Starfall

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Explicit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archive Warning:</td>
<td>Choose Not To Use Archive Warnings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category:</td>
<td>F/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fandom:</td>
<td>Star vs. The Forces Of Evil, Gravity Falls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship:</td>
<td>Star Butterfly/Marco Diaz, Star Butterfly &amp; Marco Diaz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Tags:</td>
<td>Mental Health Issues, Amnesia, Violence, Terminal Illnesses, Forced Marriage, Smut, Mild Smut, Gratuitous Smut, Shameless Smut, Fluff and Smut</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Starfall**

by GolfAlphaMike

Summary

*[NEW LEMON FRESH (smut) BONUS CHAPTER 47 (aka 22.5) ADDED!]*

*[STORY STILL COMPLETE] Marco and Star have been separated by the dimensions. Why were they torn apart? Can they make their way back to each other? There will be adventure, action, and drama. But most of all, there will be Starco. HELLA STARCO!*
Author's Notes: Comments and criticisms are welcome and appreciated. I will try to update this story with new chapters as regularly as possible. The ending has already been planned.

Writing for this fanfiction story based on Star vs the Forces of Evil was started during the May/June 2015 hiatus, between the broadcast of "Brittney's Party" (Ep 10) and "Mewberty" (Ep 11). I will attempt to account for any future conflict with official canon in revisions if possible. Writing continued throughout the progression of season 1.

Star vs the Forces of Evil is the intellectual property of Disney and Daron Nefcy. I own no part of it. I'll bring it back gassed up and try not to get any dings on it.

*** New Author's Note: January 22, 2017:

Well, it's finally complete.

This fic mostly takes into account the first season of the show, and I feel that it doesn't stray too far from season two. But as was the case with most fanfics written while the show is running, canon errors did creep in. Some harder to reconcile than others. There are definitely things I would have done differently had I known how the show plot would unfold.

For those of you reading this for the first time, I hope you will still enjoy it.

*** New Author's Note: May 21, 2018

Yes, I just posted a smut chapter. Sue me.

The smut chapter is an expansion of a scene, really a paragraph in Chapter 22. It has no impact on the larger story. But it's explicit and sex heavy.

See Chapter 47 for details!

I know that the show’s canon plot has, by now, decimated the plot basis for this fanfiction. But, if you only take into account Season 1, most of early Season 2, a little of late Season 2, and itty bitty bits here and there from Season 3, it’s still fine… if you squint a little.

It’s okay. *sniff* It had its time.

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Starfall by GolfAlphaMike

Chapter 1: Hold

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"He says that your family has been housing a girl as an exchange student. Is that true?"

"No. I mean, we used to house exchange students. There have been several, in fact. But right now? No. We haven't had an exchange student live with us for about four years."
"He described the exchange student as a girl about his age. Blonde. Very energetic personality. Unique style of dress. Does that sound like any of your previous wards?"

"No. The only other blonde girl was about six years ago. But other than her hair color, not how you describe. She was very conservative, really."

"Did they have a relationship?"

"A romantic relationship? They were only twelve."

"Still, did you see anything that would make you think that? Any signs of attraction? Unrequited feelings? Returned affections? Sometimes these things can bring up repressed feelings."

"I suppose that there may have been some feelings. A crush. But it never went beyond that."

"The reason I'm asking is because your son claims that he and the exchange student who was supposedly living with you the last few years were in a romantic relationship. Did he have any such feelings for someone more recently?"

"No. He used to have a crush on a girl at school, but that was a while ago."

"How long ago?"

"I guess over... three years?"

"Nothing since then?"

"I don't think so. He just seemed like he lost interest in chasing girls."

"Did she fit the description? Blonde, energetic, unique?"

"I'm not sure. Was Jackie a blonde, dear?"

"I'm not sure either. She had streaks of colors in her hair, though."

"Hmm. He claims the fictional girl and he have been in a relationship for the last two years. I'm just trying to find out if they are related."

"I don't think he's ever had a girlfriend. He even went to his senior prom alone."

"Is your son socially awkward?"

"I don't think so. He has friends. Do you think this has something to do with someone from school?"

"We don't know... These next questions are hard to ask, but we think they're important. Does your son use any drugs?"

"What?! No! He would never!"

"I know that might be upsetting to think about. But parents are often the last to know. Please think carefully."

"No. We're positive."

"Alcohol use?"

"There was a party a few days ago. There may have been alcohol there. He came home with a tattoo."
He said he couldn't remember getting it."

"So he may have had a blackout? Is this a frequent occurrence?"

"No, it's never happened before. It was so unlike him."

"Well, some substances can cause hallucinations. We're running some lab work."

"Hallucinations like the girl? Is he still seeing her? Does he see her here?"

"No. He says she went home a few days ago. We looked up the name. The place doesn't exist. Like he made up the name too."

"You think he's making this up? Why would he do that?"

"Sorry. That was a poor choice of words. I meant that he hallucinated the name too. 'Mewni'."

"You don't think he's just lying then?"

"I don't. I honestly believe that he believes it."

"What makes you so certain?"

"We could just tell. The way he told us the story. He had an answer for everything. Complete details. Plus, we occasionally get people just making things up on purpose here. We're very good at spotting them. Your son is no liar."

"Do you think any part of his story is true?"

"I don't think so."

"What makes you certain of that?"

"This next part may worry you."

"Please tell us why."

"Though he's convinced of his story, there are parts that are simply not possible. He says the girl possesses magic powers. Actually, he says she was in possession of a magic wand. He says it has the power to perform incredible feats, materialize objects and animals, telekinesis, and act as an magical weapon. His description was very fanciful. Unicorns and rainbows and such. He even ascribes your dogs' creation to it."

"But we don't even have any pets!"

"He says that they disappeared shortly after she left."

"This sounds crazy!"

"We don't really like to use that word here."

"I'm sorry. But this is very disturbing."

"I understand... The reason he's here is because of an episode at your home, correct?"

"He was so angry. He accused us on being part of a prank. He claimed that pictures had been erased. He was holding a piece of paper. We thought it was some bad news. But when we looked, the paper
was blank. It didn't make any sense."

"We think he may be suffering a form of delusional paranoia. He believes that evidence of the girl has been deliberately removed. He believes that everyone is part of a conspiracy, or had their memory altered."

"Oh my! That's why he was so angry."

"There's something else. In addition to the conspiracy belief, he also claims that monsters come occasionally to steal the wand. He says that he and the girl fight them off when they do."

"My goodness! Is that why he fought the orderlies?"

"Maybe. Does your son get in a lot of fights?"

"Street fights? No. But, he's a very accomplished martial artist. Many different forms."

"That actually explains a lot. He knows how to handle himself in a fight. It took a lot of people to restrain him. Also, people here have to have some self defense training."

"How many people? Three? Four?"

"Seventeen."

"Oh my! Are they alright?"

"I don't think he wanted to hurt anyone. But he seemed very confused and scared."

"What can we do to help him?"

"I would definitely recommend therapy. You should try to arrange treatment. Right now, we're going to keep him here another few days for observation. We just want to make sure he's not a danger to himself or others."

"Is he under arrest?"

"We get that question a lot. But, no. This will be treated as a medical matter."

"Can we see him?"

"Of course. But please avoid talking about his delusion if possible. Try to reassure him that you love him, and that he'll be going home soon."

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"How is she?"

"Inconsolable. She refuses to see anyone. She hasn't taken food in days."

"What can I do?"

"I do not know. But, you have been her best friend a long time. Just try to be there for her. She needs somebody. She must feel so alone."

"I wouldn't consider myself her best friend anymore. That's definitely him now. But she's still mine. I'll be there for her. Hopefully she'll want to talk to someone soon."
"Thank you."

"Have you tried opening a portal there from other dimensions?"

"Yes. So many people have tried so many methods from so many different dimensions. Dimensional travel to Earth is impossible."

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"Dear, I fear that there is not much time left." said the queen weakly.

"I know." the king said sadly.

"We must finish the planning for Star to assume the throne. It's a shame that travel to Earth is impossible. Marco Diaz was a good match. They were very fond of each other."

"Yes. They reminded me of us at that age." Tears began to form in his eyes.

"She should have been so lucky." The queen paused. "But we must all do what we must for the welfare of the kingdom. Please bring our daughter to me. I must speak with her."

Star entered the bedchamber and sat at her mother's side.

The queen took her daughter's hand. "Star, sweetheart, there is something I must tell you about the Butterfly line. Something that has been kept from you. Something that if it becomes known, could bring disaster to the kingdom and endanger you and those around you. It's also why the law requires you to have a king to ascend to the throne."

Tears welled up in Star's eyes. Not just because her mother's time was coming to an end, but also because she knew she would be forced into marriage when it does.

To Tom. Not to Marco. Tom.

Star thought back to just after she arrived back in Mewni.

"Hi Dad!" Star said as she hugged her father.

"Welcome home Star. Did Marco travel with you?"

"No. He's back on Earth." Star said, slightly annoyed.

"Some things have happened since we last spoke. The nobles want to know the plan of succession. Has Marco agreed?"

"I haven't talked to him about it. Yet."

"Star, are you having second thoughts?"

"Of course not."

"Did you know that Empress Ishtar says that it would not be proper for you to marry non-royalty? She still desires you to marry her son."
Empress Ishtar was the ruler of the underworld kingdom. She and her husband had one child. A prince. Star's ex-boyfriend, Tom.

When Star was younger, before she was sent to Earth, their parents introduced them in hopes of laying groundwork for an alliance by marriage.

Tom was interesting to Star. He was rebellious and charming. When Star and Tom began their relationship, talks advanced into a possible engagement. But their relationship didn't last long. Tom turned out to be prone to anger and jealousy. Also, he had a wandering eye. Star had caught him flirting with other girls multiple times.

But more than just Tom, his mother made Star very uncomfortable. She seemed concerned with her son producing a new heir more than was appropriate that early in a relationship. It was definitely inappropriate for their ages. Star felt as if she was being pressured not just into a relationship, but into motherhood far too early.

There was an incident when Star's family was visiting Tom's family. Tom 'accidentally' walked in on Star while she was dressing. Star suspected that his mother had orchestrated it.

It was the last straw. Star broke up with Tom and ended all marriage negotiations.

"Ugh, we went over this. Will she ever give up?" Star complained.

"She is very persistent. She has made moves that concern us. She is trying to secure her son's position as your potential husband."

"Ha. It doesn't matter if Tom is the only other eligible bachelor in existence."

"That is the concern, Star. He IS the only other eligible bachelor. All the other princes of appropriate age have had marriages arranged for them, or have publicly stated that they will not be pursuing your hand."

"How the heck did she do that?!"

"By a combination of bribes, favors, concessions, and threats, I imagine."

"Well, fat lot of good any of that will do. I love Marco. And he loves me. I'm already spoken for."

Star flatly stated.

"Spoken for without speaking, you mean. We do not find this comforting, Star. He needs to make his intentions known."

"I promise to talk to him about it when I go back to Earth. He's in the middle of placement exams for college."

"College? Is that not a large commitment of time for the next several years?"

"Hey Bestie!" came a voice.

"Pony Head!" Star greeted her.

"Oops. Sorry, King Butterfly." Princess Pony Head said realizing she had interrupted their
"It's all right princess. I am sure Star would appreciate time to catch up with you." The king turned to Star. "Star, it is very important that we continue this discussion before the gathering of nobles tomorrow. These are serious matters."

"We will, dad. Tonight."

The king bid them goodbye leaving Star and Pony Head alone.

"It's so good to see you! Hugs!" Star wrapped her arms around Pony Head.

"Good to see you too! How was your prom with your Earth-Turd?!"

Star no longer bothered to correct Pony Head when she called Marco that. The name had become more of a term of endearment. Though Marco still didn't totally appreciate it.

"It was so great!" Star said with a giant smile. Her expression became slightly annoyed. "Even though it started off bad..." Her smile returned. "There's so much to talk about!"

"What about right after prom?" Pony Head said with a wink.

"Nooooo..." Star said dryly.

Pony Head raised an eyebrow.

"...

She continued to eyeball Star.

"...

Star's cheek hearts became beet red and she turned her head away.

"...not right after prom." she said quietly.

"Room. Talk. Details. Now."

Pony Head bit Star's dress shoulder and began to pull. Star's feet never even touched the ground as she was dragged to her room.

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"Now remember, Star. Anything you agree to in the Great Hall of Mewni is binding by law. Even for a queen. You must keep a clear head. You must always think before speaking."

"I know, Mom." Star paused. "Are you sure you can't be there?"

"No, I'm sorry Star. My caretakers say it would be too stressful in my condition. Your father will be there with you. But you will need to speak for yourself if you are to be queen. Everyone in the Great Hall understands that you are the future ruler of Mewni, but they are allowed to speak freely with you there. Everyone speaks as equals there. You must be able to handle the debates on your own."

Star was heartbroken knowing that her mother would leave them soon. The queen was still so young. She only had months left, not the decades she should.
Star was standing in the center of the circular Great Hall of Mewni. Noblemen and Noblewomen surrounded her in the seats that rose along the walls. The daylight shone into the Great Hall through the images on the beautiful stained glass dome.

"Princess Star. We are saddened to learn of your mother's illness. But unfortunately we must now plan for the worst."

"Yes. Thank you for your sympathies. I understand the importance of the matters at hand." Star replied.

"Very well. Then let us begin."

The nobles had gathered to discuss the plan of succession for Star. Ever since the queen's illness had been revealed, the nobles have been pressuring the royal family to finalize wedding plans for the future queen. Questions and answers seemed to come from every direction.

"Princess, have you made plans for your coronation? Have you selected a husband?"

"I have. His name is Marco Diaz. From Earth. We have been in a relationship for two years now."

"Marco Diaz? I have not heard of this prince."

"He's not a prince."

"He is not? Is he a nobleman?"

"No. He's not."

"Please. It is not required that the princess' husband be nobility if they are not from this dimension. It has not been for quite a long time. Her own father came to Mewni under similar circumstances as I recall."

"Yes. Thank you. Marco Diaz may not have a royal title, but he is intelligent and strong. His heart is brave and kind. He will make a good king and protector for Mewni and a good partner and husband for me."

"Very good. Have you begun planning your wedding?"

"Well... no. Not yet."

"No? I do not think we need to tell you that time may not be as plentiful as we would like. What seems to be the delay?"

"Um... I... I haven't proposed marriage yet."

Clamoring and shouting erupted from the gallery.

"Princess Star! This is unacceptable!"

"Without a king, you will not be permitted to ascend to the throne by law!"

"Without a queen, the kingdom will fall into chaos!"

"Who is to say what this Marco Diaz's intentions are? What if he declines the princess' proposal?"
"Preposterous! What fool would turn down a chance to be king?!"

"Not all men crave power! He could decline for any number of reasons!"

Star realized that she, more than anyone, should have known better than to just assume Marco's wishes. She should have brought this up to him a long time ago. She should have just asked.

"Please! Please! Quiet please! Quiet please! This is just a minor misunderstanding that can be cleared up easily! The princess should simply bring Marco Diaz here so he can make his intentions known!"

A woman's voice spoke out. "Perhaps an alternative should be discussed since we are all here now."

Star turned to see an impossibly beautiful woman. Fair, smooth, completely blemish free skin. Like she was carved from marble. Robes made of the finest golden silk. Shiny, blood red hair flowed from her head to below her waist like a river. And a face that could only be described as perfect. As if its features were sculpted by only the greatest artists.

Star freaking despised her.

"Empress Ishtar, we all know what your alternative is."

"Yes. And do you have a better one?"

Star remembered what her father told her the previous day. The Empress had removed all other suitors from consideration.

"Let us at least consider the possibility that Marco Diaz declines. If he accepts, then all is well. If not, well, my son would make a suitable husband, wouldn't you all agree?"

Star shouted. "I broke up with Tom, because he was an immature jerkface!"

"My son has matured since then. You were both so young when he was being considered as your husband."

"I also ended it because our age didn't stop YOU from seeing me as some kind of baby making factory!"

"My goodness, Princess. As if you would really need any encouragement."

Gasps and murmurs were heard from the gallery of nobles.

Star was infuriated. "OH NO YOU DIDN'T!" Star shouted out loud.

"Now, now. Everyone should just calm themselves." said a nobleman.

"Yes. Princess Star, you should simply bring Marco Diaz here as soon as possible." said another.

Ishtar spoke again, "Yes, princess. I will be more than happy to drop the entire matter if Marco Diaz declares his wish to become your husband here in front of everyone. But what will happen when he declines? It would be best to have Tom available in reserve."

"Marco will NOT say no!"

"Perhaps you are not as confident of Marco Diaz's intentions as you would like to believe. Otherwise you would have already agreed. If Marco is unable or unwilling to marry you when it is time for you to ascend to the throne, you should be engaged to marry my son. For the security of the kingdom, of
A noblewoman responded, "Princess Star, that does seem like the prudent thing to do. And the sooner Marco Diaz speaks here, the sooner these concerns can be put to rest."

"Yes. He should definitely visit soon. You should take him to see our dairy farms. I believe he enjoys free samples." Ishtar said condescendingly.

A single "Oh, snap!" was heard from the otherwise silent gallery.

Star saw red. Her cheek hearts had turned into flaming skulls. She was too livid to speak.

"Perhaps my son should accompany him as well. I'm not sure about Marco Diaz, but WE are certainly in the market for a new heifer."

The next thing Star knew, she was being held back by her father. The entire gathering of nobles was shouting.

Star paid none of it any attention. Thoughts of murder filled her mind. "I don't need the wand to kill this witch! I'll strangle her with my bare hands!" her dark side said to her.

"Star, you need to calm down." Her father implored. Star did not hear.

"Ishtar! You wanna do it this way?! I'm gonna bring Marco here, and when he accepts my proposal to marry, I'M GONNA RUB OUR ENGAGEMENT RIGHT IN YOUR SMUG FREAKING FACE!"

"Are you so certain that he would stand here in front of witnesses to declare that he wants to marry a trollop that would you accept engagement to Tom if he does not?"

Protests from the gallery erupted. "Empress Ishtar! That is completely out of line!" a nobleman shouted.

Star was beyond enraged. "YOU KNOW WHAT?! FINE! WHATEVER! THAT'S NOT GONNA HAPPEN ANYWAY! MARCO AND I LOVE EACH OTHER AND WE *WILL* BE MARRIED!"

Star took a few deep breaths to calm herself. She looked to her father who was squeezing his eyes shut and pinching the bridge of his nose. Star then looked at Ishtar who had an expression of complete self satisfaction.

Star realized what just happened. She had been goaded into accepting Empress Ishtar's terms. And here in the Great Hall of Mewni, that's as good as final.

She had "Starred" this one up.

A noblewoman spoke, "Princess Star. We will give you a few days to discuss this matter with Marco Diaz." She then addressed the full gathering. "Shall we all reconvene here in three days?"

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In the emptying hall, Star and her father talked about what had just transpired.

"I'm sorry you had to find out about that like this, Dad."

"You may be my only daughter, but you are also a grown woman in love, Star. I understand."
"I sort of lost my cool."

"I understand why you did. Empress Ishtar was disrespectful and insulting. And normally I would say it is alright, but this is quite unfortunate. You entered into an agreement in the Great Hall. If Marco does not express his intent to be your husband when the nobles gather again, Tom will be your fiancée. Had you not agreed, we would have had more options open."

"It doesn't matter, Dad. I know Marco will say yes."

"Well then, you had best ask him immediately. There simply is no more time for delay."

Star left to open a portal outside. She was determined to bring Marco back immediately. It wouldn't matter if he was in the middle of an exam. It wouldn't even matter if it meant that she would have to kick down the bathroom door and pull him off the commode.

Once outside, Star tried to use the dimensional scissors to create a portal to Earth. Nothing happened.

"Oops. I must've messed up."

Star tried again. Nothing happened.

"What's wrong with these?"

Star tried opening a portal to Quest Buy to test them. The portal opened and she walked through.

"Uh, can I help you?" asked the sloth clerk.

"No." Star said confused. She tried to open another portal to Earth. When that failed, she opened another portal and returned to Mewni.

As she emerged in Mewni, a voice said to her, "Is there something wrong, Princess?"

She turned to find Empress Ishtar standing there.

"What did you do to these?" Star held up the scissors.

"To those? Why I have done nothing to those. Perhaps you should try another pair."

She ran to find Manfred. He had another pair.

Star found him tending to the royal carriage. "Manfred! Open a portal to Earth!" Star shouted as she ran towards him.

"Yes, Princess." Manfred said with a concerned voice.

He produced his scissors and performed the necessary motions. Nothing happened.

"Excuse me, princess. Allow me to try again."

Again, he was unable to create the portal.

Star grabbed the scissors from him. She tried repeatedly.

Cut. "No."

Another cut. "No!"
More cuts. "NO! NO! NO!"

Each time she failed, the panic in her heart rose. Her tears began to fall.

Ishtar remained silent as she approached behind her.

Star turned to her and asked screaming, "WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?!"

The Empress smirked, but said nothing as she left.

The scissors slipped from Star's fingers to the ground. She fell to her knees and covered her face as she wept.

"MARCO!" she screamed through her hands.

Manfred did his best to console her.

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Things moved quickly.

Star tried everything she could to open a portal to Earth. She tried numerous pairs of dimensional scissors. She tried going to many different dimensions to see if a portal could be opened to Earth from them. She sought out travel methods that did not use dimensional scissors. Nothing worked. Star did not sleep or eat for the three days.

She explained to the nobles that Earth travel had been restricted somehow. And while the nobles were sympathetic, the agreement she made with Empress Ishtar would be enforced.

If Star refused, she would not be allowed to ascend to the throne when her mother passes. Mewni would be thrown into civil war when different factions within Mewni try to seize power for themselves. Not to mention the threats from outside conquerors. Star would not, could not, allow that to happen.

Empress Ishtar did not attend the second gathering.

"Your father and I had hoped you would be able to marry for love."

"There's still time. If we can find a way to bring Marco here soon, he could formally challenge the engagement."

"I know you hold out hope for him. I know that your heart belongs to him. But all the experts and learned men among all our allies have tried and failed to open a portal to Earth. They have been failing for months."

Tears flowed from Star's blue eyes.

"But that must be put aside for now. There's a reason why the law states you must have a king to take the crown. Let me tell you why..."

Star listened to her mother. She listened to her queen. The story her mother, the queen, told turned Star's world upside down. When she was done, Star knew what she had to do. She had to be strong. For the good of her kingdom.

Star bid goodnight to her mother for the evening and went to her father.
"Dad, we need a plan. I'm determined now, more than ever, to never marry Tom. We need to think of a way to stop my wedding. Or at least delay it as long as we can."

"I may have an idea. But no one is going to like it." the king responded

"I think I might." said Star

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Lost

Starfall by GolfAlphaMike

Chapter 3: Lost

Marco stepped off the bus in front of the college's main gate.

"First day of college. Hope those exemption exams were worth it, Marco. They cost you everything. You aren't even ahead now." he said to himself.

It was spring. Marco had delayed starting college for a semester. Which was understandable considering everything that happened in the last few months.

"You lost Star. She never came back. No one remembers her but you. You got sent to the funny farm. And your shrink has you on meds."

Marco thought about how quickly his life fell apart.

"I love you."

In his half awake, half asleep state, he rolled onto his side and reached out. He found the warmth he was searching for and wrapped his arm around her. He gently kissed her lips which earned him a soft, sweet moan in response. She rolled to face away but moved her body against his. He held her close and he breathed in the wonderful scent of her hair. Her contented sigh was the last thing he perceived before he fell back asleep.

Again, in a semi-conscious state, he reached out. This time he did not find what he sought. He found only a pillow where she should be. He felt a sense of loss that she had departed while he slept, but remembered fondly what they shared with each other last night. Her pillow was a poor substitute, but he held on to it as if it were her. It still held her scent. It would have to do until she returned to him in a few days.

An annoying buzzer invaded his senses and he blindly swatted at the source. An envelope was unknowingly knocked from the nightstand and slid under the bed.

A button silenced the grating sound and he returned to his dreams.

His half open eyes slowly focused on the glowing red numbers.

11:40.

His eyes briefly closed before they snapped open fully. A realization hit him.
"11:40... A.M." he said.

He was late. Placement exams for fall classes at college start at noon.

"Stupid clock! The snooze button is right next to the off button! Who designed this thing?!"

He leapt out of the full bed. After grabbing a new red hoodie from his closet and whatever clean clothes were handy he ran to the bathroom. He prayed that it was unoccupied. Finding it empty he called out towards downstairs.

"Hey Mom?!"

"Yes, Marco?"

"I messed up! I overslept! Can you drop me off at college?!"

"Sure, Marco."

"Do you think we can leave in a few minutes?!"

"Yes, that's fine. You had better hurry and get ready."

Marco brushed his teeth while he showered and dressed quickly. He was ready to go at 11:44.

Marco and his mother were talking in the car as he combed his hair in the sun visor vanity mirror.

"I haven't seen Star this morning. Was she still asleep?"

"No. She had to go back to Mewni for a few days. She left early this morning."

"Oh dear. I hope it's not about her mother. She wasn't well at your graduation."

"She didn't say why. Just that it was important."

"Marco, why didn't you go with her?"

"I have these placement exams. And she said she would come back in a few days. We actually had an argument about this."

"Well, I'm glad you made up."

Marco wondered briefly how she would know they made up.

"But Marco, Star is your girlfriend. You should be there for her. There would have been other opportunities to take these exams."

Marco knew his mother was right. He hoped Star would come back soon. He swore to himself that he would go with her next time no matter what.

"I guess I was just playing it safe."

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Marco's mother dropped him off at the entrance to the college campus at four minutes past noon. He was grateful that he did not have to take the extra time needed to find parking. He thanked his mother as he left and told her that he would just take the bus home.
Marco got to the testing room at 12:08. He convinced the administrator to allow him in.

He completed the exam to exempt him from the course before the time limit was up. He got something to eat before a second exam. He felt that he did well on both tests.

He took the bus and arrived home after 6:00.

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Marco had finished dinner and was preparing to study again when Alfonso and Ferguson knocked on the front door.

"Marco! We're going to a party!" Ferguson said.

"A party? Are you crashing it?"

Alfonso replied, "No! It's open to everyone! Sort of a goodbye party to high school. Everyone's invited!"

Ferguson noticed someone was missing. "Hey, where's Star?"

"She's not here. She had to go home for a few days."

"Well, you're coming with us!" the two visitors stated.

"I have another placement exam on Monday. I should just stay home and study."

"You can do that later!" Ferguson objected. "We're leaving in a few months. Who knows if we'll ever get another chance to go to a party like this!"

His father's voice came from behind him. "Marco! You must vive la vida a little more. Be espontáneo!"

"But..." Marco began.

A strong hand shoved him out the door. It slammed shut behind him.

"Wooo! Par-tay! Par-tay! Par-tay!..." Ferguson and Alfonso chanted.

Marco resigned himself to going. He figured he could always come home early.

==================================

A beer was placed in his hand the moment he arrived.

"I don't know about this. We're only eighteen."

"C'mon, man! It's cool! It's cool!"

"Where's your girlfriend?"

"She's..."

Somehow the beer bottle in Marco's hand was empty. Another replaced it.

"Maybe just one more."
"Aww! We miss Star!"

"Staying here for college? That's cool! I'm going to..."

"Ferguson's belly face is here!"

"Hey Marco! Try this! It's made from apples!"

"Fer-gu-son! Fer-gu-son! FER-GU-SON!"

Marco saw Alfonso doing a handstand on a keg.

"Why didn't Star come with you?" Jackie asked.

"Marco! Beer Pong!"

"Soooo, Marco. Star's gone, huh? Tee hee." Janna slurred her words.

"Marco needs another drink!"

Marco still felt in control. He could handle a night out.

He missed Star.

Justin appeared wearing a poncho and a sombrero. He was juggling a bottle, a lime, and a shaker of salt.

"WOOOOOOO!

Everyone chanted. "SHOTS! SHOTS! SHOTS! SHOTS! SHOTS! SHOTS!..."

==================================

Marco rolled over and his hand brushed a warm body. "Star's back early..." he thought to himself.

He moved to pull her close. He opened his eyes expecting to see his girlfriend's blue ones looking back at him. Instead he saw the bespectacled eyes of Alfonso.

"WHAT THE HECK?!" Marco exclaimed as he shoved him off the twin bed.

Marco sat up and looked around. He was back in his room. Ferguson was on the floor where Alfonso had just joined him.

"Ugghhh..." Ferguson moaned.

"Ahhhhgg..." Alfonso groaned.

"What happened?" Marco asked.

"I don't know."

"How did we get home?"

"Did we walk?"

"Uggh..."
"Everything's fuzzy."

"I can't remember anything."

"Hey! I found a taxi receipt in my pocket." Alfonso said.

Ferguson took it. "Let me see. A hundred twenty six dollars?!"

Marco grabbed it. "The party was only a mile from here! Paid in cash?"

"Where the heck did we go?"

"My head..."

"Hurk..." Marco felt sick.

Marco leapt from his bed and rushed for the bathroom. Once inside, he knelt before the porcelain altar and began to pray.

After a few horrible minutes of worship, he rinsed his mouth and returned to his room.

"Hey, I found a letter under your bed." Alfonso said from his position on the floor. He reached under the bed and withdrew an envelope.

Marco took it and looked at it. It was a pink envelope, like Star uses. But there was no writing on the outside. The paper in it was the pink paper that Star preferred, but was also blank.

"Weird. It's blank." Marco put it back in its envelope and laid it on his nightstand.

"Marco. You weren't fast enough." Ferguson said as he pointed at Marco's shirt. "You got a little something..."

Marco looked down. "Aw, man." he said as pulled off his t-shirt and threw it in the laundry. He opened his drawer for a new t-shirt.

"Marco, wait!" Alfonso shouted.

"What?" Marco paused.

Ferguson was biting his lip. Alfonso had a huge grin on his face. They both looked like they were holding back laughter.

"Heeee! I think I know where we went last night..." Ferguson said gleefully.

"Yeah. The party." Marco said.

"Besides there..." Ferguson said.

"I think we went to a... tattoo parlor!" Alfonso giggled as he finished.

"C'mon. What makes you say... Oh, no." he said, shaking his head. He slowly turned his gaze down to his own chest.

"OH! NO!"

Marco rushed to his mirror. There he saw it on the center of his chest. A star. About the size of his closed fist. Right over his heart.
His friends began laughing hysterically. "Marco got a tattoo! That's awesome! Ow, my head..."

Marco was speechless.

"Check the bathroom for a tiger!" Alfonso joked between laughs.

"Maybe there's a baby in the closet too!" Ferguson added.

"This isn't funny!" Marco scolded.

"Oh, yes it is!"

Laughter continued as Marco stared at the star. He had seen star tattoos like this before. A five pointed nautical star. It was colored red and black. The shadows gave it a three dimensional look.

Whoever gave it to him was very good. Marco had seen some bad tattoos before, but this one was perfect. The lines were crisp and perfectly straight. The color was bright, and smooth.

He knew there were a lot of meanings associated with the nautical star tattoo, but he didn't feel like they applied to this one. It reminded him of one thing. Of one person.

He smiled a little and let out a chuckle. "I hope Star doesn't mind."

"Who?" Ferguson asked still snickering.

Marco thought that he didn't hear over the laughter. "Star." He said again.

"Who's that?" Alfonso asked catching his breath.

"Um... my girlfriend?"

"Oh! Did you meet her at the party?" Alfonso asked.

"No. I told you she went home."

"Wait, what?" Ferguson said confused.

"I think the booze has really messed everyone up. You guys should get some sleep. In your own beds. And check yourself for tattoos."

"Yeah. Good idea."

Alfonso and Ferguson didn't have any tattoos. Only Marco did.

==================================

After Marco saw his friends on their way, he took a shower. He had always heard that a tattoo would for a while when new. He was glad that his didn't.

He then went down to the kitchen where he saw his parents.

"Look, Dear! It's our fiestero! Buenos días!"

"Ugh. Dad, please. Not so loud..." Marco said as he sat at the table and gestured for his father to take it down a notch. Marco was sure his dad was purposely being loud to irk him.

"Well, I'm glad you went out with your friends last night. You are home alone too often." Marco's
mom said as she was preparing a plate of food for her son.

"I'm not home alone that much, Mom."

"Yes you are. Always studying."

"But, what about St..." Marco began to protest.

His mother cut him off as she turned toward the table with his food. "MARCO! Are you hurt?! What is that on your chest?! A bruise?! Are you bleeding?!" She almost dropped the plate.

Marco looked down and realized his mistake. He had worn a plain white t-shirt. The tattoo's black was so dark, and the red so bright, that it was showing through the thin fabric. A dark t-shirt would have hidden it.

Before he knew it, his father had grabbed the bottom of the t-shirt and pulled it over his head. It had only been a short time since he found out about it himself. Marco had hoped that his parents wouldn't find out. Ever.

Marco's mother was heartbroken. She wailed about her son's skin being branded. His father seemed very amused, but made a token show of scolding Marco. When they asked where he got it, he admitted that he couldn't remember.

Marco wasn't able to study that day and not just because of his hangover. He missed Star greatly now. It had been two days since she left and he was wondering how much longer she would be away.

Marco tried to take an afternoon nap but was having trouble falling asleep. He noticed that his bed had returned to being a twin bed. Laying on his bed he opened his nightstand drawer and took out a box. He wanted to look at the pictures Star had given him after prom.

He took out the pink envelope and pulled out the letter. Marco was confused. The paper was blank. He then looked at the two pictures. Star was missing. The pictures only showed a door frame.

Marco was furious. Someone had taken the letter and pictures and replaced them with these as a prank. Ferguson and Alfonso slept over last night. He believed it was them. He was going to kill them. Those pictures were private. Star gave him those believing that no one except him would ever see them. The letter too. It was extremely personal.

He remembered the letter Alfonso said he found under the bed. He picked it up from the nightstand. Did Star leave him a note when she left? Marco concluded that it must have been replaced as well. He didn't even get to read it.

Marco put the pictures on the nightstand and took the blank papers in hand. He stormed down the stairs, muttering murderous words.

"Marco? Are you alright? What's the matter?" his mother asked sensing his anger.

"Alfonso and Ferguson are a couple of jerks! I'm going to explain that to them with my fists!"

"Goodness, Marco! What did they do?"

"They stole some letters from Star from my room when they were here earlier." Marco said holding
up the blank papers.

"Letters from who?" his mother said as she took the papers to look at them. "Marco, these are blank."

His father was there now, as well.

"From Star! They were personal!"

"Who is Star, Marco?" his father asked.

Marco stopped and looked at his father and mother.

"Star. My girlfriend." he stated plainly.

"We didn't know you had a girlfriend, Marco." His mother looked pleased for a moment. But her expression changed when she saw Marco's face.

Marco was very confused now. "You didn't know that Star, the girl who has lived with us for the past four years, was my girlfriend?!" Marco was trying to remain calm. "Mom, we just had a conversation about her yesterday! In the car!"

"No we didn't, Marco! You barely said a word!" his mother replied.

"Marco. We haven't had anyone live with us for years!" his father said. "Now, who is Star?"

Marco was upset now. This was a joke and his parents were in on it. He pointed to the picture by the staircase of him and Star.

"STAR!"

Marco turned to look and was stopped cold. The frame was there but now the picture was of Marco alone. He was on the left side of the picture, as if another person was supposed to be in it with him. Star was missing.

Marco looked at other pictures he knew Star was supposed to be in. A picture at school. The family portrait. The prom picture Marco gave his parents just a few weeks ago. Star was missing from all of them. As if she was simply erased from the pictures.

Marco was confused and angry. This was an elaborate prank. "This is NOT funny! You did all this for a joke?! Where are the pictures of Star?!!"

"Marco! Son! We don't know what you are talking about!" his father said concerned.

"Marco you're scaring us! What's going on?! Who is Star?!!" his mother shouted. She looked like she was on the verge of tears.

Marco had a terrifying thought. He grabbed the papers from his mother's hand and ran to his room. When he got there, he quickly put the papers back in the box with the envelopes and instant pictures. He put the box in his nightstand and shut the drawer.

He looked at the framed copy of the prom picture he kept on his nightstand. Star was missing. It looked like Marco had gone to prom stag. He felt his heart racing now.

His mother arrived quickly. "Marco! Please! Tell us what's going on!" She was crying. Marco knew she wasn't joking.
"Yearbooks." Marco said as he went to the bookshelf. He opened the yearbook from their senior year and began searching. "Senior portraits... A... B... Barnes... Bennett... Bollinger... Buckner... ... no."

Marco stopped. There. The spot where Star's senior portrait was supposed to be. It was blank. The note she had written to Marco in the nearby margin was also gone.

"No!"

Marco quickly turned to the page for the drama club production of 'Romeo and Juliet'. Star had played Juliet. But now the page had a note about how the role of Juliet had gone uncast and the production went on by simply skipping Juliet's dialog.

Star was missing from all the activities she was part of. She was also missing from the index. Marco felt himself panicking.

Marco threw the book aside and grabbed the yearbook from their junior year. It was the same. Star had been completely erased. He went to their sophomore yearbook. Same. Their freshman yearbook. Same.

Marco was in tears now. He took out his phone. They had taken a selfie together a few days ago. He was swiping through photos when his mother held him from behind. "Marco! Please stop! Calm down. What are you looking for?"

"I have to find her. Please. I have to find Star." he muttered as he kept swiping through his phone's photos.

Then he found it.

They were at the park. They had taken a selfie together in front of the large fountain there. But now the photo only had Marco. He was smiling at the empty space next to him.

Marco didn't know what happened next. But he found himself in the car. His mother was backing the car out of the driveway. His father was holding him in the back seat. His huge arms were wrapped around Marco, half in comfort and half in restraint. He looked out the car window. The tower on the left side of the house. Star's room. It was gone.

His tears wouldn't stop.

Star was gone.

==================================

His father had called the doctor while his mother followed him to his room. They were told to take Marco to a mental health facility.

Marco was confused and went along at first. But then he started to struggle. He knew in his heart that Star was real. He knew he wasn't imagining her. He wasn't crazy. The world was crazy and he was the last sane person.

He tried to run. But the facility was a maze. He knocked down some orderlies. Spun a large one into a group. Tripped a few more. He almost got away. He was within sight of the exit when he was tackled as he passed a corridor. They dogpiled him. They overwhelmed him with numbers. They pleaded with him to stop fighting, but he refused. He remembered feeling a needle prick him.
He was held for a week for evaluation. His doctor interviewed him about his 'delusion'. Marco decided to just tell the truth. He was eighteen years old. Legally he could have made the doctor keep silent about everything. But Marco waived confidentiality for his parents. Once they were reasonably sure that he wouldn't hurt himself or others, he was released.

After he got home, he approached the door to Star's room. It had changed from a medieval castle style door, back into the original interior door. He held out hope that he would see Star's bedroom. When he opened the door and looked inside, he broke down and wept in the doorway. The room was a regular guest bedroom.

He went into a depression. His family arranged therapy and he went willingly. His therapist was convinced that Marco was schizophrenic and prescribed antipsychotic medication. Marco took the pills at first, but soon learned how to fake taking them. He would try to convince his doctor to end his medication soon.

His friends tried to help and be there for him throughout the summer, but soon they had to leave too. Ferguson had been accepted into college on the east coast and moved in August. Alfonzo had joined the military and was sent to Basic Training in October.

There was no trace left that Star was ever there. Marco only had his memories and the tattoo. He made it a point to take a moment every morning to look at it in the mirror and remind himself that the love he had with Star was real.

He didn't know what else he could do.

He had lost Star. He had lost himself.

"And now you're here. Better make the most of it. It's all you have now." Marco said to himself as he entered the college gates.

continuará
Another ball. A neighboring kingdom was holding one because... she didn't actually know why. Star was here because her mother could no longer travel. But the royal family needed to be make an appearance. She attended with her father.

Star didn't care much for balls in Mewni. They aren't really parties or celebrations. There's no spontaneity. Every dance is practiced and choreographed. Every interaction scripted and planned. They're just a way for the nobles to keep up appearances. Project an image of strength, wealth, and prosperity.

Star thought a better display of prosperity would be a common class that didn't have to resort to eating rotten food and vermin.

Star wished that Mewni balls were more like Earth parties. More like the Senior Formal. Prom. She thought back to her high school prom held the month before graduation.

Star approached Marco at his locker as he was putting some books away.

"I've got everything ready for prom tomorrow." He said without turning from his locker.

Star had a sudden and unexpected reaction. "Oh, really? And whoooo... are you taking?" she asked with a saccharine sweetness.

"You, of course."

A fierce expression suddenly appeared on her face. "GUESS AGAIN, YOU BIG JERK!" Star shouted as she shoved Marco into his locker.

"What?! Star?!" Marco shouted as she slammed the door shut.

No one around could believe what just happened. Not even Star.

"Marco! What did you do?!" Ferguson asked into the locker's vent holes.

"I don't know!" Marco answered. "Star?! STAR?!!" His voice echoed in the metallic enclosure.

Alfonso tried opening the locker. "It's locked. What's your combo?" he asked.

A moment later a piece of paper was slipped from the vent. Star stomped away grumbling before Alfonso could open the door.

Star ignored Marco in class. She was still steamed.
Marco tried to talk to her after class. She walked away from him quickly and he followed.

"Please! At least tell me what you're mad about!" Marco pleaded.

What she was mad about?! She would show him what she was mad about! She looked at the people in the hall. There. Perfect.

"I find myself without a date to prom. I would like to take you." she asked the shabbily dressed keytar player.

"Uhh..." Oskar started.

"Just. Say. YESSSS." Star said to him slowly and deliberately.

"Uhh..." he continued.

Star could not believe she ever had a crush on this guy. He was barely capable of converting oxygen into carbon dioxide.

"...yes." he finished.

"What the heck, Star?!!" Marco shouted.

Star grabbed Oskar's arm and began to walk away from Marco.

"Oh, so that's how it is, huh?! Ya gonna do me like that?! Well, that's just fine, then!" Marco shouted as they walked away.

When they were far enough and Star was confident Marco could no longer see them, she stopped, grabbed Oskar by the front of his shirt, threw him against the lockers and held him there.

"Whoa. I didn't know you still liked me!" He said as he puckered his lips for a kiss.

"THIS IS NOT A DATE!" She clearly stated and pulled him slightly before slamming him again.

"My boyfriend is a jerk. And YOU are going to help me make him jealous," Star said commandingly.

"Whoa! On second thought, not sure I wanna get involved here. I saw that guy roundhouse kick a giraffe in the throat once." Oskar waved his hands in front of himself.

Star wasn't offering a decline option. "Oh yes. You do." Star released her grip but kept him pressed against the locker with her left hand.

"I know you're in danger of not graduating because of your record. Plus, you've already been held back twice. So, you help me and this little problem goes away." With her right hand, Star made a dismissive gesture, wiggling her fingers.

Oskar mimicked the gesture, wiggling his fingers.

"That's right. It goes away." Star gestured again. "We understand each other?!" It was more a statement than a question.

Oskar nodded. He made the dismissive gesture again.

"Good! Pick me up tomorrow at six!"
Jackie found Star in the hall.

"Star! What happened today? Everyone is talking about it!"

Star covered her face with her hands. "I don't know! I was so mad at Marco!"

"And you think going to prom with Oskar is going to make it better?! You should just let Marco apologize."

"Marco doesn't even realize what he did! No. Uh-uh. Unless he figures it out, this is happening!"

Marco and Star didn't talk until the next night. It was prom night.

Star came down to the living room first. Mr. and Mrs. Diaz were stunned. Star was wearing an elegant dark blue evening dress that showed off the skin of her shoulders. Beautiful. It matched her eyes and highlighted her blonde locks which were up in a bun. Her tiny mewberty wings were visible on her back. It was unlike the ballgowns that she normally wore to events like this. Mr. Diaz took a few pictures. Star was happy to pose for them.

Marco came down next wearing a tuxedo. Star was stunned when she saw him but did her best not to show it.

Mrs. Diaz clapped. She was thrilled with how handsome her son looked. Mr. Diaz took a few more pictures. Then they noticed that Marco's tie and vest were green. He didn't match Star.

"You look very beautiful, Star." Marco said.

Star blushed at his compliment, but pushed her reaction down. "You look nice, Marco. But I hope you don't think you'll be going with me to prom." she said.

"Why don't we get a picture of you two together?" asked Marco's parents.

"Sorry! No time! My date's here!" Star said as she opened the door.

Oskar was parked at the curb in front of the house in his jalopy. He got out of the car still dressed like a homeless hipster.

"What?! You've gotta be kidding me!" Star complained loudly. Marco smirked.

Star lifted her wand and cast a spell. Oskar was instantly groomed and dressed in a tuxedo. He was unrecognizable. Quite presentable, actually. Another spell transformed his wreck of a car into a carriage pulled by two manticores.

"Ah. That's better." Star turned to Marco's parents. "Bye!" she said as she waved. She then entered the carriage and pulled Oskar in with her.

"Um... Have a good... time?" Mr. Diaz said confused. He and his wife waved. They then looked to Marco for answers as Star and Oscar rode away.

Star was unhappy. Oskar may have looked better, but he was still a very uninteresting person. He
had no personality. He couldn't carry a conversation. He was inattentive. And worst of all, he wasn't Marco.

Star felt her heart flutter when she saw him come down the stairs. He looked so handsome. If only he realized what he had done. He'd be her date instead of this loser.

Everyone else seemed to be having a good time. The prom was being held in a fancy hotel ballroom downtown. Ferguson had brought Janna. Alfonzo came with Hope.

Star saw him. Marco was here.

From across the room, Marco and Star looked at each other sadly. Star knew that he wanted to apologize, but still had no idea for what. Star wanted to just go to him and put this fight behind them. This had already gone too far.

She was wondering if he came alone when the answer walked in next to him. Jackie. She was wearing a green evening dress. She looked gorgeous.

Star thought that Jackie wasn't coming because she had broken up with her boyfriend a few weeks ago.

She remembered Marco's tie and vest from earlier. Green. Had Marco asked Jackie to prom to get back at her? Star felt jealousy and anger rising in her gut. She was about to confront them when instead, Jackie approached her.

"Hi, Star."

"Jackie?! What are...?! Why did...?!!"

"I know, I know. Relax. I asked him."

"What?! Why would you do that?! I thought we were cool!"

"He would have just moped at home if I didn't. He won't figure this out there. And he can't apologize if he's not here."

Star felt herself calm down.

"Ugh... Maybe I should just tell him."

"It's still early. Give him a little while. Enjoy your... date?"

Oskar was stuffing shrimp into his mouth three at a time... and double dipping them in the cocktail sauce.

Star wanted Marco to figure it out quickly.

==================================

About a half hour later there was a commotion on the dance floor and Star went to investigate. She saw Marco on the opposite side of the dance floor.

Pixies had emerged from a portal and were searching among the crowd. The Pixie Empress was there.

"Sugar Wings!" Ferguson smiled and greeted her with outstretched arms. He was met with an
uppercut that knocked him out. Janna was only mildly annoyed.
"There! Bring my husband to me!" The Pixie Empress was pointing at Alfonzo.
"What?! Husband?!" Alfonzo said surprised.

Eyebrows rose on every human face present. Hope began scooting away from him.
"Yes. You took your vows with me in Pixtopia."

"But, I was only fourteen years old! I couldn't legally consent to marriage!" Alfonso protested.
"Such nitpicking of details. By pixie law, we are wed!"

Alfonso was speechless. Pixie soldiers grabbed him and dragged him to face his 'wife'.

Her expression became stern. "And as your wife, I want to know why you did not have me accompany you to this ball?!"

"Why would you think I would take you to prom?! We haven't seen each other in years! How did you even find out about prom?!"

"I shouldn't even have had to ask! You should know that it is expected of you!"

A look of realization appeared on Marco's face. He slapped his forehead. He was saying something out loud, but Star couldn't hear it. She tried to read his lips. "I am such an... ash hall?"

"I was only fourteen when we married. I had no idea the obligations I would be placed under. I'm only eighteen now and I'm still not prepared for that kind of commitment. Empress, you deserve someone who is."

The Pixie Empress' expression softened.

"Maybe we should get pixie divorced." Alfonso said.

"Kill them all."

Marco and Star went to work. Their argument would have to take a back seat until the battle was over.

