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Girls and Bridle

Chapter 8 - The dust that we are

"WHAT WAS THAT!?"

"..."

"SERIOUSLY!? WHAT WAS THAT!?"

An infuriated Sophie screamed her lungs out at her two terrorized ponies who had never seen her this angry. With their back against the wall, still fully geared up in their racing attire, Morning Star and Moonlight trembled so much the scolding directed at them was intense. With their hands fastened to the waist and their bit well secured between their teeth, there was nothing they could do or say to dodge the storm. They had to endure it.

"THAT WAS PATHETIC! PATHETIC!"

"..."

"ARE YOU PONIES OR TURTLES?"

Sophie was angry. Very angry. And that was not the worst. No, the worst was that she had valid reasons to be. The team has just completed its first exhibition race on a real 3000 meters track and finished last. But even that was not the problem. On top of losing the race, they have lost their reputation because they didn't even come close to being a threat to any of the other teams.

"I can't believe this! You didn't even come close to your worst training lap. You looked like amateurs out there! It was HUMILIATING!"

"..."

Coming from their trainer, this was not a fun thing to hear. And considering Morning Star was supposed to be the fastest ponygirl in the world made it even harder to digest. But, as if they had not heard enough already, this enraged version of Sophie still had more venom to spit at them.

"Do you know where I'm coming from? The Triple Crown discipline board! They convened Penny and me to an emergency meeting. They said that they believed that we had falsified our training results to get accepted on the circuit. So, they said that to preserve the organization's reputation, they had to eject us from the competition. Do you know how often this happened in the history of the Triple Crown? NEVER! SO, I HOPE YOU ARE PROUD OF YOURSELVES!"

Was that true? Were they now considered the worst team in the history of the Triple Crown? Was that it? Was their dream over, and Penny's stable would go bankrupt? Having a hard time believing what she had just heard, Morning Star made one step forward but was quickly pushed back against the wall.

"BACK OFF, Morning Star! If it hadn't been for Penny and her carefully chosen words, that would have been the end of it. You'd have made history in a terrible way. But, instead, they gave us ONE more race to prove we belong here, and if we can't at least follow the pack, we will be ejected with no appeal possible."

"..."

"Now, I'm going to remove your bridle. I don't want to hear apologies, and I don't want to hear excuses. I just want you to tell me what you think went wrong. Is that clear?"

Morning Star and Moonlight nodded. It sure felt like the wrong time to disobey. Sophie detached their wrist cuffs and unbuckled their bridles before tossing them on the ground, which was almost a crime for a trainer to do that. She then stepped back and crossed her arms.

"Go ahead, Star... I'm all ears."

"... We... we didn't... listen."

"Yeah... I kind of notice that. What else?"

"... I... I don't know..."

"You don't know? Do you want me to tell you?"

That was a rhetorical question.

"You kept looking at Moonlight because you were angry at her."

"I... wasn't angry... I..."

"Yes, you were! You even pushed her after the race."

"But... she ran all wrong... and..."

"STOP! She isn't YOU! You are the lead pony! Your job is to run as perfectly as you can to make her life easier!"

"I... I know... but..."

"No buts! I know what I saw! If you can't admit it yourself, we have a major problem."

Morning Star lowered her head and looked aside. She knew Sophie was right, but running with someone else was hard.

Her trainer wasn't done, though. She still had to get Moonlight's point of view.

"And you, Moon? What do you think went wrong?"

"Oooh... I don't know..."

"What do you mean, you don't know!? It didn't feel like you were on the track with us today, but you were!"

"Yeah... but..."

"So? You must have seen something?"

"..."

Something different appeared in Moonlight's face. Something Sophie had not seen since that time when Tiantang Zhi Ma had lent her to Penny's stable for a year. A face of reluctance and anger.

"Moonlight? I'm talking to you!"

"That's it... I'm done! Being a pony is stupid."

"WHAT?"

"I'm going home! I don't want to play anymore."

"Moonlight! Seriously? This is not a game! This is your future! This is OUR future! Don't you care about Penny's stable?"

"I DO! BUT YOU HAVE TO LET ME RUN!"

"..."

Moonlight, not caring anymore, started to undo her harness. She had done all she could to obey Sophie, but this last scolding was too much for her. Being a ponygirl wasn't something she had ever considered to do as a career, and all of this was based on a request from Tiantang Zhi Ma, not a personal desire.

"Heeey! You can't take your harness off!"

"Whatever, Sophie. I'm not your pony and never will be. I'm not like you guys. You showed me that I could trust you... I did... I tried everything you asked me to, but now it is you that don't trust me."

"What do you mean? I trust you, Moon. You are amazing!"

"Ah yeah? Moonlight, listen to me. Moonlight, don't sprint so soon. Moonlight, do this, do that. You spend all your time holding me back."

"I'm not holding your back! I'm managing your race. I've done this all my life and won my fair share of races. That's my job!"

"See, you are not even listening to what I say! What I can do doesn't matter because you won't allow it."

"... That's not true, Moon... I'm gradually turning you into a champion, but I do it the right way."

"I'M NOT A CHAMPION! I DON'T WANT TO BE ONE! I JUST WANT YOU TO LET ME RUN!"

The angry pony kicked her harness in the corner and stormed out of the stall, frustrated. It was her old life all over again. Since she was a kid, everybody had pushed her down. Her parents, her teachers, everybody! Trust was not something she was willing to give lightly anymore, and just when she had finally accepted to give it to Sophie, the same thing happened. Moonlight, you can't do this. Moonlight, you do it wrong. It was the same nightmare she had never managed to escape. Nobody trusted her, and she would be better off on her own.

Moonlight jogged all the way back to the race track in the middle of the now-empty stadium, jumped over the fence, and started running, even though the staff grooming the track yelled at her to stop.

Back in the stall, Sophie grumbled. There was nothing else to say. This day was a disaster, and their road to the Triple Crown had died at this very moment.



"Ooooh! That felt soooo good! I'm having a mental orgasm right now!"

Neigh!

As Brittany loaded up her two pink ponies in the trailer, she was jubilating. Not only they finished in third place during their first exhibition race, but Sophie the bitch and her two retarded ponies had humiliated themselves in front of the whole world. The latter was so much more satisfying. On top of that, the rumor saying that Penny's stable faced ejection was just icing on the cake.

"I'm so proud of you two. I'll let you play with Cassy to your heart content all week as a reward. I also spoke to Stardust, and she was beyond thrilled to hear about your good result. And you know what? More than ever, I think we can win the three main Triple Crown races. I learned tons today, and I will have the perfect strategy for next time. I think you two are stronger than anybody else who was on that track today."

Hemlock and Nightshade were still feeling fresh like roses even after this long tough race. This one had been more than three times longer than the Super Cup ones they used to win before the NRPA league suspended them. The two ponies tried to nose each other while Brittany secured the trailer chains to their harness.

"Oooh! It was such a good day. I haven't felt good like this since... forever!"



During the three hours trip back home, Sophie and Moonlight didn't say a single word to each other. It was over. Nothing else needed to be said. Morning Star was alone in her trailer because Moonlight had refused to travel like a pony. Instead, she just laid down on the rear seat of the pickup truck, and Sophie sat in front by herself.

The truck and trailer pulled in the driveway of the stable that was now doomed to go bankrupt. In a few weeks, this dream would be nothing more than a bad memory.

Sophie struggled. As much as she wanted to hate Moonlight for her harsh decision to abandon everything, a lot of truth had come out of her mouth. The young girl never had the profile of a ponygirl, but she had tried really hard. She had attempted to be part of this crazy racing world, but it hadn't worked in the end.

Finally, the reality had caught up to Moonlight, and she didn't have an ounce of obedience left in her heart. Winning or losing was just an irrelevant concept in her eyes, one reserved to people who had given in a system of fame.

The sad trainer parked the truck in front of the house and let her head fall back on the headrest. After turning the engine off, a heavy silence that was both calming and disappointing overwhelmed her. Sophie had run out of options. The fragile connection linking her to Moonlight had been severed, and the two girls had already started to drift away, physically and emotionally.

