

Able to scavenge one working syringe from the destroyed medical area, Fred approached the only pony he'd met in person. "Carlos, I need to ask something of you." No ponies, converted or original had looked into their doings. He'd need pony blood and all the supplies here had been scattered in that initial attack. "I've told you I want to continue on this path, but I need a certain reagent not in ready supply."

Carlos eyed Fred askance. "Eh?"

Holding up the syringe, he explained "I'll need an amount of Pony blood. Converted will work fine, and no natural ponies have stopped by."

Carlos pawed the ground, staring at his hoof's motion. Finally, he spoke softly a single word. "Sì."

There were no thermometers, so Fred would have to guess not only the thermal coefficient of the syringe, but the average body temperature of the Equestrian pony. Hoping it was close to Earth-'simple animal' pony temperature of 101^f, Fred finalized his plan, and at the precise hour injected himself with Carlos' blood. It was red, as blood should be. Fred desperately hoped the treatment that turned it purple, as shown in the news clips, was a pony-safe preservative and not a critical part of the conversion.

As it turned out, it was probably a heavy soporific. Using just plain blood hurt like nothing Fred could have imagined as his bones re-knit themselves into new shapes. It took every ounce of willpower he could conjure to not slip out of posture for his wings. But he had seen winged tourists that afternoon, reminding him how narrow a margin he'd be working in. He'd just have to trust his superstitious instincts and take what he got.

Two in the morning, and the moon was just setting. The pain had finally subsided. Fred felt very disoriented, but he knew he'd succeeded, as he'd lost his fingers long ago. It was at some time during the wracking pains, his eyes clenched in determination; Fred had not *seen* it happen. But now that he could breathe freely, move freely ... it was clear he was some derivation of pony, now.

The street lamps that still worked illuminated Fred's form as he crawled carefully out of his sick bed. Carlos had watched the whole thing, silent. His first comment was "Amigo, you look like some kind of ..."

"Freak?" Fred finished, finally finding his wings & stretching them. He had no illusions to a flight skill, but his brain was definitely wired for six limbs. Reaching a hoof he felt for a horn ... and found none.

Fortunately that was just because he was searching too low on his forehead. Carlos looked down at the shorter 'filthy animal' and grabbed the tip of the very short newfoal's horn between hoof wall and frog, then wiggled Fred's whole head. "Yeah. I think they might put you out of your misery or something. We have to travel together now, amigo. Two outcasts together." Fred smiled, glad this would-be terrorist could laugh about the pony form.

None of the books explained how to 'magic' things. Perhaps Fred couldn't, as there was no magic to bathe in anyway. The books seemed to imply the horn was a fifth (seventh, for Fred) limb, and a pony just learned to use it like a baby learned to walk (again). "Maybe there's a whole village over there of disillusioned or untriggered HLF agents, Carlos. I'll help you look."

Carlos nodded. And smiled.

Later, during the pre-dawn light, the pair were grazing. The pony-edible things from the abandoned convenience store had long since been raided. Fred had never seen whether it was human anarchists or curious pony immigrants.

A trio of white winged stallions dropped out of seemingly nowhere, and the streetlamps exploded. Fred assumed that meant he'd been right, although in this new body he couldn't feel the magic.

"You newfoals need to proceed to an evaluation camp in Equestria. This neighborhood

hasn't been declared safe by Princess Celestia yet." Fred noticed the metal armor the trio wore – matching. This was a uniform. Since when did the invaders declare themselves to have this level of dominion?

Carlos spat, the puddle of dribble dripping down one of the officer's front left hoof. "We live here. We were born here you filthy pigs."

Well, that's one way to say hello. "What my friend means, is that we have a great deal more familiarity with these parts than..."

"I didn't ask you your opinion, newfoal. Both your soon to be converted president and your accepted leader Celestia insist there is to be no incidents of any kind between human and pony." Fred found it odd that the one speaking was staring so intently at Carlos. The other two were stealing frequent glances at Fred, but not actually looking at him either. "And you're a pony now. Maybe you didn't know, but that shiny stick on your head makes you lethal to all your friends and family. Is that what you want, human? To kill your family because you're too stuck up to move out when you need to?"

"Hey man," Carlos interjected, overlooking the detail about him not being the one with the pointy deathstick. "I didn't ask to drink this Kool-aid."

The spit-upon pegasus interjected "No pony is asking about anything. You're being herded to the nearest gate." Another glance, then back to Carlos. "We'll come back with help if you need to be hogtied and carried."

Fred sighed in response while Carlos was reduced to his native version of Spanish. The third officer responded with the same style of rapid fire gibberish. Nose to nose, anger flaring in both of their faces. Then just as suddenly the three officers must have decided they were currently outclassed, as they all jumped into the air. Fred didn't see a wing unfold until they were twenty feet up, at which point they took off like rockets.

"They ain't supposed to do that." Carlos glared up after the armored pegasi. "That kind

of flight takes magic, and any humans around would be hurt." Here Carlos lowered his head, closed his eyes, and breathed deep. "Except that it won't matter. That's how the world smelled just as the bombs went off. Didn't go off, whatever."

"You can smell magic?" Carlos nodded. "I'm guessing it washed in about the time the streetlamps broke? Just about when the cops dropped out of nowhere?" Carlos lifted his head and looked at the now shattered street lamps, took a careful, slow breath through his nose, and then nodded again. Looking around, Fred saw no sign of any ponies, so he started walking towards where he thought the way to Equestria would be found. "I have some plans for this moment. But I – and I guess you, need to get to Equestria when no one's looking. We'll try to blend in, or I'm prepared to live as hermits until we can find our real place in this world."

What Fred's plan's didn't account for, was why three cops, so to speak, had been scared off by what at first glance looked like a twelve year old and a sixteen year old with attitude problems. Hopefully they could avoid being recognized at the border crossing. Or bypass it altogether and move to some town without having their papers signed.

Carlos just followed, a little sullen but never argumentative. It seemed to Fred the reports were very right; ponification adjusted your personality; that argument notwithstanding, Carlos didn't seem capable of planning or executing the kind of violence that had left him an earth pony.

He couldn't yet figure out if he himself had changed; maybe it would reveal itself in coming days. Or maybe he was too close to notice, and would never know. *Perhaps*, thought Fred briefly, *that would be okay*.

So long as he could maintain his independence, and a modicum of anonymity, and avoid the drama he expected would be found in most newfoal encampments.