==================================

The battle was ended quickly. Star had used a freezing spell making the pixies easy to capture. Marco had yanked the tablecloth from a dinner table like a magician. The table setting barely moved, but he did have to keep the candelabra centerpiece from falling over. He used the tablecloth to form a makeshift bag. An ice sculpture of a pixie now graced the top of the punch fountain. The bag was full of tiny shivering winged soldiers. Weapons littered the dance floor.

Star opened a portal back to Pixtopia and the bag was thrown in. The ice sculpture was also thrown in because it was actually the frozen Pixie Empress.

A single pixie in a light blue seersucker suit carrying a briefcase emerged from the portal. It tipped its wicker hat and handed Alfonzo a card.

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"Call me." it said before returning through the closing aperture.

"How am I supposed to dial yen?!" lamented Alfonso.

Star promised to help him later.

"Huh? What'd I miss?" Ferguson said as he regained consciousness.

==================================

The weapons were swept up and placed in recycling. A new tablecloth was provided by the hotel staff and the table was reset. The prom soon returned to normal.

Star had left the ballroom and was on the balcony staring out over the city lights. She felt a presence behind her. She heard Marco's voice.

"I'm sorry, Star."

Star waited silently.

"I never even asked you to go to prom with me. I just assumed that you would. I expected it."

Star was glad that Marco realized what he had done, but she was sad that their fight had lead to this.

Marco continued. "You probably get enough of that already, considering your position."

"So much of my life is already planned. So much is expected. For a lot of things, I feel as if I'm never asked. I'm just told."

"And I don't want to do that to you, Star. You deserve to make your own choices."

"It wouldn't have been a choice. I wanted to come with you. I just wanted to be asked."

Star felt Marco's hand touch her bare shoulder.

"I'm sorry." he said again.

Star turned to him and wrapped her arms around his body. She leaned into his chest. Her eyes began to mist. She felt his arms wrap around her shoulders.

"Why didn't you just tell me I screwed up?"

"I wanted you to figure it out for yourself."

"But I'm not a mind reader, Star. We just need to tell each other when something is bothering us. Not hurt each other like this."

Star felt very guilty. She was purposely trying to make Marco jealous.

"I'm sorry I did that. I don't want to hurt you. I don't want you to hate me." Star said.
"I love you. I could never hate you." He kissed the top of her head.

"I love you too." Star held him a little tighter.

"I have something to ask you. I know it's last minute, but I would be very honored if you would accompany me at prom tonight. But you're free to say no. I'll be sad, but I'll understand."

She felt her sadness leave her and she smiled. "Of course I'll be your date. Why would I say no?"

"Well, there's the fact that we both came here with other people. I can go talk to Jackie."

"WE can go talk to Jackie. But first..."

She released Marco, then cast a spell that changed his vest and tie color to red.

"But..." Marco started.

Another spell changed Star's dress from blue to red. "Your favorite color."

"And you look beautiful in it. But you changed your style."

"I thought you might like it. I wanted to make sure you couldn't keep your eyes off me."

"I could look at the real you forever."

Another spell changed her dress to a slightly poofier version of itself complete with red boots.

"Better, but it's missing something." Marco said as he reached into his tuxedo coat. He placed Star's devil horns headband on her styled hair. "And now you're perfect."

They smiled genuinely at each other for a brief moment. Suddenly, Star latched on to him, smashed their lips together, and started a tongue wrestling tournament in their mouths. Marco's arms flailed for a second to balance before they wrapped themselves around Star.

"HEY! BREAK IT UP! BREAK IT UP!" Ms. Skullnick shouted as she pulled them apart. "We're trying to keep it PG here!"

Star and Marco laughed in relief. "Let's go find the others."

They held hands and returned to the prom.

==================================

Star made eye contact with Oskar. She made a dismissive gesture with her hand, wiggling her fingers.

Oskar nodded and waved. He had fulfilled his role. Star would ensure his record was clean enough to graduate next month.

==================================

"Jackie."

"Hey! You guys made up!"

"Thank you for bringing him Jackie."
"But now you'll be taking him. He was always yours."

"Jackie should hang out with us!" Ferguson said.

"Yeah! We were all attending as friends anyway." Janna added.

"We were?!" Alfonzo asked as Hope slapped him upside the back of his head.

"Marco and I might be each other’s date, but you're our friends. We're all hanging out together. Now... LET'S PARTY!"

Star raised her wand and the ballroom was transformed to an otherworldly landscape. A DJ team of a tiger wearing sunglasses and a robot in headphones were on turntables playing bass heavy dance music. Lasers from zebra's nostrils bounced off of living disco balls.

The friends danced together the rest of the night.

"Hey! You two! You need your picture taken!" said the photographer.

They posed together for their portrait. They looked happy together. Like a young couple in love.

Towards the end of the night, Star and Marco danced to romantic songs in each other's arms.

"And now it's almost time to announce your prom King and Queen!" Principal Skeeves announced over the speakers.

"Hey Star, shall we go?" He held out his hand to her.

Star smiled as she took his hand. As they were walking out they waved goodbye to their friends. Ferguson had rented a limo. He said he would make sure everyone else got home.

Star looked at Jackie. She could see happiness and sadness at the same time. Star knew that she had feelings for Marco, yet she helped them make up anyway. Star hoped that Jackie would meet someone as wonderful as she was someday. Jackie smiled and waved as they left.

As they were walking towards the exit, Star asked, "Marco, do you think we could be king and queen of prom? They're about to announce them."

"It's not us. I had our names removed from voting. I think we would have won if I hadn't."

"Why did you do that then?" Star asked confused.

"Because you're already MY queen." Marco said.

Star blushed. "And you're my king." She held his arm and leaned against him.

As they neared the exit, they heard Principal Skeeves. "And your king and queen are... Justin and Brittney!"

"This is soooooo lame." Brittney said.

"STAR BUTTERFLY RULES!" Justin called out as they left.

Star and Marco waved to everyone from the exit.
Marco’s parents had rented a luxury car for him to drive. He said that he was technically breaking the rules since he was not yet twenty-five years old. But his parents trusted him to be careful.

"Marco, can we go to the beach before we go home? I want to talk about something with you." she asked as he helped her into the car.

"Sure, Star. Is something wrong?"

"It's about something important to me."

As he drove to the beach, Marco held Star's hand when he could. When they arrived, they took off their shoes and walked out onto the sand while holding hands. Marco had folded up his tuxedo's legs.

"Marco? At prom there were a lot of couples like us, weren't there?

"I'm not sure how many. But yeah."

"Some of them went to be alone afterward. But it really seemed like some of them might not have felt ready for that." Star said.

"That's probably true for some of them."

"Do you remember what I told you about the marriage my parents were thinking of arranging for me when I was younger?"

"I remember you said you felt like you were being pushed into something you weren't ready for."

Star was silent for a moment.

"I'm not ready tonight."

"I know."

"But you are. Aren't you?"

Marco paused before answering. "Yeah. I think I am."

"I.. I think I will be soon. But not tonight."

"And that's fine." he said as he squeezed Star's hand.

Star squeezed Marco's hand in return.

"Just out of curiosity... why not?" Marco continued.

"Because prom night has this unspoken expectation. I don't want to do that because it's expected. I want to do it because we're both ready. Whenever that turns out to be."

"Star. I love you and I do want to share that with you someday. But I don't want to make you feel forced. When that happens for us, it will be because you are ready, and not before."

"I love you, Marco. And not just because of things like this." Star stopped walking and pulled Marco into an embrace.

It was a beautiful night. The sky was clear and bright stars could be seen despite the nearby city
lights. Star and Marco looked up at them.

Star whispered in Marco's ear.

"I'm holding her." he said in reply.

Their eyes closed and a peck on the lips soon became tender kisses. Their hands stroked each others back.

Dimensional scissors pierced the nearby air. A portal opened and monsters emerged from it.

Star and Marco stopped their kissing and rested their foreheads against each other for a moment and laughed.

"Oops! Did we interrupt something between you and your boyfriend?" Ludo said.

"Ludo! We were having a MOMENT!" Star shouted.

"Hey! You guys look nice tonight!" Bearicorn commented.

Lobster Claws added, "You really do! Star, I love your dress! It's SO you!"

The other monsters voiced their agreement.

"Yes, yes. They both look great. But we aren't here for a fashion show. NOW GET THE WAND!"

"Well, isn't this the perfect way to end the night for us?" Marco said to Star.

Star just smiled.

They did their best to not mess up their clothes during the battle. Marco's tux was a rental after all.

==================================

Marco felt a little bold and put his hand on Star's knee as they drove home. She did not mind at all. And aside from some kisses at the front door, some thank yous for the evening, a few words of love, and a kiss good night, nothing else happened.

They both went to their separate rooms.

==================================

Star had changed for bed but didn't want to sleep yet. She was lying above the covers on her stomach thinking about how wonderful the night turned out despite the rocky start.

Star knew it would be him all along. But tonight made it so clear to her. She had to find the right time to talk to Marco about it. Even though they were the right age for Mewni, on Earth they would still be considered very young.

Star giggled as she imagined them together. This feeling had grown beyond her wildest dreams and she would let it take over.

Star got a dark thought. What if he said no? She knew he loved her. She felt it in her heart. But would Marco leave everything behind for her?

Star began to wonder if she should have taken that next step with him tonight, but she immediately
pushed that thought aside. She never wanted to use that as a tool. Marco wouldn't want that either.

But maybe she could do something unexpected instead.

She wrote a short note on her pink stationery. She put on a bit of red lipstick and kissed the paper near her signature.

She pulled out an old instant camera she had gotten as a gift from Jackie. She still had the red hoodie that she borrowed from Marco a few days ago.

When she was done she looked at the pink envelope. On the outside was written: 'Marco - for your eyes only'. The 'o' in his name had been drawn as a heart. The envelope contained the note and two instant pictures.

She gathered a bit of courage and approached Marco's door. There was light coming from the crack at the bottom. He was still awake.

Star slipped the envelope under the door and swiftly and silently made her way back to her room. She quietly shut her door and held her breath. Her face turned red and she felt hot. She could not believe what she had just done.

"Star?" came the voice from his door. She did not answer and he did not come to her room. Good. She wanted it this way. This time.

It took a long time for Star to fall asleep. Her head was filled with thoughts about his reaction. She hoped that he liked them.

==================================

Star and Marco were at the breakfast table and were avoiding each other's gaze. When they did make eye contact, they both blushed profusely and quickly looked away. Both had smiles on their faces.

Mr. and Mrs. Diaz were happy that they had made up.

==================================

Star missed Marco greatly. It had already been eight months since she left Earth for what she thought would be a short visit home to Mewni. Star wondered how he was doing. She had no way to know. Was he heartbroken? Was he angry? Had he moved on? Had he already forgotten her?

Star shook her head at that idea. She knew Marco wouldn't forget her. Just like she would never forget him.

Star thought of the events that led her to her current situation.

The Empress provoked Star into staking her engagement on a requirement for Marco to appear before the Gathering of Nobles at the Great Hall and formally announce his acceptance of Star's marriage proposal.

The Empress had been very smart. She had worded the agreement so that if Marco did not appear, Star would automatically be engaged to Tom.

The Empress was probably responsible for blocking travel to Earth. She must have done so the moment she learned that Star had returned to Mewni alone.

Normal magic cannot stop all dimensional travel to a dimension. Even her royal magic was not
powerful enough to do so. To make such a fundamental change would require a powerful and
dangerous spell. A curse.

Curses require a high price. Something valuable and precious. Star suspected that she knew what
price Ishtar had paid.

Star also knew that there were spies present in Mewni Castle. It's how the Empress knew that Marco
was not with her. Spies probably overheard her conversation with Pony Head about what happened
between her and Marco the night before she left Earth.

Star was shaken from her thoughts by her father. A prince wanted to formally greet the royal heir of
Mewni.

Empress Ishtar had already eliminated all the princes here as suitors. Most now kept their interactions
with Star to the minimum required by courtesy. This suited Star just fine. She was not interested in
having any of them court her anyway. Just as Ishtar planned.

Star understood now that if she didn't take drastic and unexpected action, she would soon be married
to a man she didn't love. To Ishtar's son.

From the story her mother told her, that would be a disaster.

"Princess Star. I don't know if you remember me. I am Prince Kevin of Xix. I would like to express
my sympathies for your mother the Queen."

"Scripted and planned." Star said to herself.

"I would also like to wish you well on your upcoming wedding to Prince Tom."

Star's cheeks hearts broke in half. This prince had to have heard how that engagement came to be.
Star was very irritated with him now.

The prince leaned in and whispered in her ear. "Not really."

Star smiled at the unexpected comment.

She would do something unexpected too. The next Gathering would happen soon. The plan would
be carried out then.

Star remembered that she had known this prince when they were much younger.

"Dance with me." she said to Prince Kevin.

He obliged her.

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Glossaryck said, "So princess, let's review. What are the relevant Mewni Laws of Ascension?"

Star answered. "A queen that has not yet borne an heir must have a king and cannot rule without one. The man the queen marries will serve as king. The king will step down upon the death of the queen."

"Right. Very good." the tiny blue man said as he finished his pudding.

"So, do you think this plan will get me out of the engagement?"

Glossaryck laughed. "Not a chance. You already know what the Empress' response will be. But you've planned for that too. You're thinking many moves ahead. It's just like chess."

"I can see the checkmate coming and there's nothing I can do to stop it."

"Opponents get impatient. They get overconfident. They make mistakes. You have to be ready when they do." He paused before adding, "Also, you could cheat."

"I want to just flip over the board and punch her in the throat."

Glossaryck laughed. "That's a good plan too."

The nobles were gathering again and all were headed towards the Great Hall of Mewni.

The royal family was getting out of their carriage when a hand was offered to help Star. She looked at the hand and saw its owner. Tom. Star didn't take it.

"I can manage without your help." she said.

"We need to talk." Tom said.

Ever since Star had been engaged to Tom, she had been avoiding him. It had been nine months since that day. If things had been different, she and Marco could have been expecting a child by now.

"What's there to talk about? You know I don't want to marry you. If I could get out of this engagement, I would." Star paused before adding, "Yo momma's a rapper's one hundredth problem."

As she passed Tom, he said, "I don't want to marry you." It was just loud enough for only her to hear.

Star stopped and looked at him. She was skeptical, but decided to hear him out. Star was wary of spies, so she looked around to see if anyone else heard. She saw no one that could have been eavesdropping.
"Why don't you help my mother out of the carriage. We can talk inside it."

Tom offered his hand to the queen, who accepted it. With her other hand, she took the king’s hand. They both helped her out of the carriage. An open sedan chair had been provided to carry the queen into the hall. Tom helped her to sit. She nodded to Tom in thanks.

"Star, we will wait for you inside." said her father.

"Manfred, please take us around for ten minutes." Star said as she climbed into the carriage. Tom followed and shut the door.

Once the carriage was moving Star spoke. "Okay. Let's hear it."

"I don't want to marry you."

"Then state your desire to break our engagement to the gathering. I won't object."

"You know my mother won't let me."

"Chicken."

Star knew that Tom would never openly defy his mother. She paused before continuing.

"I'm not complaining, but why don't you want to marry me?"

"I've met someone else."

"Good. I'm happy for you. Marry her instead. That'll solve both our problems."

"I can't. She's from this dimension and not from a noble family."

"Figures." Star said. "Your mother doesn't know. Does she?"

"No. And I'd like to keep it that way. You know my mom."

Star considered the situation. Ishtar would take drastic measures if this girl were discovered. She could be a threat to Star's engagement to Tom. But Star needed more than this.

"Now, why should I believe anything you've told me?"

Tom began to undo the top buttons of his jacket and shirt.

Star pulled out the wand and aimed it at Tom. "WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO PULL?! I WILL BLAST YOU THROUGH THE BOTTOM OF THIS CARRIAGE AND BURY YOU IN THE CRATER!"

Tom waved his hands in defense and shouted, "Wait! It's not what you think!"

Star narrowed her eyes, but waited.

Tom slowly pulled the top of his jacket and shirt apart. After Star saw what he wanted her to see, he buttoned his clothes back up.

Star put the wand down and looked at Tom. "Undine, huh?"

"Yeah."
Star had never seen this side of Tom. He was always so hot headed.

"Star, I'll help you break the engagement."

"Just tell your mom off."

"But not like that. She's still my mother."

"Mama's boy." Star said annoyed. Then she cracked a small smile.

"I know my mother seems severe. But she isn't all bad."

"How can you still love her with how she is?"

"The same way my father did. I just do."

Star remembered Tom's father. You wouldn't know it because of the horns, fangs, and fire, but he was very kind. He also unconditionally loved his wife.

If Tom had been more like his father maybe things would have been different between them. But Star had no regrets.

"How are you doing without him?"

"We're sad, but we manage."

Star could not care less about Ishtar's feelings. But she did feel bad for Tom.

Tom's father had died suddenly. The night Star arrived home for a visit that has already lasted nine months. The night before she discovered that Earth had been cut off.

A curse had been put in place that night. And a curse has a price to pay.

His death was the reason Ishtar didn't come to the gathering three days later when the engagement agreement was enforced. They were in mourning.

Maybe Tom had thought of all this too but didn't want to believe it. Star thought of how Marco put it once. "It's not just a river in Egypt."

They had come back to the Great Hall.

"I'm on your side, Star."

Star said nothing, but nodded.

Tom opened the carriage door and got out. He again offered Star his hand to help her out of the carriage.

This time she took it.

They said no goodbyes, but shared a smile of understanding.

Tom had lost his father. Just like Star was losing her mother. Tom was in love with someone he couldn't marry. Just like Star was in love with someone she couldn't marry.

They were more alike than Star wanted to admit.
Star waited until Tom had gone inside before she went inside as well.

==================================

The queen was seated on a chair in the center of the Great Hall. Star and her father stood next to the queen on either side. The nobles surrounded them in the seats.

"Queen Butterfly. You honor us with your presence. We know how draining this must be for you. We will try to keep this gathering as short as possible." said a noblewoman.

"Your Highness, you called this gathering to discuss the matter of your daughter's ascension to the throne?" said a nobleman.

"We think it is important to finalize the plans for the princess's coronation. Especially considering your condition." said another.

"My condition." said the queen. "Such euphemistic language. I am dying, and will do so very soon."

"Yes. Such tragic matters. I was merely trying to be delicate."

"I understand, but you need not walk on eggshells. And we do indeed need to finalize plans for my daughter's crowning. We wish to avoid the convergence of tribulation that will result if we wait until my death. It is my intention to formally pass down the crown before that time. That way, my family will be able to mourn without having to deal with matters of ascension."

A murmuring began in the gallery.

Empress Ishtar stood to speak. "Queen Butterfly. Your daughter has been very obstinate in disregarding her planning for the royal wedding. I hope it is not your daughter's intent to disregard her agreement." she said.

"It is the Butterfly family's intention to follow the law and all agreements. Just as we expect all of you."

Satisfied, Ishtar nodded and sat down again.

"And with that I will now perform my final official act as queen."

The queen motioned for Star to kneel. The king helped the queen from her chair so she could stand behind Star.

"I, Moon Butterfly, Queen of Mewni, hereby pass the Crown, all the privileges afforded by it, and all the responsibilities demanded by it, to my daughter, Star Butterfly."

Star's mother lifted the crown from her head, placed it on Star's and said. "All hail the Queen of Mewni! Long may she reign!"

The very act of standing and speaking was exhausting. Her father took her mother's arm, and helped her back into the chair.

Star stood as queen.

It was done. This way there would be no ceremony, no pageantry, no public crowning, and no delays. Mewni had a new queen. And that was that.

There was some brief applause.
Empress Ishtar was smiling. "Queen Star Butterfly, it is now time for you to take my son Tom as your king through marriage."

"That's not necessary. You see, I already have a king." the new queen said.

"WHAT?!"

"Whaaaaaaaaaaaaa...?" came the response from the gallery along with some laughs and protests.

"I already have a king. By the letter of the law."

"Who?!" Ishtar demanded.

"My father is still king."

"No, he is not!"

"Yes, he is."

"NO. HE. IS. NOT!"

"YES. HE. IS!"

"Queen Star! Please explain how your father could possibly still be king since his wife, the queen, abdicated the crown!" a nobleman interrupted the discourse.

Star answered with a question. "What does the law say in this matter? I know the law. I want to see how well you do."

"The king must step down at the end of the queen's reign!" came the reply.

"That's not what the law says. What are the exact words?"

"The king must step down upon the death of the queen." came the reply from another nobleman.

Star gestured to the former queen who sat nearby. Star's mother smiled and waved.

"As you can all see, my mother is still alive. Her husband need not stand down as king."

"And what of the future? Your mother will pass soon. Her death will trigger your father's removal. You will be without a king!" a noblewoman stated loudly.

"No, I won't. Because, my mother isn't the queen anymore." Star pointed at herself and shouted, "I AM THE QUEEN! When my mother, the FORMER queen passes, it will trigger nothing!"

"This is hair splitting shenanigans! This is not the spirit of the law! The spirit of the law is to ensure that the queen is married to birth an heir to the crown as soon as possible!" a nobleman protested.

"Someone should have written the spirit down, then!" Star retorted.

"Queen Star! You would risk upheaval by flouting Mewni law in this way?" the nobleman responded.

"I am flouting precisely zero laws! I am following them exactly! Do you wish to openly challenge the legitimacy of my reign? It will you who risks upheaval. I know that many, both here and elsewhere, will support me."
The nobleman was cowed.

"You would have us adhere to the exact language of the law in this matter?" another nobleman asked.

"Yes! Just like you all held me to the exact language of my agreement with Ishtar!" Star shouted. "The spirit of that agreement was to have Marco Diaz appear here to accept my proposal or not! It was supposed to be his choice! But thanks to a curse blocking dimensional travel to Earth, that was impossible! If he declined... which I assure you he would NOT have... it should have been another of my choice! But thanks to a very clever use of words, I was engaged to marry Tom automatically!"

"There can be only one standard! Either both of them are held to the spirit of the law or both to the letter of the law!" came a vocal call from a noblewoman in the gallery.

"Prince Tom, will you release Queen Star from her engagement to you, so we may more easily straighten out these matters?" a nobleman asked.

Tom opened his mouth to speak, but he was quickly cut off by his mother.

"NO! The engagement will not be broken! Her agreement was made with me! And I will not release her! The marriage must take place!"

"Yes! You should not have been allowed to ascend to the crown without a husband!" a noblewoman protested.

"Also incorrect! The law's exact words are, 'A queen that has not yet borne an heir must have a king and cannot rule without one.' I am allowed to ascend to be queen without a husband but I cannot rule without a king. But as we have made clear. I DO have a king. Therefore, as an acquaintance of mine is fond of saying, 'Star Butterfly rules.'"

The Empress responded, "The law also states 'The man the queen marries will serve as king!' Your father cannot serve as your king since you cannot marry him! Unless, that is, it is your intention to have incestuous relations with him!"

"Ooooooooooo!" came the response from the gallery.

Star told herself to remain calm. Ishtar was trying to provoke her into making another mistake.

"Empress Ishtar! Only the most disgusting pervert would think of that! I'm not surprised you did." Star retorted.

The audience response was a loud "Daaayyunnng!" followed by laughter and applause.

Ishtar was scowling.

"My father became king when he was married to my mother, the queen. By word of law, nothing has happened to change that."

"This is a very unusual, very literal, but arguably valid interpretation of the law's wording." A nobleman stated.

A noblewoman added, "Besides, these matters of producing an heir need not be dealt with today. The new queen is still quite young. This matter can be allowed stand for now. There is plenty of time, and no need to cause upheaval in the kingdom right now."
Another added, "That is unless, Empress Ishtar, you would prefer that we adhere to the spirit rather than the wording in both of your cases."

Star knew Ishtar would not. If she agreed, then Star would be free to choose from innumerable other potential husbands from any dimension. Any dimension other than Mewni. Any dimension other than Earth.

"No! She is still engaged!" Ishtar declared then turned to Star. "Do you think this legal chicanery will stand forever?! The laws will be clarified!"

"The process for changing those laws is very, very long and difficult, Empress. I imagine this will be debated fiercely for the foreseeable future. I expect my engagement to Tom to be... lengthy."

"We will begin the process now, then!" Ishtar demanded.

"Now? It is late in the day and the queen's mother is exhausted from this ordeal. We will begin debate over clearer laws at a later date." A noblewoman said.

Star bid everyone good night. "Make sure you take everything you brought with you! Good night!"

Nobles started to stand and file out of the Great Hall.

Empress Ishtar glowered at the new queen.

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Late that night a man dressed in black silently entered the royal quarters through a window. He approached the bed and the glint of a blade shone in the dim night light.

He was instantly immobilized by pink energy.

Lights came on in the room. A dozen royal guards rushed in and seized the intruder.

"Looking for someone?" Queen Star asked while seated in a chair hidden in shadow on the other side of the room.

She had been prepared for the predictable assassination attempt.

"My mother was moved this evening. And my father, the king, has been sent away on a secret mission."

Star paused as she looked at the assassin.

"You will be questioned. Don't worry. I don't believe in torture."

Star remained in the room as the assassin was taken to the dungeon.

She thought back to earlier in the evening.

==================================

"Star, you did very well in the Great Hall today. We are proud of you." Moon said as she sat.

"Yes, we are very proud." the king said.

"Star, we know you will be a fine queen when I am gone. You have grown so much."
"Thank you." There were tears in Star's eyes not only for the compliment. But also because she knew the next part of the plan would now begin.

"Star, I must now go into hiding. If I were to die, your marriage would happen in accordance with the law. I will need to prove I am still alive occasionally. This will be an uphill climb for some time. We will follow the plan."

"I'm sorry dad..."

"It's all right, daughter. This is for the good of Mewni. And for you." he said.

"Both of you, come here." Moon opened her arms to her family.

Star and her father rushed to her mother and kneeled by her chair. They wrapped their arms around each other and wept. They knew this was the last time they would be together as a family. The king would need to leave soon and he would never see his wife, his queen, his love again.

After a while Star and the king stood. "Star, would you please give us a few last moments alone?" her mother asked.

Star nodded. She hugged her father tightly. "Bye dad. I love you. We'll see each other again soon."

"As I love you." her father replied.

She then left the room. As she left she took one last look at her parents together.

==================================

When she returned, her mother was laying on the bed.

"Your father left while I slept."

Star remembered how she left Marco for the last time. Tears began again.

"Perhaps it is better this way. I want him to remember me as I was when I was still strong."

Star had her mother secretly moved for the night.

Star thought of her mother's words. Star didn't want Marco to remember her just as a strong young woman. She wanted him to see her as a frail old woman, after they spend a lifetime together. She still held hope that they would be reunited before it was too late.

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A few weeks later healers and caretakers were excused from the royal chamber. There was nothing more for them to do. Nothing more they *could* do.

Star sat alone at her mother's bedside and held her hand.

Her mother spoke weakly. "Star?"

"Yes, mom?" Star leaned close to listen.

"Your father and I have decided... you are to be sent to Earth so you can practice with the wand safely."
Star realized that her mother was reliving her memories.

"Who will I live with on Earth, mom?"

"We have found a family to foster you. They are good people. We think they will take good care of you."

"I know they will."

"I was told they had a son your age."

Star's tears began again.

"Do you think I'll fall in love with him?"

"I don't know, Star. We haven't met him yet."

"I think that I will."

"It will be your choice if you do. Your father and I are beginning to think that arranged marriages are a terrible idea..."

Star laughed through her tears.

"Star? Has Marco traveled home with you?"

Star decided to let her hopes live just a little longer. "No, Mom. But we'll be together again soon."

"I wish that I could be there when you marry him..."

Star could not keep her spirit up and sobbed.

"I can't even get to him, Mom. I can't marry Marco. No matter how much I want to! I love him, but I lost him!"

The queen gave a light chuckle. "You should have faith, Star. You will marry Marco. A mother knows these things."

Star nodded. "I love you, Mom." Star's voice cracked.

"I love you too, Star. Tell your father that I love him when you see... him..."

Star felt her mother's hand become limp.

"Mom?"

Only silence answered.

Star held her mother's hand and wept.

Moon Butterfly was gone.

Marco's afternoon class was ending when a feeling of intense sadness came over him. Tears started to fall from his eyes onto his class notes.
He had to leave. He tried to control his emotions until he could get out. He quickly stuffed his books and papers into his backpack and started for the exit.

"Are you okay?" asked the professor.

"No. Excuse me," came his reply as he dashed out the door.

Marco ran until he found an empty classroom. The door had been left open. He went inside, closed the door, and slumped with his back against it. He finally allowed his emotions out and he broke down.

He had been depressed. But he had no idea why he suddenly started crying. He felt like he had lost something.

Again.

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Ruins

Starfall by GolfAlphaMike

Chapter 6: Ruins

==================================

"So, Marco. Would you like to have dinner with me?"

"Sure, we can have a pizza delivered and keep studying."

"No, Marco. I mean you and I should go out for dinner. To a romantic place."

"Like... a date?" Marco wasn't surprised at the suggestion. He could tell she was attracted to him.

"Yeah, Marco! It'll be fun. You need fun. All you ever do is study. Maybe you could take me for a ride on your bike."

"I appreciate you asking, but I don't think that's a good idea."

"Oh. Don't you like me?"

"I like you. Just not that way."

"Then why did you agree to study together?"

"Because... I appreciate having a study partner?"

"You have the highest grade in class."

"Because... you would appreciate having a study partner?"

"I'm serious Marco." She paused. "Um... are you, you know, not into girls? Not that there's anything wrong with that."

Marco laughed. "I'm not gay."

"Saving yourself for marriage? You don't have to worry. It's just a date."

"It's not that I'm saving myself. There's someone. It's... complicated."

"Oh, are you in a relationship? Wait, I never see you with anyone!"

"She doesn't live here anymore."

"A long distance relationship."

"You could say that."

"Well, if that doesn't work out, you let me know. Okay?"

"Okay."

"Does studying alone with me make you uncomfortable?"
"No. But, maybe we should make this a study group." Marco said with a smile.

"Okay. Lots of our classmates will be interested. Everyone thinks you're some kind of poli-sci genius."

Marco laughed at the compliment. "Okay. Let's get back to studying." Marco paused. "What role do you think the church had in the French Revolution?"

"Well, since the church was exempt from direct taxation..." She began to answer.

It wasn't the first time he had to turn down a woman this way, and it probably wouldn't be the last. But his heart already belonged to someone. Someone he hadn't seen or heard from in three years.

This was his life now. Marco simply did not date. He knew that dating would be pointless for him because of something that happened two years earlier.

==================================

It's been a year. A year since she left his life. Marco still didn't know why. But after a year, Marco was finally beginning to face the all too real possibility that he might never see Star again. He tried to move on.

Jackie had come back from college for a visit. She had called Marco wanting to have dinner together and he agreed to meet her that night.

It was walking distance so Marco met her at the restaurant. It was nice to see an old friend. He felt sadness over the fact that Jackie didn't remember her part in finally bringing him and Star together. He did his best to push the feeling aside.

"Hi Jackie." Marco said as he found her already seated.

Jackie stood up and spread her arms inviting Marco into a hug which he felt strange accepting. "Marco! It's so good to see you! How have you been?"

"Oh, you know. I started at college in January."

"I heard. I mean... I..." Jackie looked embarrassed.

"Don't worry Jackie. It's ok. We can talk about it to get it out of the way."

Jackie smiled in relief.

Jackie and Marco talked about what happened to Marco a year earlier. His episode and mental health hold. The depression that followed and entering therapy. His delaying college for a semester.

How Alfonzo and Ferguson tried to be there for him as best they could. But they had to live their lives too and had to leave.

Marco and Jackie relaxed after that part was out of the way. They talked about their lives after high school. Marco learned that Jackie had recently broken up with a boy she had met at college. They had hit it off quickly, but the relationship didn't last long.

Marco didn't bother asking if Jackie remembered Star. Her friend. The girl he loved. He knew she didn't. No one did.

After dinner Jackie asked if Marco would walk her home. They continued talking on the way home.
When they arrived at Jackie's house, she invited him inside. They sat on the couch to talk.

"So Marco. Why didn't you and I date again in high school?"

"I don't really have a believable answer for that."

"I seem to recall you having a crush on me freshman year."

"Yeah. I guess I did."

"What happened? It seemed like later that year you weren't interested anymore. But you always seemed happy."

"I think that's when I fell for someone else."

"Oh? Did I know her?"

"I don't think you would remember her."

"Is she not around anymore?"

"No. She left. She's gone now."

"Too bad for her."

Marco was silent.

"You know Marco. It's too bad your crush on me faded, because I had one for you too."

Jackie leaned in and kissed him. Marco was surprised and he froze. For Marco, the kiss upon his lips from a very beautiful girl who at one time was the target of his affection was... empty. He felt nothing at all in his soul.

After Jackie broke the kiss, Marco did something completely unexpected. He started to chuckle. It grew into a full laugh combined with a cry.

"Hehheh heh ha... " Tears began to form. "Ha Ha HA HA HAHAAHA..."

"Marco, are you alright?"

"Hahaha heh heh oh... oh... oh... no. No, Jackie." He sniffed. "No, I'm not. I'm a wreck. I'm ruined."

"Ruined?"

"I'm really sorry. I am. But I can't do this. I'm sorry. I should go."

Marco stood up to leave but Jackie grabbed his arm.

"Is it because of Star?! I know you loved her, but she's been gone for a year!"

Marco stopped and stared at Jackie. It's the first time anyone else remembered her, much less said her name.

"Jackie? You remember Star?!"
"Who?"

"Star! You just said her name! STAR!"

"No, I didn't! Marco?! Are you okay?! I'm worried!"

Jackie had forgotten again. Marco felt himself start to break down. He needed to get away from her. "Jackie, I have to leave. Goodbye."

"Marco! Marco wait!"

He ran from Jackie's house and she ran out after him.

"Marco! Marco, wait!" she called out. But he was a fast runner and had already gotten too far away to catch up to.

==================================

Marco arrived home quickly. As he entered the front door his parents came out to meet him.

"Marco! Jackie just called. She said you were hallucinating." his mother said.

"Marco, we need to help you!" his dad pleaded.

"No, Mom! Dad! I wasn't hallucinating! You have to believe me! Star was real! She was real! She was part of this family! I loved her! And no one remembers her but me!" Tears ran down his face.

His parents surrounded and embraced him.

"We know you loved her. We miss Star too."

Her name. They said it.

"Do you remember her?" Marco asked hopefully.

"Marco we talked about this. The doctors say you are having delusions. We can take you to the hospital."

They had forgotten again.

Marco struggled to keep calm. "No. No doctors. Please let me sleep. Maybe I'm just tired. Let me sleep. I'll feel better in the morning. Just let me sleep. Mom, Dad? Please."

Eventually his parents reluctantly agreed. But they would see how he was doing in the morning.

Marco climbed the stairs. Before he entered his room he looked at the door that used to lead to Star's room. He never opened it anymore. He wanted to believe that the room behind the closed door was still a castle tower.

He lay awake in his bed for a long time turning over the night's events in his mind. Jackie's memories of Star were still there. His parents too. Emotion made them remember for just a moment. They were closest to Star besides himself. They would have the most feelings about her. Except him. He loved her. He still loves her and that's why he still remembered her.

He thought of Star's kisses. How sweet they tasted. The happiness they made him feel. The emotions behind them fed his spirit.
Jackie's kiss was like eating plain rice crackers. Tasteless and unsatisfying.

He knew at that moment that he would never love another woman again. He was ruined.

Marco kept trying to find a way to Mewni. Even a way to send a message there would have been something. But all his research turned up nothing, just a bunch of new age bookstores, psychics, and scams. Every lead was a dead end and every person turned out to be a fraud or a loon. Real magic simply would not be found.

Many friends had gone on and left Echo Creek, but Marco had chosen to attend college locally. He kept in touch with people on social media, but it wasn't really the same. For the most part, he didn't have a social life. Without a relationship, he had more time to dedicate himself to his studies.

Marco worked part time at the college bookstore. He used downtime during the job to study and read. He would graduate on time and planned to pursue a master's degree. He would have graduated early if not for his late start.

Without romance, Marco focused on other interests. Even before Star left, he had begun to study martial arts beyond karate. With her gone, he threw himself into them. Monster attacks had stopped completely, but Marco did his best to keep his skills up by entering fighting tournaments.

One of the only other things that brought him joy was his motorcycle. He had bought it soon after his date with Jackie. He would clear his mind with drives along winding roads. It was perfect for him. He wondered sometimes if he bought it because it forced him to be a little more daring.

The 'Safe Kid' would never have ridden a motorcycle.

The 'Safe Kid' took too long to take a chance on love with Star.

The 'Safe Kid' didn't go with Star to Mewni.

continuará
Star was doing very well as the queen without a king. Normally the king would speak and act with
the authority bestowed upon him by the queen. But Star only had a king on paper. Her father was in
hiding.

To keep the law regarding Star's marriage from being enforced, he provided proof of life in the form
of short surprise visits to random kingdoms. During gatherings in the Great Hall, the king would
attend virtually via mirror. But the king was not in a position to truly help with the day to day
burdens of ruling Mewni. As queen, Star was effectively on her own.

Princess Pony Head was her friend and closest advisor. Pony Head didn't have to worry about the
burdens of rule. She had older siblings who would assume that responsibility, so it was very unlikely
that Pony Head would ever ascend to her kingdom's throne. Her reputation as a troublemaker made
finding a suitor for an arranged marriage difficult.

Pony Head's family did not see any problem with her spending most of her time with Queen Star.
And Star was grateful to have a friend close by.

On her first anniversary as queen, she dedicated the aqueduct she ordered built to improve farmland
irrigation. Food production rose and the general welfare of the populace increased.

A festival for the anniversary as was arranged by a noble family hoping to gain favor. Empress Ishtar
saw it as an opportunity to publicize Star and Tom's engagement. She hoped that public sentiment
would pressure Star into the marriage. Star almost didn't attend, but didn't want the slight to be held
against her.

Tom conspicuously and purposely acted like a jerk at the festival. When Ishtar encouraged the crowd
to cheer for a kiss between the couple, Pony Head slipped Star a nausea inducing herb. The kiss was
very unromantic what with all the vomiting. Public support for the union dropped like a flaming
carriage over a cliff.

On her second anniversary, Star finalized a trade agreement that exchanged surplus grain for
medicine. The new hospital was built later that year.

That year there was an attempt by Empress Ishtar to change the law to 'The king must be married to
the queen.' Star argued that the change could interfere with a future succession if a queen abdicates
without an heir and the crown passes to a sister. It was a weak argument, but she still had enough
support among the nobles to successfully block the change.

Star helped to negotiate the end of a border war between two kingdoms during her third year as
queen. On her third anniversary as queen she opened the Moon Butterfly children's home. New families were found for many children orphaned by the war.

A few months later, Tom sent Star a secret message that his mother's spies had discovered the king's location. He had disguised himself as a simple farmer. Star had to have her father moved from the kingdom where he was given secret asylum. Pony Head suggested a good alternate hiding place.

==================================

Today was another anniversary. Four years as queen. And by all accounts, the people loved their queen.

Today she would be attending the dedication of a school. Education of the common classes had long been seen as unnecessary, but Star argued that an educated populace would bring advancement and prosperity. This one was a primary school for young children. Star planned to create a secondary school for older children next. A school like hers and Marco's.

It's been almost five years since she left Earth. She still thought of Marco every day. She wondered if he had moved on. Part of her selfishly hoped that he hadn't. But, in truth, she would understand if he had tried. She had vanished from his life without warning. She told him that she would be back in only a few days. It wasn't her fault, but she felt guilty. She wondered if Jackie had made a move for him.

Star longed for him. She could still feel him, even though they've been separated for longer than they were together. She knew she would love him for the rest of her life. They were bonded in a way few would ever understand.

Star still had scholars searching for other ways of reaching Earth, but no progress had ever been made.

While riding towards the new school in the royal carriage, Star thought back to her last day at Echo Creek Academy. Her last days on Earth.

==================================

"Star Butterfly," the announcer said as Star accepted her diploma and shook Principal Skeeves hand.

Many in the audience applauded for Star. The Diaz's cheered loudly. The King and Queen clapped with pride. Star looked at Marco among the seated students and they smiled at each other.

"STAR BUTTERFLY RULES!" Justin called out one last time. A smattering of laughter spread through the audience for a moment before the ceremony continued.

The students continued to the stage in alphabetical order. Those with last names starting with 'C' were called.

"Marco Ubaldo Diaz, valedictorian."

Star watched as Marco accepted his diploma. He wore a gold stole with his graduation gown. She joined their friends and families in cheering.

Again, Marco and Star looked at each other and smiled.

After the last student accepted her diploma, Principal Skeeves said, "The time has come to move your tassels to the left side of you caps."
The graduates all moved their tassels to the left.

"Congratulations to this years Echo Creek Academy graduates!"

King and Queen Butterfly waited until Star and Marco had a chance to talk to their classmates and bid them farewell. Mr. And Mrs. Diaz took pictures as they celebrated.

Before too long the auditorium was beginning to empty and people were gathering outside. Star's parents finally joined their daughter.

"Congratulations Star. We are proud of you." Her father said.

"Very proud, indeed. We are glad that your grades improved." Her mother said.

"Well you can thank Marco and Jackie for that. They helped me study a lot."

"Congratulations to you too Marco. Thank you for helping Star. That was a very inspiring speech." the queen said.

"Thank you your highness. I'm glad you thought so." Marco replied.

"You are too modest, Marco! It was a very fine speech, from a very fine young man." the king said. 
"Mr. and Mrs. Diaz, you must be very proud. And thank you for taking such good care of our daughter."

Marco smiled proudly. "Thank you."

"Marco, would you guide me to find Jackie? We would like to thank her for helping Star as well."

"Husband, we will find you momentarily. I would like to speak to Star."

Star's father looked sad for a moment but quickly hid his expression. "Yes, my wife. Marco? Shall we?" he said gesturing for Marco to lead the way.

When they were gone, Star's mother spoke. "Daughter, is there somewhere we could speak privately?"

Star led the way outside away from the crowds and headed towards the athletic fields.

"Is there something wrong, Mom?" Star asked when they were out of earshot.

"Yes, Star. I'm afraid that there is."

Star was surprised. "What's going on, Mom?"

"Star. You have grown into a fine young woman. You will make a very good queen."

"Thanks, Mom. But why bring that up now? You will be queen for a long..." Star stopped speaking when she realized what was being implied.

The queen placed her hand on Star's shoulder. This was unusual. Her mother was usually very stern and stoic and did not make these kinds of gestures often at all.

"Mom? What's wrong." Star's heart was racing.

"Star, my daughter, you will need to ascend to the throne soon. Within the next year, you will be the
"Why?" Star asked. She hoped the answer would be that her mother had decided to abdicate, but she knew it wouldn't be. Tears were beginning to fall from their eyes.

"Star, I am very sick. I will be gone in less than a year."

Time seemed to slow for Star. "No! You can't die! You're too young! What about the wand? It could cure you! Here, take it back!" Star was crying while holding out the wand.

She held Star's hand around the wand, but the queen did not take it. "Oh, Star. My illness is impervious to magic. And even the greatest magic cannot stop death forever."

Star wrapped her mother in a rare embrace and let the tears fall.

"I am sorry to have to tell you this today. This was supposed to be a happy occasion to celebrate your accomplishment. An education such as this is a privilege. But it would not have been right to tell you this over the mirror, and we could not delay any longer."

"Why not? I thought you said you had a year?"

"Rumors of my illness have started to spread. The nobles want to know the plan for your ascension. There will be a gathering at the Great Hall in three days. You should come home immediately so we can prepare."

"But ascension means..."

"You are very lucky, Star. You love someone who loves you back. If you ask him, he will say yes. You know that he will."

"But we've never talked about marriage. Not seriously, anyway. Eighteen is really young to get married on Earth. He was planning on going to college. He doesn't even know about the laws on Mewni. He doesn't realize what marrying me would mean. I don't want to scare him with this. I'm scared too, Mom."

"Star, It's not fair. I know. You should have more time to talk to him about this. But somehow you will find a way. You must."

Star simply nodded.

"You should come home the morning after tomorrow. That will give us a day to prepare. And you need not tell Marco about my illness just yet. Your marriage does not need that cloud over it. There is still time. I still have months."

The king and queen did not stay long after the graduation ceremony. They said that there were royal matters to attend to, but Star knew the real reason. Her mother could not be out for long. She was weak and getting weaker.

Marco could tell that something was wrong, but when he asked Star just said that she was sad that high school was over. When they arrived home, she asked Marco to let her be alone for the evening. Marco looked worried, but agreed. She couldn't deal with this today. She would talk to him about everything tomorrow.

Star didn't know how to begin. Her mother was dying which was heartbreaking enough. But, it also meant that she would be queen soon. Being queen requires that she be married by law. She wanted
and needed Marco to marry her and be her king. Her mother was convinced that he would say yes. But this was a big commitment to ask him to make so suddenly.

She sat on her bed and cried silently.

==================================

"Hi Star. Are you okay?" asked Marco when she answered her bedroom door the next morning.

"Hi. I'm sorry about yesterday. Something happened and I need to go back to Mewni."

The color drained from Marco's face. "Oh no. It's happening! You're leaving! Don't go, Star!"

Star realized what she said. This was always Marco's big fear. "Oh! No, Marco. I'm not leaving forever. Just for a few days."

Marco clutched his chest and held himself against the door frame and breathed a sigh of relief.

"Can you come with me?"

"When do you need to go?"

"Tomorrow morning."

"I'm sorry, Star. I can't."

"What?"

"Well, I have the exams. The first ones are tomorrow."

"Marco, this is important."

"So are the exams, Star. They are really going to help me get ahead in college."

"I don't think you get it. I want you to come with me!"

"I said I can't! Why do you need me to come with you anyway?"

"You know what?! Fine! Never mind! Don't come!" she said as she slammed the door in Marco's face.

"Star?! STAR?!"

Marco stayed outside her door for a long time before he left.

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Mrs. Diaz knew that something was bothering Star. She brought Star meals to eat in her room. Mrs. Diaz didn't push. She knew Star would talk when she was ready.

Later Star had calmed down and had time to think. She realized that she was being really unfair. Marco had no idea what was going on, and she hadn't really explained anything to him. Yet, here she was making demands.

She was hurting him again. She had slammed the door in his face. He stayed by her door for hours hoping to talk to her. Marco had always been afraid that someday Star would leave Earth and him behind. It was the reason why he buried his feelings for her for so long.
The situation was making her behave irrationally. She had to think of a way to handle the nobles at
the gathering. She had to figure out how to bring all this up to Marco. She couldn't just pop the
question now. It would be like holding a weapon to their relationship's head.

Star imagined their conversation.

==================================

They were on a beach alone when Star got down on one knee.

"Marco, I love you. Will you marry me?"

A look of pure glee appeared on Marco's face. "Yes, Star! Yes! We can get married right after
college! I'll be able to get a good job and then we can start a family! I'm so happy you asked! I love
you! Eeeeee! Everybody is gonna be sooo jealous!" Marco fanned his teary eyes with his hands.

The scene changed in Star's mind. Now she was standing by an office cubicle wearing a peach
colored business shirt with a white collar and cuffs. A paisley tie, black suspenders, and glasses
completed the look.

"Umm, yeeeaaah... If you could go ahead and marry me right away that would be great, mm'kay...
Oh, oh! And I almost forgot, as my husband you'll become the King of Mewni too, 'kay? See
we're... losing my mother soon. She's dying actually, and I'm being promoted to be the new Queen
of Mewni. As king, you'll have a whole lot of power and responsibility just heaped on you and... we
also sorta need to play catch up on having a baby girl."

Star took a long, loud slurp from her coffee mug.

Marco pulled something from his fanny pack and threw it to the ground. There was a small explosion
and a cloud of thick white smoke appeared. When it cleared a tree trunk log had taken his place in
the cubicle.

"Oh, did I mention that if you say no, you'll have to be... laid off. Your replacement would need to
be found as soon as possible and I would have to marry him instead. Otherwise Mewni could
possibly... burn to the ground."

The overhead cabinet slowly opened and Marco peered out looking very scared.

"Grrrreat." Star said.

==================================

Star shook off the imagined scenario. This was not something that she could just spring on Marco.
One day isn't enough. They needed more time.

It was then that Star realized that she DID still have more time. She had months to talk to Marco
about marriage. They didn't need to get married today. The wedding could actually wait until she's
crowned. Star would just tell the nobles her plan to marry Marco. She had already chosen her
husband.