"So, I'm going to call Tiantang. She will come to pick you up. Okay?"

"Yeah."

"Do you want to pick up your stuff in the house?"

"I have nothing in the house. I will stay in the car until Tiantang shows up."

"It might take a while..."

"Yeah."

"Okay."

Sophie exited the car and closed the door behind her. For a moment, she stared at the orange sunset. It was curiously beautiful, clashing with her dramatic day. Nature never cared too much about what its inhabitants decided to do. It was only there to provide them with a scenery they could use to live their lives, whatever they decided to do.

A faint smile grew on the lips of the small trainer. It was indeed a beautiful evening.

The few steps separating her from the trailer was all she had to cross to find happiness again. When she opened the door, she saw her relaxed pony, waiting patiently to be freed, fully trusting her trainer to do the right thing at the most appropriate time.

Sophie climbed into the metallic trailer and unhooked the chains restraining her beloved ponygirl. Then, with a finger around one of the bridle's straps, she led Morning Star outside and walked a few steps away from the vehicle before stopping and hugging her friend.

"Can't win them all, uh? So it looks like it's just the two of us again, at least for a little while longer."

Morning Star nodded.

"Do you want to go for a little run while I'm putting the trailer away? Yes? Don't go too far, okay. Let me take that bridle off for you. I'll call you when the dinner is ready."

It was extremely rare that Sophie allowed Morning Star to run freely without her bridle and waist cuffs, but it seemed the right thing to do after what happened. Without a word, the elite pony started trotting toward the arid land where she would zig-zag between the rocks and kick some cacti with her pony boots. It would be a moment she would use to reconnect with herself and the land beneath her horseshoes.

As she exited the property limit, Morning Star stopped for an instant and looked at Ivory's words written on the palm of her hand.

"You are not alone."

And then, she playfully bolted toward a big rock that was about a hundred meters away. Perhaps she would run around it a few times while enjoying her freedom.

Everything would be okay because she wasn't alone. That was what Ivory had promised her, so it must have been the truth. Therefore, there was nothing to worry about.



About two hours later, a red car parked next to Sophie's truck. A well-tanned hand knocked in the window of the latest. It was already nighttime when Moonlight exited from her hiding spot for the first time since she arrived at the stable.

In front of her was Xiuying, alone, who had come to take her away from this place.

"How are you, Moonlight?"

"That's not my name anymore."

"I see. Do you want to say goodbye to Morning Star and Sophie before we leave?"

"No. There is nothing else to say. I am nothing to them."

"I see. Follow me, then. Tiantang is waiting for you at home."

"She won't convince me, Xiu."

"I'm sorry?"

"She won't change my mind. I won't race again. I'm not a ponygirl."

"I see. Well, that's good. Because she has no intention to make you change your mind."

"She doesn't?"

"No. This is your choice and yours alone. She just needs your help with something before you leave us. If that's okay."

"Is it pony-related? Because I'm done with that."

"No, no. I promise it's nothing like that. Alright, let's go. I will let her ask you herself."

"Okay."

It felt good to be around Xiu again. Even if Moonlight had abandoned her equine side, Xiuying and Tiantang had always treated her fairly. They had given her an opportunity of a lifetime but never forced her to do something she didn't want to. The way Xiu had graciously accepted her choice was another display of how understanding she was. It felt good.

They climbed in the car, made a noisy u-turn in the gravel driveway, and slowly headed back to the road, which was another desired step toward her ponyless life.



"CASSY! WE WON! Well... almost. We finished THIRD!"

"Ooooh! Is that true? That's amazing, Nightshade!"

"Yes! And Brittany said we could play with you as much as we want all week!"

"... That's... a... generous offer... I guess."

Playing cards with Stardust on the kitchen table, Cassy stayed home with her boss as it was not worth going to a meaningless race. It would just have been distracting if a legend had been sitting in the stands. All the cameras would have been on her. Also, Hemlock would have been way too anxious and would have tried to impress her childhood idol.

But now that the ponies and Brittany were back, they quickly understood that everything went very well, better than expected, and it was not the right time to damper the mood by doing anything that could have been perceived negatively.

That said, Cassy was still not sure to know how to react when Brittany used her as pony food at her convenience. It also didn't help that Stardust didn't interject the slightest when this offer happened. It was hard to tell if she let it happen because it was funny or because it helped her new ponies perform better. The only thing Cassy knew was that it was better not to argue with her not-so-unpleasant faith.

At least Cassy was a former racer and had kept herself in relatively good shape, which allowed her to survive this ordeal. She would have never imagined the extent of Hemlock and Nightshade's libido and sexual endurance. It was ridiculous and unusual. When they were not racing, they were having sex, and since they had started to include Cassy into their games, they were even more motivated to have fun.

It was all good, though. That day when Brittany hung her to a tree branch for hours and then unleashed her ponies on her, Cassy understood something; she was happy. Even though it had been an energy-draining adventure, the ponies had not gone any softer on her afterward. Instead, they had used her limp and exhausted carcass the same way they would have done with a fresh one. Even after several licking-induced orgasms while she was their prisoner, they had untied her to take advantage of her exhausted body and had even forced her to return the favor. Following that, they gave her some water and dragged her back into the house for more intense lesbian sex, where her main role was to endure.

Hemlock and Nightshade liked to play with Cassy a lot, and that was the end of it.

Tonight, once more, Brittany offered her to the ponies as a reward for their excellent performance... and it was okay.

Cassy couldn't deny it...

Since the ponies had adopted her, since the first time Nightshade sat on her in the stall to prevent her from moving, she had fun. She didn't mind being pushed way beyond her physical

limits until she reached her breaking point. It was enjoyable for an ex-competitor like her. In the past, nobody had been this demanding, and perhaps they should have.

As an ex-ponygirl who had never won anything, only now she began to understand that if she had had a good trainer, maybe she would have performed better on the track. Her former trainer had been way too friendly and too empathic, leading to an average career without exciting results.

Hemlock and Nightshade were the first ones to push her beyond what she thought she was capable of. It was not a race, it was sex, but still... The feeling of having given every ounce of energy during a physical activity had been exhilarating. The feeling of not being able to move a toe anymore but still being pushed regardless had shown her that there were, in fact, no limits to what she could accomplish. Being done was no longer an option.

Cassy wanted more of this feeling without making it known publicly, which was why she acted so willing around the ponies. That way, they would drag her to the bedroom, and she would feel alive again; they would find a way to make her perform better.

Nightshade grabbed her reward's wrist and pulled off the chair as if she had been given a material gift. Cassy was her favorite toy, and she had been granted the right to play with it.

"Hemlock! I have Cassy! Where are we going to fuck her?"

"Oh, let's go to our stall on the haystack. That way, we won't disturb Stardust and Brittany. Cassy can be noisy."

"Right. Maybe we should gag her?"

"No, I want her to lick us."

"Oh, right... Let's go then. Come, Cassy."

Before they even exited the door, Nightshade was already pinching Cassy's nipple through her shirt, making her squirm. It was going to be another long night.



"Where are we going, Tiang? It's very dark now."

"It's called nighttime, Moonlight."

"It's not my name anymore! And I know that. I'm just wondering what you needed my help with. Why are we walking in the middle of the desert when it's night? It's getting cold."

"One more reason to keep walking."

"We've been walking for over an hour. Do you even know where you are going?"

"Don't you worry about that."

Moonlight definitely had regrets. As soon as Xiu had parked the car in the driveway, Tiantang Zhi Ma asked her to follow because she needed her help with "something." There was no reason to refuse, but now, after more than an hour walking aimlessly in the desert, it became a source of worry. Tiang's refusal to give her any detail about their destination more and more looked like she had fallen into a trap.

She was near the point where she would turn back and abandon Tiang to herself. If Tiantang wanted to take a stroll in the desert at night, it was her business. That said, there was a little problem that lingered on her mind for the past few minutes. If she were to return to the stable, she wasn't sure she would be able to. It was nighttime, and she couldn't see any light in the distance anymore. Tiantang's stable was located in the middle of nowhere, so there wasn't even any village aura glowing on the horizon. Simply put, Moonlight was lost with no points of reference.

