or any Royal guard involvement. Put this matter under the Royal Seal: we will return in the morning for a *sub rosa* collection of any paperwork.”

“What, this is an outrage, you can’t just-”

The guard pushed the letter onto the mayor’s desk, spun it around so that Big Mac couldn’t see the writing, and then pointed to a paragraph. The mayor stared at it, open mouthed, and then raised both her hooves to her mouth.

“Big Mac, go with them, just go. Don’t argue. Really don’t.”

Big Mac looked from one guard, to the other, and then to the mayor.

“All right. Tell my kin that when I went to go clear up after this flood, I said I loved them, ya know?” he wasn’t stupid: this time of year a flash flood was plausible, and he’d been called up by the government to do heavy lifting during rescue work before because of his exceptional strength, but given flash floods were dangerous, it was a perfect cover story should he leave unexpectedly for a short time... or should he disappear.

“I’ll tell them... I’ll tell them. Take care Big Mac, and don’t worry.” said the mayor. “This... this can’t be as bad as it looks...”

It was less than an hour later (he’d been taken in a flying carriage, and it had scared him witless), and Big McIntosh was standing in front of the biggest pair of doors he had ever seen. He’d been to the Palace before, to see his little sister get the medal for fighting Discord, but this was not one of the palace’s function halls.

This was the door to the throne room. He was standing in one of the anterooms, actually waiting to enter the throne room. The two Pegasus guards, Briggs and Wedge, were still there, but in addition to this, there were two Unicorn guards flanking the door. None of them spoke. For the first time since... since *that* day, Big Mac felt very, very small, and very, very vulnerable.

After a while, he became aware of raised voices from inside the throne room. The doors were thick, but if he strained, he could just hear them.

“and what is more, majesty, is I have reason to believe that the right honourable representative for lower Manehattan may, in fact, be using the services of one of these establishments!”

Quiet: somepony answering, somepony who didn't feel the need to shout.

“And if I was? What the right honourable representative for Uffington seems to have forgotten in his *zeal*” Big mac had never heard a word pronounced with such venom. “Is that until he gets that decision from the supreme court, then the appellate court's decision stands, and so I am well within my rights to do so, not that I ever have, mark you.”

“Political arguments?” asked Big Mac. The unicorn guards blanked him, but Biggs and Wedge, who seems okay guys provided they weren't about to arrest you, shared a look.

“Every day.” Wedge said. “All the time. Look, it's nearly twenty-three hundred hours, Her Highness needs to be up before dawn, because otherwise there won't *be* a dawn, and they're *still* at it.” Wedge sighed. “I don't know how she does it.”

“She should just do what Luna does.” Replied Biggs.

“What does Princess Luna do?” asked Big Mac.

“Punctuates every sentence with lightning strikes: she's got used to not using the royal Canterlot voice out and about greeting her subjects, but if politicians are going to come into *her* throne room, and try to get her to do stuff for them, she'll insist on doing it in accordance with full court etiquette. From over a thousand years ago. And it' didn't make much sense then, either.”

Big Mac snorted nervously “Thanks. That's really helped me relax. Huh, well, at least those scary Luna guards with the bat-wings aren't around.”

Biggs and Wedge shared a look.

“Actually, that’s us.”

“...You what?”

“Well, not just us, but all the Pegasus in the guard. She’s got her own scary looking unicorns and earth-ponies too; you get sequestered over from the Celestian side of the guard on a three-month rotation. That said, apparently they’ve reformed the Night guard, so Luna will get her own regiments and they’ll take over those duties full-time. What, you think there were a load of Bat-winged guards all the time Luna was in exile, for a thousand years, just sitting around waiting for her to return? Or that maybe some suddenly showed up just when she did? It’s us.”

“You’re kidding me.”

“I wish I was: In the old days, there were Royal Lunar guards who looked like that, but with Luna gone, they just intermarried with the general population and bread themselves out of existence. Maybe the odd throwback now and then, but that’s it. So to keep Luna happy, make her feel respected, we dress up for her, remind her that she’s still thought of. It’s just us subject to a simple magical transformation, a glamour bonded to your armour, changes your appearance, lets you fly far more quietly at night, improves your night vision... scary as heck to look at, but pretty cool once you get used to it. Wears out when you remove the armour.” Said Wedge.