As far as Marco's college plans went, he could commute from Mewni with dimensional scissors. It
didn't have to be a choice between marriage and college. It could be both. It would be a lot of effort,
but they could make it work.

She couldn't just drop all this on him and then take off for a few days. They would talk about
everything when she came back.

Of course, she needed to apologize first.

==================================

It was very late when Star went to Marco's room. The hallway was dark and there was no light coming from the crack under his door. She hoped that she could wake him without being too loud.

She knocked very softly and whispered, "Marco?"

The door opened immediately. He hadn't even been asleep. He stood in the doorway. Star felt herself get warm when she saw that he was only wearing a tank top and boxer shorts. She then felt herself get hot when she remembered that she was only dressed in a short nightgown.

He had opened his mouth to speak when Star rushed to him and embraced him tightly. She buried her face in his chest and said the only thing she could think of. "I'm sorry, Marco. I'm so sorry." Her voice cracked even though she was whispering.

She was relieved when his arms curled around her and felt him kiss the top of her head. He pulled her into his room and quietly closed the door.

"It's okay, Star."

"No, it's not. I shouldn't have treated you that way. And I had no right to demand that you change your plans. It's important to you to take the tests."

"Whatever is happening on Mewni seems important to you too. What is it? I still don't know."

"It IS important. But I can deal with it myself for now. It's a lot to explain. I promise to tell you everything when I get back."

"Are you sure you don't want to tell me now?"

Star shook her head against his chest. "When I get back."

"Okay. If you're sure."

Star squeezed him tighter for a moment before releasing him from the hug. He looked him in the eyes again. "I'm sorry I got angry at you like that. I need to control my emotions better."

"Your emotions are part of you. They're one of the things I love about you."

"But they shouldn't control me. I'm sorry."

"It's okay, Star." Marco paused to look at her. "You know, when we fight like that, I'm always afraid you'll leave and I'll never see you again."

"You don't need to worry about that. I never want to leave without you."

"I can't go with you tomorrow but the last exam is on Monday. Could you come pick me up after that?" Marco offered.

"No. The reason I'm going will be done by then. I should be back before Monday."

"I'm sorry, Star."
"No. This was really short notice and your placement exams are important too. I shouldn't have gotten so upset. There's still time." Star said.

"Time for what?"

Star shook her head. "Later."

They reached for each other's hands and held them as they stood in front of each other. They looked in each other's eyes in the dim light of his room and gave each other a small loving smile. They rested their foreheads against each other.

Star let her emotions take control.

"Marco, I don't want to go back to my room. I don't want to be alone anymore. Would it be okay if I stayed here tonight?" Star said softly.

Star heard Marco's breathing pause for an instant.

"I want to be with you tonight." she whispered to him.

Marco swallowed audibly then whispered to her, "I want to be with you too."

They could feel each other's body heat radiating as they drew closer. When their lips were near enough to feel each other's breath, their eyes shut. There was passion in their kiss. Their arms found their way around each other again. Soon her hands found their way under his tank top. After a moment feeling the muscles beneath his skin, she lifted the shirt up and over his head. He was now clad only in his black boxer shorts.

Star pushed Marco toward the bed. Their eyes opened when he fell backwards onto it. She turned the twin sized bed into a full sized bed using magic then placed the wand on the nightstand. She climbed on top of him straddling his waist.

They had never gone this far before. One of them always slowed or stopped their make out sessions before this point. But this time would be different.

A moment of lucidity caused Marco to worry about the risks. Star reassured him that a spell she had been casting on herself would protect them.

It was the moment of truth. Star grabbed her nightgown and lifted it over her head. She took it off, leaving her wearing only her panties. Marco was entranced by the sight of Star above him. His pupils grew to fill his eyes.

Star's cheek hearts were dark red and a hot blush tinted her pale skin. She looked into Marco's eyes and smiled. She leaned over while still straddling him and pressed their naked skin together. Marco's heart was pounding against her. Their kisses were sensual and deep. Star could feel Marco's excitement against her. She knew he could feel the heat of her arousal.

After a slow buildup, they helped each other remove the last bits of their clothing. They explored each other in ways they had never done before.

With simple words of love, they joined and became one.

They were each other's firsts. This was a new experience for both of them, but soon they found the rhythm and motions.
It was magic.

Later, they lay with each other thoroughly exhausted and satisfied. They were both beginning to drift into dreams.

"I love you."

Star felt Marco reach for her and pull her close for a soft kiss. She moaned sweetly at the sensation. She wanted to be held as she fell asleep. She rolled to face away, but moved her body against his. His arm wrapped around her. As her consciousness slipped away, she felt him nuzzle her hair and breathe. She sighed peacefully.

Star woke first to find Marco still embracing her from behind. In that quiet moment she felt a contentment and happiness that she didn't know was possible. She didn't want to leave. But her duty called.

Rather than spoil this perfect moment with goodbyes, Star elected to let Marco sleep. She carefully reached for her wand on the nightstand. Once she had it, she cast a one hour sleep spell. Now, nothing short of a cataclysm would be able wake him until the time passes.

She savored the embrace for a moment more and then untangled herself from him and stood. As she did, he rolled onto his back. His chest was not covered by the sheets.

She gasped when she saw it. This kind of love was very rare and precious. But here was proof that they had found it in each other. He would say yes. She knew it now. Star sat on the bed and reached out to caress his chest. He would see it when he woke, but she wouldn't be here to explain.

Star reluctantly snuck from Marco's room back to hers. She wrote him a note on her stationery then gathered what she would need for the trip. Despite it's size she decided to take the spellbook with her for Glossaryck's knowledge.

After getting dressed, she went back to Marco's room to find him still asleep. She placed the pink envelope on his nightstand then leaned over and gently kissed him once more. Even asleep, his lips responded to hers. She wanted him again, but that would have to wait until she came back to him.

Star took one last look at Marco before she opened a portal with her dimensional scissors. She then grabbed her bags and went through. The portal closed behind her.

Had she known what the next few days would bring, she would never have left their bed.

Star was shaken from her memories when she heard the lead escort shout "Hold!" The carriage stopped. Another escort shouted for a cart to move from the street to make way for the queen.

Star felt something was wrong. She used the wand to cast a shield spell over the carriage.

The cart was suddenly obliterated in a fiery explosion. The sound shook Star's body. Her ears rang but she could hear screaming. Shouts of "Protect the Queen!" broke through the pandemonium.

Manfred was outside driving her carriage. She feared he was hurt. But Star felt her carriage moving
quickly. They were escaping.

The attack occurred near a street intersecting the planned route. The carriage took this detour.

The royal carriage escaped easily. The attack was poorly planned and executed. The cart and carriage were too far from each other when the cart was detonated. The escape route had not been blocked.

Manfred had luckily been unharmed, but one of the royal escorts had been killed and another two wounded in the explosion.

==================================

An emergency gathering of nobles was called to address the assassination attempt. Accusations started flying immediately.

"Empress Ishtar! Did you attempt to harm the queen?!

"What would I have to gain?! It is my wish to have my son marry his fiancee. Killing her would prevent that!"

"A queen has not been attacked so openly in centuries!"

"The queen attacked today! The attempted murder of her father when she ascended to the crown! Who is to say that her mother's illness was not also part of a larger plot?!!"

"That is a theory without proof!"

"What purpose would such an act have accomplished?"

"Mewni would have been thrown into mayhem!"

"There is no succession plan for such an event! How many would be conquerors would have attempted to take the throne?!"

"Queen Star, we are glad that you are safe, but this does bring to focus the fact that you are still not married and do not yet have an heir."

"Every queen that has ever gone this long without birthing an heir has had their lineage end with them!"

"We fear that this may yet be the fate of your house, Queen Star! It could very well have happened today, if luck had not been on your side!"

"Your highness, you have simply stalled long enough!"

Star understood now why the attack had been so sloppy. It was designed to fail. It wasn't meant to kill her. It was meant to scare the nobles into forcing the marriage issue.

"Queen Star. We know your feelings on the matter. We sympathize. We know that you do not love Tom. But this is now secondary to the security of the kingdom!"

"We must insist that the wedding take place as soon as possible!"

"And what if I refuse?" protested the queen.
“Carrion birds have already started to circle, Queen Star!”

“You must not jeopardize the kingdom for your selfish desires!”

“The five year anniversary of your engagement is approaching. That is in three months. Your wedding should take place at that time.”

“If you do not wed by that date, Queen Star, it will be seen as your disregard for the welfare of this kingdom.”

“You will not be allowed to rule.”

>Your orders will be disregarded.”

>Your wishes regarding the governing of this kingdom will be ignored.”

“All the progress you have worked so hard for will be wiped away! You must not allow this!”

Star was trapped. She had held Ishtar to a stalemate for a long time. Longer that she could have hoped. But that was now ending. There was nothing she could do.

“I understand.” she said. While this was not an acceptance of the terms, neither was it a rejection.

==================================

Star stayed behind alone in the Great Hall after all the other nobles had left.

Guards remained outside guarding the entrances against another attack, but Star knew they weren’t necessary. There would be no other attacks. Even though it looked like a failure, the last had really been a success.

The Great Hall had a different feel when empty. It was now unlit, but it was not pitch dark. Though there were no windows on the ground walls, night light passed through the stained glass dome bathing the room with color. It reminded Star of a Catholic church. She had visited some during her time on Earth. Star knew that they were considered sacred places.

Star looked up at the dome. Its builders had created a detailed and beautiful work of art. Though she had looked at it many times, she often found details unnoticed before. Tonight was no different. She gazed at the artwork for a long while. Searching for answers or inspiration.

Her remaining support among the nobles was eroded. Star will have to be married within three months. To Tom. To Empress Ishtar's son. Otherwise Mewni will fall to disaster and war.

She silently looked at the dome. Among the images of great queens of legend, warriors fighting mythic beasts, and great battles, she noticed a small star. There were many other stars scattered across the artwork. Some larger. Some brighter. But she found herself focused on this one seemingly insignificant star.

Her heart ached. Tears began to form. The one person she needed most was out of her reach.

She fell to her knees in the hall and prayed.

"Marco... I need you."

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"Marco... I need you."
He wasn't sure why, but Marco opened the door to the guest room. He hated looking at the room like this, but Marco just got the feeling that Star had called him.

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Author's Note: This chapter was written and published BEFORE the initial broadcast premier of the episode 'Blood Moon Ball'.
Sacrifice

Starfall by GolfAlphaMike

Chapter 8: Sacrifice

It was late when Star returned to the royal chambers. Princess Pony Head took one look and knew that she had been crying. Pony Head had been waiting near the school when the attack happened. She was not able to attend the emergency gathering.

"What happened, Star?"

"It's over. Ishtar beat me. The marriage is happening. I've lost." Star broke down and cried again.

"What?! No! You can't give up!"

"If I don't get married in three months, I'll be removed from power. Mewni will tear itself apart."

"Why now? It's been almost five years!"

"The attack. It was a lie. I'm not really in danger. No one wants me to die because no one wants a war of succession. But there's still no heir to hold the throne if I die. The nobles were all scared. They want an heir to be born as soon as possible."

"But removing you from power? That's just as bad as if you died! Who would take power?"

"It would be years of conflict before everything is settled. They know I won't let that happen."

"Maybe we could still convince a noble to contest the engagement!"

"We tried that. We couldn't find one willing to risk everything. Not their title. Not their wealth. Not their lands. Not their honor. And definitely not their life."

"Your Earth-Turd would. He wouldn't even have to think about it."

"Yeah, he would. But Marco isn't a noble. He doesn't have anything to risk except his honor and his life."

"That's worth more than everything those other losers have to offer combined."

Star laughed through her tears. "I wish I would be able to convince them of that."

Pony Head leaned against Star in her version of a hug. "You've found a way to convince them of a lot of things. He's noble in his heart. You'll convince them of that too."

"But he's not here with me. I miss him so much. I need him more than ever."

"I know you do."

"It's been almost five years. Do you think he still thinks of me? Does he still love me?"

"You still feel him, right? You know he does."
"I know he's sad a lot. He feels alone."

"So do you."

"I at least have you. I don't think he even has that."

"His friends? His family?"

"No. It's like he feels cut off from them too."

"Why?"

"I don't know. The bond doesn't work like that."

Pony Head thought about the bond. You can feel your lover's emotions. It was very rare and takes a special kind of love. A kind that most people couldn't even imagine. She doubted she was capable and felt a twinge of jealousy.

It's found even among the common classes. They had the freedom to follow their own hearts. One of the few things that they had that the nobles didn't. Most nobles had political marriages and didn't have that kind of love. Just a bond of duty. Pony Head's own parents didn't have it, but there were the lucky few like Star's parents.

Star had told her that people from Earth didn't have something like this. She wondered if Marco's parents would have been bonded if they were from a magical dimension.

Tom's father was marked. Pony Head couldn't think of anyone that deserved that kind of love less than Ishtar. But that's the thing about love. It doesn't matter if you deserve it or not.

Even though the love wasn't her own, Pony Head came to a decision. Star and Marco had something worth a sacrifice.

"Star, there's something I need to do. Something big. Unfortunately, I need to say goodbye."

"What are you going to do? Why do you need to say goodbye? I need you!"

"I'm gonna help you. But after what I do, we won't be able to see each other for a while."

"What? Why?"

"Ha. How would your Earth-Turd put it? I won't pass start nor will I get paid."

Normally Star would never let a friend make such a sacrifice for her. But Star knew that this wasn't just for her or for Marco. The impending marriage had much larger consequences than just who fathers the next Mewni heir.

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Princess Pony Head's time in St Olga's had gained her unexpected knowledge and experience. Princesses who had done far worse than her were sent there. Whispers traversed the halls. Stories of the darkest magics found their way to her.

She skulked around just outside the inner chamber of the Secret Library. She had smeared boot polish over herself in an attempt to blend in with the shadows. In reality she looked like a zebra with black and lavender stripes.
It didn’t matter though. Most scholars stayed out of the inner chamber, and not just because of the guards. Unauthorized viewing of the scrolls stored there was severely punished. Their use, even more so. She hoped her title would lessen the penalty, but knew it would still be harsh.

Pony Head knew what she was looking for. The Scroll of The Omniscient. It summoned a force that had access to hidden knowledge. It might know how to break through the dimensional barrier to Earth. Hopefully the price it demanded would not be too high.

It’s very existence was considered 'Top Secret'. But secrets have a way of making their way out. No one knew that she knew about it.

Pony Head believed that if it were truly dangerous, the scroll would have been destroyed. But it wasn’t. Instead, it was being kept in reserve for a dire emergency. She thought that this qualifies.

Star probably would have used the scroll a long time ago if she could get permission. Access to the inner chamber of the Secret Library required a supermajority of high nobles to agree. Ishtar had enough allies to prevent that.

Getting past the guards was easy enough. She made no sound as she moved. A benefit of having no feet. The ground level was frequently patrolled, but there were small windows high on the wall. Too small for a person, but being just a floating unicorn head was making this far too easy.

She found herself alone in the inner chamber. Almost. The elderly and nearly blind librarian was here. Another safety precaution. He could not easily read any of the scrolls safeguarded here.

"Can I help you?" asked a frail voice.

Busted. The librarian still had very good hearing.

Pony Head deepened her voice. "Yes. Use of The Scroll of The Omniscient has been authorized by the Gathering of Nobles."

"Please fill out this request form, while I retrieve it." said the elderly man.

He returned after a long while. The librarian squinted at the drying ink on the completed form. After a moment he spoke. "I am sure you appreciate the danger in what you are about to be given. Please return the scroll on time. There will be a charge for late returns. Good night, Seymour Butz." The elderly and frail librarian held out the scroll and Pony Head took it in her teeth.

Pony Head had, of course, faked every line of the form. The authorizing nobles listed included the likes of Pat Fanny, Ben Dover, and Amanda Fondle. As she floated out of the window through which she arrived, she thought to herself, "When this is all over, I should talk to someone about the lax security. And it might be time for the librarian to retire."

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The room had been prepared according to the scroll’s instructions. An ancient and powerful symbol was drawn on the floor. The window drapes had been drawn, darkening the room. Candles on the symbol provided the only light.

"Aw, man. I'm sooo goin' to the clink for this. And could this spell possibly be any more cliche?"

Pony Head spoke the summoning words.

A wind from nowhere extinguished the candles and the room blackened. With a flash of light, she
found herself on the summit of a flat topped mountain. The scent of brimstone filled the air. On all sides dark clouds churned and stormed. An ocean of glowing magma surrounded the mountain lighting the clouds from beneath with fire. Lightning arced between the clouds. Directly above her the clouds formed a hole exposing a starless black sky.

The black void separated like an eyelid exposing a single sinister eye. A deep and booming voice sounded from all directions.

"WHO CALLS UPON ME?"

Pony Head quaked with fear, but she steeled herself. She would have to shout to be heard over the chaos. She had to do this for Star.

"I do! I am Princess Pony Head! I called for your knowledge and your power!"

"MAKE KNOWN YOUR DESIRE AND I WILL MAKE KNOWN THE PRICE!"

"Marco Diaz and Star Butterfly must be reunited!"

"YOU DISTURBED ME FOR THIS?!" The voice said angrily. "THIS IS TRIVIAL! YOU NEED ONLY USE DIMENSIONAL BLADES!"

"Dimensional travel to Earth has been made impossible!"

"AH, EMPRESS ISHTAR HAS CAST A CURSE!"

"Can the curse be broken?!"

"THAT IS NOT IN MY POWER! THE EMPRESS WILLINGLY PAID A HIGH PRICE FOR THE CURSE. IT WILL NOT BE BROKEN!"

"What?! Some supernatural force you turned out to be! You didn't even know that travel to Earth was impossible until I told you!" Pony Head said sarcastically.

The eye turned blood red and the lightning intensified in strength and frequency.

"YOU DARE TO INSULT MEEEEEE?!” The voice shouted impossibly loudly. Princess Pony Head's ears stung from the power.

"AHHH! I'M SORRY! I'm sorry! But there must be a way! I need to help Star! Please, there must be a way!" Pony Head pleaded.

The eye returned to it's original color and the lightning slowed.

"THERE IS ANOTHER WAY! THE DIMENSIONAL BARRIER CANNOT BE BREACHED TO GO TO EARTH! BUT IT CAN BE BREACHED TO LEAVE FROM EARTH!"

"How will they do that?! I thought they have no dimensional scissors!"

"THERE ARE THOSE ON HIS WORLD WHO HAVE THE ABILITY TO CREATE ONE LAST DIMENSIONAL PORTAL!"

"How will he find them?!"

"THE PIECES ARE IN PLACE! THE QUEEN'S MAGIC HAS ALREADY LAID OUT THE PATH!"
"Wait! Star?! Not you?! What's your part in this then!"

"THE QUEEN IS NOT AWARE OF HER ACTIONS! SHE DOES NOT KNOW WHERE THE PATH STARTS OR WHERE IT LEADS! SHE DOES NOT EVEN KNOW THE PATH EXISTS! BUT I CAN SEE IT!"

"Can he be told how to find the path?"

"YOU WILL START HIM ON HIS JOURNEY WITH A MESSAGE IN A DREAM!"

"Yes! That's the ticket! What's the message?!"

"PRINCESS PONY HEAD! FIRST, THE PRICE FOR THAT KNOWLEDGE AND ITS DELIVERY MUST BE NEGOTIATED!"

"What's the price?!"

"YOU WILL BE MY BRIDE!"

"What?! Why would you want to marry me?!"

"YOU ARE A PRINCESS! A ROYAL UNION WILL BE... ADVANTAGEOUS!"

"You don't even have a body!"

"IN THIS PLACE, THAT IS NO OBSTACLE TO ME!"

The eye distorted, and appeared to liquify. It dripped down like tar, pooling on the mountaintop in front of Pony Head. A physical form rose from the pool. As it floated out of the pool, the remainder of the liquid was drawn into the mass.

"Would this form be acceptable?" the floating form asked smiling with closed eyes.

Pony Head circled and examined the floating body. Actually, the form was a floating unicorn head which lacked a body.

She was impressed. The floating form was actually quite attractive. Handsome lines on his face. Good teeth. Perfectly groomed mane. His neck muscles were well developed. Straight and shiny horn.

"Hmm... very nice. *Very* nice. But royal marriages are often matters of the state. Perhaps some other arrangement can be made." said Pony Head.

"I am of course open to negotiation." said the form.

"I'm sure we'll come to an agreement." said Pony Head.

A sinister eye opened.

"YES! I AM SURE THAT WE WILL!"

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"Marco Diaz slumbers. Now is the time for you to speak to him through his dreams. These words will start him on his journey."
Words appeared in the clouds as fiery letters. Pony Head read them and was confused. How could this nonsense possibly be any help to Marco?

"Time grows short! You have only seconds left!"

There was no more time to think or ask questions. She had to take the force's word about the message. There was really no other solution. She shouted the words as instructed and hoped that he heard her.

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Marco suddenly sat up in his bed. He was soaked in sweat. Just an intense dream. A voice said something. What was it? Whatever it was didn't make sense. Marco sat awake in bed for a while trying to remember.

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"It is now up to Marco Diaz to follow the path." the form said as it turned to Pony Head. "It is time for the agreed payment."

"I will be happy to pay, just as soon as it is allowed." Pony Head said as she faded from the dark landscape.

"WHAT?!"

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Pony Head found herself back in her room. She was surrounded by large intimidating men in masks and brown jackets. The moment the scroll was used, alerts had sounded throughout the kingdom. It didn't take them long to track down 'Seymour Butz'.

"Sweetheart, why did you do it?" King Pony Head asked.

"Sorry, Dad. But it was the only way I could think of to help Star." Princess Pony Head replied.

"Did you think about the fact that you would be punished? You're too old to be sent to St Olga's"

"I did, but sometimes you need to sacrifice a pawn to protect another piece. To protect the queen."

"Aww, Sweetheart. That was very selfless of you. But you aren't a pawn."

The princess was moved by the compliment. "Thanks, Dad." she leaned against her father in what passes for them as a hug.

"You're a bishop, minimum. Eh... knight, tops."

The princess was annoyed by what turned out to be a rather backhanded compliment.

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St. Olga's was harsh, but it was nothing when compared to this place. She would have gladly gone back to St. Olga's to spend the entire sentence upside down. It would have been a picnic.

As she rode the conveyor belt into the dark fortress where she would be held she had one thought, "This had better be worth it, Earth-Turd."
The iron gate to St Joan's Correctional University for Malfeasant Royalty slammed shut.

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He rode his motorcycle past Echo Creek Academy on his way to the congressman's office where he was now working. Marco looked up while stopped at the light. He remembered. He had a dream last night. A female voice. She said something to him. It seemed important to her. But what she told him didn't make any sense. He stared at the California flag.

"Hey, Earth-Turd. The bear leads north."

Cars behind his bike were honking at him to go.

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Marco pulled into a nearby coffee shop. He ran in and grabbed a napkin and a pen from the cash register. He had to write it down.


"Um, can I take your order?"

Marco looked up at the cashier. "Oh. Uh, yeah..."

After ordering, Marco sat at an empty table. He laid the napkin out and stared at the words. He knew what the first three words meant. Pony Head was the only one who ever called him that.

Was it just a dream? Does he want this to be a message so much that he's trying to convince himself of it? But if his mind would make up a message, it would be from Star, not Pony Head. Marco thought back to his dream. It was definitely not Star's voice, which he'd recognize anywhere. It could have been Pony Head he supposed. Marco allowed his train of thought continue down this track. "So a message for me from Pony Head, in a dream, probably about Star. Hey, why not?" he thought.

Marco's thought train continued down the track to the last four words. He was mumbling to himself. "Am I supposed to go north? No, I can't just go north. The message doesn't say 'The bear goes north.' It says 'leads.' I'm supposed to follow a bear north? I can't just follow a bear north. Bear sightings are incredibly rare around here. Using California flags as a guide is right out. They're everywhere."

After a few moments of thinking, Marco heard a commotion outside. He went to check and stuffed the napkin in his pocket as he stood and walked.

When he got outside the front door he found Lars and a group of others were accosting a man behind wheel of a huge red Chevy truck that was parked in the lot. They were hurling disgusting homophobic epithets and the driver looked scared.

"Leave him alone Lars!" Marco shouted.

"Well, well, well! If it isn't the local nut case! Is this your boyfriend?" Lars laughed. "Maybe you finally moved on from your imaginary girlfriend!"

Somehow word had gotten out about his 'delusion' a while ago, but Marco was used to the talking behind his back. "That's real brave of you to say from way over there! Why don't you come closer and say that?!" Marco gestured for the bully to approach him.

"Ha! There's five of us and only one of you!" Lars responded.

"Yeah, it does seem unfair... to you!" Marco took a fighting stance. It had been a while since he last had a good fight. Lars and his gang weren't the kind of monsters he used to fight alongside Star, but sometimes you just have to lower your standards and fight the opponents you're given. Marco
thought to himself, "I am going to enjoy this."

Lars and his gang looked suddenly very scared. They ran off without a word.

"Huh." Marco said disappointed. Lars was a coward, but usually it took until punches were actually thrown for him to turn tail and run.

"Are you alright?" Marco said to the driver.

"Yeah, are you okay, Hon?!" said a deep, masculine voice from above and behind Marco's head.

Marco turned to see a man behind him. Immensely tall, massive, and very strong looking. He was dressed in outdoorsman gear. An orange plaid flannel shirt with woodland pattern pants and tan work boots. Below his folded sleeves, dark hair covered his forearms. More hair poked from his shirt collar. A knit cap and full beard completed the look.

"So much for my trying to be intimidating. Oh well..." Marco thought to himself.

The driver said, "I'm okay. I don't think they'll be back. Not with people willing to fight them." The driver looked at Marco. "Thank you for helping."

"It's was nothing. I'm just glad everyone is okay," Marco replied then turned to the huge man. "After all, you were the one who actually scared them off."

"No, no. It was something. Thank you." He smiled. "This is my husband, Mark, and I'm Ben." He said as he held out his hand.

Marco took it and shook. "Marco." He waved to Mark.

"Hey." Mark waved in return.

"Marco? Coincidence!" Ben said smiling.

Marco smiled, then he and the huge man returned inside.

"Order for... Marcia?" came a call from the counter.

"Every time." muttered Marco as he collected his coffee. "Marco?" he said to the barista

The barista looked again at the writing on the paper cup. "Oops, yeah. Sorry." he said as he handed Marco the cup.

"Heh. That's okay."

Ben asked Marco, "Did you know those guys?"

"Yeah. Just some losers. I went to high school with them."

"Were you actually going to fight them all?"

"I was."

"That's either the bravest thing I've heard in a while or the craziest. I might not have been much help. Mark thinks I'm a little too gentle."

"Well, I don't know if you overheard, I'm totally cray." Marco said with a smile. "By the way, that's
some truck. What kind is it?"

"Everyone loves our baby. It's an '04 Kodiak."

"Of course it is." thought Marco. "Wow. It still looks great. Like new." he said.

"Hey, thanks! We do take good care of her."

"Order for... Bjorn?" came a call from the counter.

The huge man collected his order. "Ben." he said to the barista

"Oops, yeah. Sorry." the barista apologized. "Stop writing the names like a preschooler!" he scolded the cashier.

"Are you going hunting?" Marco asked.

Ben laughed. "I can see why you would think that. But, no. We're headed to Seattle for a coffee festival."

"Ah. I'm headed north today too, so I guess I might see you on the road."

"I guess we might. It's a long drive, so we better get going. Thanks again, Marcia!" Ben said with a smile.

Marco chuckled. "No problem. See you around, Bjorn."

Ben entered the huge red truck and it began to pull out of the lot. Marco pulled the napkin from his pocket and looked at the message once more.

Marco was now certain his dream was a message. And this was as obvious a sign as he was ever going to get. Whatever forces at work might have been more subtle by pointing using a giant neon arrow sign that said 'Follow' in flashing letters.

There wasn't time to go home to prepare or pack. Marco only had whatever he left the house with and the clothes on his back. But this was it. He didn't even care about his job. He was going to find a way to Star even if it kills him.

He stuffed the napkin back into his pocket, chugged his coffee, and coughed violently. The drink was very hot. "Road trip." he said hoarsely.

==================================================================

The truck took the expected route towards Seattle and Marco didn't have any trouble following. Thanks to the truck's size and color, he was able to keep his distance. He didn't want to spook them. When getting gas, he tried to avoid the same stations as them.

Marco called the congressman's office he was working at and told them a personal matter had come up and he didn't know when he would be able to come back. They told him that they needed him, and if he couldn't tell them when he would be available, they would have to let him go. Marco didn't care.

It was getting dark when the truck pulled into a Travelodge in Redding. They were stopping for the night, so Marco would be doing the same. He parked in the back of the lot around the corner from the truck. He waited what he felt was enough time to allow Ben and Mark to check in then went into the lobby.
He decided to call his parents to let them know he would not be coming home for a while. He was thankful he was sent to voicemail. His message was short and vague.

Though he had been riding all day, Marco had trouble getting to sleep. His mind was filled with thoughts. Was this crazy? Was he on a wild goose chase? He had left on a spur of the moment feeling.

What was Star doing now? Was she expecting him?

It would be late when he fell asleep.

Marco woke and looked at the clock. 8:47? It wasn't too late. He had to check out at 11:00. He didn't have any luggage to gather so he had time. He closed his eyes again. Then they popped open. A feeling of dread came over him. He grabbed the room key and ran from his room.

Searching the lot for the red truck revealed it was gone. Marco was deflated. That was his lead. Should he get on the road now? He knew that they were heading to Seattle. If he sped, he might be able to catch up. But then he realized that they could be hours ahead. They could have taken a detour. They might have even turned around. He was supposed to let the bear lead him north. This part of his journey was ended.

What should he do now? He needed to eat and think about the next steps.

After checking out Marco sat on his motorcycle, looked around and saw it. Time for a meal at Black Bear Diner.

Marco sat, ate, and stared out the window. He kept lookout for anything bear related.

He was almost through with his meal when he saw it. Not the truck from earlier, but it was just as good.

The classic car was very out of place in Redding, California. It was painted a deep navy blue. On the side was the word 'Chicago' in block capital letters. A giant stylized orange letter 'C' was on the passenger door.

Marco quickly took two $20 bills from his wallet and put them on the table. He called out to his server as he left. "Money's on the table! Big tip! Sorry!"

He quickly got on his motorcycle, put on his helmet, and started the bike. He had to hurry to get on the road. He burned out of the parking lot and merged back onto the highway.

He passed vehicles aggressively, riding the slots at dangerous speeds. He caught up to the car quickly and slowed as he approached. He followed closely.

The car had Illinois plates. Bumper stickers with sayings like "There's Always Next Year" and "Everybody Needs a Scapegoat" covered the rear. Marco was close enough to get a glance of the driver. He was wearing a cap. It was a different blue than the car and had a circular red letter 'C' logo. It appeared that the driver wasn't just a football fan.

The car wasn't taking the interstate north. Marco was glad to have eaten because he would be on the road for a while longer. He slowed down and allowed the car to lead.
Marco followed the Chicago sports fan for hours. It was almost like the car knew that it was leading him somewhere. His thoughts wandered.

Was Star leading him to her with magic? This trip didn't seem accidental. He had a feeling that he was doing exactly what he needed to do.

He wondered if Star would be happy to see him. Would he even be allowed near her? She was royalty and he wasn't. Had she assumed the throne? Was that why she didn't return? Was she married? Five years had separated them. Marco pushed such thoughts aside. He was going to find her. He would deal with whatever situation he found when he did.

As he passed an intersection, Marco's thoughts were interrupted when he saw a creature at the edge of the woods off to the side of the road. Marco had seen monsters before. He had fought monsters. But this one was the strangest yet.

Conjoined bodies covered with brown fur. How many heads? Seven? Eight? Bear heads! They stuck out from the creature in odd places.

The creature was so attention grabbing, that Marco didn't realize he was riding off the shoulder.

The change in the surface alerted Marco. The bike shook violently as it rolled over rocks and debris. Marco was able to steer the bike back onto the shoulder and stop, but he realized he now had two problems. One, he had a flat. And two, he was alone with a monstrous cryptid that may or may not be aggressive.

"Keep calm. Don't make any sudden moves." Marco told himself.

Slowly, he lowered the stand and dismounted the bike. Keeping his hands in view, he stood with the bike between him and the creature. All of its heads were looking at him silently. Marco did what came naturally to try and ease the tension. He smiled.

The many bear heads loudly roared in unison. It was like a chorus. Marco realized what he had done. Showing teeth can be a sign of aggression in nature. He pressed his lips together tightly. The symphony of roars ceased. Marco and the creature were still and silent for a long moment.

With a final grunt, the creature turned revealing a final head and body on what could be called its back. The beast crouched and placed its paws on the ground. The last body was positioned like a dying roach with its limbs in the air. The creature then bounded into the woods and disappeared.

Marco breathed a sigh of relief. He had been following bears since yesterday, and If any bear needed to be followed, it was that one. But he couldn't hope to keep up with it.

He took a moment to examine the bike. The rear tire had been punctured by a nail. He didn't think it could be fixed by him out here. He needed a repair shop.

The sign at the intersection indicated a town in that direction. The sign was poorly maintained and the mile count had been lost. Marco hoped it wouldn't be too far. Maybe someone there has answers about the monster bear.

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Author's Notes: For non-American readers: The clues about bears in this chapter relied on a bit of American cultural knowledge. The number of clues and coincidences in this chapter may strike you as excessive. And you'd be right. But Star's magic is capable of conjuring seemingly living beings, so who's to say that didn't happen again here.

1. The California state flag prominently features a grizzly bear.

2. In male bisexual and gay culture, a "bear" is a often a larger, hairier man who projects an image of rugged masculinity.

2. The Chevrolet Kodiak is a line of medium duty trucks produced from 1980 to 2009. Aftermarket companies customize them as pickup trucks and commercial trucks for consumers.

3. "Gentle Ben" is a 1965 children's novel by Walt Morey about the friendship between a boy named Mark and a bear named Ben. The story provided the basis for a popular late 1960s U.S. television series.

4. Bjorn: From an Old Norse byname meaning "bear".

5. Travelodge is a motel chain in the United States known for its mascot "Sleepy Bear", a half awake teddy bear wearing a sleeping cap, a robe, and slippers. The Travelodge brand name is used in several countries by different companies.

6. Black Bear Diner is a restaurant chain in the western United States which serves homestyle and "old-fashioned" comfort foods. By sheer coincidence, the company is based in Redding, California.

7. The colors and 'C' logo painted on the classic car refer to the The Chicago Bears, a National (American) Football League team. This car would be considered very out of place in Redding, California which is about 2,100 miles (about 3,400 km) from Chicago, Illinois.

8. The bumper stickers on the rear of the classic car and design of the driver's hat refer to The Chicago Cubs, a Major League Baseball team.

9. The eight headed, three bodied bear monster... Oh yeah. We're going there.
Marco pushed the bike down the road at the intersection. Soon he found a place where he felt it would be safe.

He walked on the road toward the town for a while. Cars passed him on the road, but Marco didn't want to hitchhike. Eventually a police cruiser pulled up beside him.

"Hey buddy. Are you ok?" said an officer in the passenger seat of the cruiser. A grey mustache stood out against his dark skin.

"Yeah. My bike has a flat."

The officer behind the wheel spoke. "Yeah. We saw a bike by the side of the road a few miles back."

"Hop in. We'll give you a ride into town." said the first officer.

"Thanks! That would be great."

Marco rode in the back of the cruiser. The officers said that it was late in the day, but he might make it in time to catch the repair shop before it closed.

Marco felt lucky. He would not have made it into town before it was late if the officers hadn't found him. He saw the town's name on a water tower. Gravity Falls.

It was after five when Marco was dropped off in front of the mechanic shop. He thanked the officers and called out to the mechanic. He caught him closing the garage door.

"Hello? Wait please!" Marco called.

"Just closing up, but what can I do for you? Don't suppose you walked all the way into town."

"Hi, yeah, no. My bike got a flat on the highway. It's at the end of the road at the turnoff. I could really use some help."

"Well, tell you what. I can't work on it right now, but I'll go pick it up and bring it back here. I'll work on it in the morning."

"Yes. Thank you."

Marco would be staying the night. The mechanic said there was a motel about two blocks away. It was nothing to write home about. Rooms were cheap at least.

There was nothing interesting on TV. Marco got restless in the room and couldn't relax. Around ten o'clock he gave up and went for a walk.
He went to the main street and walked about a few blocks. Then he saw an old fashioned neon sign. Bert's Bar. Part of the sign was burned out. The first two and the last two letters were the only ones that glowed.

Naturally he went in.

There weren't many people. Marco looked around and chose a stool at the bar.

Ever since the party right after high school, Marco didn't drink much. But he felt odd ordering a soda here so he ordered a bottle of beer. He sat and drank for a while, but nothing else caught his attention.

Marco wanted to talk to someone about the creature he saw, but the bar was pretty empty. Plus he couldn't think of a way to bring it up without sounding crazy.

The TV over the bar blared, "Are bears coming to eat you? An increase in bear sightings at local campgrounds has officials concerned. Stay tuned to find out! The Eleven o'clock News with Shandra Jimenez is next!"

An opening. Marco spoke obnoxiously loudly, hoping to be overheard. "Hey! I saw a bear today too!"

No response from the bar patrons.

"It looked like it had three bodies! Hope I didn't interrupt a bear orgy!" Marco cringed inwardly at his crass comment.

"Ha! You just saw Multi-bear!"

Marco turned to look at the person who spoke. His hat had a blue pine tree on it. Marco moved to get a better look. He could see that the guy was young. Maybe younger than himself. As Marco got closer he saw his eyes. This guy might be barely old enough to drink, but he had the eyes of someone twenty years older. What else had this guy seen?

"Multi-bear eh? That's a pretty good name for it. You've seen it too?"

"I have! I had him at my mercy, but I chose to spare his life." The man flexed his left arm proudly.

"You fought him? Wow. What made you spare his life?"

"We're both fans of the 70's pop group *hic*-abba"

Marco laughed. The man was clearly drunk. His nose was reddened. Marco found him interesting. He moved to a nearer barstool.

"So what would make you want to fight Multi-bear?"

"It was the final test of manhood for the Manotaurs. But I came to the realization that killing the Multi-bear wouldn't make me a man. Just a killer. So I guess that's the real reason why I spared him. Finding another *hic*-abba fan was just a bonus, I guess."

"How old were you?"

"Twelve."

"Monster fighter at twelve?! Wow. I didn't start until I was fourteen."
"You've fought monsters too?"

"Yeah! I used to fight them all the time. It's been a few years though."

"I'm not really a fighter. More of an investigator."

"A monster investigator?"

"Nope. An investigator of the paranormal."

"So you're like those guys on TV? Ghost Finders? Spook Hunters?"

The man laughed. "Those guys are frauds! They never find a thing! I on the other hand, once had to trap a vengeful lumberjack ghost in a silver mirror once."

"Sounds like you should have your own show."

"The networks wouldn't listen to my pitch."

Marco and the man laughed.

"Marco Diaz." he said as he held out his hand.

The man took it and shook. "Dipper Pines."

"You've led an interesting life."

"Less interesting lately. There's been fewer mysteries in the last few years. Used to be a new thing every week, but there hasn't been anything really new in a few years."

"Why do you think that is?"

"My Grunkle Ford said that Gravity Falls is a weak spot in the barrier between dimensions. Weird things used to leak through. Looks like the barrier's been fixed."

Marco's interest was piqued at the talk of dimensional barriers. Barriers that kept him from Star. Nothing was getting through the barrier. Maybe that's why she didn't come back.

"Do you get bored now?" Marco thought of the last day he fought monsters.

"Not really. A lot of weirdness made it through before it stopped. I'm still trying to find it all. Trying to develop a new field of study. None of that fake stuff. Real paranormal activity."

"So you're here for research?"

"I'm trying to complete my Grunkle Ford's work. He was the real expert. A genius."

Marco thought that he might have found his next lead. But then he realized what Dipper had actually said. "Was?"

"He's gone now."

"Oh, that's too bad. I would have liked to talk to him."

"Are you interested in the paranormal?"

"Yeah, I am." Marco noticed that they both had empty bottles. "Let me buy you your next beer."
"Sure! Can I get another Hamm's, Bert?"

The bartender opened a bottle and handed it to Dipper.

"Hamm's?" Marco asked he was handed his own beer.

"I'm not trying to be ironic. Something made me come in here and order it. Something unexplained."

"Well here's to your Grunkle Ford!" Marco held up his bottle.

"Here's to the unexplained!" Dipper clinked his bottle to Marco's.

"So why do they call you Dipper?" Marco asked as he took a sip of his beer.

Dipper removed his hat and showed him.

The beer bottle slipped out of Marco's hand and crashed on the floor unnoticed.

Marco's memory flashed back to a moment years ago.

==================================
...In some other places, the people look at them and see a plow. You looked and saw a bent scepter."

Star asked, "What do you see Marco?"

"I see a ladle. Most people here do too. We call it the 'Big Dipper'."

"Ah! I see it!..."

==================================

Marco pushed the memory to the back of his mind. This was no time to reminisce. He knew for sure now. This was the guy he was supposed to find.

As Marco was about to speak a girl's voice sounded. "Hey Dipper! Who's your hot friend?!" A brown haired girl about the same age as Dipper appeared at his side. Bubbly was the best description for her. She was wearing a sweater with a huge cat portrait embroidered on the front. There was a resemblance with Dipper. Relative? Sister maybe?

Dipper opened his mouth to introduce his new acquaintance... and promptly threw up all over the girl's cat sweater. Then he passed out on the floor of the bar.

"Hey, Bert? How many has he had?" the girl asked the bartender.

The bartender held up two fingers.

"Dipper, you are such a lightweight." The girl looked at Marco and gave him her best smile. "Hi, I'm Mabel."

"Hi, I'm Marco. You have very straight teeth."

"Thanks. My parents said they cost a fortune."
He needed to speak to Dipper again, so Marco helped get him into a booth while Mabel called a cab and got cleaned up. Marco leaned him into the left inside corner of the booth against the wall. Mabel soon came back and slid in next to Dipper. Marco sat on the right side of the booth.

"So you're new here. I've never seen you in Gravity Falls before. And I know everyone!"

"Yeah, I'm sort of passing through. I'm from California."

Mabel gasped. "Us too! We used to come here every summer. Now we go to college here. Just passing through? Where are you headed after here?"

"That kind of depends on him." Marco said while gesturing to the sleeping Dipper. "I actually came here to find your... brother?"

"Yeah, my ding-dong of a brother. Oh man. What did he do? You aren't a bounty hunter or government agent here to arrest him are you? The Sasquatch incident was supposed to be a closed case."

Marco was intrigued. "Sasquatch incident? I'll have to ask later." He thought. He then said to Mabel, "No, no. Nothing bad like that."

"Then why?"

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you. No one does."

"Ha. Try me."

"I've been following a trail of sorts, leading here. To your brother. I think... I believe he's going to help me find someone I love."

Mabel's face lit up and she squealed with glee. "Well you've found her, baby!" Suddenly Mabel was on the other side of the booth sitting next to Marco. Her right arm wrapped around Marco. "Mabel and Marco, together at last!" Using her left hand she reached into her pocket. She threw some candy coated chocolates into the air like confetti. There was a rattling noise as the candies fell around them.

Marco chuckled inwardly. He could tell early in the conversation that Mabel was attracted to him. He should have been more specific.

"Actually Mabel, you're very cute, but I meant my one true love whom I already know. Specifically her. Um... sorry."

Mabel blushed profusely and was momentarily crestfallen. But she perked up immediately. "Oooh. Is it someone who lives in town? What's her name? Maybe we know her." She asked as she returned to the other side of the booth.

Dipper mumbled.

"Oh, she's not from Gravity Falls. And this next bit is the part where you tell me I'm crazy."

"Oh, I don't know about that. We have a high tolerance for crazy things."

"Her name is Star Butterfly. She's a magical princess from another dimension." Marco braced himself to hear laughter, but it didn't come.

Mabel's eyes were wide. Her mouth agape in surprise. "Go on."
Marco kept lookout for guys in white uniforms coming to catch him with a net. He told her the story of him and Star. Some details were left out because he wasn't ready to share everything just yet.

"I believe you." Mabel said when Marco finished.

He smiled. "Really? I wouldn't." Marco said.

"No one could just make up a story like that and tell it with a straight face."

"A crazy person might. Everyone I know thinks I'm crazy." Marco made a twirling motion with his finger next to his head.

"You aren't crazy. I'm a good judge of crazy. I'm also a good judge of character. You aren't lying."

"Mabel. Cab's here." The bartender said.

"Could you please help me get Dipper into the cab?"

Marco looked at the time. It was very late. "That took a while." Marco said as he helped Dipper walk.

"Yeah. This is a small town. There aren't many cabs." said Mabel as they shoved her brother into the back seat. Mabel joined him. "Can you give us a minute?" she asked the driver.

"Sure, but hurry up. I don't want to have to charge for cleaning up."

A quick sniff made Marco wonder if the cleaning charge had ever been used for its intended purpose.

Mabel said, "Marco, I really think we can help you. Come to the Mystery Shack on Gopher Road outside of town tomorrow morning. Hopefully this dum-dum will wake up."

"I will Mabel. And thanks for listening."

Mabel smiled and nodded to the driver. As the cab drove off Marco could hear Mabel shouting "To true love!" out of the car window.

When Marco got into the hotel room he lay on the bed above the covers. He stared at the ceiling and thought about the flashback he had. A flashback triggered by the sight of Dipper's birthmark.

==================================

Star and Marco had defeated Ludo's forces again, but they were far from the city.

Ludo kept opening portals during the fight. Marco and Star had chased him back and forth through dimensions. When the fight ended and Ludo's forces retreated, Marco and Star found themselves in the wilderness. Soon, night had fallen and the dark forest surrounded them.

In the confusion of the fight, they had left the dimensional scissors back in Star's room. She used the wand as a flashlight.

"Marco? I'm getting worried. Are we going in circles?"

"Don't worry, Star. We're not."

"You sure? We've been walking for hours."
"I'm positive."

"Okay, but can we stop? My feet are tired."

Marco could use a break himself. "Sure. Let's get to that clearing." Marco pointed to an open area between the trees.

When they got there, Star looked up in wonder. "Earth's sky is so pretty!"

"Yeah. We're far from the city. The stars are really bright out here."

Star turned off her wandlight. "I've never seen it like this!" she said as she sat down on the grass.

They had never been caught out in the forest this late. It was a warm and cloudless summer night with a new moon. Stars that were hidden by the lights of the city now came out to be seen. The milky way stretched overhead and the sky shined like a blanket of diamonds.

"I'm sure Mewni's sky is just as beautiful."

"No. The night sky on Mewni is not as dark. And it's more violet than black. We never see this many stars." She looked at Marco. "Will you teach me something about Earth stars?"

Star gestured for him to join her on the ground. He sat beside her. The grass they sat on was actually very comfortable.

Marco loved astronomy. He was happy Star was interested. "Sure! Does Mewni make constellations from the stars?"

"They do! But I think ours are different."

"Let me show you one of the most famous Earth ones. Do you see those seven really bright ones?"

Marco did his best to point them out to Star.

"I think so."

"What does that look like to you?"

"I think it looks like a bent scepter."

Marco looked at the sky. "Yeah. I guess I can see that." he looked over to see Star, gazing up in wonder.

He continued, "Different cultures see them as different things. In some other places, the people look at them and see a plow. You looked and saw a bent scepter."

Star asked, "What do you see Marco?"

"I see a ladle. Most people here do too. We call it the 'Big Dipper'."

"Ah! I see it!"

"Good, because it's a really useful thing to know."

"It is? It's pretty, but it's useful too?"

"Yes. Go ahead and find the two stars that form the front edge of the ladle."
"Okay."

"Now, imagine a line starting from the star at the bottom to the one at the top."

"Mm-hm."

"Imagine that line extending through and past the star at the top. Keep it straight.

"Am I looking for something along the line?"

"Yes, follow the line and you'll find a star that is brighter than any stars near it. It's special." Marco did his best to point out the star he was talking about.

"That one? It doesn't seem special. It's brighter than the ones around it, but there are so many that are brighter. Like that one." Star pointed one out.

"That one? That's not a star, Star. That's a planet. Venus."

"Can you tell me more about Venus."

Marco gazed at the Star on the ground for a moment before beginning. He looked at the bright planet.