"Tiantang! It's not funny anymore! Let's go back!"

"You can if you want. You are the one following me. I'm not holding you on a leash."

"But... I don't know where to go. I'll get lost."

"Aren't you already lost? You would not be in a worse situation than now. Right?"

"..."

"If you are following me, it's because you are in need of guidance, no?"

"Is that a punishment for having left Penny's stable?"

"That's not the word I would use, no."

"Ah! So it has something to do with it! Look, I won't change my mind! I'm not going back there."

"I'm not asking you to."

"..."

"Come on. Follow me and save your breath. We are far from our destination."



Hours passed. It must have been close to midnight when Tiantang finally stopped and began climbing on a huge rock for no apparent reason, which puzzled Moonlight even more. Not only did she feel like a hostage due to her dependence on Tiang to go back home, but on top of that, not knowing the reason for this strange destinationless trip tortured her.

"Can we go back, now? And why are you climbing on that rock? Are you going to meditate or something?"

"Nope. I'm going to sleep. It's late, and I'm tired."

"..."

"You should do the same, Moonlight. If you sleep on the sand, you might get bit by a tarantula or a snake, so you shouldn't. You'll be safer on top of the rock."

Being born in this arid region, Moonlight knew that what Tiang was saying about the spiders and snakes was right, but sleeping on a rock was something she had never done before, and it didn't seem like a good idea from a comfort perspective.

"No! Let's go back home! I don't want to sleep on a rock. Why are you doing this?"

"Sleeping on a rock? I told you. I don't want to be bit by a spider."

"Not that! Why did you drag me in the middle of the desert? I have no idea where I am, and you know I can't go back home by myself. I need you to lead me back."

"No, you don't."

"... Yes... I do. I'm lost. I can't go back without you."

"Wrong. I'm lost too."

"... What!? You... You are lost too?"

"I sure am. We've been walking in the desert at night for hours. Did you really think I could remember my way back? I'm not an explorer."

"... But... How are we supposed to go back then?"

"I don't know. We will have to figure it out, or else it's not going to end well for us."

"But... we have no food... no water... Tomorrow is going to be super hot... We have to return home now."

"I'm sleeping here, Moonlight. You can do whatever you want. But just don't stand still on the ground. You are going to get bit."

The young ponygirl immediately climbed on the rock, suddenly fearful of what could be crawling around her. Tiang was trying to find a comfortable position on the hard stone that would be her bed for tonight.

"You are lying! You know where we are! You are just pulling my leg to punish me for having left Penny's stable."

"Instead of spitting insanities, just sit down here next to me. Can't you appreciate what you have?"

"Appreciate what I have? What are you talking about?"

"Sit down, Moonlight."

"I'm not Moonlight."

"I don't care about your name. Sit down."

Frustrated and feeling trapped, Moonlight dropped her butt next to Tiang, who was already stargazing. There was almost no moon tonight, and the clear sky allowed the stars to shine brighter than usual.

"Look at the sky. Isn't it beautiful?"

"I've seen stars before, Tiang. Thank you. Nothing special there."

"Do you see that very bright one over there?"

"... The orange one?"

"Yes. That's Betelgeuse, part of the Orion constellation. I was born there."

"... You were born there!? ... What are you smoking?"

"Nothing. You were born there too, Moonlight."

"..."

"See... Everything we have here, even you and I, is made of stardust. Did you know that when a star dies and explodes, it sends an unquantifiable amount of particles across the universe? This dust then turns into new stars and planets. This cycle has existed since the beginning of time. Everything surrounding us is there because of dying stars, and that includes you and me."

"I... I didn't know that."

"So, everything you see, here on Earth and as far as you can see in the sky, it's all the same thing. We came from everywhere. Do you understand?"

"... Yeah... I mean, we live in a big universe."

"No, Moonlight. No. We ARE the universe."

"..."

"Try to appreciate what you've been given. Everything you can see and touch is part of who you are, and you must make the best of it. Let's sleep now. I'm tired, and tomorrow will be a long day."

This little conversation, seemingly out of place, had somehow soothed Moonlight. She had indeed looked at the sky often, but never from that angle. Why did Tiantang tell her this? Was it because she thought she had been ungrateful toward the opportunity that she had been given? Was this the underlying message? Was being part of such a gigantic universe meant that she shouldn't have wasted a possible second chance at winning something with Morning Star and Sophie?

Yet, Tiantang didn't use a reprimanding tone when she shared her vision of the universe. She had merely stated a fact. Something that, perhaps, she needed Moonlight to know. Some guidance for a young girl who didn't know who she was anymore.

Moonlight laid down on the hard rock, trying to find a spot that wasn't too uncomfortable. She wouldn't sleep just yet. She had to observe the night sky for a bit longer. She had to contemplate who she was for the first time.



"You are so cute, Cassy."

"Haha... Thanks... but I really want to sleep now. I'm not used to coming this often."

"Nooo, Cassy! Play with us some more."

"Maybe tomorrow, Nightshade. Okay?"

"Awww!"

All evening, Hemlock and Nightshade did kinky things with Cassy, pushing the poor woman beyond her limits, but at some point, they had to consider sleeping because tomorrow was a training day.

Sleep with Cassy between them was something the two ponies grew accustomed to. They didn't want her to go away, and on top of that, they thought pressing their big boobs on hers was pretty hot. Until now, they had never considered playing with a third girl, but their new companion was just so attractive and fun. Cassy's big brown eyes must have had something to do with it.

Hemlock played in Cassy's hair gently and gazed into her eyes.

"Stop looking at me like that. It's embarrassing."

"No. Nightshade is right. You are super pretty."

"Aaww!"

"Why aren't you a pony anymore? I mean, you are still young enough to run."

"I am, but I was not good enough. I never won anything."

"But, you can still be a pony, right? Just for fun."

"Haha... Just for fun? I'm not too sure about that. It would be kind of pointless for a stable to keep a ponygirl who doesn't run."

"You are a helper, no?"

"Yes. What about it?"

"You could help Brittany as a pony. She makes us do all kinds of boring jobs like grooming the track. She told us more than once that she wished she had a third pony to do all that because we were doing it wrong."

"Mmm... I'm good at grooming the track. I did it often. I found that kind of work calming."

"See! See! I'll tell Brittany that you want to be a pony again. She is going to say yes!"
"I'm so sure about that, Hemlock. Mmpph!"

For no reason other than not wanting to argue, Hemlock pressed her lips on Cassy's for another deep kiss.

"Aaaah! Enough with the kissing! We need to sleep!"
"Okay, but you are going to be a pony again!"
"Sure! Sure! Whatever you say!"



"Hey! Wake up, sleepyhead."
"Hmmm..."

It wasn't even sunrise when Tiantang Zhi Ma woke up Moonlight. The faint glow of the sunrise began illuminating the horizon, and the last few stars were slowly fading away. It was definitely chilly in the desert in the morning as the rocky sand had already released all its accumulated heat overnight, getting ready to absorb more.

Moonlight slowly twisted back up on her legs. It took her a moment to remember why she was here and how much trouble she was in. There was nothing familiar around her that would have allowed her to situate herself. As far as she was concerned, she was lost.

"Tiang... Can we go home now?"
"Sure. Lead the way."
"..."
"I told you. I have no idea where we are. We walked randomly for 5 hours last night."
"... being lost in the desert... is dangerous."
"Yes. Very. And I think it's going to be a hot day too. We have no food or water."
"... But... Why did you do this to me? Is it really just because I left Penny's stable."
"Oh, it has nothing to do with that. At least, not directly."
"... So, why then? What did I do?"
"Nothing. You did nothing wrong. I just like you."
"You... like me? So you want me to die under the hot sun?"
"Certainly not. And I don't want to die either. I just wanted to give you a great opportunity to learn something important before you leave us."
"An... opportunity? An opportunity for what?"

"To learn that you can do whatever you want."