“Certainly the best nightmare Night costume I’ve ever worn.” Said Biggs. “Wish it didn’t have side effects, though.”

“Like what?”

“Well if you’re in bat form, a sudden desire to eat moths.”

Big Mac digested this information.

“And they managed ta’ Intermarry and breed themselves out of existence?”

“Heh. Go figure: maybe there were a lot more Goth girls back in the day.”

Without warning the doors opened.

Big McIntosh felt Wedge and Biggs step sideways and instinctively moved with them as the throne room emptied.

He could tell instantly that the delegation was made of two distinct groups, that they did not like each other, and that one group felt like it had won whatever argument was going on. First came a well-groomed but stony faced white Unicorn stallion wearing an expensive looking sash, at the head of the first group who *stormed* out, each one of them either looking grave or outright scowling. The leader was muttering instructions to a far younger mare, who looked like a PA. Mac only caught a fragment of what was said *immorality, threat and supreme court scand-* as he went past. The second group, looking a little smug for his liking, swept out with their noses in the air, although Mac noticed the pony in the centre of the group, an older grey Unicorn Stallion with a monocle, looking more worried than the rest. Another pony slapped Monocle on the back in congratulation, and he smiled briefly, tiredly, but the worry was still in his eyes as he did it.

Round one to them Big Mac thought But whatever it was about, that pony knows round two is coming even if the others don't.

Two unicorn guards followed them out of the throne room and escorted them to the outer doors. There was a *clunk* loud enough to be felt in the hooves as well as heard, but the other ponies seemed not to notice and kept walking towards the closed doors exiting the anteroom. The clunk was repeated, and the throne room doors swung shut, and the very instant the inner two doors to the throne room closed the doors between the ante-room and the courtyard boomed open, as if the energy from one set of doors closing had opened the other. Magic, or some clever mechanism. Big Mac realised that it acted as an air-lock, no, a security lock: nopony could rush into the throne-room un-announced because opening one set of doors closed the other. The group of ponies seemed not to notice and walked though as if nothing had happened: Big Mac guessed this was day-to-day life for them. The outer doors closed behind them, and the inner ones boomed open, narrowly missing

him. He tried not to flinch as he felt the breeze from those multi-ton doors passing within inches. Biggs and Wedge didn't even blink.

He stared into those open doors. The throne room was well lit, but some sort of shimmering pink shield partly obscured his view inside, making everything shimmering, strange and unreal.

He turned to Wedge. Wedge nodded. "Your turn. The field will let you through, so long as you're not a changeling. New feature. Perfectly harmless. Although, and this is very rare, you might taste blood as you walk through. On rare, rare occasions it can mistake certain objects for changelings. Usually fillings. Sometimes dental crowns. Braces. Poorly fitted Bits. Swiss cheese, for some reason. Teeth." Big Mac stared.

"Rare, rare occasions" Biggs added.

"Do, do you go in with me?" he asked. Wedge shook his head.

"Only if we're summoned. Good luck."

Big Mac swallowed, then put his Hoof down in a determined manner. He was an Apple, dammit, Even if he had disgraced the family and was about to get chewed-out on it by the highest authority imaginable, he wasn't going to go in that room acting like a coward. He hoped.

Head held high, Big Mac entered.

There was a slight tingling sensation as Big Mac crossed the shimmering, vaguely pink shield, and entered the throne room. He realised that the field was distorting the image he had seen from outside or casting some illusion: It was more softly lit than it had seemed from outside.

The room was perfectly laid out to draw your attention to the throne: regardless of whether you entered head held high, or eyes averted humbly to the floor, it drew you; first to the spread of carpet at the base of the throne where the two Unicorn flankers stood on guard, twenty-four hours a day, and then up, slowly, majestically up the steps until you came to the throne itself, always perfectly spot-lit, beautiful but left intentionally understated in order to show-off not the throne, but it's occupant.

Her Radiant Majesty Princess Celestia Lightbringer, Banisher of Chaos and of Darkness, Bringer of Unity, First of Equestria, Sol Invictus Aeviternus, "Quod est Licuit". Alicorn of the Blood Royal.