"A long time ago on Earth, before people knew anything about what was above the sky, they looked at that one and thought it was special and beautiful. After all, it was the brightest star in the sky."

"It was special in other ways too. They could see that a few stars seemed to move along paths in the sky. That was one of them."

"Some cultures believed it was the goddess of love. For the Romans her name was Venus. A woman so beautiful that any who saw her fell instantly in love with her. Flowers sprung from the ground where she walked."

Star's face lit up as she looked at it.

"Time went on and people learned that the stars that moved weren't stars after all. They were planets."

"So Venus is a planet like Earth?" Star inquired.

"Yes and no." Marco said.

Star moved closer to Marco and he put his arm around her. She didn't seem to mind. She leaned on him a little.

"One thing you should know about planets is that they don't have their own light."

"They don't? But Venus is so bright."

"That's because Venus reflects light from the Sun. And it does it in a way that makes it look brighter than anything except the Sun and Moon. But it can't shine on it's own."

"When I asked you if Venus is a planet like Earth, you said 'yes and no.'"

"Star, you've been here a year now. What do you think of this planet? What do you think of Earth?"
"Oh! It's so great! I love it here! It's got so many wonderful things to see and do and try! Plus I love the people here, like..." Star looked at Marco for a moment before quickly looking back to the sky.

Marco paused a moment to look at Star before continuing. "What do you imagine the planet Venus is like?"

"It is so bright and beautiful. It must be a wonderful place."

"So did people a long time ago. For the same reasons too."

"Maybe we could visit? Maybe we could get there with the dimensional scissors."

Marco hadn't considered this possibility.

"You can do that? No. Please don't. Don't even try." He pleaded.

"You don't want to go?"

"It's a very bad idea, Star."

"It is? Why?"

"Star, I should warn you, this next part of the story is kind of sad. But I think you should know."

"It's okay Marco. I want to know more."

"As time went on, people learned even more about Venus. We learned that, unlike Earth, which is a planet of life, the truth is that Venus is a planet of death."

Star was silent. She searched for Marco's right hand to hold. They found each other's hands and squeezed.

"Venus might have been like Earth once, but something went wrong a long time ago. Now, the air there is poisonous and so heavy that it crushes like an ocean. It's hot enough to melt lead. Any water has boiled away. Hurricane force winds sweep the planet. Venus shines so brightly because of the reflective clouds. Clouds of acid."

Marco turned to Star and found that she had a sad look. "Star, I'm sorry. I didn't want to make you sad."

"It's terrible to know that places like that exist." Star said.

Marco tried to comfort her and stroked her back.

"No. No, Star. It's not. It's the terrible truth about a terrible place. But it's not terrible to 'know' the truth."

"What do you mean?"

"Star, have you ever heard the saying, 'The bitterest truth is better than the sweetest lie'?"

Star shook her head. She looked at Marco and silently listened.

"Imagine what would happen if we tried to go to Venus without knowing the truth about what kind of place it is. It's better to know the truth than to believe something that's false."
Star nodded. She turned away from Venus and looked at Marco.

"Star, can you still find the star I showed you earlier? I still haven't told you why it's special."

Star looked up and searched. "That one, right?" she pointed to it.

Marco smiled at her. Star smiled at him in return.

"It doesn't matter which is brightest. That star is more important than any other in the sky."

"Why that one?"

"It's a guide. It's Polaris. It's the North Star."

Star looked at it intently.

"As long as you can see it, that star always shows the way north. Travelers could use it to find their way. Without it, people might not have been able to explore the world. It's even helping us now."

"It is?"

"Sure. We've been walking for hours. You were afraid that we were walking in circles, not making any progress. But because of the North Star, even in the dark, I know we aren't just going around and around. We're going forward. It's helping to guide us home."

"Wow." Marco could feel Star's thumb rubbing his palm.

Marco's held Star's hand a little more firmly. "The most important and special Star to me." Marco was glad it was too dark for Star to see him blush.

There was a pause between them. They were silently gazing but not at the sky.

"...Marco?"

There was something in the way Star said his name. Her voice trembled. Marco's heart was pounding. His blood rushed in his ears.

"...Star."

If he did this, everything would change. Was he ready to be that bold? Somehow, they were already facing each other. She was so close. His arms were already around her. His fingers brushed the bare skin on her arms. It was warm and smooth and soft. Her sweet scent filled his senses.

Then he hesitated.

"Are you ready to go? I think we can find a road before too much longer." Marco helped her stand.

"Yeah." She sounded sad.

Marco reached for her hand and she took it.

"Are you okay, Star?"

Star squeezed his hand but didn't say anything for a moment. Then she interlocked their fingers. "I'm okay."

They started walking.
"Want to know something else about the stars?"

"Sure."

"The Big Dipper is actually also a part of a larger constellation. It forms the tail of Ursa Major. The Great Bear..." Marco pointed to the sky.

Soon, they would find a road which they followed until they found an old gas station. They used the payphone to call for a ride which took a long time to reach them. It would be very late when they arrived home.

Marco saw Star to her room and she seemed like she had something to tell him. But instead she just wished him good night. He did the same. There was a lot left unsaid.

In his room Marco lay on his bed above the covers staring at the ceiling. He covered his face with his pillow. He then balled up a fist and began to punch himself through the cushion, punctuating each strike with a word.

"Stupid. Stupid. Stupid. Stupid. Stupid..."

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Back in the hotel room, Marco lay on the bed above the covers staring at the ceiling. He couldn't clear his mind of thoughts.

"I'm here now because of magic."

"His birthmark is the Big Dipper."

"He'll lead me to the North Star."

"I should have kissed her then..."

He turned out the light.

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continuará
"The Mystery Shack. Yeesh, what a dump." Marco thought as he parked his motorcycle. How long ago had the 'S' fallen from the sign?

The mechanic had repaired Marco's bike. It was now late morning.

Marco entered the gift shop. He looked around at the clutter and saw a mounted bearcorn head. His hopes began to rise.

He approached to inspect the taxidermy. His face fell when he looked closer. A fake. This was just a regular bear head. The horn of another animal was glued to it. Dried droplets of the epoxy used could be seen at the horn's base.

There was a group waiting. Was there a tour? Maybe he should join them.

Suddenly, a man appeared in a puff of smoke.

Marco regarded the man in front of him. He looked to be in his late 60's. He was dressed in a black suit and had an eyepatch over his left eye. He held a cane, but there was no limp in the man's gait. On the man's head was a red fez with a gold symbol.

"WELCOME TRAVELERS, TO THE MYSTERY SHACK!"

"I'm Stan Pines, and I have spent a lifetime travelling the globe in search of the strange, the bizarre, the magical, and the unexplained, for YOU! Follow me and prepare to be amazed!"

The group followed into the museum.

"We'll begin our tour with our first exhibit. This fearsome creature comes from South America where it stalked its prey on cacao plantations. Centuries of exposure have made it's flesh merge with the vegetation and transform... Behold! THE CHOCOCABRA"

Stan pulled off the cloth to reveal an old chocolate carving of a monster. The heat of the lights had melted parts of the candy sculpture. Tourists 'ooh-ed' and 'ahh-ed'. Camera flashes went off.

Marco was not impressed. Chococabra? That means 'chocolate goat'. Marco looked at the sculpture. It tried but failed to evoke a fanged and clawed reptile standing on it's hind legs. A brown drop of
liquid fell from an outstretched arm. Then the whole thing collapsed and fell over. No one else noticed. Their guide had already redirected the group's attention.

"Tremble in fear... THE QUETZALCOATRACK!"

Stan opened the curtain to reveal a taxidermy display of large snakes that had been joined together in the form of a a coat rack. Feathers had been glued to the snakes.

Marco thought, "Why doesn't anyone call him out?" But the other tourists were already taking selfies with the display. "Is everyone that gullible?"

"Gaze in awe at... The MUMMY OF THE EGYPTIAN GOD KAMEN-RAMEN!"

A turtle shell, perched atop a headless mannequin. The whole thing had been wrapped in gauze bandages and decorated with a plastic jewel gun.

The tour continued for a while longer. Each exhibit was a bigger hoax than the last. Marco almost left the tour in disgust.

"Follow me back to the gift shop where you can buy stuff. Donations are appreciated." As tourists passed him, the man held out a giant glass jar. Marco couldn't believe his eyes. The people were dropping wads of cash in.

Marco was disappointed. Had Mabel been playing with him? She didn't seem like the type. But leading him here, to this farcical place? And this old crook? He's nothing but a fraud and a shyster.

"C'mon kid, pay for the tour." the man said to Marco.

"That was a complete rip-off. Where did you get those exhibits? An arts and crafts class for second graders?" Marco retorted.

The man took the money from the jar and stuffed handfuls of bills in his pockets. He laughed and put the empty jar on the register counter. "A skeptic! Kid, this is the finest collection of the paranormal you will ever see." He gestured with his cane at the junk around him.

Marco heard a cheery voice from behind him. "Marco! You're here! I see you've met my Grunkle Stan. Have you asked him about Mewni yet?"

The cane slipped out of Stan's hand and clattered on the floorboards. A pained look appeared on his face momentarily before he collected himself.

"Mabel, where did you hear that word?" Stan asked his grandniece. Marco could tell he was struggling to remain calm.

"Mewni? From him." Mabel pointed to Marco. "He told me he was in love with their princess."

"ALRIGHT EVERYONE, LISTEN UP! THE MYSTERY SHACK IS NOW CLOSED! EVERYONE GET OUT!" shouted Stan as he herded tourists toward the exit over their protests. Marco was being pushed out with them until he was yanked out of the crowd by Stan. "Not you. You stay."

After the last tourist was outside, Stan locked the door, flipped the sign from 'Open' to 'Closed', and drew the blinds.

Stan flipped up the eye patch to look at Marco with both eyes. Marco was surprised to see that was
yet another lie.

"All right kid, start talking. What do you know about Mewni!" Stan demanded. He got close in Marco's face in an attempt to intimidate him.

Marco would not be intimidated. "Whoa, whoa, WHOA! I came here for answers, not more questions! And certainly not for that so-called tour. Before I tell you anything, I need to know if I am wasting my breath or my time here!"

Stan paused for a moment looking Marco dead in the eyes. Marco was determined to not look away. Eventually Stan relented.

Marco watched as Stan proceeded into a closet and began to rummage. Marco kept alert. What if Stan was retrieving a weapon?

He emerged from the closet holding an old shoe box. "Here." Stan said as he handed the box to Marco.

Marco opened the box and looked inside. His eyes became wide and he reached inside to touch. He knew instantly that they were real. The subtle tingle of magic could be felt. His legs became weak and he fell to his knees.

Inside the box was a pair of dimensional scissors.

Marco took the scissors in his right hand. He concentrated on his destination, and made the cutting motion.

Nothing happened. Marco's hopes were crushed.

"No..."

"So, you do know what these are," Stan said.

Marco spoke through an unsteady voice. "I... I'll tell you everything. Help me. I need answers. Why don't these work?" Marco was on the verge of tears.

"I'd better wake up Dipper." Mabel said.

Marco sat at the table with the Pines family. Mabel had prepared coffee for everyone, but Marco was still focused on the only physical evidence that his life with Star had been real. The first proof that he wasn't delusional.

Dipper was still groggy and rubbed the sleep from his eyes as he sipped his coffee. "Hey, didn't we meet at the bar?"

"I'm surprised you remember anything after how I found you last night!" Mabel said to Dipper. "Marco, why don't you start from the beginning." she suggested.

Marco took a deep breath and spoke calmly.

"I'm Marco Diaz from Echo Creek, California. When I was fourteen my family was chosen as the host family for a girl visiting as an exchange student. Her name was Star Butterfly. She was really the heir to a kingdom in another dimension. Mewni..."
When Marco finished his tale, Dipper said, "Wow. That's pretty unbelievable. Magic led you to Gravity Falls? To the bar? To me?"

"It's not like you to be skeptical, bro. You're usually the first on board with this stuff." Mabel said. Stan was looking at Marco silently as if judging him. "I believe every word." He finally said after a while.

"You do? How about some answers, Grunkle Stan?! Real answers! What are those?" Dipper said pointing to the box.

"Dipper, those are dimensional scissors. They open portals between worlds."

"Mr. Pines, please tell me. How did you get those?" Marco asked remembering his manners. He was Marco's elder and not family. It would be inappropriate to call him 'Stan'.

"I got them from the Queen of Mewni."

"You knew Moon Butterfly?!"

"Yeah, but she wasn't the queen. Not yet anyway. I got those from her mother, Queen Rose Butterfly."

Marco remembered his talks with Star about her family. Rose Butterfly was Star's grandmother. She reigned as queen before Star's mother.

"Grunkle Stan! Have you been to Mewni?!" Mabel asked.

A look of realization came over Dipper. "Grunkle Ford's portal machine."

Marco was elated. The Pines family had the ability to open a dimensional portal.

"Dipper mentioned him last night. He was an expert in the paranormal? A genius?" Marco said.

"The auth."

"Grunkle Stan! You promised you would never introduce him like that again!" Dipper interrupted. Stan sighed in resignation. "My brother."

"Why have we not heard about any of this before?! When was this?!" Dipper demanded.

"It was a long, long time ago. And it's something that I had to force myself to bury."

"Grunkle Stan. Please tell us. What happened?" Mabel's eyes became big. She was attempting to convince Stan to talk with puppy dog eyes.

Stan looked at Mabel, and his stern look began to fracture. He looked at Marco who had a pleading expression.

Stan sighed again. "You know what, kid? You opened up to us. So I'm gonna open up to you... I'll be right back."

When he returned he had a bottle of whiskey and some glasses. He also had a box of tissues which
he placed on the table.

Dipper asked gesturing to the tissues, "Are we really going to need those?"

"I know *I* will." said Stan as he poured himself a generous glass. "Any good story has a beginning. This one begins in Glass Shard Beach, New Jersey, 1960-something..."

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continuará
"...By day I was Stanford Pines: Mr. Mystery. But by night, I was down in the basement, trying to bring the real Stanford back."

"And eventually, you did." Marco commented.

"Yeah, but it took thirty years. It was only when Dipper and Mabel first came to stay for the summer. Dipper found the third journal. The second had been found by Gideon and we were able to get it back. That was nine years ago."

Marco was thoughtful. It was already hard enough to have been separated from Star for five years. He didn't want to imagine being separated from someone he cared about for the time Stan had been separated from his brother. Ten years, then another thirty on top of that.

"What happened to your brother?"

Stan looked sad. "He's gone now." he said before he took a swig of his drink.

The same vague answer Dipper gave at the bar.

Marco looked at Dipper and Mabel. Both had a somber expression. Marco previously assumed that Ford Pines had died, but he wasn't so sure now. There was clearly more to the story that they would to keep to themselves. But, the Pines family had already opened up to him. If they didn't want to share that part, Marco wouldn't press them.

"Grunkle Stan, but what about Mewni?" Mabel asked.

Dipper answered, "Don't you see Mabel? Grunkle Stan only had the first journal for thirty years. Without all three journals, he couldn't get the machine to work right. But he could get the machine to work *wrong*!"

Stan stuck a finger out on the hand holding his drink to point at Dipper. "You always were the smart one, kid."

Mabel stuck her tongue out at her brother.

"The basics of the machine were in the first journal. Theory, formulas, mechanics, et cetera. Plus, the machine had already been built. But I wasn't a genius like my brother. It took years for me to even begin to understand any of it. And I was missing details on fine tuning, stability, and most importantly destination control. All that was in the second and third journals. It was like the difference between breaking something with a sledgehammer, and cutting something with a scalpel."

"But you kept trying anyway." Dipper said.

"My life settled into a routine after I lost my brother. Running the Mystery Shack and trying to get the machine to work again. Night after night of tinkering, studying, and testing. Eventually, even a blind squirrel will find an acorn."

"...By day I was Stanford Pines: Mr. Mystery. But by night, I was down in the basement, trying to bring the real Stanford back."
"When did it happen?"

"I had been at it for seven years. I was thirty five..."

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Stan finished resetting the circuit breaker. He was determined to isolate the short. This was his eighth attempt tonight.

"Activation in ten… nine… eight… Eh, nobody else is here. Who am I counting down for?" he said as he threw the master switch.

The machine whirred to life for an instant before the circuit breaker tripped and cut the power.

Stan was tired and frustrated. He had had enough for the night. He cursed and threw the screwdriver he was holding to the floor in anger.

The tool hit the concrete floor at an angle. The elasticity of the plastic handle caused the tool to rebound. It flew toward the open breaker panel.

Stan crossed the marked safety line on the floor to retrieve it. When the screwdriver landed inside, the metal bridged exposed contacts.

The machine sparked to life. Objects in the lab began to float and the portal began to pull unsecured objects into it.

Stan was caught unprepared. He reached for a support column as he floated past it, but the column was just out of reach. He couldn't stop himself from being pulled into the portal. He screamed as he passed into the white light.

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He hit the ground on his side and groaned in pain. He was disoriented momentarily before he remembered the accident in the lab. He had been pulled into the portal. Where was he?

He looked around to see that he was in forest meadow. It was night, but there was something wrong with it. The sky was an odd shade. He began to search for the North Star to orient himself but stopped immediately.

"Hot Belgian Waffles!" he exclaimed. The multiple moons and huge planets visible in the sky made it clear that he wasn't on Earth.

Was this where his brother went?

These questions would have to wait for later. A bloodcurdling shriek drew his attention. A large ostrich-like creature with two heads was charging towards him. Stan prepared for a fight. He searched around him for something he could use as a weapon. He found only a rock and a heavy tree branch. He picked them up and readied himself.

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Stan stoked his campfire. He hoped that the fire would keep other predators away for the night. The roasted meat of the creature that attacked him tasted like chicken. He would have to find his way out of the forest when dawn came.

He was grateful that he was still fully dressed while he was working. He pulled the white lab coat
tighter around him for warmth. It would have been bad if he were caught out here in the wilderness in just his boxer shorts.

He trudged through the forest for hours before he found a road cutting through it. He followed the road in a direction he thought would get him out of the forest quickest, but he had no way of knowing for certain.

After more hours of walking Stan heard a scream. A woman's scream, calling for help. Without thinking, Stan ran towards the voice.

A carriage was stopped in the road. It looked like something from a fairy tale. An ornate carriage decorated in white, blue, and gold. It would not be out of place in medieval Europe were it not for the two beasts hitched to it.

Goat horns protruded through the golden manes surrounding the beasts' lion heads. Their red bodies were scaly like a giant reptile. The small wings attached to their hindquarters were far too small to be useful for flight.

One of the beasts had been slain by arrows, it's body lay bleeding in the road. It was still hitched to the carriage. Unable to flee, the other beast reared and roared in terror.

The coachman was slumped in the driver's bench. An arrow had pierced his neck. His dead eyes stared at Stan.

But what really made Stan pause was the band of monsters that were surrounding the carriage. They came in all forms. From flora to fauna. Reptiles, mammals, and birds crossed with humans.

A monster tore open the door to the carriage and reached inside. It pulled a screaming woman out by her long blonde hair.

"LET HER GO!" Stan shouted as he leapt in to fight. A hard kick to the monster's head made it release the woman who stumbled to the ground. She looked up at Stan in surprise.

Another monster attempted to grab Stan from the rear, but an elbow to the gut staggered it. Stan took the opportunity to turn and knock the monster out with a well placed punch.

Stan knew that there were too many opponents to fight. They had to escape. "C'mon! You have to get up! We have to run!" he shouted to the woman.

She scrambled to her feet.

"Can you unhitch... that?!" he said pointing. Stan knew that the beast wasn't a horse, but didn't know what to call it. He fought to create a clearing for him and the woman near the beast. While she worked to release it, Stan battled for time.

As she was undoing the last fasteners Stan was overwhelmed. There were too many, and he was only one man. He was thrown to the ground. "RIDE!" he shouted at the woman just before a kick to his midsection knocked the wind from him.

She had released the beast and was trying to calm it enough to mount it. Monsters were almost able to reach her by the time she jumped on, but she was able to ride out of the melee.

Stan was glad that he was able to help save the woman. But now he had to face his own fate. He had
failed his brother. He still blamed himself. Hurting and tired, he closed his eyes as the monsters closed in around him.

"HYAA!" the woman shouted as her mount barreled through the throngs of monsters sending a few flying. She kicked a monster looming over Stan in the temple. As it crumpled to the ground she reached her hand out to Stan. "C'MON! LET'S GO!" she shouted to him.

Stan took her hand and she helped pull him onto the beast behind her. Stan held on to the woman's waist. She then tugged on the beast's mane like she was holding reins and they rode to escape from the monsters together.

They rode the beast hard until it started to tire. When they felt that they were far enough away from the danger, they stopped to gather themselves.

"Are you okay?" Stan asked the woman as they dismounted.

She looked at Stan and for the first time he noticed the gold stars on her cheeks. He wondered if they were makeup.

The woman nodded silently. Then she began to tremble. Tears began to flow from her blue eyes. "Cedric..."

Stan opened his arms to her. She accepted his offer and cried into them.

"Was he your driver?"

She nodded. "He was my friend..."

Stan let the woman cry.

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They walked with the beast to save its strength. They were silent until the woman spoke.

"Thank you for saving me. I know that you didn't have to do that."

"Yes I did. Who knows what would have happened to you if I didn't. Any idea why they were trying to kidnap you?"

Seemingly confused, she asked, "Don't you know who I am?"

Stan shook his head. "I'm not from around here. I'm from-"

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"WHO WAS SHE?! WAS SHE THE QUEEN?!" Mabel asked excitedly. She was hyperventilating. Dipper handed her a paper bag to breathe into.

Marco wondered silently. A blonde haired blue eyed woman with marks on her cheeks.

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"-another dimension." Stan said.

"Oh. Okay."
"Doesn't that, ya know, surprise you?"

"Not really. Dimensional travellers are common here." she informed Stan.

"They are?" Stan was shocked. Dimensional travel was common. His brother might be here. "Where is here, anyway?"

"Mewni."

Stan was silent.

"You have no idea where you are, do you?"

He shook his head. "People where I'm from don't really travel between dimensions much."

"This is the dimension of Mewni. There are many kingdoms in this dimension. The most powerful is also called Mewni."

"Is that where we are now? In the kingdom of Mewni?"

"No. We're in the kingdom of Xix."

"Is this your home?"

"No. My family is from Mewni, the kingdom."

"Oh? Just visiting?"

"I was travelling to Xix on official business. I was being escorted there the Royal Guard of Xix. My kingdom is showing support to lower agressions between them and the kingdom of Quosto."

"What's going on?"

"Xix and Quosto have been engaged in a cold war for years. Xix rules over a very valuable region on its border with Quosto. Quosto has a very old claim to the region, but the people there broke away decades ago. They rebelled against a corrupt and repressive regent. The ruler of Xix at the time offered them protection."

"Decades huh? Are you a peacemaker? A government official?"

"My presence here is a demonstration of Mewni's friendship with Xix. Quosto has been making overtures to war recently, but we are confident that they won't attack and risk additional conflict with Mewni if I am there."

"Just by you being here? Is that why those monsters were trying to kidnap you?"

"Maybe. There are others who do want a war to start. Conquerors, warlords, and profiteers who would benefit from it. They've been known to hire monsters as mercenaries. They drew off my escorts and made the manticores drawing the carriage panic and run."

"It was an ambush. I'm sorry about your friend, Cedric."

The woman looked sad. "Thank you. He was my servant, but he was also my friend. I have so few."

"What? Someone as nice as you? You must have lots of friends."
"No. My position separates me. Not a lot of people even get close. Only nobles and other royalty."

Stan paused at the revelation. "You're royalty."

She smiled at Stan. "Yes." A look of realization came over her face. "My goodness! We don't even know each other's names!"

"Well, I'm Stan Pines." he held out his hand and smiled.

"I'm pleased to meet you Stan Pines." she looked at his hand for a moment before she took it in both of hers. "Is this how you greet people where you're from?"

Stan blushed slightly from her touch.

"This is how we do it here." The woman stepped back, curtsied and smiled. "I am Princess Daisy Butterfly. Sister of her highness Queen Rose Butterfly of Mewni."

Stan bowed. "Nice to meet you, Princess Daisy Butterfly."

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Mabel was staring at Stan. She rested her cheeks in her hands with her elbows on the table. A goofy dreamy smile was plastered on her face.

Dipper was furiously scribbling notes.

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"Where are you from Stan Pines?"

"Earth, and you can just call me Stan."

Daisy smiled. "Earth. Not many travelers between here and there."

"No? I thought you said dimensional travelers were common."

"They are. But most people here find Earth too fantastical. But there are many, many other dimensions. Did you not know that?"

"No. Actually I didn't even know about this one until I got here. Dimensional travel is sort of unknown on Earth."

"And yet, here you are. What brought you to Mewni?"

"An accident."

"Oh?"

"An accident with a dimensional portal took my brother away a few years ago. I've been trying to bring him back ever since. Another accident happened last night, and now I'm here."

"I see. Well, I don't think it happened entirely by chance. Did you arrive in the forest after your accident?"

"Yeah, I did."

"Fate put you right where you needed to be to come to my aid."
"Fate could've at least given me a warning. I was attacked by a giant two-headed bird-thingy. It tasted okay."

Daisy laughed. "When we get back to the castle of Xix, you'll have come with me to try some of that beast barbecued. It's the least I can do to repay you."

The growing sound of a stampede made the pair stop and turn. A group of mounted soldiers was approaching. Their banner fluttered in the breeze.

"It's my escort. Stay behind me for a moment. I don't want them to think you're a threat." Daisy said as she waved to the approaching soldiers.

The mounted soldier in the lead approached. "Princess! Are you alright?! Are you hurt?! Who is that behind you?!" she shouted and began to draw her weapon.

"Captain Crystal! Put your weapon away! This is Stan Pines! He saved me from the monster attack! He's a friend!"

The captain eyed Stan warily, then put her weapon back in it's sheath. The soldier dismounted and approached.

"Our thanks to you then Stan Pines. But you have no armor or weapon. How did you fight the horde?"

"I might not have armor, but I do have weapons." Stan held up his fists and introduced them. "This is weapon number one, and this is weapon number two!"

"He fought them bare handed!" Daisy said to the soldiers.

The Captain laughed. "That is the most foolhardy thing I've heard in a long time! I like you, Stan Pines!"

She then turned to the princess.

"Princess, we feared the worst when we found the carriage. We feel sorrow for the loss of your servant. A few soldiers stayed behind to lay him to rest. It was all we could do for him."

"Thank you."

"We should ride for the castle. We can still make it there before dark. It's good that you still have a mount. Stan Pines, you can ride with me."

Daisy laughed. "We did just fine together. Stan will ride with me."

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"Marco? Did Star ever mention Daisy?" Mabel asked.

"I remember her mentioning her name, but she didn't say much about her."

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Stan was trying his hand at riding the manticore. He drove while Daisy sat behind him.

"Do you have a wife Stan?"
“No.” Stan flatly stated.

“I find that surprising. Why not?”

“It’s never been in the cards for me.” Stan wanted to steer the conversation away from himself. “What about you? Is there a fella waiting for you at home?”

“No. Not anymore. He died a few years ago.”

“Aw, man. I’m sorry.”

“It’s alright. I don’t mind talking about it.”

“What about kids?”

“That wasn’t in the cards for us.”

Stan felt that he was wading deep into uncomfortable territory.

“You seem tense.” Daisy said.

“What?! Me?! Naw!” Stan nervously responded.

“You’re afraid of getting inappropriately personal. Relax. I’ll tell you more about me. Maybe later you’ll tell me more about yourself. Deal?”

Stan wasn’t used to talking on this level with anybody. For years he kept people at arm’s distance. But there was something about this woman, and he wanted to get closer.

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“She told me all about herself. Political marriage at eighteen. Her husband was a prince and a naval officer. They were married for an alliance between their two kingdoms. They were married for eight years. He died six years earlier at sea.” Stan said to Marco, Dipper, and Mabel.

“What happened to the alliance after that?” Dipper asked.

“They didn’t have kids and her husband was an only child. No heirs. His cousin was made heir and he was already married. Alliances changed when he took their crown. Daisy was sent back to her sister, Queen Rose.”

“How sad!” Mabel exclaimed.

“Another political marriage was unlikely. Rumors were going around that Daisy couldn’t have children. Without possible heirs, any alliance formed by marriage would have been considered weak. But she was still sister to the Queen of Mewni. So she became an ambassador.”

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A man embraced Daisy as she dismounted the manticore as they entered the castle gate.

“Daisy! It is good that you are safe. We were very worried when we received reports of the attack. We sent out additional scouts and troops in search of you and your attackers.”

“I’m okay! I’m okay!” Daisy laughed.
Stan dismounted the manticore after observing this exchange.

"I am sorry about Cedric. Did he have any family?"

"No. He grew up in an orphanage. We were his only family." Daisy said sadly.

"That is a terrible shame. We will have a marker placed at his resting spot."

"Yes. That would be very kind of you."

"Captain, I'll need to be debriefed on the events of the attack." Brad said.

"I'll have a full report for you shortly."

Stan cleared his throat.

"Oh, my! Where are my manners? Stan, this is Prince Brad of Xix. Brad, this is Stan Pines. He's the one who rescued me from the monster ambush."

Brad bowed deeply to Stan. "You deserve all of our gratitude! Are you a knight Stan Pines?"

Before Stan could respond, a knight interrupted. "Your highness! A monster has been captured outside the eastern wall! He may have been a scout!"

"Oh dear! Please excuse me. I must deal with this quickly. The monster may have information relating to Princess Daisy's attackers. I would like to continue our conversation later. Goodbye for now."

After the prince departed, Stan asked Daisy, "Didn't you say that you didn't have a guy waiting for you?"

"Mewni has had close relations with Xix for generations. It's never needed an alliance marriage. Prince Brad and I are childhood friends, but there is no romantic love between us." Daisy said.

"I do wish that were otherwise, Princess." said a gravelly voice.

Stan and Daisy turned to see an old man dressed in regal clothing. A crown sat on a head of thinning grey hair.

"I keep telling that boy to take Daisy as his wife. He's already thirty three for crying out loud! But nooooo! He says that he wishes to marry for love." the king said with a smile.

"Hello your Majesty." Daisy hugged the man and kissed his cheek. "King Sam, this is Stan Pines. He was in the forest and came to my aid when the attack happened. Stan, this is King Sam of Xix. Brad's father."

"Another brave knight come to capture the Princess's heart! Oh well, another avenue closed. I do wish my son would get to finding a wife. I would like to retire soon."

"This isn't Mewni Kingdom, your Majesty. Nothing is stopping you from turning the crown over to Brad, whether he's married or not."

"Nooope. There's still the matter of an heir. I feel like dangling the crown in front of him is the only pressure I can apply. What is it with our family? We seem to marry so late. If I had married sooner, maybe I would already be blessed by grandchildren. What a dream."
"I'm sure everything will work out in due time."

"Stan Pines, you're a dimensional traveler, aren't you?" The king turned to Daisy. "Lucky you, Princess!"

"How could you tell?" Stan asked.

"Oh, I'm very good at this game. And you are from... Andromeda, I think?"

"Earth, your royalness."

"Earth?! So very rare! We haven't had a traveler from Earth pass through here for years."

"Has anyone else from Earth has passed through in the last seven? I'm looking for someone."

"The last seven? I don't think so. But that is a long time, and there are many kingdoms in this dimension. Perhaps they traveled through another. Talk to my assistant. He can make inquiries. And if there is anything more I can do for you, don't hesitate to ask."

"You're pretty generous, King Sam."

"It's the least we can do for someone who would leap into harm's way to protect the Princess. You have no idea how important she is to Xix. Please make yourself at home."

The king departed and Stan turned to Daisy.

"He seems to like you a lot. And he wants you to marry the prince."

"Yes, he's one of the few who don't believe the gossip about me. But it doesn't really matter. Brad has a secret. He's already in love with someone."

"Why hasn't Brad just married this girl then? Seems like that would make his dad happy."

"He can't. He says she's not from a noble family."

"Oh," Stan said disappointed. "Royalty. Well, lah-dee-dah!"

"Nobility and Royalty actually can marry non-nobles. But only if they are from an outside dimension. Like Earth." Daisy said.

Stan smiled at her before commenting, "Well that's dumb! Why can't he just marry her?"

"It *is* dumb!" Daisy agreed. "They'll tell you that it's to ensure a strong ruling class. But I think the rule is to maintain the separation between nobles and commoners. There are problems with such a small pool of eligible nobles. Allowing marriage from outside the dimension allows them more freedom of choice, but still maintains the class division within it."

"Somebody should shake this up."

"I hope someone does someday. But, it will be difficult. This is the only way the people here have ever known."

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"When we first started dating, I said something to Star about how she was royalty and I wasn't. She said not to worry and that it was something that would take care of itself."
"Sounds like she had plans for you." Stan said.

"OH MY G- THAT'S WHAT SHE WAS TRYING TO TELL ME!"

"What? What was she trying to tell you?" Dipper asked.

"My mom said that Star's mother didn't look well at our high school graduation! Stan just said that Prince Brad could inherit the throne of Xix whether he was married or not. Unlike Mewni!..."

Mabel patted Marco's shoulder.

"If her mother was sick, Star was going to inherit the throne. But she had to be married. Star wanted me to come with her..."

"But that was almost five years ago!" Dipper said.

"...she's already married..." Marco was crushed.

"Hey! You don't know that! She called you! Remember? She led you here with magic! She needs you!" Mabel tried to reassure Marco.

"Yeah, kid! Those Mewnians are a smart bunch! They might have found a way around that by now!" Stan said.

When he was following the bears, Marco told himself that he would see this through no matter what. He'd already come this far and he would go as far as it takes.

"You're right. I don't know that for sure. I shouldn't just assume the worst like that."

Stan refilled his drink and poured a glass for Marco.

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"Hello, Stan Pines." Said the prince as he approached.

"Hey, Brad."

"How's the search going?"

"Bad. Another response came from another kingdom. They said that the last Earth traveler through there was eleven years ago. And it was a woman travelling with an eccentric old man"

"That's too bad. What is that now? Fifteen responses? All no sightings of your brother?"

"Yeah. I'm beginning to think that my brother didn't wind up in Mewni after all."

"You got here quite by accident, and there are many, many dimensions. It is very likely that he was sent to another dimension. Without magic, dimensional travel is difficult to control."

"Should I go back to working on the machine? I was getting nowhere fast."

"That may still be the most likely way to find him. Even if you traveled with dimensional scissors, you could spend years searching and still come up empty handed." the prince paused before continuing. "But you don't want to return to Earth yet, do you?"

Stan didn't answer the question. He looked around before speaking. "How are things with your
"secret girlfriend?"

"As they have been for years. Unchanged. It is not fair to either of us."

"Still never gonna tell Daisy or me who she is, huh?"

"Much as I would like to be able, some things are better off secret."

"I hear that! What would happen if you eloped?"

"I would be forbidden from ascending to my kingdom's throne. The marriage would be voided, and she would be exiled. A bad outcome all around. If I had a sibling to ascend instead of me, I would have offered to flee with her already. Perhaps to Earth. You're lucky you're from another dimension."

"Lucky isn't really how I would describe myself." Stan said.

"I would." Brad said as he nodded to someone behind Stan.

"Hello, boys." Daisy said as she approached.

"Hello Daisy. I'm sorry, but I was just on my way to see someone." Brad said.

"Uh-huh. *Someone*." Daisy said as she smiled and made air-quotes.

Stan smiled at her use of the gesture.

"Stan, please come walking with me." she said as she held his hand.

'I enjoyed spending time with her. And we were spending more and more time together as the weeks passed."

"Did you like her Grunkle Stan?"

"I sure did. But I couldn't imagine what a princess would see in a lug like me. And I didn't like to talk about my life. But I liked to listen to her talk about Mewni."

"Mr. Pines, You mentioned that you met the Queen of Mewni. That's who you got your dimensional scissors from. When did you go to Mewni Kingdom?"

"I actually never went to the Kingdom of Mewni. Instead she came to Xix."

"Stan. I just received a message from my sister. There's a problem with her daughter, Moon."

"Yeah? What's the problem?"

"She's come down with a rather severe case of a common adolescent Mewni condition."

"Oh, well that's too bad. She should rest. I hope she gets better soon."

"Well, it's not exactly the kind of condition that gets better with rest."

"Does she need a doctor?"
"My sister can help her, but she's not at her home. She's here in Xix. We need to find and catch her."

"Runaway, huh? Mewni is kind of a long way away. What did she do? Fly?" Stan laughed at his own jest.

"..."

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"So why am I in this getup again? I thought I was trying to pass myself off as a teenager?" Stan asked.

"You are! But you are also thirty five years old, Stan. We're trying to push your average age down."

Daisy said.

"So you dress me as a four year old?!"

"Thirty five and four average out to nineteen and a half. You just make it as a teenager. Consider yourself lucky we didn't go with a onesie and a diaper to get the average down to eighteen."

Stan looked at his outfit. Blue overall short pants and a white sailor shirt. High white socks and black loafers added to the look.

"I feel ridiculous."

"Oh Stan! You look adorable! And didn't you tell me that musicians from your dimension often dressed like this? They perform those songs, 'Road to Hades' and 'Foul Tasks Done for Low Cost'?"

"One guy, and that's different! Just because he pulls it off doesn't mean I can! And the song titles are… never mind. Not important right now."

She placed a propeller beanie on Stan's head. "Perfect!" Daisy spun the propeller as she pushed him out of the door.

Stan walked to the 'X' painted on the ground. He sighed and said his line. "Oh, look! It is I, Stan, the teenage boy, out here in the open."

"BOY!" said the purple teen princess as she flew towards him.

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"Mewberty." Marco said solemnly.

"Wait. The princess transformed into an actual butterfly?" Mabel asked.

"A spell by an evil wizard?" Dipper asked.

"No. This is just something that Mewni princesses have to deal with."

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Stan brushed some of the petal-like purple diamond shapes from his clothes as he stepped away from the teenager captured in the net.

"You seem very nonplussed about this." Daisy said.
"Eh, this isn't the weirdest thing I've seen. This is just like a typical Tuesday in Gravity Falls."

"Gravity Falls. Is that the name of the place where you're from on Earth?"

Stan froze. He had given away a detail that he didn't mean to. He feared it would lead to more questions. Questions he would prefer not to answer.

"Ah! My sister has arrived."

Stan breathed a sigh of relief. He would avoid questions about himself for a while longer.

"Hello, sister!" Daisy said as she greeted her sister.

"Hello Daisy, please lead me to my daughter. I know she needs me."

"She's here." she said as they led the queen to the strange purple being.

"Moon? It's me. Your mother."

The purple being was agitated and barely acknowledged the queen. She did not speak. Her attention seemed unfocused on anything except boys.

The queen held up an ornate scepter. "MENDING HEART HURRICANE!"

Energy erupted from the scepter. A young girl with platinum white hair was now in the net. Stan took note of the magenta colored diamond shaped marks on her cheeks.

"Mom?"

"You're alright now, Moon."

Stan knew that magic existed in Mewni, but this was the first time he had seen someone wield it so easily. Usually, potions and spellbooks were involved.

"How long was she like that?" Stan asked as he helped to free the girl.

"Since yesterday. She underwent the change quickly and fled before we realized what had happened. This was unusually long lasting and early. I thought she would not experience this until well after her birthday tomorrow. But she will be alright now."

"Sister, will you still be giving Moon the wand tomorrow?"

"Yes. But instead of returning to Mewni Castle, we will remain a few days for her to recover from this episode. I will give the wand to her here."

"Sister, this is Stan Pines. I told you about him. He's been my friend since I came to Xix. He's the one who saved me."

"Your majesty." Stan bowed.

"Stan, this is my sister, Queen Rose Butterfly of Mewni."

"Stan Pines. Charmed." the queen said as she held out her hand.

Stan took the queen's hand briefly. He took a moment to regard the queen and was very impressed. She had a regal air about her. Her pink hair had been gathered into a large beehive style. A shining
crown was affixed to the front of the hairdo. Blue marks on her cheeks reminded Stan of snowflakes.

A sudden realization hit Stan. "Wait, you're going to give her a magic wand?"

"Yes, as is custom on the Mewni heir's fourteenth birthday."

"I was with Daisy in the throne room watching when the the queen gave her daughter the wand the next day. It changed when she held it." Stan said.

"Yeah. I've seen the wand change when other people held it. It reflects the personality of it's holder." Marco said.

"So the queen just handed over the magic wand to a teenage girl?" Dipper asked.

"Oh, come on Dipper. What's the worst that could happen. It's not like she was gonna cause a disaster." Mabel scoffed.

"THIS IS A DISASTER!" the king lamented as the throne room burned around them.

"Come father! Everyone! We need to get out!" Brad shouted.

The group ran out the exit. Once outside, they noticed that not everyone had followed.

"Where's my mom?!" Princess Moon asked while holding the wand.

"THE QUEEN IS STILL IN THERE! YOU ALL WAIT HERE! I'M GOING BACK IN FOR HER!" Stan shouted.

"NO! STAN! WAIT!" Daisy called out after him. But it was too late. Stan had already run back into the burning room.

He covered his mouth and nose with his sleeve and fought through the smoke. He saw her facing away from him standing in the center of the room.

Stan was about to call out to her when she raised her arms and shouted.

"COTTON CANDY FIRE EXTINGUISH!"

The room was doused in a pink fluffy substance smothering the flames.

"FORMICIDAE CLEANUP CREW!"

Millions of pink ants sprang into existence. They began to quickly devour the sugary material. Tiny burps could be heard as they ate their fill.

"FENG SHUI RESTORINO!"

The burned furniture and structures in the room were bathed in a pink light. They seemed to heal themselves, returning the throne room to a pristine state.

The queen looked pleased with her handiwork as she turned toward the exit. Her expression changed to surprise, then quickly to frustration when she saw Stan.
"Wait, hold on! She used magic without the wand?" Marco waved his hands.

"That's right. She didn't need it. But wait for me to finish. It'll all make sense."

"That's pretty good, your highness! I thought you needed the wand for that."

"Stan Pines. What you just saw is a royal family secret. Only Daisy and myself know what you now know. You will tell no one. Not King Sam nor Prince Brad. And certainly not my daughter. She is not yet ready for that knowledge."

"But-" stan began.

"EXECUTO BEHEADUS CHOPARINO!"

With a flash of pink light, a guillotine appeared in the room. The queen snapped her fingers and a hooded executioner pulled the lever. The heavy blade fell on a melon, slicing it cleanly in two.

Stan stood stiffly. Sweat beaded on his forehead. "T- Tell them what? I didn't see nuthin'!" he said.

"I am pleased to hear that. You are very good at keeping secrets, correct, Stan Pines?"

Stan nodded nervously.

"Some secrets, like this, should be kept. Others should be allowed to come out. Some secrets become known no matter how hard you try to keep them hidden."

Stan wondered how much the queen knew. Did she have him investigated?

"My sister still knows little of your past. It would be best if she heard the truth directly from you. Perhaps you should allow her closer."

He looked down shamefully.

"Let us rejoin the others. They must be worried." the queen said with a smile.

Stan watched her as she moved toward the exit. He followed shortly.

"Don't worry everyone, everything's fine. The fire wasn't as big as it looked." Stan said smiling as they emerged from the door.

"But- but the entire room was ablaze!" said King Sam.

"Naw! It's fine! See for yourself."

"I'm sorry, Mom." said Princess Moon.

"It's alright, dear. No harm done. But when we return home tomorrow, we should find you a safe place to practice."
"I thought about what the queen said to me for weeks. She was right. Some secrets can't stay hidden forever." Stan said as he took a sip of whiskey.

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"Stan, what is your home like?"

Stan still didn't want to talk about his life. "You don't need to know about it. It's not very interesting."

"That can't be true. I've heard stories of Earth, they say it's a fascinating place."

"I don't really like to talk about myself."

"I've told you all about myself! I've opened up so much! I still know so little about you! Are you hiding something? Do you have a wife after all?"

"No! I don't! I'm completely alone, and I don't like to talk about it!"

"Why not?!"

"Daisy… I- I'm ashamed. If you know more about me, you will never see me the same way. You won't want to have anything to do with me."

"Stan. Please. I don't think that's true. And I need to know more."

Stan simply nodded.

"Come with me." she said.

Daisy took Stan's arm and she led him to the King's assistant. Daisy borrowed his dimensional scissors.

"Stan, take these in your hand. Think of your home."

"I don't really have one."

"Then think of where you came from before you found me. Gravity Falls."

Stan thought of his brother's house and cut the air.

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They emerged in the basement lab. The lab had long since lost power and was dark and silent. Stan found the emergency light switch and flipped it. Dim lights illuminated the lab. The circuit breaker panel was still open. A dark stain of soot covered the console near the opening.

Stan looked inside and saw the tool that caused the portal to activate months ago. He put on a rubber glove and withdrew the screwdriver.

"This is how I got to Mewni."

Daisy looked fascinated at the machinery in the lab. "Stan? You built all this? This is amazing!"

He cringed from the undeserved praise. "No. I didn't."

"I don't understand."
"My brother built all this. He was the smart one. Not me. The accident that took him. It was my fault."

"Tell me what happened, Stan. Please."

Stan told her the truth. His life and his brother. Their separation. His family disowning him. His failures and running from his mistakes. His reunion with his brother. The fight in the lab and the accident. His attempts to fix the machine. Separating tourists from their money to maintain the house and lab. His guilt.

"I've never stayed in one place for long. And when I finally stop moving, I can't even be myself. I'm living a lie. Everyone in this town thinks my name is "Stanford" but that's not true either. That's my brother's name. I'm pretending to be my brother. This is his house, not mine. My family thinks I'm dead now. I have nothing. I am nothing but a fraud and a failure. This is why I'm alone. The real me is worthless."

She stood closely in front of him. "No you aren't."

"How can you think that?"

"Your life has been so difficult and so lonely. You did what you needed to. You're a fighter and a survivor. You have a rare determination. And you are still trying to do the right thing for your brother. Family means everything to you. Even though he shut you out, you won't abandon him."

Daisy reached out to hold his hand and asked, "What's your real name?"

"Stanley."

"Such a small difference. I was afraid you were going to say something like 'Archibald' or 'Clarence'."

Stan let out a small laugh.

"Stanley. That's what I'm going to call you from now on. You need to know that someone knows and loves the real you."

Stan stared at her in silence.

Daisy closed her eyes and kissed him.

"I love you, Stanley."

He wrapped his arms around her and held her tightly. "I love you too, Daisy."

"Stanley, there's something I need to tell you."

"What is it?"

"The rumors about me..." Daisy's voice began to crack. "They're true... I'll never be a mother. Only my sister knows the truth." She sniffled. "And now, you do too." Tears began to fall. "I'm sorry."

"Sorry for what? You haven't done anything wrong."

"I should have told you sooner. Before we got closer. I was afraid you wouldn't want me. Like so many others."
"I don't care about that. I only care about you."

==================================

"She loved it here. She found the paranormal weirdness of the town comfortably familiar, but she thought cars and electricity were magic." Stan smiled as he spoke.

"How long did you stay?" Marco asked.

"Just a few days. Literally the happiest days of my life. I had never felt so close to someone. Not even to my own brother when we were kids."

Mabel and Dipper just looked at Stan as if they had never met him before.

"But soon she had to go back. Things were still going on in Xix. Before we left I got something I had been hanging on to. A diamond ring." Stan said.

"Where did you get a diamond ring?" Dipper asked.

"Never mind where I got it! I just had it, okay?!" Stan snapped.

"Grunkle Stan! Were you going to ask her to marry you?!" Mabel exclaimed.

"Yup. I was going to wait until the whole thing with Quosto blew over to ask her."

"But Grunkle Stan, you've only been married once. When you were in your forties. To Marilyn. For only six hours." Dipper pointed out.

Stan looked at him out of the corner of his eyes. "Thanks, Knucklehead. I'm aware of that."

Marco looked around. There were no wedding pictures on display.

"I think everyone at the table knows that this story doesn't have a happy ending."

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A portal opened in the field outside Castle Xix. Stan exited the portal first and was shocked by the ruin. The castle wall had a crumbling gap. The smoke of smoldering fires wafted in the air.

"Stan Pines! Stan Pines! Where is the princess?"

Stan looked to see the king's assistant running toward him.

"Stanley? What's going on?" Daisy said as she exited the portal.