"But... I know that already. I can run, I can get a job, I can do all kinds of things."

"No, you don't, Moonlight. You know how to try things, but you don't know what you can do yet. Not even close. You don't know you can win because you never won anything."

"That's not true. I won my first race."

"No, you didn't. Sophie won it for you. You just did what she told you to. Plus, how is it winning when you knew you could outrun everybody else on the track?"

"... That's... mean!"

"Whatever, Moon. Now, start walking. The sun is rising, and soon, the heat is going to become unbearable."

"Do you seriously want me to lead the way back home? I can't do that. I have no clue where to go. I'm lost."

"Exactly. You are lost. Now save your saliva and get moving."

"..."

Moonlight has not grown in this area. At home, she certainly would have recognized some sort of landmark to get an idea of her location, a hill, a rock formation, a distant mountain... But out here, there was nothing like that. It was not her land, and nothing helped. With Tiantang pressuring her to lead the way, it made things even more difficult. If she were to pick the wrong direction, she would drag her mentor to inevitable death. They wouldn't be able to last long in this environment without water. It was so unfair. What was Tiantang trying to teach her? A lesson? Or was this simply a punishment for having failed to win the Triple Crown?

"Ow! Did... did you just throw a rock at me?"

"Yes... It was a small one. I'm trying to motivate you... Move!"

"Hey! Stop throwing rocks at me... It's not cool!"

"Then start walking!"

"Alright! Alright! So mean!"

The two women finally made their first steps in an unconvincing direction. It was a choice based on nothing tangible, but in this case, there weren't any good options other than getting their legs in motion.



"You are such a pain, Cassy."

"It was not my idea, Brittany! It's Hemlock and Nightshade who..."

"Whatever! As if I needed another pony on top of those two crazy troublemakers."

The small pickup truck wobbled along the road leading to town. Onboard was Brittany, grumbling incessantly, and Cassy, who chilled on the passenger seat with her arm out of the window to enjoy the fresh air before it became unbreathable.

"I'm sure I can help around the stable. It's not an entirely bad idea, you know. I miss being a pony a lot."

"You can count on that. I'll put you to work, so you stay out of my hair. I'm doing this to keep Hemlock and Nightshade happy. Not because I need help."

"Oh, you need my help, Brittany. You just don't know it yet."

"Shut up! I don't need anybody's help. I can take care of the stable by myself."

Indeed, this morning, right before the sunrise, Hemlock and Nightshade had raced back to the house, ran up the stairs, burst into Brittany's room, and jumped on her bed. This partly was why she was in a foul mood today. Her two ponies had asked her to make Cassy a pony again, which she flat out refused. Letting her ponies play with the helper had no impact on her life, but taking care of a third ponygirl definitely would.

But they insisted. Again... and again... and again... and again... until she lost patience and agreed to do it just so her two ponies would get off her bed. It was an unfair tactic. The sanctity of her bedroom had been violated.

"And why don't you have pony gears already, Cassy? You were a racer, no? So where is all your old equipment?"

"I sold it. I didn't think I would play pony again one day. I was just happy helping Stardust with her various endeavors."

"Not smart... Now we have to buy you new stuff. I had nothing your size at the stable."

"Yay! We are going to Pony Exchange!"

"AH! In your dreams! We are only going to secondhand shops. I'll find you the most used tack I can find. Tarnished leather, rusty rivets, frayed straps..."

"Awww! That's not cool."

"Well, if you bring no money in, I won't spend big bucks on you. You are not worth it."

"Brittany, I understand why you have no friends."

"That's it! You get out of the car and walk!"

"Stardust wouldn't be happy about that. Haha!"

Cassy oscillated between her weak position and Stardust's strong influence. Brittany wasn't wrong when she said that it wasn't worth paying the high price for brand new gears, but at the

same time, she couldn't go too extreme because Cassy was Stardust's protégé. Abandoning her in the middle of the road wouldn't be an intelligent thing to do.

Slowly but surely, the small truck made its way to the nearest town. As promised, Brittany refused to stop anywhere close to Pony Exchange and instead went directly to a disreputable neighborhood where the buildings were poorly maintained and the people had suspicious attitudes.

"Mmm... Brittany... I don't think they sell pony gears around here. Or if they do, it must be stolen stuff."

"That's why we are here. We are looking for good deals and people we can haggle with. They will be more preoccupied with getting rid of the merchandise rather than getting a good price for it."

"That's a way to look at it."

After parking in front of an abandoned barbershop with broken windows, the two girls jumped out of the car.

"I think I just stepped on a rat... It was squishy and made a noise. Like, Eek! Eek!"

"Stop whining. Over there, Cassy... There is some sort of used clothing store..."

"It looks like a pawn shop to me."

"It's probably not far from the truth."

The whole wooden building looked run down. Fortunately, there was not much rain in this region because that thing would have been entirely rotten by now. Even the name of the store was unreadable because the red paint had faded under the relentless sun.

Brittany and Cassy crossed the street, avoiding potholes, and reached the store's door. When they pushed it open, it gave the impression that it would snap in half so much the frame was dry. The little brass bell worked fine, though, and its jingle attracted the attention of a very suspicious-looking man wearing a formal outfit that clashed with the general ambiance.

Most of the clothes were carelessly piled up on various tables of unequal shape and size. The best-looking clothes seemed to, at least, be hung on racks, and the walls were decorated with all kinds of rusty signs and antic junk.

"Customers! Yees! Welcome to our modest shop. Pretty ladies like you are certainly looking for nice robes? Or perhaps a wedding dress, yes?"

"Gross! No! And keep your distance."

"Aaah! Yes! Not from around here, we see... we see. Let me introduce ourselves, yes? We are Archibald DeGrasse! At your service."

The creepy man was getting too close for Brittany's comfort. Yet, she was still doing the talking.

"Why do you say "we" when you are alone here?"

"Aaaah! Yees! The life of a merchant can be a lonely one, Miss pretty girl. Yes. Do not mind our little habits. What we care about is to offer you the best service possible. So tell me, young ladies... What are you looking for exactly? Something special, yesss?"

"Kind of... We need pony gears... Something... affordable... if you get my drift..."

"Aaaah! Ponygirls... yes... we see, we see... Of course, it is for the taller pretty lady, yes? Please, please! We have what you need. Will you follow us, yees?"

As the strange man headed toward the back of the store, Brittany and Cassy looked at each other. The former pretended to puke by inserting two fingers inside her throat, and the latter just smiled as she found this caricature of a man quite entertaining even though she probably wouldn't like him to touch her.

They followed him to another room separated by a dusty curtain. On the way, Cassy snatched a brown cowboy hat and placed it on her head as if there was nothing to it.

"Haaa! Cassy! You are going to get fleas in your hair."

"Nice! So you can wash my hair back at home!"

"In your dream! I'll shave it instead!"

"Hey, I'll be your pony. So you have to take good care of me."

"Yes, I'll give you a monthly bath in the cold river."

"There are no rivers near the stable."

"Exactly!"

The back room was not what the two girls had expected. It was actually dedicated to ponygirl outfits. What was supposed to be a festival of useless junk and broken gears turned into something quite exceptional. The place was LOADED with harnesses, boots, bridles, reins, and pony outfits of all kinds.

Yes, everything was extremely dusty, piled up carelessly, and the spiders had a blast decorating the place. But for pony lovers, this could be an amazing goldmine. This place was dark; there was one small window, but the light had trouble piercing the floating dust.

Brittany's jaw dropped to the floor.

"Woah... We probably will get lung cancer, but... This is amaaazing!"

"Yees! Amazing it is! The little lady is a connoisseur. We see. Is it fair to assume that you won't need assistance past this point, yees?"

"... Yes... We are going to be okay. That is perfect."

"Perfect! Perfect! Please! Take your time. You may let Archibald DeGrasse know if you need anything, yees?"

"... sure!"

Not soon enough, the weird store owner walked out of the room and carefully closed the curtains behind him, darkening the pony room even more. It only took one second for Brittany to forget about how dirty this place was and start digging in the various piles of tangled leather on the table in front of her.