There were no Unicorn flankers. There was no spotlight. The throne was empty.

Celestia didn't need it or any fancy titles to make an impression.

"Hello. Big mac, isn't it?" Asked Celestia from her position sitting at the base of the steps to the throne, reading. His jaw dropped. She could *sit* with the effect it would take any other pony a perfectly timed dramatic entrance to make: regal, beautiful, just a little bit scary. "I'm just going through your case notes, plus the information the Mayor gave to my guards. Please, make yourself comfortable. I took the liberty of giving my Unicorn guards some time off; Wedge and Biggs are excellent guards, and good ponies, but I felt that given what's happened, perhaps you'd seen enough of guards for one day."

Big Macintosh stood and stared, this wasn't how a dressing down was supposed to start.

"Don't worry, you're not in trouble. It's just I thought now was an opportune time to offer you some advice. Please, sit down: I have some spare throw-cushions, I believe. Don't worry; you weren't brought in here just so I could give you a dressing down."

Okay... Big Mac thought looks like she can read my mind.

"No, not really, not without quite some effort and not inconsiderable risk to both of us, anyway; It's just that after the first five-hundred years of doing this you get quite good at guessing what ponies

think at these sorts of times. Please, sit down.” Celestia said, leafing through some papers. Big Mac noticed she had a far thicker file than the one that the guards had brought with them.

“So, Macintosh, I understand you got into a little trouble tonight.”

“Look, the Mayor always was sorta’ reluctant to get involved in all this, and fates help me ah pushed her. If you’re planin’ any punishment for her, you’d better go ahead and heap it on me.”

Celestia looked up from her papers, and looked Macintosh in the eye. To his credit he held her gaze for a good three seconds before the nervously defiant eyeballing gave way to the open wonder and naked awe that usually struck ponies when they realised they were talking to Celestia.

“Well that’s very noble of you Macintosh, but as of this time I haven’t got anything planned for the mayor other than a letter consisting of sensible advice. I could heap it on you, if you wish, but we already have a very effective postal network.” She said, trying to hide a puckish smile. “Besides, neither of you have broken any of Equestria’s laws.”

“You what?”

Celestia looked up and smiled briefly.

“Did the mayor ever demand money up front or a percentage from you?”

“err... nope?”

“Did she ever demand you... service ... certain clients, or demand you service a certain number of clients, or bring in a specified cash total per-month?”

“Nope.”

“Okay, did she ever try to confiscate your earnings or use violence or coercion to get you to commit an intimate act you felt unwilling to?”

“No, and ah resent the implication. I just asked her to find me names of mares who might be... yanno? Interested? That’s all. I paid her per name, and it was up to me which I saw and when.”

“Well then, prostitution is not of itself illegal in Equestria, and as it appears that the mayor has not broken any of my anti-pimping laws, knowing ponies who might go for that sort of thing is not itself illegal, and many firms pay third parties for list of potential clients. And although you’ve been claiming that the monies generated were from the farm, presumably to hide what you do from your family, both you and the mayor have been paying the proper income tax, which is ironic, given how this started. So I see no reason why word of this should reach the courts. As for the client and her... *unexpected* husband, I’ve arranged to keep that quiet. No charges are being filed, and the husband is under the impression he bravely fought of a changeling attacker.” She noticed the expression on his face and frowned as well.

“Don’t cry government cover up on that one, it was the wife’s idea. If I was covering it up it would have a better story. Or at least explained why the changing attacker had apparently brought chocolate mousse into the bedroom. No, I just called here because I’m worried about you.”

“About me?” asked Big Mac, stunned. “Why?”

“Because I’m your princess.” She said bluntly. “A great many rulers over the ages have had extensive secret police networks to prevent uprisings. I’ve never favoured the Idea; uprisings are almost always the result of strife, and strife can be fixed in cheaper, easier and in better ways than dragging ponies away to the cells in the middle of the night. I have, for this reason, a network of ... helpers. Probably best to think of them as secret *social workers*. All too often victims of domestic violence or sexual abuse or the terminally depressed don’t come to the attention of the proper authorities, because the proper authorities can only act on fact, on what’s reported to them. I try to... help the process along by having a network of ponies I trust feed me information about individuals they think might need help, but who for whatever reason haven’t asked yet. Who may, for whatever reason, never ask. I then... arrange matters as needs be. On rare occasions I feel merit it, I intervene personally. Cells are seldom if ever involved, before you ask.”