"I don't know! I think there was an attack!" Stan responded.

"Princess! We need to get you to safety! Hurry! Let's get into the castle!"

As they ran for the castle gate they saw soldiers lying unmoving in the field. Some were dressed in different armor than Xix soldiers.

Daisy was ushered to a fortified and guarded chamber. She refused to enter unless Stan was allowed to stay with her.

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"Captured soldiers revealed under questioning that they had specific orders to capture Princess Daisy alive."

"She would have been used as a hostage to force Mewni to withdraw its support of Xix."

"A surprise assault. It is fortunate that she was not in the castle at the time."

"A covert enemy unit tunneled under and weakened the castle wall. They collapsed the tunnel at the start of the attack causing the wall above it to fall. Repairs are being rushed. A full legion now guards the breach. The remaining walls are being inspected to ensure they are not also compromised."

"With the breach so heavily guarded, the rest of the soldiers are spread thinner."

"Have reservists been called up?"

"They have, but we fear that their numbers are fewer than we initially thought. And it will take time to properly train and arm them."

"A recruitment effort should be initiated. We need more soldiers."

"Has conscription been considered?"

"No. Do not resort to forcing the unwilling to fight."

"Very well your highness."

"Why attack now? The cold war has already lasted decades."

"They have recently made military alliances with several other kingdoms. They intend to reclaim their lost territory. The others would be given conquered lands in Xix."

"Xix will need more allies."

=================================================================

"Daisy, is the territory that valuable?"

"It is, but it's more than just that. It's the king of Quosto. Or rather, it's the grandson of the regent."

"He's not really a king?"

"No. His grandfather seized power when Queen Ladybird, the last queen of the royal house of Quosto died. Quosto used to be an ally of Xix. But the regent and his descendants were conquerors with dreams of creating an empire."

Daisy paused before continuing.

"The Ladybirds also had royal magic. Their line ended when their queen died without a woman descendant to inherit the magic."

"They had a wand too?"

"Yes, They did."

"Wouldn't whoever got the wand control the magic?"

Daisy looked thoughtful for a moment.
"You know how my sister has the ability to use magic even without the wand?"

"How could I forget? Your sister made it clear that that was top secret." Stan made a slicing gesture at his neck with his finger.

"She didn't gain that power from the wand. She has magic because she was born with it. The royal magic is passed through the bloodline."

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"No. Wait. Hold up! Star said that she didn't get the wand until she was fourteen. She had magic only after that." Marco interrupted.

"Sure. She was told her whole life that the wand was the magic source. She didn't believe she had magic until the wand was given to her."

"It's like a magic feather!" Mabel exclaimed.

"I think that also explains why there's a marriage rule for queens." Dipper commented.

"How do you figure that?" Marco asked.

"Magic is hereditary and it's possible for a royal line to die out. They probably want to encourage the queen to have children as soon as possible."

"Why keep any of this a secret?" Marco asked.

"Think about it. Monsters used to come to try to take the wand from Star, right? What would they do if they knew the real power wasn't in the wand, but in her? They'd try to take her instead."

"The wand is just a decoy." Marco realized.

"Well, the wand has *some* magic. It can do stuff like change it's form and move things. But it's nowhere near as powerful as they let people believe. Daisy told me that it's useful as a focus. Something to channel the royal magic." Stan added.

"So Star's mother didn't give up her magic."

"The queen couldn't use magic openly. Which is why Queen Rose swore me to secrecy. Politicians."

Marco always wondered why Mewni would take such a big risk and send the source of their power and their best defense to Earth. Now it made sense. They hadn't.

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"What about you, Daisy? Can't you use magic?" Stan asked.

"No. Royal magic can only pass to one descendant. Usually it's the eldest daughter, like my sister."

There was a knock on the door. It was Queen Rose, King Sam, and Prince Brad escorted by the Captain. Stan opened the door to let them into the chamber.

"Sister. We must speak." The queen said to Daisy before turning to Stan. "Privately, please. I'm sorry."

Stan looked to Daisy.
"It's alright. Wait for me here. I'll return later."

It was a while before Daisy returned. Stan turned toward the door when it opened. She stood in the doorway. She had clearly been crying.

Her voice was rough when she spoke. "Stanley." The door closed behind her.

"What's wrong?" Stan asked as he went to her.

"Other kingdoms will be willing to fight alongside Xix only if they had a more secure alliance with Mewni."

"How are they planning to... no."

"I am to marry Brad." Daisy said sadly. Tears were falling from her blue eyes.

"NO!"

"I'm the only member of the royal family available to cement the alliance."

"But you said that they wouldn't do this because you can't have a baby!"

"That fact will be hidden. The truth about my condition is just a rumor for now. Brad will take his love as a secret concubine. She will bear his heir. The child will be passed off as mine."

"You can't do this!" Stan said through his tears.

"I have to! Xix doesn't have a large enough army to fight Quosto as well as it's allies! The disputed lands and more will fall back to Quosto! Others will pay the price if I don't! They will be the ones to suffer and die! I can't let that happen! I don't want to marry him! But I have to!"

Daisy fell to her knees. Stan rushed to her and wrapped her in his arms. Together they broke down and wept.

"I have to." Daisy whispered.

The one good thing he had in his life. She was being taken away from him.

"Queen Rose..." The captain began.

"Hello Stan Pines." the queen said.

Not in the mood for small talk, Stan began demanding answers right away. "Why are you forcing Daisy to marry Brad?!"

"I am not forcing anybody to marry anybody. If Daisy was unwilling to marry Prince Brad, I would not allow it. But Daisy understands that this necessary, and it is her duty."

"If Mewni wants to help Xix, then why the need for an alliance marriage? Why not just help?"

"The alliance is not for us. Mewni has already fully committed to Xix's cause. But powerful as it is, Mewni is just one kingdom. To push back the offensive as fast and with as little bloodshed as
possible, Xix will need as many allies as possible. Other kingdoms will not commit militarily if they
fear the war will get drawn out or go badly. A formal alliance assures others that Mewni will not
back out of the conflict at a critical moment."

"I am sorry Stan Pines. You must leave Mewni and Princess Daisy tonight never to return. Your
relationship with her is no secret. Your continued closeness will cause rumors to spread questioning
her commitment to Xix."

Queen Rose handed Stan a pair of dimensional scissors.

"These have enough magic to work only once. They will return you to Earth."

"Well, what if I refuse?" Stan said.

"Then you will be arrested and imprisoned in an outside dimension. But that is a pointless threat. I
know that you will not refuse."

"Yeah? What makes you so sure?"

"Because Daisy herself will ask you to leave. She will do so because despite her love for you, she
knows she must sacrifice her own happiness to preserve as many lives as she can."

Stan understood. If he stayed it might lead to more suffering. Daisy would resent him if that
happened.

"I truly wish things were different. You would have made my sister very happy. But your destiny
does not lie here. Your work to help your family is not done."

Stan had no response. He still had a job to do. Just like Daisy.

"Farewell, Stan Pines."

The queen turned and left the room. Stan and the Captain were now alone.

"Seems like the only winner in all this is Brad and his girl. At least they get to be together." Stan said
to the Captain.

"It is not as they wanted it. His love can never become known. She must remain concealed, lest the
legitimacy of his heir be questioned. She will make further sacrifices as well. She must resign from
the position she worked so hard to rise to."

"Oh yeah? What position is that?"

"Captain of the Xix Royal Guard."

Stan looked at Captain Crystal in shock.

"It was not easy for me, someone of common blood, to prove that I was the soldier that most
deserved the honor of command. Pregnancy will cause my armor to become ill-fitting."

"You're Brad's girlfriend."

"I will name a soldier to succeed me. I will tell them that an illness has compromised my ability to
serve. I will leave the castle as the former Captain."

"Before too long, I will join the servant staff under an assumed identity. I am of average height and
build. No one has seen me without my helmet except the prince in years. No one will recognize me. I will become Daisy's personal assistant. Being so close will make it easier to conceal my relationship with the prince."

"When I am with child, I will travel with Daisy to the Kingdom of Mewni under the pretense that her pregnancy is difficult. There, I will give birth and surrender my child to her. She will return to Xix and raise the child as her own.

"I am not certain if I will be allowed to return with her. My presence may eventually put the secret at risk of exposure."

Stan was stunned by the details of the plan. "You deserve better than this."

"That is what Brad said. But I will tell you what I told him. I am not doing this just because I love him. I am doing this because I will always consider it my duty and honor to protect the kingdom of Xix."

Stan was silent but nodded.

"I will take you to say goodbye."

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Daisy stood and stared at Stan as he entered the chamber. When the door shut behind him she rushed to him crying. They held each other until both had cried enough to speak.

"Stanley. We need to say goodbye. I'm sorry. You need to go back to Earth. I'm sorry." She said barely above a whisper.

"I know, Daisy. I know. I have to let you go." He softly replied.

"I wish you could stay so we could be together."

"I do too."

They held each other quietly before Stan spoke again. "I want you to have this." He took the ring out of his pocket and held her left hand. He slowly slid the ring onto her fourth finger.

"I know that you don't have this in Mewni, but this means something more on Earth. It means that I love you, Daisy. I always will."

Daisy stared at the ring and covered her mouth with her other hand to stifle her sobs.

She collected herself enough to say to him, "I want to believe that there was a bigger reason you found your way here. That we found each other for a reason. More than just saving me. If someday you get the chance to help Mewni, if you can help my family... please don't turn away."

"Daisy, I-"

"Please! Promise me, Stanley!"

"I promise, Daisy. I promise." Stan leaned back to look at her face. The marks on her cheeks had changed to broken hearts. "Please. I don't want to see broken hearts. I want to see stars. I'm glad that I found you. Even if this has to be goodbye."

"I'll never regret a single moment, Stanley." Her cheeks marks changed back to stars for him. "I want
you to know, I want you to always remember that I love you..." Tears fell like rain. "...and if I could have... I would have said 'yes!'"

They held each other tightly. Stan tried to commit every detail of her to his memory. The warmth of her touch. The gold of the stars on her face. The scent of her hair. The feel of her lips on his. Even the salt of her tears as he kissed her face.

His memories would need to last him a lifetime.

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Stan wiped his eyes with the tissues. "The Captain had orders to make sure I left. She was allowing me those last moments out of kindness."

Mabel was bawling. She slid out of her chair at the table and went to hug him.

"Did you ever try to go back?" Marco asked.

"I wanted to. Even if it was just to make sure she was okay. The moment I got back to Earth, I tried the scissors, but they didn't work. And I couldn't get the machine to work again until years later. Even still, I'm not sure it would have taken me to Mewni. It was pure luck that I went there. There are a lot of other dimensions, and I could have gone to any one of them. Without the other journals I had no way to set the destination. I don't know how everything turned out in Xix."

"But I can use the dimensional portal to get to Mewni now, right? You have the ability to set a destination now, don't you?" Marco asked.

Dipper looked at him with an apologetic expression. "I hate to to tell you this, Marco. But Grunkle Ford tore down the portal right after he got back to Earth. It's been gone for years."

Marco was speechless. This was another dead end after all. His spirit fell through the floor.

"NO! We are NOT giving up yet!" Mabel reassured Marco. "What about those, Bro? Can they be made to work again?" she said pointing at the dimensional scissors.

"Well, Grunkle Stan didn't say they were broken. Just that they only had enough magic to work once. Maybe they can be recharged? I think I read something in Journal Two." Dipper said hopefully.

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continuará
"...Turned out that Old Man McGucket invented the memory eraser to avoid dealing with what he saw on the other side of the portal."

"Did he start the Society of the Blind Eye?"

"He did, but somehow Blind Ivan got the memory eraser and took over."

"I still have that song in my head."

Marco felt like he had found kindred spirits. This is the first time in a long time that he felt like someone else had had a lived a life like his. They could relate. Dipper and Mabel shared stories of monsters, ghosts, and demonic possession. They couldn't even play a game of mini-golf without it taking a turn for the bizarre.

"Speaking of memories, I have a theory on what happened to everyone's memories of Star." Dipper said.

"Oh? This ought to be good." Mabel commented.

"Oh it is! It will blow your minds!" Dipper made a gesture of fireworks near his head.

"Is it the Society of the Blind Eye? Because if that was the big reveal, you kinda spoiled it. Our minds remain decidedly un-blown."

"No, not them! Besides, the memory eraser doesn't erase physical evidence. No. My theory is that Star..." Dipper paused for effect. "...was never here. Mind blown!"

"You sound like my shrink." Marco said.

"Hear me out, hear me out. She *was* here. But then a time anomaly happened. History was changed so she never came to Earth. This explains why there is absolutely zero evidence she was ever here. Mabel, back me up on the time anomalies here."

"The time anomaly guys would have shown up to fix it. Besides, Marco's parents and Jackie do remember Star, but only if you get 'em emotional. Not to mention Marco still has his memories. Why him and no one else? I think it was a magic spell, and true love protected him. I base this belief on absolutely nothing."

Mabel was a romantic at heart. Which explained why she was so eager to help Marco when he met her. She also wanted to help Dipper.

At one time, he had a girlfriend that had grown up in Gravity Falls. But she had dreams of living somewhere else. Dipper didn't want to leave Gravity Falls.

Dipper had been continuing his great uncle's work studying and documenting the paranormal activity around Gravity Falls. He had completed the first volume of his own journals and was now working
on his second.

His research could only be completed here. He and his girlfriend tried to have a long distance relationship, but it was too difficult.

Mabel asked if Marco knew anyone she could set her brother up with. She felt that he was too focused on his education and research. Marco immediately thought of Janna, who would definitely share Dipper's interests. But because of the loss of everyone's memories of Star, Janna's memories of magic also disappeared.

"So I was working out a method for recharging the scissors." Dipper said as he opened his great uncle's second journal.

Dipper knew the three journals written by his great uncle Ford backwards and forwards. He had uncovered hidden notes written in the ultraviolet as well as the infrared spectrums. Dipper read a little from them every night as if they were religious texts. Despite his familiarity, Dipper always referred to the physical books when working.

"If we had an item that held raw magical energy, we could siphon off some magic and use it." Dipper said.

"Raw?"

"An enchanted item has magic that's already focused for a purpose. It's like an apple pie. The apples are already cooked. But we need raw apples."

"So what would be a raw apple in this analogy? Magic crystals?"

"I thought of that. Did you know I once found crystals that if you shine a light through them they would make things bigger or smaller? But they wouldn't work. They have a natural purpose. They're naturally baked."

"What would work?"

"The horn of a unicorn."

Marco thought of Pony Head. He had seen her shoot energy from her horn in the past. She could float. She survives despite being just a head. She was obviously magical.

He briefly fantasized about fighting her for her horn before he shook the idea out of his head. Star would never forgive him. Besides, she wasn't even here on Earth.

"Not exactly common. I don't suppose you have one handy." Marco said.

"No. And I haven't seen a unicorn since the 'Mabelcorn' incident."

"Mabelcorn?"

"Long story." Mabel commented.

"But maybe we can substitute." Dipper said. He turned the journal to a page about unicorns. "Says here that unicorns are related to other supposedly mythical horned animals. Tigericorns, sharkticorns, bearicorns, squirrellicorns, emuicorns, et cetera. Their horns are all the same."

Marco thought back to the Mystery Shack. "I saw a stuffed bearicorn head in the gift shop. But I know it's not real. I don't suppose the horn is."
"No, it's just another exhibit my Grunkle Stan put together. The horn is just a wood carving," Mabel said.

"But it doesn't matter. Want to see a real live bearicorn?" Dipper said.

"I would love to see a bearicorn. But fair warning, it wouldn't be a new experience for me. I used to fight one on a semi-regular basis."

"Aw."

"You know, this bear thing is really spooky." Marco said thinking about the dream message.

"You guys go ahead without me. I have to run the gift shop today." Mabel said.

Dipper and Marco stood at the entrance to a cave.

"So how did you find a bearicorn?" Marco asked.

"He showed up a few years ago. There were a few sightings by hikers. We thought we were looking for Bigfoot and instead we found him. He's actually not a bad guy." Dipper said. "Let me go in first to introduce you."

Dipper led the way. "Hello?!" he called as he entered the cave.

"Who is it?" came the sing-song answer.

"It's Dipper. Just coming to visit. We need to talk."

"Come on in!"

Dipper and Marco rounded a corner in the back of the cave. They were met by a tastefully decorated room. Antique furniture was arranged to form an intimate living area. Carefully knitted doilies covered small end tables. An arrangement of flowers in a fine crystal vase rested on one. A lamp with a stained glass shade upon another.

"Dipper! Welcome! It's been too long!" greeted a large brown bear. A horn protruded from the top of it's head. It wore a red tunic.

"Hi Bearicorn! I hope you don't mind, I brought a friend." Marco stood beside Dipper. "This is..."

"MARCO!" Bearicorn finished the sentence.

Surprised, Marco took a fighting stance.

"Uh-oh." said Dipper as he scooted away.

Dipper and Marco sat on the victorian sofa. They both held a fine porcelain cup filled with tea. A tray of biscuits rested upon a coffee table.

"Dipper, Marco and I have met before." the host said.

"Wow. Small world. You're a thousand miles from home in a small town in a different state. What
"Are the odds?"

"Marco Diaz. It's been years! How are you? What are you doing in Gravity Falls?" Bearicorn said as he finished pouring a cup of tea for himself and took a seat in an antique chair across from them.

Marco looked sad. "I'm trying to find a way to Mewni."

"Really? Why?" Bearicorn asked and took a sip of tea.

Marco and Dipper looked at each other in realization.

"Bearicorn, do you remember how you and Marco know each other?" Dipper said.

"I was in Ludo's army when we used to come here to try and... try and... I don't know. I remember fighting with Marco a lot." Bearicorn said.

Marco laughed nervously. "I guess we did."

"Another question. Who rules Mewni?" Dipper asked.

"Mewni Kingdom? Queen Moon Butterfly and King Butterfly. Do you know them?"

"Yeah, I knew them." Marco said.

No one else? No children? No heirs?" Dipper asked.

Bearicorn looked like he was concentrating. "I want to say 'yes', but I can't think of any."

"Does the name Star mean anything to you?" Marco asked.

Bearicorn shook his head.

"Whatever happened got to him too." Dipper said to Marco who nodded sadly.

"Let me ask you something. Have you been here for five years?" Marco said.

Bearicorn thought. "Yeah! I was sent to gather some crystals here for Ludo. No one came for me. Only Ludo and Buff Frog have dimensional scissors."

"Someone I knew was supposed to come back from Mewni too. But she didn't. Or couldn't." Marco said.

"No one came for you. No one came for Marco. Both happened about the same time. That's a big coincidence." Dipper said.

"Maybe it wasn't a coincidence. Is it possible to block dimensional travel?" Marco asked the monster.

"I don't know, but that does make me feel better. It's nice to think that I wasn't left here on purpose."

"Seems like you have a pretty good thing going here." Dipper commented.

"Actually it is. It's nice to not have to fight all the time. I should have quit from Ludo's army years ago."

"Are you not interested in going back to Mewni?"

"I kind of like it here. The gnomes and Multibear come by for poker night. There are other bears in
the woods here. They're not too smart." Bearicorn finished with a chuckle.

"Bearicorn, I need to ask you for a big favor." Marco sipped his tea as he prepared to ask. "We need to open a portal to Mewni, but the method needs a horn like yours. I know it's a lot to ask, but may I please have yours?"

"Marco..." he said as he took a sip from his cup. "It hurts to remove my horn, and it will take a long time to grow back, if ever. Why do you want to go to Mewni anyway?"

"Someone is there that I really need to see. Is there anything I can do to get you to reconsider?" Marco asked.

"I'm sorry."

Marco sighed. "I am too. It really would have been nice to have one of these meetings between us end without violence." he said.

"Yeah. It would have been. But I think we both know that you were just asking to be polite."

"Umm... Bye! Thanks for having us! You have a lovely home!" Dipper blurted out before dashing for the exit.

Marco and Bearicorn both quietly finished their tea and put the cups on the table.

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Marco exited the cave to find Dipper waiting for him.

"I was hoping it wouldn't go down like that. Sorry." Marco said.

"He'll forgive you. Eventually."

A fierce roar echoed from inside the cave.

"We should probably go though." Dipper said.

Inside the cave, smashed furniture was scattered everywhere. Claw marks tore the cushions of the victorian sofa. It leaned against the wall of the cave. The tray of biscuits was scattered on the floor when the table was overturned. A leg was broken off from the table and stuck like a spear through the seat of an antique chair.

Shards of crystal littered the floor along with flowers and spilled water. Only one cup and two saucers from the fine porcelain tea set remained unbroken. The stained glass lamp shade was smashed when the lamp was used as a cudgel.

Bearicorn let out another fierce roar in pain. He was badly bruised, had a dislocated shoulder, and possibly a cracked rib or two.

He dragged himself to a wall mirror that had miraculously survived unbroken. He looked in it to inspect his injuries only to find his view blocked by a note taped to the glass.

Dear B,

If this works, I will make this up to you.

- M.D.
Bearicorn pulled the note off the mirror and looked at himself. His horn had been sawed off.

A serrated bread knife that had been used as a saw lay near a footstool that had served as a sawhorse.

He reached up with his good arm and lightly touched the stump. It stung from the contact and he hissed in pain.

Bearicorn turned away from the mirror and leaned with his back against the wall. He looked over to the note on the ground. A small smile appeared on his face and he started to laugh. He had to stop when the laughter hurt his ribs. Definitely cracked.

"Ow."

==================================

Through the woods, Marco walked with Dipper towards the Mystery Shack. In his hand he held a freshly cut horn.

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Marco looked at the lab workstation. The dimensional scissors and bearicorn horn were suspended in a large glass beaker containing a liquid. Wires connected the scissors and horn to a power converter.

"You're electroplating them?" Marco asked.

"I'm magic-infusing them!" Dipper answered. "I'm transferring the magic energy from the horn into the scissors. I don't know exactly how long it'll take. We should be prepared to go when it's ready."

"We?"

"Well yeah! I'm coming with you!"

"Dipper, shouldn't you, you know, think about this?" Mabel cautioned.

"There's nothing to think about! He's not going! It's way too dangerous!" Stan stated.

"But, a magic dimension! There's gotta be teachers of magic there. Maybe even an entire school! The knowledge I've been searching for. It's there!"

"But you don't know what else is over there!" Mabel argued.

Stan, Mabel, and Dipper argued back and forth.

"I can handle it! Grunkle Stan went by accident and he was able to handle it! I've been dealing with the paranormal for years! I can handle a few monsters and poor sanitation! Tell them Marco!"

Marco looked at them before speaking. "I know you can handle Mewni..."

"There, see?!"

"But you can't come with me."

"What?! Why not?!"

"Because I might not be coming back."

"..."
"Something stopped Star from coming back for me. Even if I make it to Mewni, even if I make it to her, there's no guarantee that I'll be able to come back. I can accept that. I'm not going just because I want to. I'm going because I need to."

Marco paused before continuing. "If I don't come back, you'll know you dodged a bullet."

"But if you do come back..."

"Right. If I do..."

Dipper sighed in resignation and nodded. "Marco, take this." Dipper handed Marco a gold coin.

"You've been holding out on us!" Stan exclaimed.

"Dipper, I can't accept this."

"Yes you can. You need it. You think they take credit cards in Mewni? I found it in the forest while searching for aliens. I've been saving it for something important. This is it."

Marco nodded with gratitude. "Thank you. Take my bike. I won't be needing it." he said as he gave Dipper the key.

Dipper's face lit up with glee. "Eeee!"

"But you have to promise to sell it back to me when I get back."

"Okay, I will. And I promise to fleece you for it too!"

Stan laughed.

"Grunkle Stan, do you have anymore gold? Marco might need it! What about your medallion?"

Mabel asked.

"This thing? It's just plated. All this'll get you is a crowbar to the kneecaps."

"There are some things I might need. Can I get some stuff from the gift shop?"

"You should probably hurry." Dipper said looking at the scissors.

==================================

"You should definitely take one of these. And this. And this." Mabel paused before saying to Marco, "Thanks for convincing Dipper not to go."

"I wonder if I did the right thing." He said while selecting a folding knife with 'Mystery Shack' stamped on the plastic handle.

"But you said..."

"I know. But I told myself once that not going to Mewni was the smarter and safer thing to do. It was the single biggest mistake I ever made."

"That was different. Dipper isn't going for love."

"Maybe not love of a girl. He's lucky. He's found something he wants to dedicate his life to. If I do make it back, I will bring him to Mewni. I owe him. I owe you all."
"I'm just trying to watch out for him."

"I know. And speaking of people I love..."

==================================

"Mom, Dad? Hi. Yeah. I'm in Oregon."

"No. I'm visiting friends."

"Don't worry, Mom. This is not because of any delusion."

"I just needed to get away for a while."

"The congressman can hide his own skeletons for a while."

"It'll be fine."

"Ok bye."

"Love you too." he said, then hung up the phone.

"Do you kiss your grandma with that lying mouth?" Mabel asked with a smile.

"Nothing I said was a lie. I'm in Oregon. I'm visiting friends. I'm not having a delusion. And soon, I'll be getting away for a while in Mewni." Marco answered.

"You've been hanging around politicians too long."

==================================

Mabel and Marco returned to the lab.

"I thought you were grabbing some stuff?" Dipper asked.

Marco lifted the waist of his hoodie to show a waist pack with the words 'Mystery Shack' embroidered on it. "I believe in being prepared, but packing light."

A flash of light and a popping sound came from the lab table. The glass beaker had shattered. The dimensional scissors lay on the table among the broken glass and liquid. They seemed to glow.

"Marco, you should try them now. I don't know for sure how well that worked or how long it will last. It might not take you exactly where you want to go either."

Marco picked up the dimensional scissors. The tingle of magic was stronger than it was before. Marco concentrated on Mewni and cut the air.

There were sparks as Marco made the motion, but a portal didn't open.

"No! It's not working!" Marco lamented.

"Maybe you need something stronger to guide you to Mewni." Dipper said.

"Star is there and he loves her! Shouldn't that be enough?!" Mabel asked.

"Too bad you aren't bonded." Stan said
"Bonded? What's that?" Mabel asked.

"Um... well... in Mewni... when a man and a woman love each other... I mean, really love each other... a whole lot... really, really, really love each other..."

Stan made gestures with his hands.

"Stop. We get it." Dipper and Mabel deadpanned.

"... a rare magical bond linking your souls might form. A mark will appear over the man's heart."

Marco realized it now. He *was* bonded to her. He had been all this time. The star over his heart. It wasn't a drunken mistake at a tattoo parlor after all. The surge of emotions he felt sometimes. It was her. It was Star.

It was magic.

"I am. We are. We're bonded."

He wanted to ask more questions, but knew there wasn't enough time. The magic in the scissors could already be running out.

Marco put his hand over his heart. He concentrated not on Mewni, but on Star. And with his other hand, he cut the air with the scissors again.

A dimensional portal shimmered in the lab. The sound of rushing air and a loud electrical buzz filled the room.

The scissors became searing hot and Marco dropped them on the lab floor. They blackened and crumbled to dust. Their job was done.

"Thank you for helping me!" he shouted as he shook the pain from his hand.

"Good luck, Marco!" Mabel and Dipper shouted back as they smiled.

"Mr. Pines. You kept your promise!"

Stan smiled. "I'll run you a tab for the merchandise!" he shouted.

"But I just traded-" Marco was cut off as Stan shoved him through the portal. The portal soon collapsed shut.

There was silence in the lab until Dipper asked a question. "Is that why you helped him, Grunkle Stan? Because you made a promise to Daisy?"

"Yeah. But also because if things had happened just a little bit different, the Butterflys would be family. *He* would be family."

"How did you know about the bond, Grunkle Stan?" Mabel asked.

"I didn't want tell you guys *everything.*"

"Oh." Dipper said. "OH!" he exclaimed when he fully comprehended what Stan meant.

Stan pointed at Dipper's feet and shouted. "AND IT HAPPENED RIGHT WHERE YOU'RE STANDING!"
"AAHMMM!" Dipper jumped.

Stan laughed at him.

"Great, now I have to burn down the lab!"

Mabel smiled then looked to where the dimensional portal had been.

"Do you think he'll succeed?" Mabel asked.

"I hope so. There are already enough sad old men in the world."

==================================

Something had happened. The feeling sprang from nowhere. Star knew it wasn't her own. She had no reason to feel it.

Hope.

"Marco..."

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continuará
Marco splashed down. The taste of salt filled his mouth. When he surfaced, he looked out and saw nothing but water all the way to the horizon. He had not thought of this possibility. He wasn't prepared to survive in the open ocean. He was going to drown. He felt the panic rise in his chest. He thought of Star as he began to sink below the water.

But Marco refused to give up and he struggled back the surface. He would swim across the ocean if he had to. Determination burned in his heart. He would be able to cover more distance if he swam with the current. He would swim until he found land. He swore to himself that he wouldn't die without a fight.

Sensing the direction of the waves, he turned to face in the opposite to swim... and swam face first into a wooden log sticking vertically from the water.

After rubbing his face in pain, Marco looked at the log. It was the support pylon of a pier. He was only a few yards from land.

An old fisherman that looked like he belonged on a package of frozen fish sticks was on the pier. "Goin' for a dip, Matey?" he asked and laughed.

A fish slapped Marco in the face with its tail.

He swam to the pier's ladder and climbed up. "Wet socks." he grumbled and began to wring out his clothes as best he could. "I think I took a dimensional detour. Could you tell me where I am?" he asked the fisherman.

"Here be the port town o' Port."

"The port town of Port?"

"Aye. Folks here be uncreative."

"Um, just to be clear, what dimension is this?"

"This be the Mewni Dimension."

"YES! I MADE IT! I'M HERE!"

"No one be this pleased to be in Port. Where ye be headin' now?"

"To Mewni, the Kingdom of Mewni."

"Well then, ye ain't made it there yet, Matey! Mewni Kingdom still be on the far side of the sea."

Marco scoffed. "Is that all? That'll be the easy part. I've already travelled the hard part. How can I get there?"
"Ye be needin' to arrange passage on a ship."

Marco looked around and didn't see a ship docked at the pier. "Do you know when the next ship will dock here?"

As if on cue, a sailing ship sped like a speedboat into port... Port. Deckhands leapt onto the pier and caught docking lines thrown from the ship to be tied down. The entire docking process seemed to take only seconds.

"Any time now..." said the fisherman.

Marco spotted a man on the ship wearing a tricorn hat. He seemed to be overseeing the actions of the crew. "Excuse me! Excuse me, Sir!" he called up from the pier.

The man looked down from the ship.

"Are you the captain?"

The man nodded.

"Where is your ship headed next?"

"To the Kingdom of Kolma."

The fisherman spoke. "Neighborin' kingdom to Mewni. Ye may want this one. Don't know when the next ship goin' straight there will be."

"Thank you." Marco said to the fisherman. "Captain, I'd like to book passage."

"Not taking passengers. We're a cargo vessel."

"Please! I need to get to Mewni!"

"You look like a strong lad. I'd let you join the crew, but we have all the men we need."

At that moment, a giant tentacle reached out of the water and grabbed a hapless sailor. It dragged him from the pier and below the surface of the water. Seconds later, a help wanted sign was hung on the side of the ship.

"Appears that a spot on the crew has opened up. Interested?"

Marco was shocked at the suddenness of the sailor's fate.

==================================

Marco got the hang of working on a ship's crew quickly. He was teased relentlessly about his motion sickness. But in a few days he grew accustomed to life on a boat.

In exchange for swabbing the deck, manning the bilge pumps, helping with general ship maintenance, and hauling in and loosening sails, Marco was given a hammock and food. He was told that he would be paid a swabbies wage when they arrived in Kolma. Marco was grateful, but truthfully, he would have agreed to forego pay in exchange for the trip.

At night Marco was usually on deck. He was fascinated by Mewni's night sky. The sky was never black. Light that was reflected off the huge moons and planets visible in the sky kept the darkness at bay. It was like perpetual twilight. Only the brightest stars could be seen. He wished that Mewni had
a North Star.

He thought of Star constantly. He concentrated on the feelings he now knew were coming from her. They were bonded. He knew she was very sad. He wondered if she could feel him. He was in Mewni. The hope of finally seeing her again threatened to overwhelm him.

He thought about the Blood Moon ball. Its ruby light shined down on them so many years ago now. Marco wondered if this bond was somehow related. Did this heart bond form because they were already bound by the Blood Moon?

Marco's parents were out for the evening. Their date night.

Marco and Star were on the couch together. The movie they were watching all but forgotten as they instead took the opportunity to make out like the teenagers they were.

Marco had a question. He broke a kiss and asked, "Star?"

She responded with a simple, "Mm?"

"Do you remember the Blood Moon Ball?"

"Mm-hm." she responded as her lips brushed against his.

"The Blood Moon chose us."

"Yup. And now our souls are bound together for eternity." Star giggled.

"Did we fall in love because of that? Did it make us feel this way?" He asked as he stroked her back.

"No, silly! The Blood Moon doesn't make people fall in love. It chose us because it saw something already there. Something that was meant to be more."

"I just wanted to make sure that nothing made you feel this way."

"You make me feel this way."

Marco laughed and gave her a quick kiss. "I meant nothing else."

"It doesn't matter. People fall in love for lots of reasons. Reasons that aren't always in their control. You should know that better than anyone. We just feel this way and it's real. We should just roll with it."

Marco smiled and put the question out of his mind.

Star moved to sit in his lap. "This feeling is so strong and it's only growing stronger." she said then kissed him. "I hope that one day it grows so strong..."

She moved her lips to his neck. He closed his eyes at the sensation.

"...that it leaves its mark on you." she whispered in his ear.

The thundering sound of a key being inserted into a lock cut through the air like a sonic boom.

They quickly assumed innocent positions on the couch. They sat up straight with some space
between them. Star waved her wand and halos appeared over their heads.

"Too much." Marco whispered.

Star grabbed the glowing rings and hid them under a couch pillow.

"¡Hola, kids! We're home! What did you two do tonight?" Marco's dad asked as they opened the front door.

"Hi Mr and Mrs Diaz! Just watching this movie!" Star said somewhat nervously.

Marco noticed that the TV was showing the DVD menu. "It just finished!" Marco blurted as he turned to face his parents.

"Well, I can tell you two enjoyed your evening." His mom said as she pulled something from her purse and handed it to him.

Marco looked at the item confused. "Make up? Concealer?"

"Just in case you want to cover that up."

Marco blushed when he realized that Star had given him a hickey.

"Don't be so embarrassed. Your father is wearing some now."

"Honey!"

"Good night, kids!" Marco's mother said as she grabbed her husband and pulled him towards the stairs.

When they were gone, Marco looked at Star and said, "I can't believe you did that."

She had retrieved a halo from under the couch pillow. It hovered silently above her head. She gave him her best toothy smile of faux innocence.

"Uh-huh. You won't be needing these then." he said as he slowly removed her devil horns headband and placed it on his own head. He then tackled her on the couch and began to tickle her.

Star squealed with laughter.

==================================

For years, Marco thought that the mark she was talking about was the hickey she gave him. He now realized that she meant the bond they now shared. It had left its mark on him.

Was this a benchmark that couples aspire to in Mewni? If it doesn't form do couples consider that a sign that their love isn't strong? Was it rare as Stan had said? If so, it seemed like a very high bar had been set. How many lovers quarrels did this trigger?

They only had that one night before she left. Does it only form the first time? Or can it form after a couple had been together for a while? It's been almost five years since that night. Since he's seen her. Marco now knew that Star still loved him. He could feel it. Was the bond permanent?

Marco pondered these questions about the bond privately. He didn't feel comfortable asking the sailors around him for details about it. But he did pick up other information about the world he found himself in.
Marco felt ashamed. He had not been here for Star when she needed him most. Her mother had passed away.

Star was now the Queen of Mewni.

She was engaged to marry Prince Tom. Marco seethed at the thought. But somehow the marriage had been delayed. Her father still held the title of King.

The Queen of Mewni was not married yet.

Marco wanted the ship to get to its destination faster.

==================================

It was a foggy day when it happened.

The cargo ship had no weapons. It was designed to be a fast transport. It relied on its speed to flee from danger.

They should have had cannons.

The area was known to develop thick fog due to the collision of currents and the geography of an island. It was the perfect place for an ambush. By the time the cargo ship realized pirates were there, it was too late. A lucky shot from a cannon severed the mainsheet, slowing the cargo ship enough for the pirates to maneuver alongside.

Hooks were thrown to capture the ship. As they were thrown, Marco and the crew did their best to cut them loose. But there were too many and Marco's knife from the Mystery Shack was not meant for this kind of heavy work. Pirates swung on ropes between the ships. Marco fought off many, sending more than a few overboard into the water.

A cannon shot did the same for him.

The deck seemed to rise under Marco's feet. The next thing he knew was that he was in the water.

The cargo ship was beginning to free itself from the pirate attack. Marco knew that they would try to escape into the fog bank. They might not even know he had fallen. He had to get back on board before that happened. But it was too late. The cargo ship began to pull away.

He had two choices. One was to swim for the island. But Marco knew that if he did that, he might be stranded and could spend years marooned there. This left option two.

"GRAPPLING HOOK!" Marco shouted as he pulled the trigger aiming for the railing on the aft of the pirate ship. "Mabel was right. This thing is really handy." Marco thought as he hauled himself over the rail.

One pirate saw Marco as he climbed aboard. "Arrr!" he shouted as he charged with a cutlass. Marco dodged his swing and knocked him out with one chop to the neck. Marco took the pirate's eyepatch and headrag. Putting them on, he tried to blend in with the pirate crew.

"Look alive! Bring 'er around! We need ta chase 'em down while they're damaged an' slowed!" The burly pirate captain shouted.

"What about our men in the water?!"

"No time ta pick 'em up before our quarry escapes! Leave 'em!"
"No! Captain!" came shouts from some of the men.

"I SAID LEAVE 'EM!"

Some pirates ignored the captain's orders and threw ropes to the men in the water in an attempt at rescue.

"MUTINOUS SCURVY DOGS!"

Some of the other pirates moved to stop the rescuers. Marco didn't want to let those men just drown, even if they were pirates. He leapt in to fight and buy the rescuers time.

"I'll have all ye walk the plank!" said the captain as he swung a sword at a rescuer.

It was blocked by Marco, who got his own sword by stealing it from another pirate. "Walk it yourself!"

"So yer the leader of this mutiny!"

"No! But the captain is supposed to take care of the crew! You'd leave those men to drown!"

"Think ye know what bein' a pirate captain be about, do ye? Challengin' me for command?"

Marco was about to say he wasn't, but the Captain had already begun to fight. "Keep pulling men out of the water!" Marco called out to the rescuers.

Marco was at a disadvantage. He had studied kendo, but that was very unlike fighting with a cutlass. The captain was strong and very skilled. He had been drawn into the pirate's kind of fight. The best Marco could do was fight for time.

Sooner than Marco had wanted, the cutlass was knocked from his hand. Marco stumbled on the pitching deck and found himself on the ground facing the point of the Captain's sword.

"It's the plank fer ye."

Protests came from a large portion of the pirates. Men that had been pulled from the water and their rescuers called for mercy.

"This treacherous blowfish cost us our booty!" the Captain declared.

"There'll be other ships! And some of us still have our lives thanks to him!"

"That boy be no pirate! He knocked me out! An' those be my eyepatch an' cover!"

Marco removed the pilfered items.

"Ah! Ye be from the cargo ship's crew! Yet ye fight for the lives of these pirates? Ye be a puzzlin' one!"

The Captain looked at the pirate crew.

"Very well! I'll not be sending ye to the briny deep if ye join this pirate crew."

Marco knew why the Captain made the offer. If Marco was made to walk the plank, the divide among the crew could lead to a full mutiny. But offering him a place in the crew would maintain his authority. Even though he knew the Captain would try to get back at him for this mini rebellion,
Marco had little choice.

He just became a pirate.

"Yo ho ho."

==================================

Marco hoped that the pirates wouldn't find another cargo ship to raid until he figured out a way off of the pirate ship. Eventually the pirates will need supplies and would need to return to land. In the meantime he took his place in the crew.

He was below deck when he heard the call. "Cargo ship sighted! Starboard!"

"Aw, man." Marco said as he wondered how he could yet avoid piracy. He felt the ship turning to attack. His stomach turned with it.

"Get yer barnacled bottoms up on deck! Prepare to board!"

The moment he and the other pirates went topside, he felt the ship turn sharply again.

"Talo navy escort hiding in the fog!"

"The cargo ship was bait! They be hunting us!"

This just got worse. Marco didn't want to board and raid a vessel, but he also didn't want to be boarded. Again.

Distant cannons sounded and cannonballs splashed in the water surrounding the pirate ship.

"Naval escort be gaining!"

Cannons sounded closer now. A cannonball hit the main mast which collapsed on deck. The pirate ship was crippled.

"Get ready! They'll never take us alive!" The captain ordered.

Marco had every intention of being taken alive.

A second naval ship approached from the opposite direction. They were surrounded.

Hooks were thrown onto the pirate ship to capture it. Marines from the ships began to board from both sides.

"They're here me hardies! Now fight!" The captain ordered.

"Forget that! I surrender!" Marco shouted as he threw down his weapon and raised his hands above his head.

The remainder of the pirate crew followed suit. They knew they were outnumbered and outmatched by the naval troops.

"YELLOW BELLIED, BILGE SWILLIN', POX FACED, BACK STABBIN' SWINE!" the Captain swore.

==================================
Marco tried to explain that he was captured and forced to join the pirate crew, but his captors wouldn't listen. They had heard that story many times.

"You will be sent to the Hex Cells of Talo. Your punishment will decided there."

"Hex Cells. Great."

Marco now had a record. He was officially a 'bad boy'. He wondered if Star would find this either hot or funny. If he ever gets the chance to tell her, that is.

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continuará
The prison was not at all what Marco expected. With a name like 'Hex Cells', he expected it to be haunted or cursed in some way.

As it turns out, the name comes from the old architecture style the Kingdom of Talo is known for. Talo. The kingdom of the long gone Honeybee royal line.

Marco sat on the floor of the cell and leaned back against one of the six yellow walls. His fanny pack and grappling hook had been confiscated.

He wondered how he could escape, but the Hex Cells were very well designed. Years of prison break movies did not provide any ideas. Marco was told that he would see the judge when she got back from vacation. Even though he was anxious to get to Star as soon as possible, Hank Innocent would just have to be patient and wait.

After two weeks, Marco's beard had begun to grow in and was itchy. He wanted to shave.

The door on the metal grate covering the top of the cell was opened and a ladder lowered in. "Convict! It's time to face the judge! Come out!"

When Marco reached the top of the ladder, he was shackled to a chain gang. He and other prisoners were marched down a hexagonal hallway past more sunken cells.

The hall lead to what looked like a six sided courtroom. A demon woman with a white powder wig and black robe sat at the hexagonal judge's bench. There was no jury box.

More chained pirates and prisoners were brought into the courtroom. Marco noticed that some prisoners were monsters. A chain gang of them was lined up next to him.

"Great fighter Red Hood! Is you! Long time, no see!"

Marco turned to look at the source of the voice. He also wanted to see who this 'Red Hood' was. Suddenly, giant green shackled arms encircled him.

"Do not tell real name. Vill be wery bad." was whispered into Marco's ear in a vaguely eastern european accent.

"Hey! Be quiet and get back in line!" the guards ordered.

Marco looked at the monster who hugged him. He always wondered about this monster. He had helped Star rescue him from Toffee once. But his main loyalty was always to Ludo.

Marco was a stranger in a strange land. Mostly ignorant. But this monster always seemed to know information. It came from his experience as a scout and a spy. And Buff Frog had just told Marco
that he should give a fake name.

Pirates and criminals were called one by one to stand before the judge. There was a short question and answer session. Then the judge passed sentence. It was very straightforward and quick. Most pirates were sent to Pixtopia.

Before long, Buff Frog was called before the Judge.

"Back again, Buff Frog? Trespassing on Royal land, huh?"

"Da! Judge."

"Arena?"

"Da! Judge."

"Done."

The Judge banged her gavel and Buff Frog was escorted from the courtroom.

Eventually Marco's turn came to face the judge.

"Name?"

He wished Buff Frog had called him something else. Marco knew his comics lore and silently hoped he would not go insane or have to be brought back from the dead before this was all over.

"Red Hood, your Honor."

"Mm-hm. You were captured as part of a pirate crew, correct?"

"I was a crewmember of a cargo ship that was attacked by pirates. I was captured. It was either join them or die."

"So, your answer is 'yes'?"

"Um. Don't I get a lawyer?"

Laughter erupted in the room.

"You're not from around here, are you?" The judge asked.

Marco shook his head. "No, your Honor."

"Thought so. See, you've already been convicted. This is just a sentencing hearing. You've probably noticed by now that most of your pirate cohorts will be sent to the Pixtopia mines. But do you have any skills that would be better used elsewhere?"

Marco thought about his interaction with Buff Frog. He was sent to an arena. It sounded like he had been there before, so it wasn't necessarily a death sentence. And he had loudly called Marco 'great fighter'. There would probably be some kind of fighting involved.

Plus, the alternative would be to develop a nice case of pixie lung in Pixtopia's shard mines.

"I'm a fighter." Marco said.

"Ha! He be no fighter! Just a lily livered landlubber!"
Marco turned toward the outburst to see the Pirate Captain.

"I easily bested him with me sword and he be the first of my crew to surrender to the navy!"

Apparently, the Captain still held a grudge against Marco.

"That true, Red Hood?" the judge asked.

"I didn't want to fight the navy. But I wouldn't mind a rematch against Captain Crunch over there."

"Gladly! Just give me a cutlass, ye weevil eatin' scoundrel!"

"I don't need one to beat you, Bucco!"

"Oooh! I like your spirit! I wish I had some spare gold to bet on you. I would send both of you to the arena." The judge said.

Marco looked at the judge sideways. Was she actually saying what it sounded like?

"Yup. Suuuure do wish I had some gold."

She was.

Marco flexed his stomach muscles and brought up an item. A small smile at the judge showed her a yellow glint between his teeth.

She raised a single demonic eyebrow.

He had swallowed the gold coin before he was captured by the navy. He knew it would come in handy. Marco began to cough.

"You should cover your mouth!" The judge said as she handed him a handkerchief.

While pretending to cough, Marco surreptitiously spit the coin into the cloth. He then placed the cloth on the judge's bench.

"Sorry, your Honor."

The judge picked up the crumpled handkerchief and looked at it. "Disgusting." she said before she placed it in her pocket with a slight grin. "Arena. Both of them. Keep them separated.

"Can I have my fanny pack back?"

"Can't have convicts walking around with weapons. But your belongings will be returned to you if you can win your freedom."

The judge's gavel banged against the bench.

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Marco was lead out of the courtroom and down a maze of corridors to a loading dock. A long, dark blue carriage was there. Barred hexagonal windows made Marco think of a prison bus. Draft animals had not yet been hooked up to it.

Buff Frog was already inside. Marco was placed next to him and shackled to the seat.

"Buff Frog wonder what happen to you. Here just in time."
"You were told to be silent, convict!" said a guard that was seated backwards at the front of the carriage.

Buff Frog looked at Marco out of the corners of his eye and a small smile curled his mouth.

In time other convicts were loaded into the carriage. The pirate captain was loaded last and placed at the far end. Marco looked back from his seat.

"This be better than makin' ye walk the plank, boy!"

"Be quiet, convict!"

"Better than keel haulin' ye!"

"I said be quiet!"

"I'll skewer yer gizzard, ye powder wettin' milk maid!"

"QUIET!" said the guard as he marched down the carriage aisle then threw a armored fist into the captain's face.

The captain barely acknowledged the punch.

"Heh."

Marco knew it was a matter of time before he had to face the captain. He tried not to worry since there was little he could do right now.

As he looked away he caught a glimpse of activity out of the barred carriage window. Draft animals were being hooked up to the carriage. Marco's stomach sank. If he had known where the arena was located he might have chosen to go to the shard mines.

When the flaming skeletal unicorns were finished being hitched to the carriage, a ramp opened and lowered into the ground. Flames danced from the opening.

"Goin' all the way to the bottom, convicts!" laughed the head guard as the carriage started down the ramp.

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"LADIES AND GENTLEBREMEM! PRESENTING YOUR HEADLINER! WILL THIS BE THE DAY HE CASTS ASIDE HIS PRINCIPLES AND TAKES THE LIFE OF HIS OPPONENT?!"