"This is nuts!"

"Who is going to get fleas, now? It's Brittany!"

"Shut up, stupid pony, and help me find what we need!"



"WHY DON'T YOU HELP ME, TIANG?"

"What do you want me to do, Moonlight?"

"Look, it's noon already. We are roasting. We don't have any water or food. This dead tree we found is not really useful at providing shade either. If we don't find help soon, we will die."

"It is very hot, yes."

"Okay! I'm sorry! Happy now? Is that what you want to hear before telling me the truth and leading me back home?"

"Sorry for what? And I told you many times. I have no idea where we are."

"Sorry for having left Penny's stable!"

"Oh, I don't care about that. I told you that too."

"Why did you do this to me then?"

"Are you even listening when I talk? It's because I care about you. But, look, since it's bugging you that much, why did you leave Penny's stable? Because you lost the race in a humiliating way?"

"Yes!... No!... I don't know! Sophie went all ballistic on me, and I don't have to take that crap! I'm not a ponygirl! I was just trying to help!"

Moonlight kicked the arid dirt, frustrated and dehydrated.

"If you can help, why didn't you? I mean... You lost badly. Is it because you didn't try?"

"Of course not! I tried! But Morning Star was running all wrong and..."

"Hahahaha! Good one! Morning Star running all wrong? The fastest ponygirl in the world, multiple Super Cup champion, running all wrong? It's hilarious that you even try to put the blame on her."

"..."

"Why don't you just admit it, Moonlight... You CAN'T help them."

"That's not true! I'm very fast and super strong! I'm probably as fast as Morning Star!"

"Yeah, but you left because you thought you couldn't help them. Right?"

"... Whatever! Let's go... Let's try this direction before we roast to death!"

Moonlight's legs were getting heavy, and it was not a small thing considering her usual strength and endurance. But Tiantang Zhi Ma, even if not complaining nearly as much, seemed to struggle as well, which added credibility to her claim of being lost. Nevertheless, she followed Moonlight without judgment despite their dire situation.

The charismatic Asian ponygirl would not help her. Moonlight was lost and needed to find her way. In the name of love, Tiantang placed her life in the hands of the young girl.



"I can't wear that!"

"It's perfect! We are buying it!"

"Brittanyyy! Come on!"

From a pile of dusty pony outfits, Brittany found a forest green latex suit. It was of great quality and fitted Cassy perfectly. The downside was that there were no breast cups. Cassy's boobs were fully exposed, something she only had realized after she put the suit on. Wearing an old suit wasn't an issue, but having her chest exposed this way was a bit odd.

"Hemlock and Nightshade will love it. Alright, I also found this old harness. It's bulky, but since you aren't racing, it will do just fine. What do you think about the boots?"

Cassy clip-clopped around the room, testing the worn-out pony boots that Brittany had laced on her feet. The fit was good, but it was as if a thousand feet had visited them before. It wouldn't

be something she could be running in unless she wanted to explode one of her ankles; there was no support anymore.

"They are comfy, but they are crap."

"No, they are not. You know nothing! We will work on them later. Let's find you a bridle and a bit, now. What about this one?"

"It's fine. But the bit looks too big. I don't like the big ones. It hurts my jaw."

"We can find a smaller flexible one. Let me check in that pile over there."

The small driver began untangling a bunch of leather straps and metal rings. Some of the bridles were probably sitting on the table for decades. There was no significant market for used ponygirl gears these days as all the brand new stuff was relatively affordable. Usually, stores like this were reserved for broke people, or at the very least, women who weren't sure if they really wanted to be a pony.

But as Brittany was tugging and pulling on the leather mess, Cassy dragged her attention elsewhere.

"Hey, Britt... look at this here."

"What? Where?"

"In the display case here... look. I didn't see it because of all the junk covering it."

Cassy pushed a bunch of harnesses off a small desk and wiped an inch of dust off the glass lid with her hand.

"Ooooooh! Wooooow!"

"What is it, Cassy?"

"I don't know... But you better take a look yourself."

Curious, Brittany walked up to the display case and looked through the dirty glass to see what was inside.

"... Are you fucking kidding me!?"

"... Britt? What is it?"

"Something... impossible."

"Uh?"

"Cassy. Grab your stuff... we are leaving."

"Why? I still need a bit."

"We have old ones at the stable. Just change back to your street clothes and grab your stuff."

Not feeling like arguing, Cassy headed to the far corner and began to take off her secondhand pony gears. Meanwhile, using her fingers, Brittany tried to lift the glass lid to access the mysterious object, but it just rattled; it was locked.

Almost immediately, a creepy voice startled her.

"Aaaaah! Yees! Little miss is indeed a connoisseur. Unfortunately, this piece is not for sale, nooo. It is way too precious."

"... I must have it! State your price."

"Yes, indeed. You must have it... but... the question is whyyy?"

"Because I know exactly what it is. And I also know you shouldn't have it! Maybe I should call the cops?"

"We see! You know the story! Yees! But the story is sometimes treacherous, little miss. In your possession, such an object could change your life in a way that you would not expect. Yees."

"... You make no sense! Creep!"

Brittany hadn't managed to take her eyes off the display case, even when the creepy man stood behind her and began rubbing her shoulders in a way that would have made a lover shiver. Something abnormal was going on.

"... Just... just tell me how much you want for it?"

"Aaah! Money! Nooo! Money won't do... What we want is way more valuable... Yes... Something way more precious."

"What is it? Tell me!"

"History! We want history!"

"History?"

"Yees! See... this object belongs to someone very important... a woman! She must receive this object. Yes."

"What woman? I don't know what you are talking about. Its previous owner is dead. What you say makes no sense!"

"Oooh... no no no! You are wrong... you knooow... You knooow who it belongs to... You fear her... You have feared her since the first time you saw her."

"I... I don't fear anyone!"

"Liiies... Now we know that you know. We can see it in your eyes. Yees..."

Brittany stepped back, in shock, and had a hard time processing what the man just told her. It couldn't be! It just couldn't be!

"No!... It... It can't be her!"

"Aaaah! Little miss... Now that you understand. This object is now yours. Will you do what you must? Yees?"

"... yes... I will..."

Using an old rusty key that he retrieved from his pocket, he unlocked the glass lid and lifted it, making the seized hinges scream. The object, in pristine condition, rested on a layer of red satin.

Unsure if she would have preferred not to discover it, Brittany stayed still while the man placed it in a small wooden box.



It was not fun anymore. Side by side, Moonlight and Tiantang dragged their feet with much difficulty between the sharp rocks and bushes that the extreme heat of the desert had burned. All day, they walked, hoping to find a sign of life. A village? A farm? A camp? Anything that could have helped them figure out where they were. Perhaps, seeing some people who could have helped them. Every bit of their exposed skin hurt, burned, almost bubbling at this point.

"Tiang... I'm... I'm scared..."

"Scared?... Why?"

"We... we won't make it out of this desert alive..."

"S... sure we will... I... I trust you..."

Moonlight slowly turned around to look at an exhausted Tiantang. The Asian woman was definitely struggling to breathe in that heat, yet, she didn't seem overly worried. She still put all her trust into the young ponygirl, who still couldn't understand why this was happening.

"TIANG! Stop saying that! I can't save us! I have no idea where we are. I'm completely exhausted, and there is still no sign of life around. We are done for."

"That's... that's too bad... I... I really thought you could do this."

"Aaaah! You are infuriating! Let's go! We are not dead yet."

All that resolve in her voice didn't translate to her body language. Having trouble supporting her own weight, Moonlight resumed her aimless course painfully, followed by Tiantang, who

was ten feet behind. Still, her heart burned with anger for having been put in this situation. Death was too great of a punishment for having left Penny's stable.

Panting heavily, Tiangang still appeared to have a desire for socialization. And here, where nobody would interrupt her, seemed like a good place for this activity.

"You know... Moon. You are... good."

"Shut up, Tiang. Save your breath."

"No no... Haha. I'm telling you... You are very good."