Celestia gestured to the thick file in front of her. “Where should we start?”

“Do... do I have to do this?”

“No, Big Mac, you are free to leave any time you want, but, and this is friendly advice, I’d stay if I were you. Tonight’s Mishap convinced me I had to intervene quickly, before things got out of

control, but I have been collating data on your case for, for some time.” She paused, waiting. Mac didn’t move, so she spoke. “Very well, let us begin. So, at risk of sounding tactless, Big mac, why have you been working as a gigolo?”

“Heh. Well, to be fair, I just needed the money. Sweet Apple Acres is barely paying its way, and what with granny’s hip, and saving to put Apple Bloom thought collage one day, I needed the coin. Simple as that.”

“I see, and you felt that there was no other way to make the required cash?”

“I’m just a simple earth pony, you’re highness. I kick trees for a living. Not much else I can do, really.”

“I see. Very well. Big Mac, could you please make eye contact with me? I’m going to try a simple truth spell. The effects won’t last more than a second or so, and if you are uncomfortable you will retain the ability to stay silent, but if the truth is *not* personally embarrassing to you, you will blurt it out. Okay?”

“I guess.” Said Big Mac, nervously making eye contact. “Shoot.” He said.

“What’s the positive square root of nine-hundred and sixty nine multiplied by the thirty-eighth digit of pi? To seven decimal places.”

“Thirty-one point one two eight seven six four eight, because the thirty-eighth digit of pi is one.”

“I see. And do you know the digits of pie of by heart?”

“Only the first six. No point leanin’ them when it’s really just division after all.”

Celestia raised an eyebrow. “Simple earth Pony huh?”

“Aw shucks that don’t prove squat, I could be one of them idiot sav’ants!”

“True, except for the fact you are clearly neurotypical, with rules out your being an autistic savant. Your former classroom-assistant, the one studying to qualify as a teacher when you were in school, Miss Cheerilee, is one of my secret little helpers. She has been forwarding me your information since your sister, Apple Jack, first started school. Before AJ attended school you were a bright, eager student. But as soon as she arrived, your grades slipped. Nothing off in that, and your grades didn’t slip that far all things considered, but you went from very good to just to above average. In fact you’re measured IQ from the test you were taking fell from one thirty to one fifteen.... The day after AJ tested a one sixteen, which is why Cheerilee deemed it worth of reporting. From that day on your measured IQ was always *exactly* one point below you sister’s. I don’t know if you know, Big Mac, but although taking time out of her collage course to help out in a local school, Cheerilee was a top college student and has since earned a Doctorate in child psychology, and as a result knows that not only is it possible for even quite young children to cheat IQ tests, but the *way* in which you cheat them can be used to estimate your IQ: to consistently score one point under you sister, when you sister is *being tested in the same room as you*, requiring you to constantly watch her, mentally score her, and score under her by just one point *in real time*, requires an IQ of at least one-forty. *At least*. In particular, once it was discovered that AJ is dyspraxic, you made a point never to hurt her feelings by scoring higher than her on a math test. You cheated to lower your measured IQ, and you did so in a very, very clever way. So let me ask again: why do you feel you need to resort to prostitution rather than say, stock trading, rocket science, or academia given the fact you’re clearly capable of them?”

“I’m still not clever, it’s just math-”

“You’re dyslexic, but only mildly. Your intelligence is above average in all areas, and you mathematical and Spatial Intelligence skills are in the top hundredth of a per cent. You’re good at maths because you’re very, very clever. It’s as simple as that: when affected by Discord, you became stupid, to the point of acting like a dog. Discord’s magic didn’t exaggerate traits, it reversed them. It affected you in that way *because* you are clever. So, I want the truth, Big Mac, and I think you do to. I’ll not use magic, just tell me... tell me about that year.”

“I... I don’t know that you mean.”

"I think you do."

Big Mac looked her in the eyes, and tried to decide whether to just up and leave or not. He didn't want to go there again. He didn't. but... but..