The calls for blood have grown stronger since the last fight.

"OR WILL THIS BE THE DAY HIS PRINCIPLES COST HIM HIS OWN?!"

Some of the calls have been for his. The denizens of the underworld enjoy their gladiatorial entertainment. Some felt that Marco's refusal to kill in the arena was sanitizing their favorite sport, making it fit only for toddlers. They would love to see his head roll.

"THE UNKILLING MACHINE! THE DEATHLESS! THE CRIMSON MERCY! RED HOOOOOOOD!!"

Of course he was not without his fans. Many spectators actually enjoyed being able to root for an actual good guy instead of the least unsavory character in the latest shipment of imported convicts.

Red hoodies with "RED IS IRONIC" printed on them have been big sellers at the souvenir stands. Demonic, but not unattractive, ladies held up signs professing their love for the mysterious Red Hood.

Today was his first one-on-one fight.

After he arrived at the arena, he was assigned to a group called The Tiamats. Many of the events were group battles, and they were supposed to be a team.

In his first battle he learned how real this fighting would be. A pirate that had been sent to the arena at the same time as him met his fate under a warhammer. A battle axe cleanly separated another convict's head from his shoulders.

At the end of that first battle, Marco was alive. He had broken the bones of his opponents but he had killed no one. In team battles, victors are declared when one side obviously dominates.

Other convicts on his team objected to Marco's refusal to kill and confronted him in the team cell after the battle.

"You're going to get yourself killed! You're going to get *us* killed! Do you think this is a game? Do you realize where you are?!!"

"I'll fight the way I fight!"

"They'll put a better fighter in with us if you we remove you from the lineup." said a large goat-like monster.
Two other convicts joined him. "Yeah! Git 'im!"

They were the last ones who tried that.

"Got three fighters in here that need to be put on the disabled list." Marco said to the team manager through the bars of the group cell.

"You know, you're supposed to save that for the battles, Red Hood!"

"Hey. They came at me!"

"Ugh. Fine. I'll have to have those fighters replaced."

"What'll happen to these guys?"

"When their injuries are healed, they'll be put back in action. Can't get out of here that easy."

==================================

New fighters would replace ones injured and killed in battle. One took the lower bunk under Marco's.

"How long been in Mewni, Red Hood?"

Marco recognized the voice immediately and did the math in his head. "Forty-nine days. You've been here before, right? How did you get out?"

"Escape impossible. Arena actually very strong prison. Only two way out. One. Survive fifty battle. How many time you fight already?"

"Five."

"Months to get out that way."

Marco knew that he didn't have that kind of time. Star's wedding was scheduled to happen soon.

"You said there were two ways out?"

"Two. Someone pay for release. Distinguish self as superior fighter. Allied army or mercenary group want you."

"What if you don't want to join?"

"Convict not given choice."

"Was that how you got out?"

"Ludo pay for freedom. He must wait few battles before Yvgeny Bulgoyaboff offered."

Marco had found out Buff Frog's real name a long time ago but still called him Buff Frog. Yvgeny Bulgoyaboff didn't exactly roll off the tongue.

"Still running with his gang?"

"Ludo get better in years since Toffee. Many monsters come back. Nowhere else to go."

"What about your kids?"
"Other monsters take care while Buff Frog here. Even Lobster Claws stop trying to eat. There's Boris, and Ivan, and Yuri, and Pavel, and Piotr, and..."

Marco let him finish before asking, "Was it really a better choice to come here instead of Pixtopia?"

"Definite. Much better. Ten years to get out shard mines."

"I did it in less than a day."

Buff Frog laughed, "Was you? Heard small group escape. Once."

"So why do I need to hide my identity?"

"Shh! Many ears."

Marco was quiet. He wanted to know what Buff Frog knew.

==================================

A while later Buff Frog spoke again. "Red Hood, you know who is prince of Underworld Kingdom?"

"Tom."

"Da. You know who rule kingdom?"

"His parents, I guess. The King and Queen?"

"Only Empress Ishtar rule now. She arrange wedding for son Tom right before husband Emperor die almost five year ago."

Five years ago. The connection did not escape Marco. Buff Frog was telling him something.

A lot happened that day almost five years ago. Tom was engaged to Star. Apparently Tom didn't even arrange the engagement himself. Tom's father died. Dimensional travel to Earth was blocked. Any evidence of Star was wiped clean from Earth. Star's scheduled wedding day was the five year anniversary of her engagement.

And now he had a suspect that may have been behind everything.

Empress Ishtar.

She was why he had to go by 'Red Hood'. It would be the end of Marco Diaz if she ever found him.

So, why didn't she just have him killed five years ago?

"Emperor and Empress? Is the underworld an empire?"

"No, is kingdom. But ruler title change many years ago. Sound more intimidating."

==================================

Today was Marco's first one-on-one fight, but he held no illusions about distinguishing himself against this opponent. This was a rematch.

Marco was determined to leave the arena without killing. He avoided edged weapons and had chosen to fight with a staff today.
"AND HIS OPPONENT! YOU KNOW HIM! YOU LOVE TO HATE HIM! YOU HATE TO LOVE HIM! HE HAS LEFT MANY LAYING FACE DOWN IN THE ARENA! THE SWASHBUCKLING SMASHER! THE BUCCANEER OF BEHEADING! THE PUNISHING PIRATE! CAPTAINNNN MMMMORGAAAAAAN!"

"Been waitin' to pay ye back for costing me my ship an' crew, boy!"

"Take it out of my share of the plunder from your last raid. Oh yeah, you led the ship right into a trap! A parrot would have been a better captain!" Marco said as he readied his staff.

"A stick?! Ye be a fool! I'll soon be usin' yer skull as a cup fer me grog! I wish we be on the sea. I'd spill yer guts an' use 'em fer chum!" The captain said as he waved his cutlass in front of him.

"FIGHTERS READY!"

Marco didn't bother to respond. It was go time and talk was cheap.

The announcer held up a tiny bell and struck it with a tiny hammer.

*BWOOOOOONG!*

The captain went on the attack immediately. Marco tried to keep his distance until he could figure out a plan.

Marco tried to attack when an opening presented itself. After a swing of the cutlass went by, he struck the captain's arms with his staff. Marco's opponent barely seemed to notice that he had been hit.

Marco now understood why the captain swung his cutlass wildly. He didn't think Marco could hurt him.

Marco used the staff to deflect the captain's cutlass. He was glad to find that weapons here were much stronger, but he knew that the staff would eventually wear and break. He tried to avoid the blade entirely when possible.

After deftly dodging an attack, Marco jabbed the end of his staff into the pressure point under his opponent's armpit. He hoped to momentarily paralyze the captain's sword wielding arm, but the captain was unaffected.

Other pressure points yielded similar results. The captain was very tough. Marco wondered if he was part troll.

The captain continued to attack aggressively. Marco was glad the arena was steady, unlike the rocking deck of the pirate ship where the captain first beat him in a fight. He used the large fighting area to avoid his opponent.

"Wishin' you picked up a sword now, ye little tar stain?"

Marco was at a loss. His attacks so far have been like gentle breezes to the captain. Marco kept probing for a weakness. Marco swung his staff upward into the captain's groin.

The captain chuckled. "Care ta be my cabin boy, ye sea drinkin' eel?"

Marco struck at the captain's right boot.

"Not time for me pedicure yet, ye pox faced rat!"
Marco’s staff struck the Pirate Captain’s left shin. He could tell that he had not struck flesh. The captain was hiding the fact that he had a prosthetic leg. Judging by the sound, it was wood.

Maybe it was not as tough as the rest of the captain.

He ducked and dodged the cutlass low. As the captain brought his weapon back to strike again, Marco rolled underneath. He recovered into a kneeling position, he planted his staff vertically in the dirt with his left hand to block the sword.

The captain grabbed the staff with his left hand and yanked it away. Just as Marco wanted.

Marco let go just as his opponent threw the staff away. The pirate captain's weight was on his left foot.

Breaking wood boards in karate is a demonstration of martial arts skill. This is the first time Marco would break a board that hit back. His fist hit the captain's wooden leg with a loud crack. It folded like overcooked asparagus.

Marco leapt away as the captain fell on his face. With the captain unable to pursue him, Marco was free to recover his staff.

The captain cursed at him. "Ye underhanded ballast pig!" He pressed his fist against the ground while he gripped his cutlass. The fingerguard moved over his knuckles and exposed his thumb as he tried to rise.

With his opponent's mobility crippled, it was easier for Marco to hit his intended targets. A carefully aimed jab with his staff broke the Captain's right thumb. He could no longer grip his weapon. The cutlass slipped from his fingers and Marco knocked it away.

As the Captain planted his left hand on the ground and tried to push himself to his feet... foot, Marco broke his opponent's left thumb. Marco could tell that his opponent was right handed, but it was better to be safe than sorry.

"Come closer ye cowardly blowfish!" The captain yelled as he got to his knees.

"Why? So you can smoosh my head? No thank you, Mr Mountain. I've seen that episode. I won't make the same mistake."

Marco had a slight phobia about being crushed ever since that time in Toffee’s crystal box. He shuddered inwardly.

"Anyway, it would save us both a lot of trouble if you would just go ahead and tap out now."

"Ha! What are ye goin' ta do? Tickle me ta death with yer stick?"

"Even a mountain will crumble if the ocean pounds against it long enough. So, anytime you want to, just say 'uncle'."

Marco swung his staff baseball style into the face of his opponent. The captain's nose broke with a wet crack. He fell and lay on his back.

"Ha! Not the first time this nose been broken! A pirate be better off if he can't smell!"

Marco moved to stand above the captain’s head. He reared and swung the staff like a sledgehammer.

*crack*
The captain was unable to grab the staff thanks to his broken thumbs.

"Ye just be makin' me prettier!"

*crack*

"Don't need that tooth!"

*crack*

"Or that one!"

*crack*

The captain brought his arms up to guard his face. Marco simply moved on to other vulnerable body parts.

*crack*

*crack*

Marco wiped his forehead with his sleeve.

*crack*

*crack*

"Whew."

*crack*

=================================================

The job took much longer than Marco would have preferred. Cheers for the brutality were eventually muted and replaced by silence except for the crack of Marco's staff and the occasional sound of a random spectator retching.

Marco had long ago stripped off his red hoodie and tied it around his waist. His grey t-shirt was dark with sweat.

*crack*

*crack*

*crack*

"...uncle..."

Marco stopped mid swing.

"Finally." The announcer sounded queasy. "FINALLY! THE PIRATE CAPTAIN MORGAN HAS YIELDED! RED HOOD HAS WON BY SHEER PERSISTENCE!"

Weak applause sounded in the arena. Even the crowd had had enough.

"IT IS NOW UP TO HIM TO FINISH OFF HIS OPPONENT!"
Marco had seen this a few times. Unlike team battles, he is expected to kill his opponent to secure victory. He walked over and picked up his opponent's cutlass from where it lay.

"Be quick about it, Matey." the pirate said weakly.

Matey. That was the first non-insulting thing the pirate captain had ever called him.

Marco thrust the point of the blade downward. It stuck in its target. The ground next to the captain's head.

"You're strong. Eventually you'll heal to fight again. Maybe someday, someone will manage to kill you. But it won't be me. This is over."

The captain paused before speaking. "Aye. Tis over. Ye beat me."

"Technically this is a draw."

Marco stalked away from the captain and toward the west tunnel entrance.

"UNBELIEVABLE! RED HOOD HAS SPARED CAPTAIN MORGAN! HE THREW AWAY HIS WIN!" came the announcement over the roars of the crowd.

"Sure hope this doesn't come back to bite me." Marco said to himself.

="You know that not count toward win total."

"Yeah, I figured. But that way will take too long anyway."

"Army and mercenaries not want if you not kill."

"There are other ways to impress."

"Like?"

"Volume."

"It not matter how loud you fight."

"I need you to do something for me at the next team battle..."

Marco was given a few days of rest before the next team battle. The soreness in his arms and back muscles had waned.

"LADIES AND GENTLEBREMEN! PRESENTING FOR YOUR ENTERTAINMENT TODAY... TEEEEMMM BAAAATTTLLLLEEE!"

"Ready, Red Hood?"

"Ready as I'll ever be."

Buff Frog left to do what Marco had asked.

"FROM THE EAST ENTRANCE, TWENTY THREE OF THE STRONGEST FIGHTERS
FROM THE BROKEN KINGDOMS! THE ALL VETERAN TEAM! THE WYVERRRRRNS! FEATURING...

OSWALD THE BUTCHER!
RAZOR STEED!
TOBY THE WIDOWMAKER!
QUENTIN CANNIBAL!
COMBAT WOMBAT!
THE DENTIST!
BADGERMAN!
DAVE!
BRUTUS THE ANNIHILATOR!...

The announcer read off twenty three names total.

Marco waited behind the portcullis gate of the west tunnel entrance.

"All right Tiamats! It's showtime! Grab your weapon from the racks as you leave the tunnel! Mind the newbies!" the team manager said.

The gate began to slowly rise.

Marco looked over the weapon selection available today. He needed to impress. The choice was easy. Marco grabbed the nunchaku from the rack.

"AND FROM THE WEST ENTRANCE! THEIR OPPONENTS! CONVICTS FROM THE HEX COURT OF OLD TALO! THE TIAMATS! FEATURING..."

Marco walked from the tunnel into the fight area.

"RED HOOOOOOD!"

The crowd loudly made their feelings known. Cheers and boos erupted from the stands.

"AND..." the announcer said in anticipation.

Suddenly the portcullis fell to the ground. Buff Frog gave a thumbs up from behind the gate.

"WHAT'S THIS?! NO OTHER FIGHTERS CAME OUT!"

Marco gave a flashy freestyle performance. He skillfully spun and swung his weapon, at times passing it behind his back and between his legs. He ended the performance with one of the ends of the nunchaku tucked under his arm. He gestured for his twenty three opponents to come at him.

"LADIES AND GENTLEBREMEN! RED HOOD INTENDS TO FIGHT THE WYVERNS ALL ALONE!"

The spectators roared. Many of Marco's fans covered their gasps and began to weep. He was outnumbered twenty three veteran fighters to one. They were sure that Red Hood's days were
This was a desperation move. Marco didn't have time to win fifty team battles. His refusal to kill made him a hard sell to armies and mercenaries. He had to win so decisively that someone would pay to free him regardless. He had to make it look easy. He had to win with style.

"I will not fear..." he said to himself.

"FIGHTERS READY!"

Marco concentrated on his breathing.

The announcer held up the tiny bell and struck it with the tiny hammer.

*BWOOOOONG!*

His opponents seemed confused and were reluctant to start until one spoke out. "If this fool wishes to die, I will oblige him!"

He strode confidently to Marco and raised his axe.

The strike was like lightning. The end of the nunchaku connected with the fighter's chin.

The axe fell to the ground. The fighter slumped to his knees before falling to his left side.

Marco did not even glance at his fallen foe.

"Twenty two."

His opponents were caught off guard when Marco began to sprint at them. He leapt at a fighter and planted a flying dragon kick in his temple.

"Twenty one."

As he landed, Marco swung the nunchaku low at the ankle of a fighter. With his leg raised, the fighter was forced to lean backward. Marco used the follow through of his swing to quickly bring his weapon into position. He brought the nunchaku down into his opponent's face.

"Twenty."

The Wyverns began to realize that this would not be the cakewalk they originally thought and began to coordinate their attacks.

Two fighters with swords approached at once. As one swung, Marco wrapped the nunchaku around the blade and caught the other handle in the same hand.

Controlling his opponent's weapon, Marco blocked the other sword. A punch with his free hand knocked the second attacker out.

"Nineteen."

Marco forced the first attacker's sword arm down into the ground. A stomp on the arm broke bones. A backhand mercifully knocked the fighter out.

"Eighteen."
Marco knocked a thrown knife away with the nunchaku and rolled to dodge another. Springing from his roll, an upward swing of his weapon launched his opponent into the air.

Marco did not even wait for his opponent to hit the ground.

"Seventeen."

The front two limbs of the unicorn had been replaced with blades. To avoid them, Marco leapt onto its back where it can’t reach. He wrapped the chain of the nunchaku around its horn and gripped both handles with his left hand.

"Get off!" the beast shouted as it bucked like a bronco and kicked a fighter to the rear.

"Sixteen."

Marco sharply kicked the sides of his mount with his heels. The beast reared up then began to sprint. Fighters dove out of its path to avoid being skewered. Marco steered into the arena wall and leapt off at the last moment.

"Fifteen."

With Marco now near the wall, a fighter tried to bring a huge mace down on him. Marco sidestepped the mace and with his left arm caught the fighter in a front headlock. He brought his left heel up quickly to kick the fighter in the face.

Releasing the headlock, he spun counter clockwise and grabbed the back of the fighter's head with his right hand. Marco rammed his foe's face into the wall cracking the stone.

"Fourteen."

Marco performed a split as an axe embedded itself in the wall with a shower of sparks. A straight punch to the groin halted his foe.

As Marco stood, he shoved his opponent over onto his back. Marco began to walk on his chest. A stomp to the face ended the fighter's day.

"Thirteen."

Marco dodged a spear thrust and grabbed it behind the point with his right hand. He swung his right leg over the spear.

His attacker thought Marco had missed with a kick. But Marco's real kick rode along the spear into his foe's head.

"Twelve."

Still gripping the spear, Marco drove it into the ground, through the foot of another fighter. Marco had pinned him to the spot.

Marco silenced the screaming with a swing of his nunchaku.

"Eleven."

A spiked metal ball attached to a chain whizzed over Marco's head as he ducked.

His foe continued to rotate the weapon as Marco approached. Marco somersaulted over it on the next
The fighter released the chain when Marco slugged him in the stomach.

"Ten."

Marco had timed the punch perfectly. The metal ball flew along its tangent into the face of another fighter.

"Nine."

Seeing that their numbers were dwindling, four fighters charged Marco at once.

A hook sweep took the fighter on the far right off balance. With his leg already chambered, Marco kicked the fighter next to him in the chin.

"Eight."

With his nunchaku, Marco knocked away the weapon of the fighter on his far left.

Marco followed with a front kick to the chest of the middle fighter. Marco felt ribs break in his opponent.

"Seven."

The fighter on the right had only begun to recover and was not ready when Marco performed a spinning back handed punch on him.

"Six."

Marco continued the spin and elbowed the nose of the left fighter. A loud crunch was heard.

"Five."

Marco closed quickly on a fighter who thrust a dagger at his head. Marco dodged and grabbed the outstretched arm. An upward swing of the nunchaku broke the elbow.

"Four."

A fighter tried to catch Marco with a spinning front kick which missed, exposing his back.

Using the nunchaku with both hands, Marco pulled the weapon against the neck of his opponent. Marco sent a knee into the base of his foe's skull.

"Three."

Marco caught the axe kick directed at him at it's peak and shin kicked the other leg of his opponent breaking the knee.

"Two."

When the fighter charged, Marco tossed the nunchaku into the air distracting his opponent. A series of quick pinpoint strikes to various pressure points froze his opponent's limbs.

Marco caught the nunchaku in his right hand, gripping both handles. He punched his opponent out with them.
Marco stood in the center of the arena.

"One."

When you looked like Marco's last opponent, you don't need a fearsome nickname. Dave was a giant even by troll standards. He looked like all he did was eat protein and fight.

Dave's reputation preceded him in the arena. He had long ago finished his sentence for unpaid carriage parking tickets, but elected to stay in the arena. He was returned by the first three Mercenary groups that took him for being too violent. The arena no longer offered him for recruitment. He didn't fight with weapons, instead preferring to crush his foes with his bare hands.

He began to approach Marco.

"Very impressive, Red Hood, but this ends now."

Marco reminded himself what he said before the start of the fight.

"I will not fear..."

Marco knew the nunchaku would be useless. He threw them to the ground.

He focused his emotion into his core.

He coiled every muscle in his body.

He would only get one shot.

He had to wait until his foe was close enough.

Marco quieted his mind.

He felt her.

"Star."

His opponent was reaching for him with gigantic hands.

"WAH-TAAAAAAAHH!"

When those who were there recounted the battle, some would claim they saw a flash of light.

==================================

Star felt her fear disappear for just a moment. She felt confidence. She felt control.

Marco had reached out to her.

==================================

When the dust settled, the hairstyles of spectators in the lowest rows had been blown straight backwards. It was as if they had been looking into a jet engine.

Marco was still in the position of his completed strike. His right arm extended to his side. His hand still clenched in a fist.

In line with his arm was a shallow trench from the center of the fighting area where Marco stood, to
Dave, embedded in the wall.

The unconscious troll snored.

Marco dropped his fighting stance.

"Zero."

The audience was virtually silent. Only a few murmurs from the crowd and the pathetic whimpers of some defeated fighters could be heard.

He had come this far, he figured that he may as well go all the way with this. After all, it's not like anyone here has seen it before.

Marco spread his arms wide and shouted at the spectators. "ARE YOU NOT ENTERTAINED?!"

Cheers louder than the arena had ever heard erupted. The structure shook from the sound. "RED HOOD! RED HOOD! RED HOOD!..." came the chants.

Marco picked up the nunchaku and tossed it into the stands. There was a brief scuffle for the souvenir. A young demonic boy emerged and held up his prize.

Pixies flew overhead and showered Marco with flower petals which fell around him onto the arena floor. He was reminded of a moment in his past. He would have given anything to be able to wrap his arms around Star right now.

The Empress, high in her private seats said to herself, "I am entertained." Her lip curled.

continuará
Buff Frog waved goodbye as Marco left. Ludo had again paid for his release. He would be released to him later.

The morning after his display in the arena, Marco was told that someone had paid to have him released into their service.

"There was more than one party interested in your service." the warden said as he handed Marco his belongings back.

"Who was interested?"

"The army of Beon wanted you to train incoming recruits. They were very impressed by your skill. The mercenary group 'Griffon's Nest' wanted you to capture fugitives alive for their bounties."

"But there is someone who is always given priority when they are interested in a recruit."

"Who?"

"Red Hood. I am Empress Ishtar of Underworld. You are now in my service" 

"Oh, crap." Marco thought to himself.

Marco regarded his new boss. The mother of the demon engaged to the woman he loves. She had something to do with taking Star from him.

But now he understood why he wasn't just killed and instead now found himself in this cloak and dagger situation.

She had no idea who he was. Or at the very least, she had no idea what Marco Diaz looked like. This seemed like a severe lapse in information gathering.

Marco wondered how he was going to slip away from her. He would much rather have been drafted by Griffon's Nest. He could have ditched them the moment they sent him out as a bounty hunter.

"Do you have any questions for me before you begin?"

Marco was somewhat surprised that he was even allowed to ask a question.

"Thank you, Empress Ishtar. I do. Why did you chose to recruit me? My refusal to kill must have weighed against that decision."

"That is what made you perfect. You will serve in my elite personal guard. I much prefer that those
who act against me be subdued, not killed. The dead cannot answer questions." Ishtar said with a smile.

Marco looked around at the occasional undead.

"You are a dimensional traveler." It was a statement, not a question. Ishtar knew he was not from Mewni.

"Yes, Empress, from Andromeda. We do not often deal with the undead."

"You will grow accustomed quickly. The undead no longer know what they knew in life."

He remembered Stan saying that the King of Xix had mistaken him for a traveller from Andromeda. Marco met a convicted traveller from there while he was at the arena. He had learned a few details from him to help sell his cover.

"Yes, Empress."

==================================

Marco was stuck. He had been stuck for a week.

A member of the elite personal guard does not have privacy or free time. Every movement is planned and accounted for. Not just when he is on duty. When he sleeps. When he eats. Off duty time is spent with other members of the guard.

Marco had hoped to get a head start before his absence was noticed. He estimated that he would have about six minutes. Just long enough to use the chamberpot.

Also the elite guard armor, while fearsome and intimidating, was cumbersome. The helmet was stuffy. The chest plate was heavy. The arm and leg guards restricted his movement. And the gauntlets and greaves reduced his dexterity and agility.

==================================

Marco was part of a detail escorting the Empress around the castle grounds when it happened.

A man emerged from a blind corner and charged at the Empress with a knife.

Marco knew that if he hesitated, he would be punished. He needed to maintain his status in the elite guard long enough to figure a way out. He moved to engage the assailant.

Marco caught the man's arm and dislodged the knife. Marco used his momentum against the attacker. Marco rolled with the assailant and put his arm in a lock. With a sudden twisting motion, the man's arm was dislocated. Marco held him on the ground.

"Excellent, excellent. You may release him."

Marco hesitantly released the man's arm and stepped away.

"You pass."

Marco said nothing.

"Ah, you are confused. You see, I occasionally use a false assailant to test new guards to see if they could be trusted to take action to protect me. This man is just a random prisoner from the dungeons."
The false assassin did not make a sound despite the pain he must have been in.

"Take another guard and escort this prisoner back to the dungeons. Tell the warden to heal him. And tell him his sentence is reduced by half a year."

"Yes, Empress." Marco said.

"Stand." he instructed the man.

The man stood unsteadily.

"Let's go." Marco held the man by his uninjured arm. He and the man walked towards the dungeons. Softly so no one else could hear him, Marco whispered to the man, "I'm sorry."

"We are both prisoners here." he replied.

"I know."

Marco signaled to another guard to accompany him and when they reached the dungeons the man was returned to his cell.

Marco told the warden that the man was to be healed and his sentence was reduced.

"Small reward for his pain and trouble. His remaining sentence is still eighteen more years."

"What was his crime?"

"He failed the test you just passed."

==================================================================

"A gift for you Empress Ishtar." said the nobleman as he held out a painting.

"I want to view it in more detail."

The nobleman began to step forward with the artwork.

Approaching the Empress unbidden was prohibited. Marco and another guard immediately advanced. The nobleman froze in his tracks realizing his error. Marco and the other guard stood close to him on either side.

"An honest mistake. It is alright." Ishtar said.

The nobleman exhaled.

"Red Hood. Bring the painting to me."

Marco took the painting grasping it by the sides of it's frame. It was a portrait of a very regal looking demon. The images of fire seemed to move in the painting.

He approached the Empress and flipped the painting around for her to view.

"My late husband. This is very detailed. The artist is quite skilled."

Ishtar's eyes looked at a candle flame.
"That will be all for today."
The nobleman bowed and made his exit.
Marco waited to be excused.
"You are heart bonded." Ishtar said to him.
Again a statement, not a question. Marco answered anyway.
"Yes, Empress."
Marco wondered how she knew.
"Where is your bond mate?"
"The Kingdom of Kolma, Empress." Marco said.
"You are the first member of my elite guard to be bonded. How long has it been since you have seen your bond mate?"
"A year, Empress."
"Did you return to the Andromeda Dimension?"
"No, Empress. I was travelling in this dimension."
"You were captured as part of a pirate crew."
"Yes, Empress. I was a crewmember of a ship that was attacked on route to Kolma. I was captured and forced into service."
"Interesting."
Marco wondered if she would be kind and free him from guard service to rejoin his 'mate'.
"If there is room in the guard barracks, hang the painting there. If there is not, dispose of it. That will be all."

Nope.
"Yes, Empress." he said and began to walk to the exit.
A candle burned out.

Marco was shocked at how dismissive Ishtar was of the nobleman's gift. An image of her late husband. She would never even see it in the guard barracks.

He had heard that Ishtar and her husband were bonded. Was that a lie?
Marco thought to himself, "It's been years since I've seen a picture of Star. I would do just about anything to see one."
"Red Hood."

Marco stopped in the middle of the room halfway to the door and turned to face the Empress.
"Heart bonds are rare and powerful magic. But they can be a weakness as much as they can be a strength."

"Yes, Empress."

"...

"...

"I want to see your heartmark. Remove your armor and show it to me."

Marco tensed.

"I do not enjoy repeating commands."

He set the painting on the ground and began to unfasten his armor. He tried to move slowly. The chest plate fell to the floor.

"Do hurry up."

Marco unzipped the red hoodie he was wearing under the armor.

He hesitated. He tried to think of an escape route.

"Show me your heart mark, now!" the Empress commanded.

He hoped that Ishtar would not realize who his bond mate was.

He lifted his grey t-shirt above his chest.

"YOU!"

Of course he was busted. It was a star.

"GUARDS! SEIZE HIM!"

The other elite guards advanced on him.

Rather than wait to be surrounded, Marco ran towards one of the guards before the others closed in. The elite guards were better fighters and Marco would have a hard time fighting his way out. Marco’s flying kick was dodged, but he mule kicked his opponent behind him as he landed. The rest of the guards were closing in. The others had armed themselves.

Marco made it to the back wall of the room. The guards moved in on him slowly and cautiously. They were waiting for an opening. Even the guard he knocked down had picked himself up.

The crackle of magic energy on the far side of the room let Marco know that the guards were the least of his problems.

Empress Ishtar had a wand.

She swung the wand and hurled a huge sphere of magic energy at him.

The guards were just as surprised as the energy plowed into them. A few of the guards were vaporized. Others dove away.

Marco ducked to the floor in the nick of time. The ball of energy crashed into the wall behind him.
Dust, smoke, and debris filled the area. As the dust began to settle, Marco saw that a hole had been blasted in the wall. He couldn't hesitate. He dove through the hole and ran down the hall on the other side. With luck it would take a few moments for Ishtar to realize that he wasn't dead yet.

A six minute head start would be generous now.

He had noted the layout of the castle in the time he was here. He knew that there was a large window at the end of this hallway. He just had to make it there.

Marco heard Ishtar's voice coming from the hole in the wall behind him. "AFTER HIM! KILL HIM!"

He surprised a guard with a running punch to the face as he came out from a corridor. He caved in the facemask of the guard's helmet. Marco was thankful he was still wearing the arm guards and gauntlets of his armor.

Marco saw another guard at the end of the hall in front of the large window. He was holding a huge morning star and was ready to fight him.

Marco couldn't believe his luck.

The guard assumed that Marco would stop to fight him. He was unprepared when Marco sped up and tackled him. The guard dropped his weapon.

Marco thought that he would need to break through the window by crashing into it himself. Instead, Marco was able to use the fully armored guard to protect his unarmored chest as they crashed through the glass.

Too bad they were so many stories up.

They started their fall. Marco grabbed the collar of the guard's chest armor securely.

Mabel said that it worked better if you shouted. Who was he to argue with results?

"GRAPPLING HOOK!"

The hook latched onto a balcony rail on the tower across from the window they just exited.

Marco knew that the grappling hook would not be able to rewind quickly with the extra weight of the guard. They swung down to the flat roof of a lower building.

The guard tumbled as they landed but was able to rise to his feet. Marco rolled and was able to get up quickly.

Marco hoped that maybe the guard would let him go since he saved the guard from going splat when they fell.

Nope.

The guard attacked. Marco jumped and kneed the guard in the head as he charged. The guard's helmet came off. Marco tried to punch the guard in his unarmored face, but it was blocked by a forearm. Marco took a quick counter punch in his chest which staggered him. The guard kept up his attack. Marco was on the defensive.

He was having trouble with this guard. But he realized that he didn't need to defeat him. Just stall him long enough to escape. Marco backed up to the edge. There was no railing or wall on the roof.
and it was still a long way down.

The aggressive guard threw a punch but Marco caught the arm and spun him. The guard was off balance. Marco leaped up and kicked the guard with both feet. The guard started to fall sideways off the edge.

Marco saw the expression of fear in the guard's face. He grabbed the guard's outstretched arm and stopped the guard's fall. He looked at Marco in surprise. But Marco was merciful, not stupid. He didn't pull the guard back onto the roof. Instead he kicked the guard's legs out from under him.

The guard was now hanging by his hand off the edge.

A fireball narrowly missed Marco and hit the roof. Mages in the building he just escaped were now using ranged attack spells. Marco was out in the open. More fireballs followed. Guards began to emerge from the roof access door.

Marco saw the grappling hook laying on the roof. The rope was still attached to the balcony rail. He dove for it and activated the rewind mechanism. He was pulled from the roof quickly and found himself headed up and towards the tower.

He climbed over the railing and found himself in a room. Marco knew he was trapped. His pursuers saw him enter this room from the balcony. It was just a matter of time before they got up here.

A voice came from behind him. "Guard? What are you doing in my room?"

Marco recognized the voice. He spun to face him. If he was going to die here, the least he could do for Star was to take this jerk with him.

Marco took off his helmet. He wanted Tom to know it was him.

"YOU!" Tom exclaimed.

Marco attacked in blind rage.

Tom grunted at the pain of the first punch. But he recovered quickly.

"WHOA! MARCO!" Tom shouted as he blocked Marco's kicks.

"WAIT!" He shouted as they grappled.

"YOU DON'T-!" Tom was cut off when his hand was cut off by a chop. He screamed in surprise and pain.

"THAT'S IT!" Tom shouted as his room became an inferno. Marco was momentarily surprised. It was the opening Tom needed. Tom grabbed Marco's neck with his remaining hand. With surprising strength, he held him aloft.

Marco grabbed at Tom's arm to support his weight and avoid being strangled. Still enraged, he kicked at Tom. But Marco had no leverage or footing. The kicks were too weak.

Tom concentrated and controlled his severed hand. It opened a drawer and pulled out a knife.

"YOU BASTARD!" Marco cursed at Tom.

"Hey! Language." Tom said as his severed hand cut the air with the knife.
It was a dimensional blade.

"Have a nice trip." Tom said as he threw Marco into the opening. He threw his helmet in after him then closed the portal.

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Marco hit the ground roughly. His helmet landed by him. "NO!" he shouted as he scrambled to his feet. He had no idea where he was now.

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Guards burst into the room and shielded their faces from the flames. "He got away! He attacked me and used my dimensional blade to escape!" Tom shouted as he extinguished the inferno.

"Master Tom! You are injured!"

"I'll be fine! Nothing I haven't had to deal with before."

"Did he give any clue where he was going? Perhaps we can still pursue him."

"No."

"..."

"There is nothing to be done here now. You are excused. Report the escape to my mother."

"Yes, Master Tom."

"Before you go, answer me. Who was it?"

"A new elite guard. Red Hood."

"Very well. You may go."

"Yes, Master Tom."

After they left, Tom began the process of permanently reattaching his severed hand. He used the time to think.

He needed to let Star know that Marco Diaz has against all odds, somehow made it to Mewni. But he couldn't call directly on the mirror. Tom suspected that it was tapped. He could try to send a secret message through a courier. But his mother would be on high alert for such treachery now that she knows he is here. Especially so close to the wedding.

The last Gathering of Nobles before the wedding is soon. He just had to trust that Marco can make it there on his own.

He would feign ignorance. His assailant did not take off his helmet. It was a rogue guard.

Tom sat and tried to relax while his hand slowly reattached.
Marco took off the remnants of the elite guard armor. He was tired after the escape and fight. His adrenaline was ebbing. He needed to rest for a while.

He looked around at the strange trees. It was getting dark and he needed to find shelter. He knew that Tom had not sent him back to Earth. Marco needed to find out where he was.

He could have really used the North Star right now.

He soon came to the edge of a clearing and looked up. He recognized the night sky from his time gazing at it while serving on the cargo ship. He was still in the Mewni Dimension.

So he had that going for him. Which was nice.

Marco saw movement at the far edge of the clearing. He was wary because he knew that wild monsters were all around him. It was growing dark, but he could see that it wasn't a monster. It was a man... mewman... whatever.

Looking closer he could see that the man was covered in leaves and mud. He carried a spear. A wild man? A lost tribe living in a remote forest?

Marco called out to the man. "Hello?! Can you help me?! I'm lost!"

The man waved and said something. Marco couldn't make it out because of the distance. He stepped into the clearing to go to the man.

He heard the man shouting now.

"I'm sorry! I can't hear you! Wait there! I'll come to you!"

The man was screaming at him now and Marco realized why when a green vine grabbed his ankle. A giant yellow flower in the center of the clearing tilted and faced him like he was the sun.

Marco was pulled off his feet. He was being dragged towards the flower. The petals bloomed and exposed a shiny black beak. The plant monster's serrated jaws opened and made a loud screeching noise.

Marco pulled out his Mystery Shack pocket knife to cut the plant off his leg. He cut the vine but it almost instantly grew back. It moved quickly, like a whip. It snapped around his wrist. Marco lost his grip on his knife and dropped it. He reached for it on the ground, but was pulled away.

The wild man leapt in to fight. The plant monster's vines swiped at him trying to capture him too.

The man dodged some attacks and his spear severed several vines that got too close.

Marco was being pulled towards the yellow flower. Marco planted his feet and struggled against the monster. It roared and Marco pulled against the vine wrapped around his hand. The green tendril was too strong. Another vine grabbed Marco's leg. He could no longer brace himself against the ground. He reached into his waist pack and pulled something out. He was about to use it when another green tendril snapped around his free arm. He dropped the item.

The wild man was cutting the vines, but the plant grew back quickly.

"The lighter! Use it!" Marco shouted at him.

The wild man spied the shiny item on the ground. He dashed toward the item, deftly avoiding the
grabbing green vines. He picked up the shiny silver lighter and looked at Marco confused.

"Open the cover!" Marco said as he was lifted off the ground.

The wild man figured out how to open the lighter after some fiddling.

"Flick the wheel!" Marco shouted as he was brought close to the yellow flower's beak.

The man flicked the wheel several times before sparks ignited the wick. He understood.

"Burn it!" Marco screamed.

The man held the flame to a squirming vine that had gotten close. The oils in the plant caught fire quickly. The plant monster screeched. Green tendrils holding Marco loosened and he was able to escape their grip. He dropped to the ground and scrambled away from the creature.

Flames consumed the monster quickly. The smoky clearing smelled like incense.

"Whoa. That was close. Thanks for saving me." Marco said still looking at the smoldering foliage.

The wild man did not answer.

Marco turned to see the man gawking at him. The mud and leaves camouflaging the man's face could not hide his wide eyes.

"Marco Diaz." the wild man said.

Marco stared at his rescuer in shock.

"King Butterfly?"

"Marco, my boy! You are here just in time!"

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Author's Notes: If anyone is interested, I am /u/golfalphamike on reddit, and golfalphamike on tumblr and fanfiction.net
Marco realized that this was way too big a coincidence. Tom had sent him right to King Butterfly.

Star's father had apparently gone native. He was covered in mud and leaves to blend in with the forest. He had just saved Marco from a carnivorous plant monster by setting it on fire.

"My daughter will be overjoyed to see you!"

"I'll be happy to see Star too. I'm not too late to stop the wedding am I?"

"No, Marco! You are just in time!"

"How long will it take to reach her?"

"Do you not know where you are?"

Marco shook his head.

"Follow me. There's something you should see." the king said.

He led Marco to the other side of the smoky clearing. They walked over the smoldering remains of the plant monster.

"Turn around." The king said pointing behind Marco towards the clearing.

"The clearing? What's there other than enough burning plant monster to build a van?"

Marco picked up a small bit of green vine. He flicked the ash away and sniffed the aroma. Marco wondered where the monster hung its blacklight posters.

"Not in the clearing, my boy! Look up!"

Marco looked above the tree canopy and was rendered speechless. He was nearly there. In the distance were the towering minarets of Mewni Castle. King Butterfly was camping in what was practically Star's backyard. She was almost close enough to touch.

Marco could see the light in the window at the top of the tallest tower. The royal quarters. Star's room. A barely perceptible motion in the window made the light seem to twinkle.

Mewni does have a North Star after all, and he would follow wherever she led him.

"Well, what are we waiting for?! Let's get over there!" Marco said.

"That is not a good idea. Not yet."

"What? Why not?"

"Spies would no doubt alert Star's enemies to your presence. You need to stay hidden until it is too
late for them to act. We should head to my campsite."

Marco looked at the light in the tower through the haze of smoke.

King Butterfly put his hand on Marco's shoulder. "You have already waited years, have you not? You must not let impatience ruin this chance now."

Marco paused and then nodded. "You're right."

He would have to be patient just a little while longer. But he could finally see the light at the end of the dark tunnel.

A thought occurred to him.

"Wait just a minute. If Mewni Castle is right there, then this forest... THIS IS THE FOREST OF CERTAIN DEATH!"

"The name is quite embellished. A more accurate name would be 'The Forest of Very Highly Probable Death'."

"..."

"...

The two of them began to laugh uncontrollably. Smoke continued to waft around them.

"I am famished! Do you have any of your super awesome nachos that my daughter has always raved about?" the king asked.

"Aw! No! But that sounds so good! You know what would go great with those? My mom's homemade spaghetti marinara!"

"Perhaps also, some Xix style barbecue! Oh, the tangy flavor of Mula spices!"

"And pie!"

"Well, of course, pie!"

"What time is it? Is it late? It feels late. Whoa! Your eyes are really red, Man!"

"Your eyes are thoroughly reddened as well! We should retire to my campsite, stare blankly into the campfire, and consume all the food stored there!"

"That sounds grooovy! We should totally do that, Man!"

They giggled all the way to the king's campsite.

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"Man! You wouldn' believe wha' I hadda do da ged here!" Marco mumbled with a mouth full of gnomefruit.

"Jus' a momen'! Someone else will wanna hear dis!" The king said while chewing on a bit of kraken jerky.

The king walked unsteadily around the campfire to a table with a large book.
Marco recognized the book instantly. He crept over and hid below the edge of the table.

The king flipped through pages until the tiny blue being appeared and hovered above the book.

"Hello, your highness! Did you see anything on your patrol?"

"Oh, yes! I did indeed!"

Marco silently rose behind Glossaryck and covered his eyes with both index fingers. "Guess who, Puddin'!" he said.

Glossaryck shook off the fingers blinding him and turned to look

"MARCO!"

"Group hug!" King Butterfly said as gathered them both in his arms.

Glossaryck broke the hug. "Ugh. You two smell like a music festival." he said waving his hand in front of his face.

"Marco fell into the grasp of a Ganjaudrey when I found him!"

"What, did you set it on fire?"

"Mmmmaybe? Just a little bit?" Marco said while almost pinching his fingers together.

The king mirrored the gesture and held his fingers up to his lips.

They both snickered.

"But... how did you get here?!" Glossaryck asked.

"So... Let me get this straight. Because of a dream, you followed a path of bears to a family in Oregon who had a pair of dimensional scissors which you used to come to this dimension where you became a sailor, then became a pirate, then got arrested by the Talo navy, then became a gladiator, then got bailed out by the Empress who didn't realize who you were at first, and then with Tom's help, escaped here where the king saved you?!"

"Mm-hm! A little weird huh?" Marco said stuffing a chunk of pixie bread into his mouth.

"The story is a little wild!" the king added.

"But... what gave away your identity?!"

Marco's snoring didn't provide an answer. Neither did the king's.

Glossaryck sighed.

In the morning when Marco woke up, an annoyed Glossaryck asked, "Hey! Cheech and Chong! Did you two eat all the pudding?!"

"Good morning, Marco! I would offer you some breakfast, but it seems that we have run out of food. We will need to hunt and gather, but only enough for today." King Butterfly said.
"Why only today?" Marco asked while rubbing his face to wake himself.

"Tomorrow is the Gathering of Nobles and the last opportunity to object to Star's engagement to Tom. We will be returning to the castle tomorrow morning."

"I thought that the wedding wasn't for another few weeks?"

"Yes, but the last opportunity to issue a formal engagement challenge is tomorrow." the king said.

"The challenge has to be made in the Great Hall on the record in front of noble witnesses." Glossaryck stated.

"Okay. But can someone please explain what happened? How and why did Star get engaged to Tom?"

"Well...

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"... So, what you're telling me is, Star wasn't able to come back to propose to me, and thanks to something she said in the heat of the moment, she was engaged to Tom?"

"In summary, yes." the king said.

"That's completely crazy!"

"And yet, here we are. Take this as a warning, Marco. You absolutely must mind your words in the Great Hall of Mewni."

Marco took a moment to absorb this. A question occurred to him.

"Empress Ishtar has wanted Star to marry Tom for a long time, right?"

"According to some, since Star's birth. She was very pleased when Star and Tom briefly dated." the king said.

"How am I still alive? Ishtar tried to kill me the moment she realized who I was. Didn't she know who I was before? Why didn't she send an assassin while Star lived with us.

"You can thank my wife for that. It was generally known that Star was living with a foster family on Earth, but other precautions were taken."

"What precautions?"

The king looked thoughtful, as if considering his next words. "Marco, what I'm about to tell you is a secret known only to the royal family and a select few. The wand isn't the source of royal magic. It was passed to Star from her mother through the Butterfly royal magic bloodline. When Star was given the wand and sent to Earth, her mother still retained the ability to use royal magic."

"Yeah, I heard. That isn't as secret as you might think."

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"Moon, darling?"

"Yes, River?"
"Our informants say that another of Ishtar's scouts has been sent to Earth."

"Oh, bother. RECORDATIO EVIDENTIA OBSCURO."

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"The Obscuring Spell. It hides memories about specific people. In this case, you and your family. It even hides physical evidence. Pictures, paintings, and even written notes vanish. Ishtar's scouts always returned without information. The spell was quite thorough."

The five years of loneliness. Doctors who labeled him as delusional and paranoid. This spell was the cause. It was bad enough to lose Star, but this spell tried to make it seem like she was never part of his life.

Marco bottled up his anger. "Don't jump to conclusions." he told himself before he spoke. "That is exactly what happened to everyone Star knew on Earth. Nobody remembers her. Every photo and every letter was erased. There is no proof that she was ever there. Did her mother do it? Did she erase everyone's memories?"

"What?! No! Absolutely not! When did this occur?"

"The day after Star left for Mewni."

"I assure you, my wife did not cast the Obscuring Spell on anyone other than Ishtar's scouts and spies."

"I was the only one who still remembered Star."

"You alone? I am very sorry. That must have been terribly isolating."

Glossaryck eyed Marco for a moment. "Excuse us a sec." he said as he pulled the king aside and got close to his ear.

"Your highness, the Obscuring Spell. Star must have cast it." Glossaryck whispered loudly.

"Ridiculous! My daughter would do no such thing! Someone else must have cast it! Star has desired Marco to come here to contest her engagement to Tom since the very moment it was made." The king whispered loudly in response.

"But the Obscuring Spell is royal magic. If it wasn't Moon, then it must have been Star. She's the last holder. There's no one else who could've cast it."

"I don't believe it was Star. Not for a second. She wouldn't do that to her friends. She wouldn't do that to me." Marco whispered loudly joining the conversation.

They both stared at Marco.

"You two are terrible whisperers."

"Marco, did anyone on Earth regain their memories before you arrived here?"

"A few people had brief flashes of their memories, but nothing permanent. And it's been years since the last time that happened."

"If my wife were the one who cast the Obscuring Spell, its effects would have grown much weaker after her passing."
Marco understood that Star's mother was gone, and the spell had shown no sign of weakening before he left Earth. Moon Butterfly had not cast the Obscuring Spell. He felt guilty for letting his anger rise at all. "I'm sorry about your wife. I should have been here for Star and for you. I didn't even get a chance to say goodbye to her."

"I understand. And thank you. I was also not there for my family at the end."

"Why not?"

"I had to go into hiding. The current situation forces me to live in exile."

"Yeah, I was wondering what you were doing living out here. I thought you were still king?"

"Only on paper. You see, there was an attempt on my life the night of Star's crowning. If I die, then my daughter would officially be without a king. According to the law, her marriage would be forced to take place immediately."

"If you're trying to stay alive, what made you decide to hide out in The Forest of CERTAIN DEATH?!"

"Actually, this was Princess Pony Head's idea." Glossaryck said.

"Quite perfect if you think about it. I occasionally came here for recreation. I am very comfortable living in the wild. For a while no one thought to look for me here. It is too close to Mewni Castle."

"Hiding under her nose." Marco realized.

"Not to mention the security system." Glossaryck added.

A panicked scream was heard from deep in the forest. A loud crunching followed by a belch was heard.

"But Ishtar is persistent and thorough. She has not been able to rule this place out because her scouts never seem to return."

"Is Empress Ishtar a royal magic holder? She has a wand."

"She has mastered dark magic but she is not a royal magic holder."

"I heard that there were once other royal magic bloodlines. Like the Ladybird line?"

"Queen Ladybird died without a living heir. The Ladybird royal magic line ended with her. Just like the others." Glossaryck stated.

"Like the Honeybee line?"

"The Honeybee line, the Dragonfly line, the Lacewing line, and all the others."

"How many others?"

"There were once thirteen royal magic lines. Twelve are gone now. The Butterfly line is the last one left. Which is why the nobles have been clamoring for Star to get married. Especially since the cart incident."