"Sure! Whatever! So good that you are trying to kill me."

"Nah... I told you. I like you a lot... I'm actually trying... to keep you alive."

"Nonsense! You don't keep people alive by dragging them in the middle of the desert without water!"

"Oh, yes. I do... I'm pretty sure I'm right... about you, Moon."

"What now? Right about what?"

"You are the best... by far... the best runner. I knew that since... the first day I met you."

"Yeah. That must be why I got humiliated during my last race."

"Sophie trained you well... but... she can't do everything for you."

"Oh, Tiang! Enlighten me! You too, tell me why it was all my fault! I'm all ears."

"You didn't think you could win. I told you that!"

"Yes, and it still makes no sense."

"You... you are scared, Moon. Because you don't believe... something good can happen to you. You want good things... but you don't believe you can get them."

Moonlight turned around again, very annoyed.

"AND WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO!? Magically win everything!?"

Tiang smiled and shuffled her way to the angry pony, ignoring the risk of getting a smack in the head, and placed her hand on her chest.

"Yes."

"..."

"Nobody or nothing can stop you, Moon. You are not like us. You CAN win everything. Even this little excursion of ours."

"NO! I CAN'T!"

Slapping Tiang's hand was not nice, but she didn't want to hear any more of this nonsense. Tired of arguing pointlessly, she resumed her walking. How could this woman put so much faith into her about something she couldn't accomplish.

"Ah... Then we'll die here... That's slightly... unfortunate."

"Exactly!"

"... but I still don't think I'm wrong about you, Moon... haha. You'll save us."

Moonlight rolled her eyes at that last comment and kept going. Perhaps putting some distance between her and her follower would make the useless chit-chat end. But as she quickened her pace, a loud thud came from behind her. She turned around, just to find Tiantang Zhi Ma lying flat on her face.

"... Tiang?"

Moon trotted back to Tiang as fast as her tired legs allowed her to, leaving a trail of fine dust behind, and crouched next to the inanimate woman.

"TIANG? Tiang! Wake up! You can't stop walking... You'll die!"

The older ponygirl's breathing was shallow, and she didn't show any signs of consciousness.

"Tiang! Tiang! Wake up! Common on! There... There are spiders and snakes around here... you said it yourself. You can't stay here. You have to wake up!"

"... Mmmh..."

"Common! You can't do this to me! You have to help me get back home."

"... I... I don't really... like... spiders..."

"Then stand up... Let's go! If we stop moving... We are dead."



"What's in the box?"

"Nothing! And stop asking."

"What's in the box?"

"CASSY!"

"Aaah! I'm just curious, that's all... Your little interaction with the store owner creeped me out. That was the weirdest person I've ever met."

"Whatever! Forget it. We have your new pony gears and I'll put you to work as soon as we get home."

"Pfff... You got me a suit with boob holes, worn-out pony boots, an old leather harness that looks manly, and a rusty bridle..."

"Well, you still seem happy..."

"Yes, because you generously bought me my cowboy hat."

"You didn't leave me a choice. You kept whining and refused to leave the store without it. You can be so annoying."

"So... What's in the box?"

"CASSY! STOP!"

It only took thirty minutes for Brittany and Cassy to return home, but it felt like two hours to the former. It turned out that Stardust's helper was a bit more playful than anticipated. From bad jokes to a finger in the ear, she teased Brittany non-stop, using the fact that she was Stardust's protégé not to fear the little trainer. Being friends with a legend came with some nice perks.

Nevertheless, the two girls made it back to Stardust's stable and parked in the driveway. After getting out of the old pickup truck, Brittany instructed Cassy to collect her new old items and stay outside while she disappeared into the house with her mysterious box.

"Brittany is weird... It must be some sort of collectible or something. But still... weird... I hope we will never have to go back to that creepy store."

Five minutes later, Brittany walked out, carrying a bucket full of pony maintenance products... The same bucket she used when she wanted to give a serious makeover to her ponies.

"Let's go, Cassy. To the stable."

"Are you turning me into a pony right now?"

"Yes. And don't make a fuss about it."

"No, no! I'm looking forward to it. Haha. I haven't worn a pony attire for a good two years. So I kind of miss it."

For Brittany, it was business as usual, but Cassy was happily following, looking forward to trotting around in pony boots, even if they were crappy.

When they entered the stable, unsurprisingly, Hemlock and Nightshade were making out on their haystack. But as soon as they noticed they had visitors, they stood up and headed toward them. But before they could make any good progress, Brittany slammed their stall door close and lowered the latch!

"No! Stay in there! I have work to do. You two keep doing whatever gross things you were doing."

"Brittany! Are you turning Cassy into a pony?"

"Yes!"

"YAY!"

As she walked past the stall door, Cassy waved at her two friends innocently. It was a good day. She had a lot of fun with Brittany, even though it wasn't reciprocal, and now she was going to wear a pony outfit again, something she has always loved to do. Okay, her new gears were ancient and would certainly be uncomfortable, but it was better than nothing.

Brittany entered an empty stall, away from Hemlock and Nightshade's curious gaze, placed her tools on the floor, and went to fetch a little wooden stool.

"Alright. Strip, Cassy."

"Usually, ponies put on their latex suit themselves. It's less embarrassing."

"Don't tell me what to do. I know what I'm doing."

"Just saying!"

"I can't wait until you have a bit in your mouth. I swear."

Obviously, Cassy had no issue taking off her clothes in front of Brittany, but that little nudge was still a fun thing to do. While she folded her clothes neatly and placed them on the dusty shelf, Brittany was already working on the special forest green suit. She had pulled it inside out and was cleaning the surface that would mold around Cassy's body.

Cassy placed her chin on top of Brittany's head.

"Whatcha doing?"

"Hey! Stop it. I'm making sure it's very clean, so it doesn't irritate your skin."

"It's super old. It probably won't be very comfortable to wear."

"No, you are wrong. I bet you didn't even notice why we bought it."

"... Because it had open boobs, and you wanted to humiliate me?"

"Yes, but it's also because it's from the company Cropity Hoof."

"Cropity Hoof? Never heard about that company."

"They closed a long time ago, but their suits were the best. Wait until I finish cleaning it. You'll see what I mean."

It was fascinating to see the latex material slowly regaining its original color under the masterful attention of Brittany. It was going from a dull dark green to a vibrant deep green. It was actually beautiful. Cassy could tell how many impurities were removed from the latex just by looking at all the blackened pads Brittany had tossed aside after use. Her only regret was that she had not realized how gross it was when she put it on at the store earlier.

"Alright. That's done. Come here, Cassy. I will give you a quick wipe to clean you up. That way, your dirty body won't nullify my efforts."

"You are going to rub your hands all over me? Sexy!"

"Stop it, dumb pony! Just come here and open your arms."

In the most non-erotic manner possible, Brittany used a damp towel to give Cassy a quick bath. Of course, the ponygirl didn't really need a shower, but it was better to be safe than sorry. Despite the exchanged sarcasm, Brittany knew that Cassy would have to work hard while wearing her suit, and some sand stuck between skin and latex could quickly become quite irritating.

Once that was completed, Brittany helped Cassy in her suit. The gliding sensation on her skin was strikingly different; it was already much easier to put the suit on, and, as Brittany had mentioned, the quality was definitely there.

The legs went in, the suit went up past the hips, the arms slid inside the sleeves, and the boobs found their way through the reinforced chest holes. Brittany zipped it up, and the result was perfect.

"Perfect fit. I like how high the collar goes. You still have a great body for a retired pony."

"I retired early, but Stardust kept me active. I don't think I can race again, though."

"No, you are done. Unless you really want to work harder than everybody else. You can't really stop training for two years in a row and easily come back. I can tell you lost muscle mass and flexibility already. But I'm not sure why you never won anything, though. You are very athletic."

"I suppose I didn't have a very good trainer."

"It's a shame, Cassy. Your body reminds me of Lady Wallenstein's."

"Oh, no! That ponygirl is way better than me. She will end up in the Super Cup league one day."