"Okay." He said. He took a deep breath, ready to say more than he ever had before. "Okay..."

"I was so happy when I heard that mah and pah were coming home. So happy, you can't know. Things with granny were great, but still, mah and pah were comin' home.

"They'd been off with uncle Spartan, explorin', out on the frontier, they was frontier's ponies, the lot of them, settlin' Apple-loosa. Apple-loosa: it's named after our family, Ya' know? Pah and his brother Spartan, Braeburn's dad, were the first homesteaders there. That's where pah met mah." Big Mac said, a touch sadly.

"It was far too dangerous back then to have foals out on the frontier, so we lived with granny and mah and pah came every autumn to help with the harvest and stayed over the winter, 'cause you don't want to be crossing those mountains in winter, and lived with us for half the year an' visited whenever they could. Spartan kept their claims in apple-loosa going until they got in spring to help plant new orchards. Pah owned sweet apple acres, and was prospecting for a good place to start a bigger orchard on the other side of the mountains. Then we heard the news, mah was gonna have another foal, and Pah had decided to sell up his claim to his brother and come back with her, not wanting to miss any more of our growin' up. She'd come on ahead, and he'd wait behind just a little until he and Spartan could settle up everything there, legal like. He was comin' back to us. Back for good."

Celestia paused, a few tears in her eyes as she saw Big Mac welling up. "And then?" she prompted. Big Mac sniffed back a tear, and shrugged.

"An' he never came home. Spartan was helping him part o' the way, and they were held up in a roadhouse in a mountain pass, waiting for a storm to clear, and word got to pah that Mah was

expectin' real soon and he might miss the birth, and Uncle Spartan said to wait for the storm to clear but Pah, he's where AJ gets her stubborn streak from, so he went out in the storm, and you don't leave kin behind so uncle Spartan went too..." Big Mac took a deep breath, and then continued. "And no-pony ever saw them again. Those mountains are treacherous at the best of times, and that's that. A couple of years ago, some gryphons from junior fliers out on a campin' trip found some o' their saddle bags in what looked like an old rock-fall. But nopony ever found their bodies or the money pah had on him from sellin' his share of the Apple-loosa orchards, and that's that. He never came home, and that just about killed mom." Big Mac looked up, tears in his eyes.

"We never blamed Apple Bloom. Never. The way mom was when she heard about Pah, she was barely eating, she didn't sleep. She weren't in no fit state to bring ah foal into the world, and the doctors knew it. They did all that they could to save her, and it wasn't Apple Bloom's fault what happened. But that *was* what happed, and nothin'll change that. We got some insurance money, not a lot, and that was it. We buried her, and AJ cried that she was buried separate from Pah so we put a mock-up grave for him next to hers, and planted a nice sapling over it. And that's pretty much all I'm willing to tell about that."

Celestia paused, and for one glorious second Big Mac thought it was over and she wasn't going to ask him anything else.

"And then?" she asked, patient as the grave.

"I... I don't wanna."

"And then, Big Mac?"

"And then, well, then I became the owner of Sweet Apple Acres. The insurance pay-out from both Mah and Pah's policy's barely covered the inheritance tax, and the Will... the Will didn't want the orchard broken up. Too many farms around those parts had been split up between siblings over the years, divided and divided again until they're too small to support a pony's livelihood, so there was a clause in the Will that I can't break it up, nor Will it to my kin in my will except under the terms of an identical clause: everythig' goes to the firstborn, forever; only way to stop the farm being broken up

into pieces too small to work. Sweet Apple Acers was mine, but I couldn't work it nor run the finances because I had six months to go before I was legally adult. Granny did what she could, but she weren't no spring chicken then, and she'd worked out on that farm since her parents where there, but never run the finances. We had no coin to hire help, granny was too old, me 'n AJ was too young, she'd a' bin about Bloom's current age, I a shade younger than AJ is now, we'd lost the money from Pah's share of the Apple-loosa orchards, and we had a new-born to feed and care for. The family helped, all the cousins an' uncles and aunts sent what they could spare, but we were goin' under by fair means or foul either way. And... and in the end, it turned out it was by foul."

"Yes. Do you need a break?"