"Cart incident?"
"Recently, someone blew up a cart in front of the royal carriage. It was her coronation anniversary too."

"It appeared to be a failed assassination attempt. But Star and I believe that it was just a ruse. It was meant to frighten the nobles into forcing Star's wedding to proceed. The nobles feared that Star could have died before she could produce an heir."

"Why doesn't Star have the right to refuse to get married?"

"Oh, she could. But the consequence would be that she would be removed from power. Her right to rule is not absolute. The wand would be confiscated. When it's lack of royal magic is revealed, it would be assumed that the true wand has been lost. A regent would be named to rule, but without the authority of royal magic, there would eventually be a conflict. Star would not risk more suffering so that she could marry whom she desires."

"Sounds familiar." Marco said remembering Stan and Daisy.

"Neither would Tom."

"No?"

"Star has told me that Tom does not want to marry her either. She says this is not a ploy."

"I guess that explains why he helped me escape. I almost feel bad about cutting off his hand again. Almost."

Glossaryck summed up the situation for Marco. "Basically, Star is being forced to marry to avoid a war for the throne of Mewni. And Mewni Kingdom is unique in that it is the last kingdom ruled by a royal magic holder."

"So, what happened to the other twelve royal magic lines?"

"Well, Marco. Our story goes back six hundred seventy six years. The decline begins with Princess Nova of Mula. The last heir to the royal magic of the Firefly line."

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"I, Nova Firefly, promise you, Lord Jon of Kipen, that I will be your wife, as is my royal duty."

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"Push, Princess! Push!"

"She is bleeding!"

"Healer! Do something!"

"What about the child?!"

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"Queen Firefly, your daughter's spirit has left the universe. Your granddaughter's spirit... never arrived. I am so sorry, my Queen."

"My line will end with me. May the magic of the Fireflys someday return to the universe."
"Queen Firefly is too old to birth another heir. There are no other children."

"A regent must be selected to hold the Mula throne when the queen passes to await the rebirth of the Firefly line."

"It has been a full generation since Queen Firefly's passing. Their magic has not yet returned."

"The regent grows old. He was not meant to rule Mula for so long. He will have to select an heir."

"Perhaps the magic returned in a common family and we are simply unaware."

"Impossible. The magic has only ever returned in noble families."

"The child's magic power would make itself known. A common family would be unable to conceal such an event."

"Queen Silkmoth and her daughter have been killed."

"How?!"

"A fire at the Silver Castle of Agma."

"Impossible! Queen Silkmoth would have extinguished it!"

"It is true."

"The Firefly line has not yet returned! Now we must also await the return of the Silkmoths?!"

"King Silkmoth cannot remain in power. Not even as regent. His authority stemmed from the queen."

"Who shall we name to reign as regent?"

"Queen Grasshopper's husband and child have died."

"Drowned in the moat at Uaine castle."

"Upon discovering them, in her grief, it appears that she used her magic to destroy herself."

"She has abandoned her kingdom and her people! She had a duty!"

"I will not judge her. Can you say for sure that you would persevere through such a loss?"

"Another regent must hold the throne in Uaine."

"Never before have three regents reigned at once."
"The regent holding the throne in Uaine has declared himself king. It has been a generation since the last Grasshopper royal left the universe."

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"We must face the reality that Magic is leaving the universe never to return."

"It has been over one hundred years since the fall of Mula."

"The loss of three magic lines has caused noticeable decline."

"Freshwater is growing scarce in Agma Kingdom. Crops are not growing to half their full yield in Uaine."

"What happens if another magic line ends?"

"There will be more panic."

"We must take precautions to preserve the royal magic that remains. Royal families must produce heirs to maintain their line."

"Royal children are now a top priority."

"What would you do to encourage queens to have children early?"

"Those here understand the stakes, but those who follow us may not."

"Make it law that queens cannot rule without a king. Nature will take its course."

"This must be kept secret from the masses."

"The loss of magic will make the power of the remaining bloodlines ever more coveted."

"There have always been those who would hatch treacherous schemes in attempts to join a royal family with their own."

"What can be done?"

"Attribute the royal magic to physical artifacts. Things held and inherited by the magic royal lineage."

"The Royal Magic is focused through each family's magic wands. They are intertwined with each line."

"Tout them as the source of royal magic and not simply a tool. Use royal magic to conceal its own true nature if we must. In time, this deception will become seen as truth."

"We can no longer use magic openly without the wands."

"Our magic need not be extravagant spectacles to be effective."

"What of the royal children? They will not understand the reasons for concealment."

"Do not make that knowledge known to them until they mature. Withhold the wands from them until just before the royal magic causes their transformation."

"They too will attribute their magic to the wands until they are taught otherwise."
"It seems wrong to hide their own power from them. It is like caging a bird. They should be allowed to stretch their wings and fly."

"This is unfortunately the best and safest of terrible options. Eventually the birds are freed."

"Only as free as a child with royal duty can be, you mean."

"There will be those who would try to seize the royal magic wands for themselves."

"Then they will play the part of fools. The wands hold power, but it is only a shadow of their wielder's true magic."

"What happened to the wands of those lines that are gone?"

"Lost in the chaos of transition."

"It matters not. They are but tools."

"The Honeybee line is in danger of collapse. Princess Amber has fallen ill."

"Will she recover?"

"It appears bleak."

"She is young. She is not even married. Will that line end with her?"

"What about her elder brother, Prince Don?"

"If Princess Honeybee dies, he should be encouraged to marry and produce another heir while the Queen is still alive. The magic will pass to his daughter."

"But he went to aid the Stoneflies. He was last seen in battle against the Golden Queen's forces at the border between Yamma and Aurok."

"The plundered wealth of the Tigerbeetles fuels her war machine. This false queen will be difficult to stop."

"She is not the first. Nor will she be the last."

"Prince Don's body has been found."

"The Honeybee line will end."

"Our number grows ever fewer."

"Nobles in the Xix region are establishing a smaller, more stable kingdom."

"Inevitable. I am surprised that the regent family held a kingdom the size of Mula together for as long as it did."

"Such is the case in other kingdoms. The inland Medoo region of Talo has already begun to break
"Away from the seaward region."

"Aurok began to break apart during the war against the Golden Queen. The northern lands desire to govern themselves."

"Of course. That is where most of the mines are."

"Yamma Castle has been destroyed. The Stoneflys have been buried."

"An earthquake caused an avalanche under the castle foundation."

"Their mountain home is now their tomb."

"Queen Lacewing's younger sister says that she will hold the throne in Liant."

"Does she hope to resurrect the royal magic of her family?"

"Impossible. Her sister and nieces are gone."

"She may have succeeded if their mother were still alive."

"The Lacewing line has already ended. The Lacewing name will soon follow. Her grief refuses to allow her to accept this."

"The Dragonfly royal family has been lost at sea."

"Why did they not escape their fate using dimensional scissors?"

"We suspect that a Tramorfidian crystal was onboard."

"Unrest has begun to erupt in Kolma."

"Queen Butterfly, Mewni is the closest major kingdom. Please extend your influence to keep the peace there."

"We already work to stabilize Uaine and Yamma. Must we also bring peace to Kolma? Mewni's influence is great, but not infinite."

"Quosto helps to stabilize the other former Mula regions. Elpon keeps the minor kingdoms surrounding it from descending into full anarchy."

"Only five of the thirteen royal houses remain."

"The Katydid family have been murdered in their beds!"

"What of the infant princess?!

"..."
"No! This can not be happening!"

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"Order has been reestablished in Elpon. The ruling noblewoman seems reasonable."

"Thank goodness."

"The noblewoman of course says that she will bear the title of queen."

"If it prevents the destruction of her kingdom, Queen Mayfly would not care. It matters little."

"King, Queen, Sultana, Empress, Pharaoh, Khan. These are becoming just words. If they feel titles bring stability and respect, then fine."

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"Queen Damselfly is unable to conceive again."

"But she is still young! Royal Magic has always ensured fertility!"

"Royal Magic has long been dying a slow death."

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"My family is gone. When I join them, the Butterflys will be the last holders of royal magic. Your burden is greater than any other."

"What has happened to this world?"

"The regent I appointed tricked me. Even if I try to remove him now, his influence is too great. I am old and weak. Everyone knows that he will assume power after I am gone whether I wish it or not. Like the Golden Queen of Aurok, he seeks to conquer. He wants to succeed where she failed. He will strip the lands bordering Xix of their resources, leaving nothing for the people."

"What will you do? Queen Ladybird?"

"That region must be kept out of the hands of the regent. It will make his armies ever more formidable. I will cede the region to Xix and ask the King to protect them. That will be my last act as the old queen."

"Mewni will aid them, even against old friends. We are in a dark age. Many nobles are petty and selfish. Many rulers crave only power."

"And some yet remain noble. You must believe that most seek to help their homelands. But without the magic lines, they are afraid and uncertain. They will seek security even if it comes at someone else's expense."

"I fear for this dimension's future."

"Answers must be sought outside of it."
"What caused the magic to not be reborn?" Marco asked.

"No one can say for sure, but some believe that the Blood Moon was offended..." Glossaryck began.


"Nova, my light. The Blood Moon has chosen us."

"Please, dance with me, Max. I want to dance with you forever."


"Wait, I thought you said that Nova married Lord Jon of Kipen." Marco interrupted.

"Sometimes people are forced apart from those they love." King Butterfly said.


"Lord Jon has stated that he wishes to marry me before the next new moon."

"Nova, please, no."

"I don't want to, Max. But what can I do? I was promised to the Lord of Kipen in the Great Hall. If I don't marry him, Gib and Kipen's truce will be broken! There will be war! I won't have the innocent pay for my choice with their blood."


"I, Max of Lur, contest the engagement between Princess Nova Firefly of Mula and Lord Jon of Kipen!"


"The duel is scheduled for the waning crescent. In the Gilded Arena of Aurok."


"So to contest Star's wedding, I have to fight Tom in a duel?" Marco asked.

"Correct." Glossaryck confirmed.

"But do not worry. All Tom must do is yield." the king reassured him.

"I had a match in the underworld arena where my opponent yielded. I was expected to kill him to seal the win."

"The rules are different for nobles. You're given the option of sparing him or not." Glossaryck said.

"The contest is a demonstration of your resolve. We will also make the argument that you were not given the opportunity to state your intentions before Star's engagement was set in place." the king explained.


"I'm afraid for you. I don't know if I will be able to go on if you die."

"But, you must. I am sorry, my love. I must try. If I am victorious, we will be together. The truce
between Gib and Kipen will stand."

"But if you are defeated..."

"Then the only blood spilled will be mine. My spirit will wait for you in the next plane."

"...somehow we will be together. No matter what happens, know that I love you, Max."

"As I love you, Nova, my light."

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"THIS DUEL IS CONCLUDED! THE VICTOR IS LORD JON OF KIPEN!"

"NO! MAX! MAX! NO! PLEASE, MY LOVE! PLEASE! OPEN YOUR EYES! LOOK AT ME! MAX! MAX!... Max..."

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"She had to marry the man who killed him." Marco said sadly.

"Such a tragic tale. They say her spirit left the universe with his that day and only her body stayed to fulfill her duty." King Butterfly added.

"Wanna hear the real kicker?" Glossaryck asked.

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"What's that you're holding? Is that the spear Max of Lur used?"

"Yeah. Whoa."

"What's wrong?"

"I don't feel so good."

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"The spear he used had a poison enchantment."

"Max of Lur did not lose in a fair fight."

"Treachery kept the Blood Moon lovers apart."

"It does not matter now. Princess Nova is gone."

"Remove any and all enchantments at the start of any duel from this day forward."

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"Do you think that Ishtar will try to fix the match?"

"Perhaps. If she did find a way, the Obscuring Spell could have been cast on everyone in your hometown in an attempt to keep an unknown challenger from coming forth." the king concluded.

"So why were you the only one unaffected?" Glossaryck rubbed his beard for a moment in thought. He snapped his fingers. "Oh, I know why. It's because you and Star had sex."
Marco instinctively panicked and lied unconvincingly. "N-no we didn't!"

"Sorry. That was crude. You and Star... 'made love'." Glossaryck gestured with air quotes.

"Dude! Her dad is right there!" Marco shout whispered.

The king sighed. "I already know about that. Ishtar learned of it through spies in the castle. She used that secret to provoke Star into her mistake during the Gathering of Nobles. Ishtar insinuated that Star had loose morals."

Marco cringed and grimaced. "Yikes."

"Later on, Star admitted the truth to me."

He paused before asking, "Are you upset with me, King Butterfly?"

"Oh, Marco. I understand. You two were in love and it has already been years since I found out that you SULLIED MY LITTLE GIRL!" he said as he snapped his spear in half. The kings expression changed from calm to furious anger before quickly changing back. "Sorry. Lost the happy. But the happy's back!"

Marco unconsciously backed away from him a bit.

"Anyway, it wasn't just that. It's because you're heart bonded."

"Is that true, Marco? Are you heart bonded to Star?"

Marco nodded. "Yeah. I... we are. Can someone please finally explain to me what that means exactly?"

"Did Star not explain this to you?"

"She left early in the morning... after. I was still asleep. I think she may have left me a note, but it looks like the spell erased it."

"Then you are completely ignorant of the bond?"

"Not completely ignorant! I know it's rare... and I know the flashes of emotion are coming from Star... and I know... I know... that's about it, really." Marco finished sheepishly.

"Well then, it's story time! Gather 'round, kiddies! Let me tell you the Legend of the Heart Bound Lovers."

"Oh, I do love this story!" The king said clapping. He laid down and propped his chin up with both hands. He looked up at Glossaryck with wide eyes. His feet swayed in the air.

Marco sat down beside him and crossed his legs.

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"A long, long, loooong time ago, before the kingdoms, there was a man and woman in love. It was a pure and true love. They were soul mates."

"He was a soldier and his duty would soon take him away. He didn't know when he would be able to return. But she had mmmagic. She wanted to feel his love while he was gone. So she created a new spell. She painted a mark over his heart. A simple mark to remind him of her. The first heart
mark. That night they did what lovers do."

"The magic spell turned out to be very strong. Much stronger than the woman had intended. She had intended to only feel his love, but now she felt all of his strongest emotions. She had intended for the flow to only travel one way, but now he felt her too. And the mark that she had painted on his heart had become permanent.

This was unplanned, but they were glad. Their spirits could be together, even though they themselves would be apart. He vowed that he would return to her. At dawn, they sadly said goodbye and he departed their home for his duty."

"The lovers spent years apart. But they still felt each other's love. They shared each other's joy and sadness. She could feel his bravery on the battlefield. He could feel her serenity at their home. They reached out and touched each other through the bond."

"When it was finally time for the man to return home to his love, tragedy struck. Just as he was within sight of his homeland, he saw a rising plume of smoke. He felt fear and pain. He knew instantly that it was her. He rushed to their home and found it ablaze. He felt her life end. The mark on his chest disappeared and with it the bond they had shared. Just as they were about to be together again, they were torn apart."

"But the man had vowed to return to her. He desired to be with her always. So he cast aside his fear and calmly walked into the flames to rejoin his love. They say that their spirits merged in the fire and became one."

"Their spirit watches over Mewni for other soul mates. If they become lovers, and if their hearts allow it, they choose a symbol and cast the heart bond magic for them."

"I have read that in ancient times, you would already be considered married." King Butterfly stated.

"What were their names?" Marco asked.

"No one knows. Their names were lost to time."

Marco was silent.

"Well, come on. Let's see your heart mark." Glossaryck insisted.

Marco removed his hoodie and t-shirt.

"Oooh. Nice one. That's what kept the Obscuring Spell from hiding your memories too. Star's heart is bound to yours. The Obscuring Spell can't overcome the bond and make you forget her." Glossaryck said as he looked at Marco's bare chest.

"So love really was the answer!"

"And have you been working out? You are looking really ripped!" Glossaryck commented.

"A star. Quite obvious who it is for."

A look of realization crossed Glossaryck's face. "Hey! Is this how Ishtar realized who you were?"

"Yeah. Somehow she knew I was bonded even though I had been careful not to show anyone. Not even in the arena. She ordered me to show her my mark. She got super pissed off when she figured
out who I was."

"We have time. Bondbreaking is done the eve of the wedding." the king commented.

"It's not like Star would willingly break it anyway." Glossaryck added.

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Star felt as if she would burst into tears again at any moment. But she was doing her best to control her emotions.

The white dress was elegant and beautiful. But she would have preferred to have no opinion at all on it. After all, she wouldn't be wearing it for the person she wanted to. This was the last fitting. The wedding date was creeping ever closer.

"Excuse me, your highness." Manfred said from the doorway.

"Yes, Manfred?"

"The high nobles request to speak with you tonight in the Great Hall."

"What? It's late. Why now?"

"The messenger did not provide a reason. He only said that it was a matter of great importance."

Star groaned. "Fine. Maybe it will get my mind off all this." she said gesturing to the dress.

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"Please follow me your highness. They are expecting you." said the assistant as she accompanied Star to the main chamber of the Great Hall.

"Please enter, your highness, the high nobles will join you momentarily."

Star entered the dimly lit chamber. In the center of the floor was a single unlit candle on a tall, ornate stand. She approached it to examine it.

When she got close, the candle spontaneously ignited. Magic. She backed away cautiously. The candle extinguished itself when she got far enough.

A soft sound from the entrance drew her attention. Figures in dark hooded robes quietly entered and gathered around Star and the candle. Star could see black featureless masks under the hoods obscuring their faces.

Star drew her wand.

"There is no need for that, Queen Star."

Star recognized the voice. "Madam Oriole?"

"Yes, and also no."

"Don't be cryptic! I demand to know what is going on!"

"Our identities are not important, but we have been chosen to represent the high nobles."

"We hide our faces from you in shame for we must now demand that you do something horrible."
"We must demand that you break your heart bond with your lover, Marco Diaz."

They knew.

She had kept the bond a secret from everyone. Not even her own father knew. The only one who could have told is Pony Head. She would have never willingly betrayed Star's confidence. Was the information coerced from her?

"How did you find out about my bond with him?!" Star shouted before she realized how. "The candle."

"This ceremony is a private and personal matter and is never seen by anyone outside the high nobles. The candle is a test. It lights only in the close presence of one who's heart is bonded."

"We can think of no other that you could possibly be bonded to."

"So what if I'm bonded to him?! I will do my duty for Mewni! What do you care where my heart leads?!"

"The bond has caused some to hesitate. But we do not doubt your resolve. You are unquestionably the strongest willed queen this dimension has seen in millennia."

"Why now? Bondbreaking is done the night before a wedding of duty."

"You are the Queen of Mewni. We wish to give you time before the wedding to mourn the bondbreaking. It is foolish to wait until the last moment."

"Well, you went through all this for nothing. I don't need time to mourn, because I refuse to break our bond!"

"Your highness, would you force Marco Diaz to watch your wedding night with Tom?"

"That's disgusting!" Star reacted.

"Yes. It is."

"It would be very cruel."

"Devastating."

"It will be worse. Marco Diaz will be forced to feel it."

"He will share your sorrow as you give yourself to another."

"It will haunt him."

"But if you break your heart bond, he will be spared the experience."

"If you break your heart bond, you will preserve his dignity."

"If you break your heart bond both of you may be free to find a shred of love elsewhere. You both may yet find some small bit of happiness."

"It is terrible to demand this of you. We know that the heart bond you share with him is a rare and precious gift."
"How would you know?! How would any of you know?!

"Because I too had to break my heart bond. I loved a common girl with everything I was. I would have left this dimension with her to wed if I were not an only child. I was forced to marry a princess to form an alliance and secure a source of clean water for irrigation. I broke my bond to feed the people."

"I too had to break my heart bond. I loved a prince from Gib, but there was a war between my kingdom and Medoo. A blood feud between families on each side made a truce impossible to maintain. I married a prince from Medoo to foster peace."

"I was defiant. I refused to break my heart bond. I loved an outsider. But the king of my homeland was widowed. He had no heir. I was asked to marry and produce one for him so that there would be a legitimate continuation of his line, thus avoiding the strife of a succession war."

"I begged them to choose another. But they wanted the new queen to be from the same kingdom to avoid suspicion of a coup. I was the only available noble."

"I had no love for him. I was determined to do my duty, bear his heir, then leave this dimension forever to be with my love."

"While I was with child, I felt my bond disappear. It was only after I bore my son that I learned that my bond mate had taken his own life. The experience of feeling me give myself to another, to a man I did not love, made him sick with despair and grief."

"I am hounded by the guilt of my selfishness. Had I broken the bond, he would have lived. He might have found love again. Just as I eventually learned to love my husband. And my son."

"With the Earth dimension blocked, Marco Diaz is lost to you. If you truly love him, you should let him go."

"Any other love will seem like a candle when compared to an inferno. But even a candle pushes back against the darkness."

Star was in tears. She was going to hurt Marco. No matter what she did, she would hurt him again.

"The bond cannot be taken against your will. One of you must purposely sever it."

"Extinguish the candle with your breath."

Star knew what she had to do. But Marco would never know why their bond disappeared. He might think that she had died. Or worse, he might think that she didn't love him anymore. It wouldn't be true. It would never be true.

In less than a month, she would be forced into marriage. She retched at the thought of the wedding night. Would she want Marco to suffer with her?

"If you love something, set it free." Star said quietly to herself.

There were similar sayings in every dimension. But she always liked how Earth's version ended. With hope.

"If it returns to you, it is yours forever."

But Star believed that even if he wanted to, he could never return to her. They could never be
together again.

Maybe he would find happiness and love again someday.

Unlike her.

Star approached the candle quickly and blew it out before she could change her mind.

The candle reignited instantly. Star knew why. She had acted without intent. She didn't want to break their bond. She wanted his love.

"Queen Butterfly, we know that you do not want to do this. We know it is difficult. But you must. There must be purpose and will behind your breath."

Tears fell like rain. Star concentrated. This would be the last time she felt his love.

"Marco..."

Star blew out the candle's flame.

A ribbon of smoke rose from the wick.

It was gone. The warmth in her soul. The feeling that had stretched between them across the dimensions. She couldn't feel it anymore. She couldn't feel Marco.

In anguish, Star fell to the floor and wept. She curled into a ball. A tearful, sobbing heap. She didn't care if it was undignified. A disgraceful state, beneath a queen. She didn't care. She felt as if a piece of her had died.

The high nobles left wordlessly. A few remembered their own loss. There was no need to rub the pain in. But one remained and did anyway.

"Ah. It's nice, isn't it? The freedom." Ishtar said as she removed her hood and black mask.

"YOU!"

"Now you won't have another in your heart when my son makes you a mother."

"SHUT UP! SHUT UP! SHUT UP!"

"Too soon?"

"How can you be so heartless?! That bond was all I had left of him! You've taken everything!"

"Oh, don't be so melodramatic, your Highness. At least you still have the emotion. I had a bond once too."

"It died with your husband!"

"No. I sacrificed it. Along with the love that formed it. Along with the part of my soul that I kept only for him. Now that they are gone, I honestly wonder how I could have thought they were valuable. They were insignificant in the grander scheme. But, at least I got something in return for my sacrifice. It was considered a very high price. My husband took my sacrifice rather badly and ended his own life that same night almost five years ago." Ishtar chuckled coldly.

Star stared wide eyed at Ishtar. Star had always believed that Ishtar had sacrificed her husband's life
to pay for the curse blocking dimensional travel to Earth. But she didn't. Not directly.

"You're evil!"

"You are not qualified to judge me. You have no idea what I'm trying to accomplish."

"GET OUT! YOU BITCH!"

"I look forward to your wedding. Your Highness. I will be giving you a bassinet as a gift. See you at tomorrow's gathering! Ta-ta!" Ishtar said as she turned and left.

Star knew that Ishtar didn't care one bit about her pain or Marco's suffering. She wanted Star to break their bond for a reason. Ishtar had tricked her again.

Star cried out in rage and obliterated the candle with pure energy. She didn't even bother to focus her power through the wand.

Such an action should have caused pain. But Star didn't notice any next to her heartache.

She sat on the floor and whispered over and over, "Marco... I love you... I'm sorry... I'm sorry... I'm sorry..."

Star wept alone for a long while before Manfred entered and sat next to her on the floor. He put an arm around her and let her lean on him.

"I am sorry, my Queen."

Star nodded silently.

"Come. Let us get you home."

It was dark when the king returned to the campsite.

Marco was sitting at the campfire. The bird he caught today was small but would do for dinner. It roasted on a spit.

The king sat on the ground on the opposite side of the fire and dropped some vegetables on the ground. "I found some demon squash growing by a fuchsia leaf tree. They will make a fine side to the Kolma bird you caught." he said cheerfully. He speared the vegetables with sticks to place near the fire to cook.

Marco looked at him silently. The king could see that Marco had been crying. His eyes were reddened and puffy. Tears stained his cheeks.

"Are you alright? You look distressed. Do not be sad! It is a big day tomorrow. You will finally see Star again after so long!"

Marco said, "I'm sorry, who?"

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It was very late when Star arrived back in her private quarters. She was physically and emotionally spent. Manfred offered to keep her company, but Star declined. She wanted to be alone.

Laying in her bed, she wondered why Ishtar wanted her to break her heart bond. Star was sure it had something to do with tomorrow. The last Gathering of Nobles before the wedding.

Star debated whether she would even bother to show up.

She wished that she had thought to bring one of Marco's hoodies with her when she came back to Mewni. She thought that the heart bond would be all she needed to comfort her for the few days she was supposed to be gone.

Now that their bond was broken, the room felt cold and empty. She thought back to the morning she left. She still held on to that perfect moment with Marco. His arm holding her. The comforting warmth of his body. Even with everything that was happening then, that was the last time she felt truly at peace.

She hugged one of her pillows and tried to imagine it was him. She rubbed her cheek on the soft cloth and thought of his red cotton hoodie. She searched her heart for the bond just as she did every night. The energy of his feelings was easy to find when she searched before. But tonight there was nothing. Her memories of his love were all she had of him now. A few tears fell from her eyes and dampened the pillow.

Eventually her exhaustion led to a fitful sleep.

A metallic clang woke Star. Then there was a scraping sound. She looked towards the source of the noise.

A grappling hook was in the window. Someone was climbing into her room.

Star rose quietly from her bed, held her wand, and patiently waited. Whoever was climbing into her room would get what was coming to them. A narwhal to the face. Star still enjoyed the classics.

A strong hand appeared on the windowsill and a dirty, bearded face soon followed.

"Dad?!!"

"Star! Sorry to visit unannounced, but something has happened." her father said as he pulled himself into the window.

"What?"

"Someone needs your help." he said as he grunted and pulled a large sack in.
"Who?"

He opened the sack then reached in. He pulled out and held up the unconscious cargo by the back of his red hoodie.

"Him."

Exclamation points replaced the hearts on her cheeks. "Marco..." Star whispered. Her eyes rolled back in her head and she slumped unconscious to the floor.

"I probably should have told her to sit down first."

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Star woke in her bed. It was morning.

Last night's dream was just wishful thinking. Marco came back to her at literally the last moment. Her father had pulled Marco out of a sack, like an illusionist. Her father looked like a savage, covered in plants and dirt. She couldn't remember the rest of the dream.

She closed her eyes again. Maybe she could find Marco again in another dream.

"Star, you need to wake now."

Star's eyes shot open.

"Dad?!" she said as she looked at her father. He was wearing his regal blue clothing.

Star rolled in her bed to turn away. "I know why you're here now, Dad. This is it. The Gathering is today. No point in you hiding anymore."

"You need to get up, Star."

She sighed. She sat up on the edge of her bed and said, "I know."

She looked down at the ground. She wondered where the leaves and mud came from.

"I apologize, Star. I made a mess when I came in last night. I'll request the servants clean up."

Star paid no attention to her father's words. She got out of bed instantly and began to look around her room.

There. Asleep on the chaise lounge.

He was here.

"Marco."

Star ran to him and knelt next to the lounge. She threw herself onto his chest and wrapped her arms around him. Tears of joy formed in her eyes.

"You're here! Marco! You're really here!" Star cried.

Marco continued to slumber.

"Marco? Marco?! Wake up!" Star shook him. "MARCO!"
"Dad?! What's wrong?! Why won't he wake up?!

"I needed to render him unconscious in order to get him here. He will need magic to wake."

"Why would you have to knock him out?!"

"I will explain, but first... Star, did you cast the Obscuring Spell?"

"No! Why would I do that?!"

"Marco said that everyone you knew on Earth has lost their memories of you. Every image of you has disappeared. Even letters you wrote were erased."

"Everyone on Earth? All our friends? Mr and Mrs Diaz?" Star was shocked. "But that's royal magic! I'm the last holder!"

"Someone cast it. If not you, then who?"

Star realized. Another royal magic line still existed. "Ishtar."

"Empress Ishtar is a master magic user. But, royal magic? She was not born to one of the magic bloodlines!"

"She did this! I don't know how, but it was her! I just know it!"

"Star, there is something else. Marco was unaffected by the Obscuring Spell. He was the only one who still remembered. Until last night..."

"I'm sorry, who?" Marco asked as he wiped his eyes.

"Star."

"Do I know her?"

The king paused. "My daughter? Yes."

"Your daughter... Do I know you?"

"Oh, no. You can't forget now."

"Forget what?"

"Star! Your true love! My daughter! The queen! You must recall!"

"Who's Star?"

"No, no, no, dear boy! Not now. Not now!"

The king went to the spell book and hastily flipped through it until a tiny blue man appeared from between the pages.

"Morning already? I can't wait to have a bath in the tub and not the river. These legs need a trim. Look!" The tiny blue being said as he raised a furry leg.
"Glossaryck! We have an enormous problem!"

"Whoa! An elf!" Marco said as he spied the man from the book.

"What? You act like you've never seen me before, Marco!"

"How do you know my name? Have we met?" Marco said poking the tiny blue being.

"What? You don't remember me? I've caught you sneaking into your girlfriend's room so many times that I've lost count! You can't say you've forgotten little ol' me!"

"I think I'd remember having a girlfriend."

"Uh-oh."

"What is happening?"

Glossaryck darted forward and grabbed the waist of Marco's hoodie and t-shirt. He quickly lifted them together and looked at Marco's bare chest.

"Hey! What's the big idea?!" Marco said as he pulled his clothes back down.

"His heartmark is gone! The Obscuring Spell!"

"Ishtar." the king muttered under his breath.

"You can't bring him to the Gathering like this! He won't contest anything!" Glossaryck pointed out.

"Marco, we need to get you to the castle as soon as possible. My daughter may still be able to help you."

King Butterfly brought out a large brown sack as Glossaryck entered and closed the spellbook. After placing the book in the sack, the king motioned for Marco to follow and began to walk. Marco did not follow.

"Marco, time is an issue and we really do need to go."

"Goodbye. Whoever you are."

"We need you to come with us."

"No offense, but I don't usually go walking into the forest with strangers."

"Marco, something has happened that is affecting your memory."

"You sound just like my shrink." Marco began to walk out of the campsite in the wrong direction.

"You can't go into the forest alone! It's dangerous!"

"I'll be safe!" Marco said.

King Butterfly withdrew the spellbook from the sack and flipped through the pages until the tiny being emerged.

"Use the blue vial from the first aid kit." Glossaryck said.

"Good idea." said the king.
"Where's the road? I need to- mmmph!"

King Butterfly had grabbed Marco from behind and covered his mouth and nose with a cloth.

"Shhhh. Sleep now, Marco. Sleeeep. Shhhhh..." the king said comforting.

Caught by surprise, Marco was unable to free himself in time. His eyes drooped and closed. His body went limp.

"You'll have to carry him. No going through the front door. Ishtar's spies will alert her." Glossaryck said.

"What's this?" The king asked finding a device hooked to Marco's belt. "A strange crossbow?"

"You need to leave me here for now." Glossaryck said.

==================================

"I used the essence of Morpheus leaves on him. With his memory loss a debate would have proven fruitless. Against Marco's fighting skill a struggle could have gone either way."

Star was crying. "It was me, Dad! Marco lost his memory because of me! I broke our heart bond! I'm such an idiot!"

"No, my daughter. No, you are not." He said as he hugged his daughter.

"Yes, I am. I'm so gullible. I fell for another of Ishtar's tricks. She knew this would happen. She got me to believe I was protecting him."

"Then you let him go because you love him. You are selfless, not an idiot."

Star was silent in her father's embrace.

"Can you undo the Obscuring Spell?"

"I can't just uncast it, because I'm not the one who cast it."

A ray of daylight streamed into the window illuminating the crown on the night stand.

"The gathering is today! Marco has to contest my engagement today!"

"Is there anything that can be done?"

"There's still one thing I can try. But it takes time."

"The gathering will go on for a few hours. I will go ahead and stall for as long as I can. I will get our allies to also stall for as long as they are able. You must break the spell and bring him as quickly as possible. You must not doubt yourself. He needs you now as much as you need him."

Star looked over to Marco's sleeping form.

"Marco's trying to come back to me. But he's not back yet."

==================================

Marco woke in a bed. He was confused. He was in a forest last night. How did he get here? Was he in the hospital? Did he have an accident?
He looked over to see a woman sitting in a chair next to the bed. Watching him.

She was beautiful. Blonde hair and bright blue eyes. She had hearts on her cheeks. Were they makeup or tattoos?

"Marco?" she said to him.

"Doctor?"

"Uh, no."

"Nurse?"

"No. But I am here to help you, Marco."

"Where am I?"

"In my room."

"Your room? Have we met?" he asked as he sat up on the edge of the bed.

"We used to know each other."

"We did? Where?"

"Echo Creek."

"I'm sorry. I don't remember."

"That's okay. It's been a few years since we've seen each other."

Star reached out and held his hand.

"Can I ask you a question?" Star asked.

"Sure."

"Will you trust me? I know that you don't know me. But will you trust me anyway?"

Marco was going to say 'no'. After all, he didn't even know her. But there was something about the way the woman held his hand.

"Yes." he said.

She smiled at him. "I'd like to tell you a story."

"Okay. About what?"

Star knew that empathy made memories surface. The person who has forgotten, connects emotionally with a person who remembers, and for just a moment the spell is weakened. But that wouldn't be enough.

Instead, she had to bring forth his buried feelings. He had to feel them strongly enough to overwhelm the Obscuring Spell. He had to feel them long enough to weaken and break it's hold on him. He had to feel them on his own.

It was almost like he had to fall in love with her all over again.
"This story is about two teenagers..."

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continuará
Fears

Starfall by GolfAlphaMike

Chapter 20: Fears

==================================

Star began her tale.

==================================

One of the requirements for graduation was a year of a foreign language. But he was exempted since he was already fluent in one.

She should have taken Spanish. But no, she just had to go and ask Janna for her suggestion on a language to take. Janna sold French to her as the language of love.

Janna was shrewd. She signed up for Spanish then asked him to tutor her at lunch. She knew that if Star had also taken Spanish, he would have spent lunch time tutoring Star instead of her.

Instead, Star studied French with Jackie.

Star had gotten hold of a book on dating that listed a lot of flirting techniques. She wondered if maybe Janna had the same book, because she was practically going down the list.

Star could see from where she was sitting that Janna sat very close to him during their lunchtime study session. She twirled her fingers in her hair. She touched his arm constantly.

When saying a new word or phrase in Spanish, Janna would ask him to watch her lips as she tried to pronounce it.

"Vamos a pesarnos." she over-enunciated, then flashed her best smile at him.

He looked confused. "You want to weigh each other?"

Janna's face fell. "No, no, no... Where are my notes?" she said as she flipped through the papers in front of her.

The bell signaling the end of lunch rang.

"Hmm. Lunch is over. Try to figure out what you were trying to say for Monday."

Janna was still searching her notes. "Wait! It's here somewhere!"

"It can wait until Monday, Janna. We'll continue then." he said as he stood to walk towards Star and Jackie.

"Guys, I'll meet you in class. I have to get something from my locker."

Star nodded and waved. Then he turned and walked out of the cafeteria.

"Do you think I should ask him out?" Jackie asked as she finished putting her books in her backpack.
"Huh?" Star responded confused.

"Should I ask him out? I know he had a crush on me."

Janna, Chantelle, Brittney, Hope, and so many others were interested in him. Star could see the way they looked at him. And now Jackie was interested too.

And why wouldn't they all be? He was smart. He was kind. He was funny. And in the two years she had known him, he had practically exploded into manhood. Thanks to a growth spurt he was broad shouldered and tall. Training and fighting had sculpted his body. And while some of his boyish cuteness remained, his face was very handsome.

Star understood perfectly why the all the girls were attracted to him.

After all, she was too.

She wasn't exactly sure when it started, but there was one day at school, less than a year after she came to Earth.

==================================

They were talking about something. About what, she couldn't recall. But at that moment, a stray thought just popped into her head. She found herself just watching his lips move as he talked to her, and she wondered what it would be like to kiss him.

She must have looked like she spaced out, because he gently shook her shoulder and asked her if she was okay.

Even though his touch was gentle, Star felt it intensely. Like an arc of electricity had jumped between them. She jumped back and her face felt hot. Surprised and embarrassed, she stammered some deflections. She was fine. She had no reason to be anything but fine. She was up late last night. She was thinking about something from class. He had food on his face.

He looked at her with a raised eyebrow. She wondered if her cheek hearts had given her away. Star was certain that he could hear her thoughts.

Star blurted an excuse as she ran away from him and into the girls restroom. She was grateful that no one was there.

She tried to calm herself and looked at herself in the mirror over the sink. She was blushing. A pink tint spread over her face. Her cheek hearts seemed larger and brighter than usual. She could feel the heat all the way down into her body.

She splashed some water on her face then stared her own reflection in the eyes. She tried to tell herself to come to her senses. That she needed to get a grip. That it was just him. That she had never had thoughts like that about him before.

It was that moment when she realized that wasn't true. She did have thoughts like that about him. She had thoughts like that all the time.

The urge to hold his hand. Not because they were leading one another somewhere, but just because they were walking together and she wanted to.

The hugs they gave each other after a fight against Ludo's monsters. She looked forward to them like they were her reward for victory in battle. She always melted into his arms.
Whenever she saw one of his red hoodies hanging on the back of a chair, she always had to stop herself from wrapping herself up in it. There was something about how they smelled. It was pleasant, like a nice soap or cologne. They smelled like him.

When she discovered something new about Earth, she wanted to tell him. She wanted to share every day with him.

Whenever she was sad, he always made her feel better. She was happiest when they were together.

She just wanted to be with him.

All these feelings didn't start today. They didn't just start yesterday either. She had no idea when it happened. The feelings came quietly and naturally. They had snuck up on her like a ninja moonlighting as Cupid. He could now return to his ninja clan with his honor intact. His mission was complete.

She was in love with him.

She looked at herself in the mirror again. She began to giggle at how obvious it was. Then the humor died when she realized that he had another quality. One that might keep them apart.

He was her best friend.

How do two people go from being best friends to being more? Is that even possible?

She had no idea if he felt the same way.

There have been some moments, but she didn't know if those moments meant the same thing to him that they did to her. If she told him how she felt and he didn't feel the same, it would change their friendship. It was a risk.

She would have to be patient and see if he wanted more than the friendship they had now.

==================================

A few months later, a perfect moment came. She was sure things were about to change.

They were in the forest after dark. He was telling her about the stars in Earth's beautiful night sky.

The way his arm felt around her. The way he held her hand. The way he talked about the North Star. How it was the most special and important star to him.

She wanted him to feel that way about her.

When they were facing each other, it would have been so easy for her to close the distance between their lips. She knew her own feelings and had almost let them slip out that night. But she still wasn't sure how he felt. She wanted him to kiss her. She needed him to be the one to make that leap.

But he didn't.

After that night things even seemed to move backwards. It was like he had crossed a line without meaning to, and now he was trying to cross back to the other side.

Star wondered if her chance had passed her by.

==================================
Jackie pulled Star from her reminiscing. "Yo! Star? You okay?"

"Um, sorry. I was just thinking of something."

"Kind of lost you for a minute there. But what do you think? Do you think he'll still want to go out with me? It's Friday. Maybe he'll want to go out tonight."

Star was at a crossroads. Janna, Brittney, and all the rest were one thing. But Jackie... she was something else.

He had a crush on Jackie for years. Even though he hadn't brought it up in a while, Star wondered if Jackie was the reason why he never made a move. Did he still have feelings for her?

Star felt like a door was closing on her. She could have easily dissuaded Jackie from asking. Star could have even masked her intent by simply saying that she thought he was interested in someone else.

But that wasn't her call. It would have been hypocritical of her to take that choice from him now. She was annoyed when he crashed the Blood Moon Ball when Tom asked her to go. And he at least had reason to be wary of Tom.

But that wasn't the case here. Jackie wasn't trying to manipulate him. There was no ruby light of the Blood Moon she was trying to get him under. She didn't have a history of anger. They didn't even have a dating history with each other.

Jackie was a good person. Jackie was her friend.

Star really had no reason to object. More than that, she had no *right* to object. So Star wondered why Jackie even bothered to ask her opinion.

"You're zoning out again."

"Sorry." Star paused to gather the strength to say what she needed to. "Yeah. You should ask."

"It starts with a 'b'!" Janna wailed.

He approached Star after their last class of the day.

"Jackie asked me to go out tonight."

"I'm so happy for you." Star said even though she was definitely not happy. "You must be thrilled."

"Did she say anything to you about it?"

"She asked me if she should ask you out. I told her that she should."

"Oh."

"So where are you going?"

"I haven't accepted. I thought I'd run the idea past you first. I thought you and I were planning to hang out."

"But this is a big deal. Besides, you don't need to check in with me. I'm not your girlfriend."
She immediately regretted saying that and silently berated herself. "Think, *then* speak!"

"You know what? You're absolutely right. I'll go tell her 'yes' right now." he said before leaving to approach Jackie.

Star felt like she had pushed him away a little. She thought she could handle this, but now she wished that she had just waved Jackie off.

"Well, Star, you starred that one up." she said to herself.

"So where are you going to take her?" Star asked through his door.

"There's a new place down by the beach. I made reservations."

"Are you excited? It's your first date with Jackie."

"It's not like I haven't hung out with her before."

"Yeah, but Janna and I are always there too. This is really the first time you'll be spending time with her… alone." Star emphasized the last word.

"Huh, I guess you're right." he said as he opened his bedroom door.

Star blushed when she saw how well he was dressed.

"So, how do I look?"

"Jackie will be very happy to be on a date with someone as handsome as you." Star said.

"Right. Jackie."

Star was quiet as they walked downstairs.

"Have a good time, son! Here is some money for the ride and dinner!" his father said.

"Thanks Dad."

"Your ride's here." his mother said as she looked out the window towards the street.

"I'd better go."

Star wanted to whisper, "Don't go." But she didn't want to risk him giving her the obvious response.

"¡Adios!" his father said.

"Bye, Star." he said to her.

Star smiled and waved, but her heart sank as she watched him leave for his date. She stayed in the front door until the car pulled away. She closed the door then went over to the couch to sit down.

Her feelings must have been showing through because his mother came and sat next to her.

"Oh! I just remembered that I left the oven on in the backyard!" his father said as he left awkwardly.

"What's wrong, Star? You seem sad."
"It's nothing. I just... It's... I..." Star couldn't find the right words.

His mother reached over and held her hand. "Do you like him? I mean, as more than just a friend."

Star was going to deny it. But, she stopped and her face cracked. What's the point in denying it. Instead, she just nodded and then leaned her head on his mother's shoulder.

"I don't know what to do. I don't think he wants more. I don't think he feels the same way."

"Oh, Star." his mother said comfortingly as she put an arm around Star. "Of course he does. A mother knows these things. You don't see the way he looks at you."

Star was surprised by this. "Then why hasn't he said anything? Why did he go out with Jackie tonight?"

"Because he's afraid."

"He's afraid of being with me?"

"No, dear. He's afraid of losing you."

Star was confused. How could he lose her if he was with her?

"I want to show you something." his mother said. She led Star to the pictures on the wall and pointed at a high one.

Star knew the picture. It was of him and one of the exchange students that previously stayed with his family.

He was younger. The girl in the picture was about the same age. A hairband was in her short blonde hair. It was candid. Like they weren't expecting a photo to be taken. An embarrassed but happy smile was on his face.

Star felt a twinge of jealousy. This girl had done something that she hadn't. She was kissing him. It was just a chaste kiss on the cheek, but you could see there was more behind it. The girl's smile showed in her eyes while her lips were busy.

"Who is she?"

"That's Emily. She stayed with us as an exchange student."

"How old were they?"

"They were twelve years old."

"Did he like her? Did she like him?"

"Oh, yes. It was obvious."

"I always wondered about this picture. But I wasn't sure how to ask him about it."

"I doubt he would have told you much."

"Why not?"

"Because it never grew into more than what you see in the picture. Not long after, she had a sudden
family emergency and had to go back home. They barely had enough time to say goodbye to each other."

"Was he mad at her for leaving?"

"Mad? No. He understood why she had to leave. But he was still heartbroken. He was determined not to let that happen again. There were a few more girls as exchange students after her, but he never let himself get too close."

"Does he keep in contact?"

"He does with most of the students that stayed with us. But not with her. Eventually letters, calls, and messages trickled to a stop. They both moved on."

Star understood now. He was keeping his distance. If he doesn't get too close, it won't hurt as much to say goodbye. Would they eventually disappear from each other's lives?

"But you're different, Star. You're the best friend he's ever had. You're the most important and special to him. Even though he tried to keep his feelings for you from growing, they grew anyway. The heart wants what it wants."

Star blushed at his mother's words. "...the most important and special..." she said to herself.

"But he's right. Someday, I'll have to leave. I don't even know when that will be. It could be tomorrow. It could be years from now. But someday I *will* have to leave. And he knows it too. We may not want to talk about it. But we both know it."

"A lot of things can happen. For instance, there's no guarantee that tomorrow, Rafael won't step off the curb and be hit by a bus. Our time together could end without warning."

"That's a gruesome thought!"

"But I would be left with the memories and experiences of the love we shared and the life we lived together. I would cherish them. And I wouldn't regret a single moment even if that was how our time together ended. You need to make the most of the time you have together now. No matter how short or how long that might be. Love is worth the pain."

Star understood now. She shouldn't, *couldn't* waste any more time waiting. If she wanted more from him than just friendship, she needed to tell him how she felt about him.

"Our time together now. Thank you!" Star smiled at his mother. "I have to go!" she said as she gave his mother a hug before sprinting to her room.

She wouldn't wait until tomorrow. She wouldn't even wait for him to come home from his date with Jackie.

She was going to tell him. Now.

==================================

Star was seated at a beach cafe across the street from the restaurant. She wore a tan trenchcoat with the collar raised. Her blonde hair was tucked inside the coat and under a fedora. A pair of glasses with a large fake nose, bushy black eyebrows, and a thick moustache completed her disguise.

She could see them at their table on the patio. He was seated with his back toward Star. It looked like
they had just sat down and were talking. Star just needed an opening. Eventually Jackie will get up to use the bathroom and she'll just go over and tell him.

"Drink your drink, Jackie. You can't hold it forever."

Star felt a little guilty for trying to steal Jackie's date, but she knew that if she didn't do this right now, she might not find the courage to try again anytime soon. And by that time it might be too late. He and Jackie could be picking out a honeymoon destination by then.

Star could see them talking, laughing, and smiling. They seemed to be having a good time together.

Jackie looked right at her for a moment and Star feared that her cover was blown. She looked at her disguise again and realized that she was still wearing her purple boots with the spike on the toes.

But Jackie made no other indication that she recognized her.

When Jackie began to twirl a finger in her hair, Star thought, "Is Jackie flirting with him?" Star wondered if she had ever flirted with him. She couldn't recall ever doing so. How many opportunities to flirt had she let slip by?

Jackie reached out and held his hand on the table. Star knew she was definitely flirting with him now. Star debated whether or not to go over and interrupt their date immediately instead of waiting for an opening.

Suddenly dimensional scissors pierced the air.

"No! Not now! NOT NOW!" Star screamed internally.

Ludo and his monster army emerged from the portal opening.

"Wait!" Star said. "Follow me."

Star walked from her seat in front of the beach cafe and led her adversaries around the back and onto the beach.

"Do we really have to do this right now?! I'm in the middle of something!" Star asked.

"Buff Frog tells me that you are alone! Your bodyguard, whatshisname, isn't with you! Now's the time to strike!" Ludo cackled.