"You could have too. Alright, let me clean the suit's exterior now. It's gross."

Similar to what she had done to the inside of the suit earlier, Brittany attacked the exposed surface. Once more, the dull green color turned into something vibrant, almost lickable. Making

Cassy giggle in the process, she went from her neck to her toes, not missing a single spot with her cleaning pads.

"The exposed boobs are odd, but it's a beautiful suit, Britt. Did you know it was going to look like that?"

"Yes. As I said, it's a Corpity Hoof brand. It's premium stuff and you can't go wrong with it. And this is your harness... I bet you are too dumb to know what it is too."

"Hey! Be nice! But no... I don't know."

"Armando Silverthread. Rings a bell?"

"The fashion designer?"

"Yep... did you know that in the fifties, she produced a handful of those bulky harnesses?"

"I... didn't... Are we rich now?"

"It's definitely worth some good money, but ponygirls don't wear this style of harness anymore. Today's ones are much thinner. But it is still a very very good harness. Let me clean it up first. It's not going to look too good right away, but after weeks of rehydrating the leather, it's probably going to look like new again."

"How come you know all that stuff, Britt?"

"I just like pony gears. That's all. It's a hobby."

Brittany sat on her stool and began conditioning the sad-looking harness under Cassy's increasingly impressed gaze. She had no idea Brittany could be so knowledgeable about pony equipment. Most people these days were simply going to Pony Exchange to buy brand new stuff without even considering the possibility that what was sold in the past could have been better and cheaper. Cassy crouched in front of Brittany to look at her working.

"You are pretty when you work."

"... What!? Shut up, Cassy!"

"My trainer didn't have that passion. You really seem to like what you do. And it makes you look pretty."

"Are you flirting with me? If that's the case, I'll kick you in the teeth."

"Kick me, then. I'm just trying to be nice."

"You annoy me."

Incessantly smiling, Cassy thought it was not that hard to crack Brittany's shell after all, and it was a fun thing to do. But going it too far could cause damage, so instead of pushing the cork into the bottle, she turned back to her remaining pony gears and grabbed one of her used boots.

"So, what about the boots? Are they special too?"

"You can't tell?"

"No... They look flimsy."

"They are made like that. Don't you know what that symbol is?"

"What symbol? Oh... a horseshoe with wings?"

"It's not wings, you idiot. It's fire. That's the Iron Inspire logo."

"Oh! I know that brand. They still sell stuff today."

"Of course, they do, silly. It's the oldest pony wear company. What they crafted in the sixties was their best stuff."

"So, you only got me good gears today, after all."

"I... I just wanted a good price. But since I found those, I got them."

"You like me. You wanted the best for me. I remember seeing cheaper harnesses in the piles."

"Cassy! I swear I'll make you groom the track twice tonight if you don't shut up! Let me work now!"

"Haha! You like me! You like me and you got me good gears."



The sun was going down, but the damage was done and walking felt pointless. At this point, it now had more to do about defying death than finding a way back home. Moonlight supported Tiantang as much as she could, keeping her arm wrapped around her neck, but the Asian ponygirl wasn't helping much anymore.

The two women crashed on the abrasive sand next to a dry bush and some dusty rocks. There wasn't much more life out there in the desert than inside their chest.

"..."

"..."

"W... why?"

"..."

"... Why did you... do this to us... Tiang?"

"... Be... because..."

"... Why?"

"... Because... I love... you... and... I care..."

"... S... stop! Stop saying that!... It makes... no sense."

"... Moon... You... you are... the universe..."

"You are insane!... You know that?"

"... N...no... Ca... call upon it... You'll... see... Don't... fear. Don't fear."

"..."

"M...moon... Trust... me... You can... do... everything... If you... believe... in yourself. You are... better than... you think. So much... better..."

"... What... whatever! I'm done... talking... We are... dead."

"Haaa... Too bad... I... I would have... loved to see Xiuying again... My... my lover... She is... going to be so... mad at me... if I... die."

Moonlight rolled to her back painfully. A pointy rock stabbed her kidney, but she didn't even have the energy to react to the pain anymore. For many long minutes, she just looked at the darkening sky, thinking about nothing. She wasn't even mad at Tiantang Zhi Ma for having put her in this hopeless situation. It was irrational and weird. Why did she even include herself in this insane plan? Moonlight knew that Tiantang loved Xiu more than anything else in the world. So why would she put her life on the line? To teach her that she was the universe?... whatever that meant. It just made no sense.

But as she was trying to recover, her mind began to wander. Why was she here exactly? How did this happen? She lost a race badly. And then Sophie yelled at her. And then she yelled back at Sophie. Why? She liked Sophie. She liked Morning Star too. So how did that happen? What could have gone so wrong? Sophie had asked her what went wrong during that race, but Moonlight had never really answered and just accused her of not having given her enough freedom to run as she wanted.

It was a lie...

Such a lie...

The truth was... Moonlight didn't do anything that she had learned during her training. Instead, on the track, she decided to do whatever she wanted. But trying to go faster just made things worse. She threw Morning Star off balance during the whole race, not respecting the plan and not listening to Sophie, who was trying her best to control her.

And then... they lost. And that hurt a lot...

For Moonlight, who grew up with parents who had no pride in their daughter no matter how much she had tried to obtain some love from them, it was a big blow in the guts. It couldn't be her fault... It could only be everybody else's fault because people were idiots. It had to be that. All her life, they told her what to do and how, and she always thought she knew better.

But this failure on the track has been a painful wake-up call. Even if Sophie had scolded Morning Star after the race, Moonlight knew that she was solely responsible for the fiasco. It was all her fault. She knew she didn't give her teammate any chance to perform well.

"... Moonlight... she ran... all wrong..."

That was right... Those words from Morning Star after the race were the truth... She just didn't have the guts to admit it.

And now Moonlight was in the desert, dying. Why? It had to be related... But how... What did Tiang really try to teach her?

She extended her exhausted arm toward the now dark sky and circled one of the brightest stars with her fingers... It felt strange... a bit different than all the other times she had looked at them. What Tiang had told her about the universe and exploding stars was perhaps true but still very metaphorical.

Yet...

What would happen if she could actually call upon the universe? What would happen if she could harness the energy of the stars to get the strength to walk some more and find a way out of here?... Would they provide her with some well-needed guidance? What would actually happen if she were to believe Tiantang Zhi Ma, the wise Asian ponygirl? She seemed to know an awful lot about the universe.

Was this how Xiu and Tiang had found her in the first place? Did they call upon the universe, asking to find her? Or was it just a coincidence? Surely, if Tiantang had provided this obscure advice, it was likely because she believed in it herself.

What would happen to Moonlight if she started believing in the universe... in the stars... and above all else... in Tiantang... in Xiu... in Sophie... in Morning Star? All of them were part of her as per Tiantang's explanation.

What would happen then?

Moonlight closed her eyes... A light wind brushed against her excessively dry face... the overheated ground transferred its heat to her back... Her ears caught the noises of insects and the one of a coyote in the howling in the distance. The dry bush nearby sang her a song.

Why could she hear all of this all of a sudden? She had heard all those noises before, but it was different this time. It was not the noises and her... It was her and the noise, together. Her own breathing mixed with the cacophony of the night in a way that she had never experienced before as if she had oddly connected with her world.

In the back of her mind, a doubt... Was this happening because Tiang had suggested that this connection was possible, or was it because it was really happening? And did it happen when she had considered believing in the people that had been kind to her? Did she connect with all those people, too, just by opening her heart a little?

What had she done? A strong feeling of guilt cut deep inside her guts... Everything was connected to her now... and it was excruciating. She could feel her friends' despair.

Penny would lose her stable...

Sophie wouldn't be able to do what she loves anymore...

Morning Star wouldn't be able to run anymore...

Tiantang would die at her side...

Xiuying would never be able to see her lover again...

All of this was so wrong.

Stardust's stable... The pink ponies would undoubtedly win but without any feeling of pride. What would be the point of running without good opponents?

Those thoughts resonated inside her brain so loudly that it was unbearable.