"Eey-Nope. If we're doin' this I'm getting it off mah chest in one. Well, the farm was stuck in a heckava rut, we were broke, and a rival farm as tryin' to move in on us. And there was one pony in the tax office who happened to own stock in said rival farm, and she made sure we got done-over come the end of the tax year."

"Yes: her ownership of that stock was never declared, making it an illegal conflict of interest. I... part of the reason I'm going over this with you in such a personal way is I feel my government should have caught her earlier. We could have prevented this." Said Celestia.

"Aw heck, if she weren't corrupt we'd have gone under for sure. Besides, not your job. You have other ponies in the government too, don't you?"

"Yes, but I'm the princess. That's the down-side of being an absolute monarch: no one to blame but yourself. It's hard to claim plausible deniability after a thousand years of running the show."

"Well, past can't be changed. I don't even know if it can be fixed. She was corrupt, and she screwed me." Big Mac said with a sad grin. " Figuratively and... and not so."

"Yes." Said Celestia, sadly. "We should have caught her before it got that far. I... I am sorry."

Big Mac shrugged. "So am I, but I'm pragmatic. That two years she was using me as her personal squeeze was two years' time for me to get the farm in shape. I'm sure she felt she could have her cake and eat it, have me and get my land sooner or later, but like you say, I'd been playing dumber than I was for the best part of five years at that point. It sure fooled her. First I got the farm's accounts running properly, did the farm's heavy lifting work myself to save cash, then I started going through her papers; you'll be surprised what ponies leave around the bedroom. I was hoping to get enough to prove she'd done wrong, but I never could work out a way to tell the proper authorities without letting' up she'd been helping keep Sweet Apple Acres in business in exchange for, well, for me. And then she just left. Left. Transferred to another government department. And it couldn't have happened at a better time. I asked the mayor if she had a part in it, and she said she told her sister to get out of town when she found out, but swore she didn't have the power to transfer her like that, so we always put it down as ... as... as an act of providence." Big Mac slowed down as his brain caught up with his mouth. He stopped and stared at Celestia.

"I... You..." he said, pretty sure parts of his brain had just welded shut.

"Yes. You're welcome." She said. "I received reports from Cheerilee saying that she was worried for you: that you seemed to be showing signs of stress in your last days of school beyond that she'd expect from the recently bereaved. In particular you became noticeably fearful and agitated during sex-ed, and at one point when she tapped you on the shoulder for dozing off in Modern literature, the only class you were as poor in before you started playing down your intelligence as after, I note, you actually screamed when you woke up. Cheerilee has a passing resemblance to the mayor's sister, does she not?"

"Not really, but close enough."

"Yes. She was worried you might be suffering some form of neglect or abuse, but couldn't narrow it down to the source based only on what she saw of you in school, so she requested that any similar reports of abuse of a young stallion or older colt be compared with your file. Then, at some point, the mayor was told by her sister what was going on, was, unlike her sister, rightly repelled by the whole affair and tried to get her out of town and get you some therapy. By a *startling coincidence*

the very same day the head of my social services directorate and inland-revenue division received identical anonymous tip-off's as to exactly what a certain tax officer had been doing. Ones which, happily, due to extremely careful editing, did nothing to hurt the financial future of Sweet Apple Acers or imply you had received tax-relief from her in exchange for sexual favours. Given how unusual this sort of co-ordinated tip-off was, I took a personal interest in this case, and noticed that although there was no return address and the notes were written in block capitals, they were on the same linen letter-paper I had recently bought the mayor of Ponyville as a birthday present. Mayor Mare is not, perhaps, the most capable public servant, but she is loyal, and hard-working, and has a good heart; it must have been very hard for her, learning what her sister had done. They used to be close, but drifted apart: years before they had both requested diplomatic jobs, but the mayor went into local politics instead and her sister ended up in tax when it became clear she didn't have what it takes to be a diplomat: it was suspected she wanted the post to facilitate offshore banking. So when I investigated these 'anonymous' allegations that a tax officer had been using the threat of financial ruin to leverage an under-age pony into sexual favours, and to my horror found them to be of substance, I simply decided to offer her an overseas diplomatic post, which by a *staggering* coincidence arrived in the mailbox the same day as a copy of some rather revealing photographs, a copy of certain financial statements she didn't want known and a note that just read 'We Know'."

"Heh. She took the job quickly?"

"She didn't stop to pack. She's on a diplomatic posting in the High Eyries of the northernmost Gryphon lands, where I believe ponies' breath has been known to freeze solid mid-sentence, and where, more importantly, you need either wings or teleportation to get in or out. I have no intention of bringing her back. If she somehow manages to come back, then she can explain what she did in court. There was an argument from some of my secret helpers that we should make an example of her, but given *your* efforts to hide what she was doing from the authorities, this seemed... neater... than publically shaming you at a trial when you so clearly wanted to keep this quiet. If you ask, I will have her returned and tried."

"No, but you should bring her back, one day."

Celestia cocked her head on one side quizzically.

“I don’t want my sisters to know what I did to save the farm, I’m not proud of it, but I do want to look her in the eye just once and let her see she has no power over me anymore. But I’m in no hurry.”

“No, nor are you in any hurry to give up the profession she forced you into.”

“I told ya, I own the farm, and can’t divide it. I quit, what do AJ, and maybe Bloom one day, do for work? This way I keep the farm and make some extra on the side.”

“You could give the farm to your sister.”

“And what would the capital-gains tax on that much prime housin’ development land on be exactly? Forty per cent? Fifty? It’s not a rich farm as it is, you sell of forty per cent of the land to pay for the tax on the rest, you’ll get no income from what’s left of it. I can’t quit the farm to take a new job, I only have a few hours a week I can work away from the farm, and there’s very few ‘respectable’ professions that pay a high-school educated earth-pony five-hundred bits for two-hours’ work a week.”

“So that’s why you do it?”

“Eeyup.”

“Interesting; you told the counsellor the mayor made you see it was quote ‘so I felt I had some control: I was with older mares, but I was in charge, when, where, if I saw them or not. They paid, so I felt I was in control of the situation. I needed to do it, doc, so I could trust older mares again. So I could trust anypony again’ End quote”

“Those are supposed to be confidential, Princess. Secret social workers I can understand, but that’s low.”

“You let her publish it in a medical journal. *The Twitch*, I believe. Anonymously, admittedly, with identity’s, place names and dates changed, what we in government call *Chatham Horse Rule*; the opinions and facts presented are real, but presented anonymously. Nominally untraceable, but there are very few cases of older male colts taken advantage of sexually by authority figures outside of family, schools or the workplace. The very fact the published journal article pointed out the authority figure was not a family member teacher or co-worker, and they threatened to force a business into foreclosure, made it pretty clear who it was about if you happen to have an eidetic memory and secret records of all suspected incidents of female-on-male molestation from the kingdom. I saw it right away, Big Mac.”

“Why do you have a file open right now if you’ve got an eidetic memory?”

“It’s a prop: Ponies get nervous if you’ve never met them yet you remember details about their lives better than they do. And very, very few ponies ever think to ask that question. It shows just how clever you are, and that you’re deflecting my questions. So, are you doing this in some perverse attempt to regain a feeling of control? Is that why you sell yourself?”

“Yeah, maybe. I got price, means I got value. I dunno. I’m not sure. Some days I think that, others... others I don’t know why I do it. So you’re going to tell me what the mayor did? That’s it’s not a healthy way to get over my hang-ups about older mares and I should stop?”

“Is it working?”

“Yes. I think it is.”

“Good.”

“Good?” said Big Mac, stunned.

“Aversion therapy has very high success rates, and although this is NOT how any sane therapist would have set out a course of aversion therapy, it could work out the same way, help you over your hang-ups, conquer your fears. If you think it’s helping you, keep at it. Just one friendly piece of advice, from one pony to another? I’d be a little more discerning about who you take as customers, Big Mac. You’ve put yourself in a position where you could be blackmailed, threatened or even falsely accused of rape by dozens of ponies who are universally richer and better connected than you are. Be careful, very careful. Also you appear to be under-charging: I’ve got the records of everypony prosecuted for pimping for over a thousand years in my head, and you, an independent agent with no pimp or madam, are getting less than many in your profession get *after* a pimp takes his or her cut.”