Morning Star observed the end of the sunset at the stable while refreshing the markings inside her palm using the pen that Ivory had secretly given her. She smiled, knowing that everything would be alright. The white ponygirl had told her those words with such conviction. She had no fear and believed that nothing could go wrong, no matter how dark this moment was for Penny's stable. Ivory told her that the weight of the world wasn't on her sole shoulders.

"You are not alone."



"Tiang... Tiang... I'm here... I'm here now... You are not alone."

"I... I know... Moon..."

"Come on... Stand up. We are going."

"... W... where?..."

"Let's get out... of this desert now... Mmmph!"

Using all her remaining strength, Moonlight pulled Tiang up on her useless legs and wrapped her arm around her neck to support her. Somehow, the Asian ponygirl didn't seem as heavy as before.

"I'm not going to let you die here, Tiang. Xiuying would be too sad. She is waiting for you."

"... I... I know... she is. ... she is... going to be... so mad... at me."

"Let's go this way."

"...Oh?... this way?... A different... direction?"

"Yes. See that bright star on the horizon... I don't know why... but I want to follow it for a while..."

"Aaaah... Yes... I love it too... It's a... pretty star."

"Good... Good... Do you know its name?"

"Oh yes... I do... I was born... there..."

"What is it?"

"Haha... It's called... the Morning Star!"



"AAAAH! CASSY! YOU ARE SO CUTE!"

Neigh!

With a bit between her teeth, she couldn't thank Hemlock and Nightshade for the compliment, but since their hands fondled her naked breast, it was probably not necessary.

Brittany had done an exceptional job as usual. Standing tall in the middle of the barn was Cassy, wearing a gorgeous forest green suit, a unique black harness made of very wide straps, exceptionally good-looking vintage pony boots with brand new leather laces, and a pretty bridle that didn't obstruct her beautiful overjoyed face one bit.

When Brittany finally released her ponies out so they could check Cassy out, it didn't take one second for the compliment to pour. The outfit was so different and so good-looking. Not bad for a kit put together at a very low cost.

But Brittany wasn't done. The final touch needed to be applied in front of everybody

"There... since you seemed to like it more than everything else in the world... Put that on your head."

Extending her arms to the maximum, the small trainer placed Cassy's beloved cowboy hat on top of her head. It was dirty, but she had no intention of cleaning it. Instead, it would be Cassy's special signature from now on. The pretty pony with the dusty cowboy hat.

Cassy ran in place, overjoyed by this last surprise. She wasn't a racer anymore, so hats were surely permitted. It would also do a good job at protecting her head from the harsh sun when she would be grooming the track before Hemlock and Nightshade's training. Or perhaps when she would pull a small trailer full of fresh water to cool them down after a long day of running. Also, Brittany told her that she had no intention of restraining her wrist since that kind of discipline wasn't necessary in her case. Cassy would get to be a pony AND help more with her hands as well.

Best day ever.

"Alright, guys. I'll let you have some fun. I'm going to prepare your food. It's already late. And then it's bedtime for me. Shopping with Cassy was more than exhausting."

Finding a way through her dancing ponygirls, Brittany left the barn with a sense of satisfaction. She had made her ponies happy, which meant they would perform well during the next race, and Cassy was now out of her hair.

On her way to the house, she paused for a moment, looking at the rising moon, and couldn't help but remember what had happened at the store and think about the mysterious object she had received from the weird store owner. This shouldn't have happened to her.

It was unfair and sad.

But...

It was also a privilege...

If what she believed in was true... It would be an experience of a lifetime. She would have a front-row seat to witness the impossible.

She took a deep breath and murmured a few words to herself...

"Moonlight... You fucking moron!"



"Alright, Morning Star. Time to go to the barn. You sleep in your stall tonight."

Sophie grabbed Morning Star's reins and slowly walked her in the direction of the barn. It was a very quiet evening, without worries or training. Despite their dire situation, a certain calm floated around the stable. It was as if nobody had yet processed what had happened at the exhibition race and were waiting for a clearer signal before freaking out. Penny's stable had never been so close to bankruptcy. But what should have felt like an inevitability had only translated to patience.

Morning Star stopped in the tracks.

"Hey! What are you doing? You almost dislocated my shoulder."

Morning Star fixated the horizon.

"What is it, Star? You saw a coyote?"

The black ponygirl began walking in the direction of the desert. Sophie just let the reins go, knowing that this was unusual behavior. It got her curious.

"Where are you going, Star?"

Morning Star began to trot, quickly building some distance with her trainer.

"Hey! I don't want to run after you tonight! It's not funny! Come back. You are going to twist your ankle on a rock or something."

Of course, Sophie had no other choice but to chase her undisciplined runner, which wasn't an easy task with her short legs.

After about two hundred meters, Sophie finally reached her pony, who had stopped but had continued to look afar.

"Okay, you are scaring me now. What are you looking at? A ghost?"

Not taking the chance to lose her pony again, Sophie wrapped her hand around the reins without interfering with what Morning Star was doing. There must have been a reason for that behavior. For a moment, she scrutinized the desert... until...

A form... a creature, perhaps... appeared from behind a big rock...

Morning Star bolted like a cannonball toward it, almost ripping Sophie's arm off in the process. The small driver had to let her pony go once more.

"STAR! COME BACK!"



"NEVER DO THAT TO ME EVER AGAIN! YOU HEAR ME?"

"Hmmm... Too loud. But I still love you, Xiu."

"I... I love you too! You but you scared the hell out of me! I thought you were DEAD!"

In the guest bedroom of Penny's house, a pretty oriental ponygirl recovered slowly on the bed. It was morning already, but Tiantang was still in a complete state of exhaustion. She didn't even remember how she ended up in that bed. She must have passed out, and Moonlight had carried her all the way to this place.

As soon as Morning Star and Sophie had discovered them wandering aimlessly in the desert, they rescued them and provided them with critical care. Of course, they also called Xiu right away, who rushed to Penny's stable and spent the night watching over her unconscious lover.

But now that Tiantang had woken up, Xiuying couldn't do anything else but reprimand her.

"I thought you were dead this time."

"Close... but... you knew I would come back, right?"

"Yes, but... don't do it again, okay? One day, it's not going to end well."

"No, this was the last time. I found her... I found who I was looking for."

"Are... are you sure?"

"Yes... I am. When Moonlight awakened... It was... amazing."



Moonlight rested on her back, awake and silent. She still couldn't believe it. After a day and a half lost in the burning desert, she found this stable in the middle of nowhere, Penny's stable. The same one she had left on bad terms only two days ago. When she heard Morning Star's hooves closing in her position, she only had time to stare at her for a moment before passing out. The white star on Morning Star's leather headband had seemed way brighter than usual, like the one in the night sky that was carrying her name.

The bedroom door opened, and Penny stepped in, carrying a glass of milk and a small plate.

"Penny? I..."

"Shhh... Don't speak... It's all good."

The smell was unmistakable. Those were fresh cookies on the plate... Her favorite. Why did she have this weakness for this snack?

The older woman sat on the edge of the bed and placed her hand on Moonlight's stomach.

"So, Moonlight... We have another exhibition race next week. If I'm not mistaken, you love to run, right? Could it be something of interest to you?"

"... I..."

Why was this her first question? Was Penny not supposed to ask why she got lost in the desert instead? Was she not supposed to ask how she managed to find the stable in the middle of the night? Wouldn't she have to apologize first?

"... Y... Yes. I... I would love to."

"I'm glad to hear that, young one. Eat your snack, and when you are ready, you can go meet Sophie and Morning Star outside. They are certainly waiting for you."

After scratching her belly as a mother would do, Penny stood up and headed toward the exit.

"P... Penny?"

"Yes?"

"I will win this time... I promise!"

"Oh... I know you will. You don't need to convince me."

"You... you know?"

"Yes. I knew you were a winner the first time I laid eyes on you, Moonlight. You are a very special girl. And now, I think you may believe it too."

"..."

"Take your time, now... Your friends aren't going anywhere. They will wait for you for as long as they need to."

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