“Well, I already got regular customers in Ponyville, and I don’t think they’ll pay higher-”

“They will, but why bother? You live an hour and a half on the train from Canterlot. Even with the loss of time getting to and fro, you could still triple your earnings easily if you came to the city and tried to make contact with the wealthier element here. It’s sad to say, but in *any* job you really have to commute.”

“And how would I explain that commute to my kin?”

“I’ve enrolled you on a horticulture course at the palace evening-classes.” Said Celestia, Big Mac looked taken aback.

“The, the mayor handled all my contacts, I don’t know any pony in Canterlot-”

“I do. There is a list added to your folder.” she said, pushing it over to him. “All from the wealthiest families in Canterlot, and all bored out of their minds. I’ve also sent a copy to the mayor and arranged some purely political meetings, which will introduce her to them socially so she can pre-screen them for you if you like. Either way, I think that you better have this folder now. No point in my keeping it anymore. I’ve made contact with you, got you to admit your psychological issues to

yourself, and given you some careers advice. Oh, and I've booked you in to see a therapist: the mayor was well-intentioned in booking you in to see one, but your sort of case really requires a specialist. Soft-shoulder really is the best for your sort of case. That's pretty much all I could say to you."

"You're really not going to tell me to stop whoring myself?"

"I would, but you won't if I did, and although it's *far* from an ideal way to sort out your issues, it does seem to be working, all my little secret helpers agree you appear to be a lot happier and apparently healthier and at peace with yourself than you were eight years ago. You've still got issues, but what you are doing seems to be working, in a strange way, and after a thousand years you learn that if something's working, even if it shouldn't be, you leave it well enough alone. You're already using protection, and you are a big Stallion who can handle himself, so all I can say to keep you safer than you are now is consider being more discerning in you clientele. Try moving up to, well, a kept stallion, if you can. A lot of the very rich mares in this city would kill to have a stallion like you at their beck and call, and would pay well enough that you'd not need to see any other customers."

"Huh, easier said than done." Said Big mac. "Ya got anypony in mind?" he asked, sarcastically.

Celestia smiled. "Yes."

"Well Ah didn't think you did... What?"

"I have somepony in mind... prostitution is a terrible thing, in a way. It is governed by two great and terrible myths. First, the myth of the happy prostitute, the idea that they like or at least don't mind their job, and that it's easy money. It's a myth believed mostly by Johns so they don't feel guilty, and given the violence shown by pimps and the drug addiction or, in your case and many like it, early sexual exploitation that leads ponies into prostitution, it's very much un-true. The other is the myth of the myth of the happy prostitute. It takes the other extreme; that all sex workers are exploited

and downtrodden unfortunates that need saving, and it is drivel. It ignores the very many perfectly intelligent, happy and healthy ponies that happen, for one reason or other, to work in the second oldest profession. It demeans sex workers, makes it harder for them to get meaningful help and support, and it inherently argues in favour of outlawing the industry, which only pushes it underground and thus encourages its worse extremes. So it leaves the intelligent pony with a dilemma: is it ever moral to pay for sex? And like a lot of these questions, there seems to be no answer. It's a matter of personal moral choice. Each and every pony has to make his or her decision on the matter."

"And you just happen to know some ponies who have decided it is, and want to pay *me*?"

"Well, yes. You're going to keep on doing it anyway, so if I can't dissuade you and won't arrest you, then the best I can do is make sure I know you're doing it with somepony I trust not to get you into trouble with the police, publically shame you or mistreat you in any way."

"Some rich older mare, I'm guessing?" said Big Mac, a little disgusted that his head of state, Princess Celestia, was trying to set him up with a client.

On the other hoof, I can't help but agree with her. He thought. She's pragmatic I'll grant that.

"Yes."

"Old" he asked.

"The oldest." she replied.

He didn't find that so attractive, but he was curious, he had to admit.

"Rich."

"The richest."

“Well connected? Powerful?”

“You have no idea.”

“huh.” said Big Mac. “Have I heard of her?” he asked, wondering who could be so old, and so rich, and so... powerful. Celestia was smiling at him, as if waiting for him to get the joke.

His jaw dropped, and small parts of his mind exploded when he worked it out.