Star groaned as she took off her disguise.

"Master Ludo! I tell you many times! His name is-"

"Never mind that now, Buff Frog!" Ludo turned to his monster horde. "GET THE WAND!"

Star did her best to fight while limiting her use of magic so as not to draw attention. He was across the street. Maybe he wouldn't notice.

Ludo had brought extra monsters. If she had a fighting partner, this may not have been as much of a challenge. But tonight, she was fighting alone.

She did well for a time. Her skills in hand to hand combat had grown in the last two years. But but due to distractions, and perhaps a bit of overconfidence in her skills, her mind was not completely focused.
Star looked across the street to the restaurant patio. The seats where he and Jackie were sitting were now empty. She wondered where they went.

She should have been concentrating on the fight.

She was tripped and lost her grip on the wand as she fell to the ground. The wand flew away from her and landed in the sand. As she stood to get it, Deer Beard grabbed Star from behind. She was helpless.

"Nobody touch it! Ludo exclaimed. "The wand is finally mine at last!"

He was not going to trust any of his monsters to hold the wand this time. Ludo went to get the wand himself.

Star uselessly kicked her legs at the tiny monster as he reached for the wand. Her captor moved her further away.

Ludo was inches from picking up the wand when an unconscious Big Chicken landed on him.

Star felt something hit Deer Beard in the back. His arms fell limp and Star escaped his hold. The monster fell over unconscious and Star could see who saved her. He was already fighting off Spikeballs.

"Star! Get your wand!" he shouted at her.

"I…" she began surprised.

"Fight now! Talk later!"

"Right!" she said as she collected herself.

Star kicked Three Eyed Potato Baby in the head as she leaped over him to grab the wand. She picked it up and in one smooth motion fired a Narwhal Blast at Giraffe-Man.

He was keeping Two Head between himself and Buff Frog. He jabbed at Buff Frog from between his monster shield's heads. Buff Frog roughly shoved Two Head aside to get to him. The monster struck at his now exposed opponent. But he had slipped away and replaced himself with another monster. Buff Frog felt a tap on his shoulder. As he turned, his human opponent knocked him out cold with a haymaker.

The fight didn't last much longer. With both Ludo and Buff Frog out of the fight, the other monsters lacked a leader. It was better to gather their wounded and run. Man-arm searched Buff Frog's sleeping form for his scissors. When he found them, a portal was opened and the monsters made their escape.

Star and her fighting partner let them go.

After the last monster slinked through the portal and the opening closed, he and Star looked at each other.

Star looked very guilty.

They faintly heard Jackie shout "Hey guys!" They looked over to where she was standing. Jackie pointed at herself then pointed down the street. Even though they were too far away on the beach to hear Jackie clearly, it was obvious what she was saying. "I'm just gonna go now." She waved
goodbye.

He sighed. "Okay, Star. My date's over. Care to tell me what you're doing here?"

The look in his eyes. They were like spotlights shining on her on stage. He was also every member of the sold out theatre audience.

"I just... I was... I... just wanted to... to see how your date was going! Sooo?... How'd it go?"

Stagefright. She lost her nerve. She might not confess her feelings to him after all.

"It was going fine, not that it really matters now. What are you really doing here, Star?"

"I... I didn't..." Star steeled herself. This was it. "I didn't really want you to go out on a date with her!". She began to raise her voice without thinking.

"What? Why not? You even told her she should ask me out!" His voice began to rise in response.

"That was a mistake! She shouldn't have asked you! And you shouldn't have gone out with her!"

"Why not?! Why shouldn't I?! Why shouldn't we?!"

"Because... I just don't want you to! I'm jealous, okay?! I followed you because I was jealous of her! Jackie was..."

"Why on Earth are you jealous?! Of Jackie?!!"

"She's beautiful! She's smart! She's normal! She's everything I'm not!"

"That's not true!... Mostly! Besides, why are you comparing yourself to her?!!"

"Because you like her!"

"What?! The crush I had on her?! That's been over for a long time! When was the last time I even mentioned it?!!"

"Then why did you go out with her?!!"

"Because she asked!"

"Why are we shouting?!!"

"I don't know!"

"There's a lot you don't know!"

"Yeah?! What else don't I know?!!"

"YOU DON'T KNOW THAT I LOVE YOU, MARCO!!"

Marco was still and silent.

"You don't know, because I've never told you. Until now. I love you, Marco... I love you." she finished barely above a whisper.

Her feelings were exposed. She felt very vulnerable. Star began to tremble. She wrapped her arms around herself. The fear that he didn't feel the same way whispered in her mind. She wanted to run
and hide. But before she could, his hand was holding hers.

"Don't go."

He moved to stand facing her. She was looking down at the sand.

"Please look at me, Star," he said.

She shook her head. Star couldn't believe that she told him like this. A tear fell onto the sand.

"I need you to look at me. Please." he said.

She fought through her fear and her gaze rose to meet his eyes.

"I love you, Star."

Her heart thundered in her chest. The words echoed in her mind. He was so close. She wouldn't wait any longer. But before she could move, he brought his lips to hers. Her eyes closed in response to the soft pressure. Warmth flooded her body.

It was their first kiss.

Star lost all sense of time. She wasn't sure if the kiss lasted seconds or hours. But she savored it for as long as it lasted.

When the kiss ended, Star's legs felt weak. Sometime during the kiss she had wrapped her arms around him. She leaned into him and pressed her cheek against his shirt. His arms held her close.

A breathless "Oh, wow." was all she could manage to say.

After some time Marco asked, "How long have you felt this way?"

"A while."

"Me too." he said still holding her. "Why haven't you said anything?"

"I was afraid."

"Were you afraid that I didn't feel the same way?"

"I was afraid that if I told you, and you didn't feel the same way, that I would lose my best friend."

"Losing you is my biggest fear. What will happen when it's time for you to leave? You're meant for big things. You're going to be queen. You're royalty... and I'm just me. You *are* going to have to leave someday. That's why I've held back. I'm already afraid of losing you as my best friend. It will be so much harder... it will hurt so much worse if we become more than that."

"I know. And you're right. You are. But we can't be afraid. We don't know what will happen. I just know that I want to be with you. However long we have. For whatever time we do have, I want to be with you. If not, we'll miss out on something really wonderful."

"It hasn't been easy, Star. I mean, you're right there. Every day, you're so close. I've been trying to deny it. Every night I have to stop myself from telling you..."

"You don't have to stop yourself, Marco. I want you to tell me. I want you to show me. Please."
Marco took a deep breath and looked at Star's face. He touched her cheek. The hearts on them appeared to beat.

"Then I will. Every day..." He paused and swallowed before saying, "...if you'll be mine."

Star put her hand over his and held it to her cheek. "I *am* yours. And you're mine."

She was looking up at Marco's face when flash of light appeared in the sky behind him. Star's face lit up when she saw it.

"I just saw a falling star!"

"Did you make a wish?"

"Is that what you do on Earth?"

"A wish from the heart is supposed to come true."

"Then I don't need to wish. What I would have wished for already came true."

Marco and Star smiled at each other.

"Falling stars mean something else in Mewni."

"What do they mean?"

"Falling stars are magic coming back into the universe. They mean something emerged from the darkness. Something was found. A secret truth was revealed."

"Like our feelings?" he said as he gathered her into an embrace.

"Mm-hmm!" Star nodded. She looked up to the sky again. Tiny points of light twinkled and flickered like candles.

She looked back down from the sky and their eyes met. Star had one last question.

"Marco?"

"Yes, Star?"

"Can you find the North Star for me?" she whispered.

Marco touched their foreheads together, and softly said, "I'm holding her."

Star let her emotions fly free. Tears of pure happiness glistened in her eyes. The hearts on her cheeks glowed and bathed both of their faces in pink light.

Their lips met again and they shared another tender kiss.

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"Star."

He said her name.

"Marco?" her voice trembled. She realized that she had been crying as she told their story. She could feel the wetness on her cheeks.
Somehow, they were both standing. They were so close. Her gaze met his eyes. His fingers touched her face and gently wiped her tears away.

"D- Do you remember?" she asked.

His lips on hers was the answer.

It was like a dam bursting. They had been forced to hold back this part of themselves for too long. The emotions flowed over them like a tidal wave. Pink light bathed both of their faces.

He was here for her. They were together again. Star drank his kisses like they were cool water and she was dying of thirst. She wrapped her arms and legs around him.

He wasn't alone anymore. He had found her. He let himself be surrounded by her. She was his shelter from the cold.

"I missed you, Marco!" she said between kisses.

"I missed you too, Star! I missed you so much!" he said as he held her to him.

"I wanted to come back! I tried!" She squeezed him with her limbs as if to make sure she wasn't dreaming.

"I know! But I'm here for you now!" More kisses followed.

"You came back to me!"

"I heard you! You called for me!"

Her prayers had been answered. But there would be time to be thankful later. Star collected herself and said, "Marco, I'll explain everything later, but right now..."

"I have to get to the Great Hall and contest your engagement!"

Marco put her back down to stand. Star unlocked the door. They ran hand in hand from the royal quarters down to where the carriage was waiting.

King Butterfly had told Manfred to wait in the royal carriage on standby. Marco and Star jumped in as Manfred snapped the reins. He drove the manticores pulling the carriage hard. They sped through the streets. They could feel the seconds ticking away.

While Marco's motion sensitivity had lessened over time, the rough and speeding motions of the carriage were not helpful.

When they pulled up to the Great Hall, they got out of the carriage. But in their rush, Star's voluminous dress got caught in the door. As they began to free her she told him, "Go now! They need to see you!" Marco nodded and ran towards the entrance.

The guards lowered their axes to stop this intruder, but Marco slid feet first, baseball style underneath the barrier. He was immediately back on his feet running.

"Halt!" They shouted as they turned to pursue him.

"Let him pass! That's an order!" shouted Star as she struggled to free herself.

The guards did not hear her and continued their pursuit down the entrance tunnel.
"It would appear that Queen Star has elected to skip this gathering." said a noblewoman.

"The queen has simply been delayed. I urge you to allow her more time."

"We have allowed ample time. She could have crossed the entire kingdom in the time we have already allowed. If the queen cannot be bothered to be here to speak to her concerns, then perhaps she is in fact unconcerned." Empress Ishtar said.

"Perhaps it is really is time to adjourn." suggested a nobleman.

Another nobleman sighed. "Well, then if there are no other objections, this gathering is-"

"I CONTEST STAR'S ENGAGEMENT!" Marco screamed as he ran into the main chamber of the Great Hall. He continued to run across the main chamber floor and was forced to stop by the opposite wall of seats. He turned to face his pursuers.

The pursuing guards closed in on Marco and raised their axes. They swung them down towards his head.

The axes were stopped cold mid swing by pink energy. A few cut hairs fell from Marco's head onto his nose.

Star stood at the opening of the entrance tunnel with her wand extended.

"-still open." finished the nobleman with a surprised look.

"NO!" screamed Ishtar.

The gathering erupted into hollers.

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"Who are you?!" asked a noble.

"I know who he is! That is Red Hood! The fighter from the Underworld Arena!" said another.

Marco sighed.

"I am not Red Hood! I mean… I am… My real name is-"

"Arena fighters are rarely volunteers. Were you convicted of a crime?" a noble interrupted.

Marco attempted to explain. "I was put into a situation beyond my control and was convicted."

"Of?"

"...Piracy. But-" Marco said embarrassed.

Laughter sounded from the gallery.

"Do you seriously expect us to recognize an engagement challenge from a pirate, Red Hood?"

Sounds of agreement swept the gathering.

Marco was exasperated. "My name is NOT Red Hood!"

"Oh? And what is your name then?"

"My name is Marco Diaz!"

A hush fell over the hall.

"Okay! That got your attention! Sorry, I was under a little pressure when I ran in here. Let me start again, just to be clear..."

Marco paused for effect, then said the words Glossaryck told him.

"I, Marco Diaz of Earth, contest the engagement between Queen Star Butterfly of Mewni and Prince Tom of Underworld!"

"You all insisted that I get married! Well here's your chance! Recognize Marco's right to my hand in marriage, and I'll marry him RIGHT NOW!" Star shouted.

"What she said." Marco said as he pointed at Star and smiled.

The gathered nobles grew louder.

"I say we go for it!"
"Just like that?"

"Why not?"

"A new heir could be on the way by this time tomorrow!"

"What about Prince Tom?"

"What about him?"

"You know it is not that simple! There are laws!"

"But, Marco Diaz was to be her intended!"

"Prince Tom should never have been engaged to her in the first place!"

"Marco Diaz did not state his acceptance of the then Princess Star's marriage proposal as was expected!"

"That is no fault of his! The dimensional block on travel to Earth prevented his presence here!"

"He got here just fine!"

"It's been years since the Queen was engaged! Why did he decide to show up now?"

"Hey! Yeah! Why now?!"

"Marco Diaz! How did you travel here from Earth? Dimensional travel to Earth has not been possible for almost five years!"

"I finally found someone with a pair of dimensional scissors." Marco replied.

"And that worked?!"

"They had to be recharged, but yeah."

"And who had these scissors?"

"A dimensional traveler from Earth who came here during the reign of Queen Rose Butterfly." Marco answered.

"When did you arrive in this dimension?"

"What day is today?"

"The 33rd of Zorshak."

"That doesn't help."

"Well then, where have you been since you arrived?"

"He was released from the Arena to serve me! I will now reclaim my servant and we will be on our way!" Empress Ishtar shouted.

"I quit."

"You can not quit! You are a prisoner!"
"I was a member of your Elite Guard. I slept in the barracks not the dungeon. And you just called me a servant. So, Empress Ishtar, I respectfully tender my resignation."

"You were convicted of piracy and sentenced! You are an indentured servant! You-

"It doesn't matter! I'm commuting his sentence!" Star interjected.

Ishtar stared daggers at Star who stared them right back.

"That's right! Since he's standing here in the Kingdom of Mewni, as queen, I have the right to reduce his sentence for the sake of justice and mercy!"

Star turned to Marco and sweetly said, "Congratulations, Marco! Time served!"

"You believe that you are the only one who can use the law?! Well, Queen Star, none of this matters! Marco Diaz cannot contest your engagement, because he is not of noble birth!"

"Marco is not native to this dimension! The class laws do not apply to him!" King Butterfly claimed.

"There was no objection when the then Princess Star stated her intention to wed him! The law allows him to be her king, but won't allow him to fight for her?"

"There was no engagement to Prince Tom at the time! Now that there is, a noble's privilege must take precedence over a commoner's!"

"That is correct! He cannot contest Prince Tom and Queen Star's engagement!"

Marco thought about the story Glossaryck had told him about Max of Lur. Not Prince Max, or Lord Max, or even Sir Max. No title. Just Max.

Marco shouted in protest. "What about Max of Lur?! He wasn't a noble! He was allowed to fight for Princess Nova Firefly even though she was engaged to Lord Jon of Kipen!"

"That was centuries ago!"

"Max of Lur would not be allowed to contest Princess Nova's royal engagement today. The law was changed so that the challenger to a noble engagement must also be of noble birth."

"Why?"

"Commoners were issuing challenges merely in an attempt to rise above their class."

"That is not why Max of Lur issued the challenge! He cared not for castes!"

"They were bonded by the Blood Moon! He contested it for love!"

"No one here can speak to the true motivations of Max of Lur! Those events took place almost seven hundred years ago! None of us knew him personally!"

"Princess Firefly consented to the contest! In this matter, Queen Butterfly should be the sole arbiter of the challenger's worthiness!"

"Motivations are immaterial! Circumstances are irrelevant! It does not matter how the law came into being! Commoners were allowed to contest royal engagements in the past, but they are not today! The law is clear! Only one who is of noble birth and unmarried may challenge a noble engagement!" Empress Ishtar declared.
Star and Ishtar locked eyes.

"I did not write the law, but all must be held to the letter of the law! Just as the queen held herself and this gathering to the letter of the marriage laws in order to delay her marriage to my son, Prince Tom."

"This is wrong!"

"Is this is what this gathering has become?! A bunch of bureaucrats, hiding behind caste rules?!"

"But this is the letter of the law!"

"Yes. If we were meant to follow the spirit of the law, someone really should have written the spirit down." Ishtar added smugly.

Star was at a loss. She had no response. She looked to Marco.

Marco looked back at her. He wanted to reassure her that everything would be okay, but he couldn't see how.

"FINE!" shouted an older nobleman as he stood from his seat.

Everyone turned to look at him.

"I, Brad of Xix, noble of blood, contest the legitimacy of the engagement between Queen Star Butterfly of Mewni and Prince Tom of Underworld!"

Star let out the breath she didn't know she was holding.

Cheers, boos, and shouts filled the chamber.

"Father! What-?!" a young man next to Brad said.

"Trust me, Kevin." Brad interrupted.

"King Brad! What do you think you are doing?" asked a noble.

"Former King." Brad corrected him. "And I am contesting Queen Star's royal engagement. Was that not clear?"

"You are an old man!"

"I am young at heart! Besides, there is no age limit for contesting defined by law!"

"What about your wealth, lands, and title? You are no longer the King of Xix!"

"Do you really think that the Queen of Xix and I did not make plans for my retirement? I still hold a plot of royal land in the Kingdom of Xix and enough funds separate from the treasury to maintain it for years! And as for my title of Former King? You can have that right now!"

"You would demand Queen Star's hand in marriage?!" a nobleman shouted.

"Of course not! I am almost three times her age! What is wrong with you?!" Brad shouted while staring at the nobleman. "Immediately upon my victory, I intend to end our engagement. Queen Star will be engaged to no one! She will be returned the right to choose a king for herself!"
"If you are victorious! And that is a very big *if*, old Former King Brad!"

"I admit that my best fighting days are behind me! I have stiff joints. I can not bench press as much as I used to. My leap has lost some of it's vertical."

"So you admit that you do not have a hope of victory?"

"Not at all! I have the right to name a champion to fight in my place! I name Marco Diaz as my champion!" Brad turned to look at Marco. "That is, if he accepts."

Marco smiled and nodded. "I accept."

"These legislative antics are preposterous!"

"Someone really ought to write down the spirit of the laws."

"Everyone can complain and moan until we are all hoarse, but it will not change the fact that this is a valid interpretation and use of the contest law!"

"Can anyone give any lawful and credible counter argument as to why we shouldn't accept Former King Brad's contest declaration?"

"..."

"..."

"..."

"Then we are now moving on!"

"What of you Prince Tom? Perhaps you would rather terminate your engagement than participate in this contest?"

Tom opened his mouth to speak but was cut off before he could make a sound.

"Do not ask my son! The royal engagement was made through me, the ruler of the Underworld Kingdom! He is still bound by my authority not only as my son, but as my subject! I will not allow my son's engagement to end willingly!"

"Very well, Empress Ishtar. Will you be naming a champion?"

Ishtar looked at Marco for a long moment. Her eyes seemed to bore into his head.

"My son is perfectly capable of fighting for his betrothed himself. He needs no champion."

"Queen Star. We are well aware of your feelings on the matter, but for the record. Do you consent to this contest?"

"OhgeeletmethinkYES!"

"Very well, Queen Star. The deadline for the royal wedding is approaching. We still intend to see you wed by that date. This matter will be resolved one way or another!"

"Former King Brad, since Marco Diaz is your champion, you will see to his welfare until the contest."
"Wait, what?" Marco said.

"I am sure the Queen of Xix will welcome Marco Diaz happily."

"Don't bet on it." Kevin muttered under his breath.

"What was that?"

"Nothing!"

"Queen Star, you have a moment before all involved are sequestered from you."

"Sequestered?!" Marco said surprised.

"Were you not aware, Marco Diaz?"

"This is a contest over the Queen's hand in marriage."

"This is a matter of dimensional importance."

"There is a preparation period. All involved will not meet again until the contest."

Marco now understood that he and Star would be parted again for just a while longer. But at least Star's wedding was no longer set in stone.

"I understand." he said resigned.

"*Now* if there is nothing else, this gathering is adjourned."

Groans of relief sounded throughout the Gathering of Nobles. It had been a long session.

"Finally. Who's hungry?"

"I could eat!"

"But, piracy, though!"

"We are way past that now!"

==================================

All the other nobles had left. Only the royal families and Marco remained in the Great Hall.

"I would like a moment alone with Marco. Everyone, please leave us." said Star.

"Queen Star! That is inapp-" Empress Ishtar started before she was cut off.

"SHUT YOUR FREAKING PIE-HOLE, ISHTAR! I WILL SPEAK WITH MARCO ALONE BEFORE HE IS TAKEN AWAY FROM ME AGAIN!"

"A CHALLENGER CANNOT BE LEFT ALONE WITH YOU, QUEEN STAR!" Empress Ishtar shouted.

"He is not the challenger. I am. I have no intention of being left alone with Queen Star. Marco Diaz is my champion. There is no rule preventing Queen Star from being alone with him." Brad pointed out.
Ishtar fumed silently.

"Get. Out." Star dismissed her.

Ishtar huffed before turning abruptly and storming out.

Before following his mother, Tom gave Star a knowing nod. This moment had long been planned for.

King Butterfly led Brad and Kevin out of the Great Hall. The entrance doors were shut leaving Star and Marco alone.

The distance between them vanished in an instant and they wrapped their arms around each other. He held her close and kissed the top of her head.

"I'm so sorry, Marco."

"For what, Star?"

"You saw it coming. And it happened exactly like you were afraid it would. I left. And I never came back."

Star cried into him. Tears darkened the red fabric of his clothes

"I hurt you. I'm sorry." she said with an unsteady voice.

"You didn't hurt me. You were taken from me. It wasn't your fault." he said comfortingly as he stroked her back.

"I'm sorry anyway. I literally disappeared. Even from everyone's memories. You felt so alone."

"It was a pretty bad time, but I would go through it again."

"What?" she asked as she thought about the years of confusion and loneliness he felt.

"Losing you hurt because I love you, Star. I love you so much. The pain was worth it for me. I have no regrets. Even knowing what happened, I would do it again and again for you. Loving you was worth the pain."

She already knew from their bond that he loved her the whole time, but Star was overwhelmed by emotion when she heard him say it.

"I love you too, Marco. I've never stopped loving you. I never will."

Tears of joy formed in Marco's eyes.

"No regrets?" she asked.

"Okay, I guess that's not entirely true."

"Bet you wish you'd skipped the placement exams, huh?"

"Well, duh." he said as they laughed through their tears.

"I'm so sorry, Star. I wasn't here for you when you needed me. I should have been here for you when your mother's time came."
Star thought back to those times. She had lost Marco and her mother soon after. She missed them both. But now Marco had come back to her.

"You're here now. Right when I need you most. More than ever. I should have told you everything before I left. I was so afraid of losing you too."

Marco held Star a little tighter.

"You know what else I regret? That night in the forest. Do you remember the stars?" Marco asked.

"Of course I do."

"I should have told you... I should have shown you that I had fallen in love with you. I should have kissed you right then and there."

Star wondered why he had this regret. They found each other eventually.

"If I had been just a little bit braver, we could have had one more year. But I was too cautious. I was trying too hard to be safe. It's not just the five years that were taken from us. It's also the one year I was too afraid to grab."

Star understood. It wasn't just the curse. Fear had also kept them apart.

"I should have told you that I'd fallen in love with you too. I was waiting until I knew how you felt. Too much waiting. I don't want to wait one minute longer than we have to."

"Me neither." he said.

"You know, if we didn't need to rush here... I don't think I could have waited."

Her fingers raked across his back. He could feel them scratching through his clothes.

"It's been so long. Five years is a very long dry spell."

Her words were thick with craving and made him blush.

"I did have a piece of you to hold onto while we were apart. I'm sorry I broke our heart bond."

"It's okay. I didn't even know it was a thing until recently. I didn't know those feelings were coming from you. I thought they were my own."

"Didn't you read my letter? I told you all about it."

"Is that what that letter said? It was a blank paper when I found it."

"Stupid spell."

Marco moved to rest his forehead against hers.

"But even before that night, I could feel you. Because we shared our love with each other. The heart bond helped while we were kept apart. And it did keep me from losing my memories of you. But when we're finally together again, we can just do it the Earth way. I'll show you that I love you. We'll show each other. Every day."

Star felt the guilt about breaking their bond lift from her.
"I did like the mark it left on you."

"Me too. It reminded me of you."

She rested her cheek against his chest and listened to his heartbeat.

"I would run away with you if I could." Star said.

"I know. But Mewni needs you. You were born to lead."

Star sighed and moved to look at Marco's face. "Will you fight for your queen?"

"I'll never stop fighting for you, Star. I promise."

"Do you know the law about promises in the Great Hall?"

"Yeah, but that's not why I'm going to keep it."

Star's eyes began to tear again. She hoped they would be able to make another promise to each other soon.

"I thought we would have more time." Marco said.

"We'll just have to make the most of the time we do have."

It wasn't clear who started it, but their kisses had resumed. They got lost in the moment and each other. They did not notice when Brad reentered the hall.

"Queen Star. Marco Diaz. Forgive me, but it is time." he said softly.

Marco and Star reluctantly stopped.

"Please. Just one more moment." Star said.

"Of course." Brad said then left again

"Star. Let me look at you. All the pictures of you are gone. I haven't been able to look at you."

Star nodded.

They leaned back in their embrace and they gazed at each other.

Star quietly wondered how Marco had become even more handsome. She could see determination burning behind his brown eyes. She missed his cute little mole.

Marco took in every detail. The shape of the pink hearts on her cheeks. The smoothness of her pale skin. The way her blonde bangs curved upwards. The sapphire blue of her eyes.

"You are so beautiful." he whispered.

She blushed and smiled at the compliment.

Marco pulled away and removed his red hoodie. He wrapped it around Star and zipped the front. She put her arms through the long sleeves before she wrapped him in another embrace.

After one more tender but brief kiss they parted and Marco left to join the others outside.
Star remained alone in the center of the hall. She turned her gaze upward to look at the stained glass dome. She searched for and found the small, seemingly insignificant star. "You are important and special..." she said in gratitude.

A small smile appeared on her lips. "...and Marco is mine forever." Star said softly to herself as she closed her eyes and rubbed her cheek with the sleeve of his red hoodie.

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Empress Ishtar and Tom had left immediately and were already gone when Marco emerged from the Great Hall.

"Marco Diaz. You are just as Queen Star described you." Brad said.

"King Brad. Thank you for what you did." Marco said as he bowed.

"No, no. Former king. And you can just call me Brad." He said as he held out his hand for Marco to shake.

Marco gripped his hand firmly and smiled.

"Tell me, how is Stan Pines?"

Marco was surprised. He had purposely withheld Mr Pine's name. The man was banned in twenty nine states and wasn't allowed to fly. He was purposely exiled from Mewni by Queen Rose Butterfly. Who knows what kind of reputation his name had in Mewni.

"Was it that obvious that Stan Pines was the one who had the dimensional scissors?"

"A dimensional traveller from Earth during the reign of Queen Rose Butterfly? The possibilities were few. And you did not say you came here in a blue box."

"True."

"He still owes me twenty silvers. It has been more than thirty years. I really should just let it go."

Marco laughed.

"So how is he? Did he ever find his brother?"

"Stan Pines is old, cranky, broke, and yes he did."

"You will have to tell us all about it on the journey to Xix. Marco Diaz, this is my son. Prince Kevin of Xix."

"An honor to meet you, Prince Kevin."

"Just Kevin, and the honor is mine, Marco. My cousin told me all about you."

"Gentlemen, I will remain here with my daughter." King Butterfly said.

"Yes, of course, River. I'm sure it will be nice to sleep in the castle again." Brad said.

"Nonsense. Camping in the Forest of Certain Death was invigorating!"

"See you again soon, King Butterfly." Kevin said.
"Will you be safe?" Marco asked.

"With this challenge pending, my assassination would change nothing."

"Lock the door anyway, your highness."

"I'll sleep with one eye open. As should you. Goodbye, Marco. Do take care. Oh! And since you will be passing nearby, would you all mind picking up Glossaryck? Take him with you! I have lived with him for almost five years! I need a vacation!"

Brad laughed. "Alright, we will."

"Goodbye, your highness." Marco said.

"We should get going. The Queen of Xix will want to hear what happened." Kevin said.

"So why do we have to leave?" Marco asked.

"Part of the contest rules. You, my father, and Tom are not allowed to be in the same kingdom as Star until the day of the contest."

"I wish I didn't have to leave her again." Marco said as he boarded the Xix royal carriage.

Brad said, "No. I can not imagine that you would. But the sequester is to avoid unnecessary controversy. Contests like these are very grand affairs. They are like your Super Bowls. Many will want to be in attendance. A suitable venue must be arranged. They take time to plan."

"It's not going to be in the Underworld Arena is it? I just came from there."

"No. That would give a home field advantage to Tom. Neither can it be held in Xix or Mewni. We will be notified of the arranged time and place. It will happen before the wedding deadline."

Marco looked out the window as the carriage began to move.

"A challenger risks their lands, wealth, title, and life in a contest such as this. My fate is now tied to yours." said Brad.

Marco was shocked. He thought that only the fighter's life was at risk.

"Why would you do that?"

"This is my opportunity to repay an old debt."

=================================================================

Passing near the border of the Forest of Certain Death, Marco and a small contingent of guards retrieved Star's book containing Glossaryck. They left the forest quickly and with only a minor dragon incident. Marco chose to keep the book closed for the journey. He wasn't sure he could stand to be trapped in the carriage with Glossaryck for the entire trip to Xix.

On the trip Marco told stories of him and Star, what happened after she left Earth, and how the Pines family helped him come to Mewni.

He did not retell much of Stan's time in Mewni. After all, Marco didn't know how much Kevin knew. Marco would let Brad broach the subject.
It was late when the carriage arrived at a small castle. Marco marveled at the architecture style. Marco wondered if this region was influenced by Asia, or if Asia was influenced by here. This was the home of Countess Tobi. An allied noble that dwelled on the route to Xix.

Marco and his companions would be their guests for the night.

Meanwhile, in the Kingdom of Mewni...

One of Star's large bed pillows was wearing Marco's red hoodie. She was still deciding whether to name it 'Marc-pill-o' or 'Marco Pillow'. She had quickly ruled out the name 'Soft Kid' because Marco isn't a boy anymore. Marco is a man.

She hugged the cushiony substitute and smiled. She didn't have to search her heart for Marco's feelings tonight. He loved her and she knew it. She felt it.

She slept soundly and dreamed of the moment when her pillow was replaced with the genuine article.

After a late meal, Brad asked, "Marco, did you know that this area has natural hot springs? This castle is even constructed on top of a cave containing one." He turned to their hosts. "Countess, is the hot spring chamber available?"

"Oh, yes! You all simply must take the opportunity to use it. You are our guests. You will sleep so soundly afterward." she said.

Marco washed with ocean water on the ships. He simply had water thrown on him in The Hex Cells and Arena. The barracks for Ishtar's elite guards only had buckets of cold water. Hot pools in the forest tended to be guarded by dragons. He had to settle for the river.

"A hot bath does sound pretty great. Thank you."

"You go first, Marco. You've clearly had the most stressful day." Kevin said.

The castle was small, but it still had a contingent of guards. Passing them on the way to the underground pool room, Marco relaxed knowing that they were there.

The cavern was larger than he expected. It was dim and very steamy making it difficult to see very far. He locked the entrance to the chamber and began to undress, laying his clothes on one of the large stones.

A feeling had been nagging Marco ever since he left Star at the Great Hall. Like something was missing.

Now it really hit him. He looked at his own reflection in the pool of hot water.

He remembered the previous night. He didn't know why he was crying at the campfire. It reminded him of the time he broke down in college. He had to excuse himself from class to be alone. To weep. He now knew that was the moment Star lost her mother.
And now he realized why he was crying last night. Star was about to break their heart bond. He felt her anguish. Then he felt nothing.

Then he forgot.

He settled into the warm water.

He had tried to be reassuring to Star. That it would be alright. They could live without the bond. That he still loved her just the same. More. Which was true. But still. He felt like something valuable was taken from them.

It was their bond that had kept him going. Even without him being aware, Star's love kept his hope alive. It probably kept him alive too. In the last five years, there were times when truly dark feelings came over him. Like it wasn't worth going on. But something made him persevere.

Once he knew about the bond, he quickly figured out how to find the energy of her emotions. On the ships at sea. In the Hex Cells. In the Arena. Even in the Underworld. By searching his heart for Star's feelings, the loneliness was pushed away.

But now he couldn't feel her. The bond was gone. Star had been tricked and the Obscuring Spell took hold of him.

Ishtar had robbed them.

He stared down at his chest. It looked so plain without the red star. He bore that mark for five years. It reminded him of Star every time he looked at it.

A regular tattoo to replace the star just wouldn't be the same. To make him feel whole, there was only one thing that could take its place. Star herself.

He wanted to look down and see her resting against his chest, listening to his heart beating just for her.

If only she could share the bed he would sleep in tonight. Or this bath.

They wouldn't even need to do more. Just the feeling of holding her close would be enough.

Oh, who was he kidding? He would be all over her like nacho cheese on tortilla chips. They would need a crowbar to pry them apart.

He closed his eyes and relaxed. A smile crept across his face.

Ishtar had underestimated them. The heart bond kept the Obscuring spell at bay, but their love was strong enough to break the spell entirely.

He still had his memories. He thought of the kisses they shared. The emotional kiss of their reunion. Their very first kiss on the beach. Their makeout sessions as teenagers. Stolen kisses between classes. The hopeful kiss when he left her in the Great Hall.

He looked forward their next kiss and all the ones to follow.

He thought of the kiss they shared in bed before she left Earth. He didn't know that would be the last one between them for the next five years.

Marco didn't want to think about the time that was stolen from them. Instead he let his memories drift to the hours before their last kiss five years ago.
His smile grew bigger.

He had been afraid that their first time would be clumsy and embarrassing. But it was beautiful and sensual. Pleasurable and fulfilling. Not perfect, but he wouldn't change a thing. It was like they had been lovers forever and were finding each other again after a long time apart.

Sinking deeper into his memories, he could still see her athletic and naked body in his mind. He could still hear the sounds of her moans. He could feel her smooth skin. The feel of her fingers touching him.

The memories were so vivid. It was almost like… she was here with him.

There was a soft splashing sound.

Marco's eyes opened to find bright blue ones staring at him through the steam.

"Star?"

She had just joined him in the warm water. She sank low and her chin touched the surface of the water. Her blonde tresses floated around her.

"Marco…" she sang as she slid closer to him.

"What are…"

"I missed you, Marco. I couldn't stay away." she whispered as she rose partway out of the water. Marco watched the water drip from her.

"Isn't this against the rules?"

"You aren't the challenger. I need you." she said as she reached out and stroked his chest.

"Are you sure it will be okay?"

"Please, Marco. I want you." Her arms wrapped around him. She pressed their bodies together. She was in his lap in the warm water. The excitement was unbearable.

"I want you too, Star."

Their lips were so close.

"Do you love me, Marco?"

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Starfall by GolfAlphaMike

Chapter 23: Details

==================================

The Queen of Xix was waiting to greet her family upon their return. She had many concerns and questions. But when the royal carriage arrived at Castle Xix, Brad was its sole passenger.

"Why are you alone? Where is Kevin? I received word about what you did. I thought that Marco Diaz would be traveling here with you. Did something happen last night at Countess Tobi’s?"

"Yes. Someone was waiting for us there."

==================================

Star was sitting on her throne next to her father. It was open court. An opportunity for the Citizens of Mewni to have a direct audience with their rulers to air grievances, make requests for royal services and aid, and pay tribute.

Star found that last one tiring. Many times it felt disingenuous. Usually it was some noble trying to gain political favor by blowing sunshine up her dress.

It was late in the day and the public session was nearing its end.

"...The current classes are full, but the school is expanding. We should be able to enroll your child at the start of the next term."

"Thank You, my Queen! My boy is very smart! He will be a big help to the kingdom!"

"Yes, I am sure that he will." Star said with a smile

The commoner departed the throne room.

"Next!" called Manfred. He was not expecting the next visitor.

"My greetings, your Majesties!" Empress Ishtar said as she walked in followed by an unknown woman.

"Who allowed you in here?!" the king demanded.

"This is open court. This is when the Queen and King of Mewni listen to the concerns of their subjects and accept tribute."

"Yeah, but it's against the contest rules for you, Empress Ishtar, to be here."

"With respect, I believe you are mistaken, your highness. Your fiance, Prince Tom, cannot be here. But I am just his mother."

"You said yourself during the gathering yesterday that the engagement was made by you and can't be ended by Tom." Star stated.
"You are directly involved. You were required to leave the Kingdom of Mewni immediately and are now in violation of the contest rules." the king continued.

"I can demand that you be disqualified. So thanks for that." Star said smiling.

"I doubt that enough high nobles would agree considering it is not certain that a violation occurred at all. Some may agree that I am involved, and some may not. But regardless, I will withdraw from this kingdom immediately. But first allow me to pay you tribute."

Star scoffed. "I plan to use whatever gift you offer for magic target practice."

"Oh, I did not bring you a material gift. The gift of knowledge is priceless compared to any meaningless bauble."

"What makes you think I'll believe anything you say? If you told me that a kerberos has three heads, I'd go and count them myself."

"You will not learn this truth from me. Instead you will hear the testimony of this woman."

The woman stepped forward to speak. She was voluptuous and had short red hair, tan skin, and green eyes.

"Your highness, I have seduced Marco Diaz."

Star blew a raspberry and laughed. "Yeah, right!"

"You think such a thing is impossible?" Ishtar asked.

"You've tried everything. All your spells, curses, and manipulation haven't been able to keep us apart. Now you're reduced to trying something this pathetic? After Marco kicks Tom's demon butt in the duel, your failure will be complete. This is actually kinda sad."

"Empress Ishtar, why do you waste our time with this baseless slander against my daughter's beloved?"

"Oh, this is more than mere gossip. There is substance to this claim." the Empress answered.

"Please. You could parade the hottest woman in the universe in front of him. Marco would never cheat on me."

"We were very intimate last night. I found his beauty mark quite adorable." the woman said.

"Marco 'Red Hood' Diaz was a fighter in the Underworld Arena. He had many fans. His face is well known." the king pointed out.

"That wasn't the beauty mark I was referring to. I meant the other one. The one to the left of his-"

"Hold it!" Star interrupted. "Dad, even though this is obviously minotaur flop, there are some things that I would rather you didn't hear. I can handle it."

The king looked skeptical, but relented. "Alright. I will be outside if you need me." He mumbled to himself as he left. "I already know too much..."

"Take the guards with you!"

"Star..."
"Ishtar wants me to marry Tom. She won't try anything stupid. Besides, even if she does..." Star twirled her wand.

The king grumbled. "Guards, follow me."

After they had all left, Star stood and approached the unwelcome guests. "So how did you find out about his other beauty mark? The same way I did? We weren't even lovers yet. I accidentally walked in on Marco as he was getting out of the shower when we were teenagers. I suppose you were waiting for him in Countess Tobi's hot spring room?"

"Yes."

"So you got a free peek at his goodies. Big whoop."

"It's also about what he saw."

"What did he see? Your bits and pieces? I mean, you a'ight, but you ain't got dis." Star gestured to herself.

"Oh, I got dat."

Suddenly the woman's form changed. Her red hair lengthened and turned blonde. Green eyes changed to bright blue. Her skin became fair, and her body became lithe and slender.

Star's eyes became wide. "You sent a mimic to do your dirty work?!"

Ishtar smirked.

Star was livid. This tramp had seduced Marco by making him think she was her. Magic energy arced off the wand and her hair began to ruffle.

She pushed the reaction down. "Marco didn't betray me. You just tricked him into believing you were me."

"He was so passionate, your highness. After such a long time, any man would be, I suppose. It's hard to believe you and he were lovers only once. But that is only if you count by the night. Is it more accurate to say that you were lovers five times?"

"How do you know that?!"

"Men are so open afterwards. We reminisced about many things as we lay together. The places he took you on Earth. The ice cream shop on Setsun Street downtown. 'Ice King's'? The beach where you first confessed your affection for each other?"

Star was silent. Those memories were supposed to be theirs.

"The songs he sang for you. 'Space Unicorn'? Such a whimsical tune. His ridiculous middle name?"

"It was his grandfather's!"

"How he wishes you arrived at your school's ball together instead of separately due to your quarrel. You actually asked your previous crush to escort you out of spite?"

Star relived her regret at hurting him.

"But he more than made up for the fact that you did not become lovers that night. We started in the
hot spring chamber, but we continued all through the night in his quarters. And he didn't seem to mind when I revealed my true self to him."

The woman's appearance changed again. She was now white haired and grey skinned. Her red eyes stood out like warning lights against her otherwise colorless body.

Star perked up. "Ha! Now I *know* you're full of it!"

"Of course, the bewitching potion I slipped him through our kiss probably had something to do with that."

"You drugged him?!"

"I doubt he will appear at the contest. The potion will last until the new moon. After your wedding date."

Star's heart fell. She felt sickened.

"It may have increased his stamina. I lost count of the number of times and ways we pleasured each other, but I know for certain that I am now his lover more than you ever were. After all… I'm his North Star."

Star flinched. Ishtar saw the expression of pain on her face.

"If you can not have Marco Diaz, I may take him as my own. I will fulfill his fantasies. Why should he be limited to just one lover? He cared for another on Earth before you, did he not?"

Her form changed again. Star recognized her instantly. "Ja-"

"Jackie Lynn Thomas," the woman taunted.

Star was stunned.

The mimic made a final jab. "I did not cast a preventative spell on myself. Maybe we will be blessed with a child. If we have a boy, I will name him Waldo after his great grandfather."

Star's face twisted into a furious expression.

"YOU SLUT! I WILL KILL YOU!"

Magic power surged around Star's body. She reared back with her wand hand. A ten foot wide ball of magic energy formed at the end.

The woman's confident expression changed to fear and she stepped back as if she had pushed too far.

"No one has attacked you, Queen Star. This would be murder. Your subjects will learn to fear you. And attacking me would trigger the war and suffering you have always sought to avoid."

Star squeezed her eyes shut tightly. The magic energy slowly dissipated and she lowered her wand. Silently, she turned her back to Ishtar and the mimic.

"Queen Star, perhaps you will now consider calling off this pointless contest and simply accept that you *will* marry my son. He will be much more faithful to you."

"GET OUT!" Star screamed in a pained voice without turning around.
"Perhaps someday you and I will part with other words."

Ishtar and the mimic departed.

"Marco Diaz took a mount and snuck away before dawn." Former King Brad informed the Queen of Xix.

"But, he was your champion! If he does not appear at the contest, your life will be at the mercy of Prince Tom."

"Not Prince Tom. Empress Ishtar."

"We will send trackers to search the countryside."

"Kevin is already following him with a contingent of guards. The prince is intelligent and a good tracker. He knows how to follow clues. He will secure Marco Diaz."

"But why would he flee? Fear?"

"No. A wax packet was found in the hot spring room. It had the odor of a potion. Marco Diaz is entranced by love. He is determined to be with her."

continuará
It was late in the day when Prince Kevin and his escort arrived at a small farmhouse in the countryside. They had left Countess Tobi's castle before dawn and were exhausted due to lack of sleep.

"We're here." Kevin said.

"Where are we?" asked the armored rider next to him.

"A secret royal safehouse. We'll be staying here. We'll receive word on when it is time to leave."

"I hate to complain, but did I really need to ride in disguise? This armor is really heavy." Marco said as he raised the visor on his helmet.

"Marco Diaz supposedly escaped from the custody of the Former King of Xix to pursue another woman thanks to a love potion. We had to get you out of Countess Tobi's castle without being recognized."

Marco shrugged and began to dismount.

Kevin addressed the members of his escort. It was made up of guards who saw what happened in the hot spring chamber.

"Lieutenant. Rest here for the night. There should be enough room for all the men and mounts in the barn. I'll speak to the caretaker about food. In the morning you will continue your search for Marco Diaz."

"Found him! He's right there!" shouted a knight at the back of the group. He received a slap to the back of the helmet for his comment.

"Heh." Kevin chuckled. "Make conspicuous inquiries at towns and villages. Empress Ishtar must believe that the search for Marco Diaz is ongoing but unsuccessful."

"Yes, your Highness."

After a while Star turned to face the throne room entrance where Ishtar and the mimic had departed. With a quiet wave of her wand, the heavy doors glowed with pink magic and closed with a loud thud.

A huge maniacal smile then plastered itself across her face.

"HAHA! YOU GOT NOTHING, ISHTAR! NOTHING! THE ONLY ONE GETTING THAT MARCO D...IAZ IS ME!" she shouted at the exit Ishtar just walked through.

Star performed a very crude dance consisting of pelvic thrusts and sassy neck movements.
"UH-HUH! THAT'S RIGHT! SHA-MON! WOOO!" she sang like a very famous and sadly departed Earth performer.

The dance was accompanied by grunts and a variety of rude gestures directed towards the closed doors.

"MARCO KNOWS WHAT'S WHAT! HE SAW RIGHT THROUGH YOUR FAKE! I'M GONNA GIVE HIM THE REAL THANG!"

Star had just added crotch grabbing moves to her dance when a voice sounded behind her.

"Star, is that absolutely necessary? I really do not wish to be reminded about who is going to be getting what.

"Dad!" Star spun around to see her father and blushed. "How long have you been there?!"

"I came back in through the private royal entrance when I saw Ishtar leave. What happened to the red haired woman?"

"Turns out she was a mimic."

"That explains it then. I feared that I was imagining things when I saw your dark haired cutpurse friend from Earth."

Star smiled. "Janna."

"They seemed very pleased with themselves. I was going to check if you were alright, but by your... dance, I take it that Marco did not, in fact, succumb to Ishtar's honeypot?"

"The mimic gave herself away and I played along."

"Then Ishtar is unaware of her failure?"

"That's right! I'm a great actor! Like in the high school play! The alien warrior princess Juliet saved Romeo from the clutches of Cyborg Tybalt and Vampire Count Paris!" Star said while pantomiming a boxing match. "The audience loved it! They were expecting tragedy not improv!"

"Do not become overconfident, my daughter. Remember the tale of Nova and Max. Not all stories have happy endings."

Star composed herself. "I know. That's what the director said."

King Butterfly looked thoughtful for a moment. "This could be to our advantage. If Ishtar thinks she has struck a crippling blow, she may not see any need for further action. Perhaps Marco will go unmolested for the duration of the preparation period."

"I have to keep an angry act for the next few weeks. I can't look happy."

"He will need to play along as well. He must realize that he needs to go into hiding again."

"'Appear weak when you are strong...’ I read that in an art book once. Turns out Earth people actually know a whole lot about combat."

==================================

"It's been a long ride, Marco. Let's go in and rest. The caretaker will prepare us a hot meal."
"I hate to put anyone through the trouble."

"Don't worry. She'll insist on feeding us. The troops too. She's the real motherly type."

He called out to the house. "Nana Gem?! Are you here?!"

An older woman emerged from the farmhouse to greet them.

"Prince Kevin! It is good to see you!"

"Hello, Nana Gem!"

"Is your father not with you?"

"Not this time. There's a political situation and he has to do some maneuvering."

"Oh. That is a pity."

"Nana Gem, this is-"

"I know who you are! You are Red Hood! I saw your last fight in the Underworld Arena!"

Marco smiled. "Actually, my name is Marco Diaz. But please just call me Marco."

"It is good to meet you, Marco. Please call me Nana Gem. Marco Diaz… I know that name… Ah! You were the one who was to be Queen Star's husband! Before!"

"Am I famous? Is this what being a celebrity feels like?"

"Kevin? A political situation? Arena gladiators? Is everything alright? Please tell me what is going on." She looked Kevin up and down. "You are looking thin. Have you been eating properly? Both of you, come inside. You can tell me everything over dinner."

She sniffed Kevin and Marco.

"And you have been riding all day. You both should go and have a bath and settle into the guest room while I cook."

==================================

Marco sat in the tub, soaking. Not a fancy hot spring. Just a regular tub in a regular washroom. The farmhouse seemed very simple, homey, rustic, and definitely un-royal. But, there were comforts here that you wouldn't expect to find in a rural farmhouse. A wood fired system provided heated water for this bath.

He relaxed and thought back to his bath the previous night.

==================================

She was in his lap in the warm water. The excitement was unbearable.

"I want you too, Star."

Their lips were so close.

"Do you love me, Marco?"
"What?"

"Do you love me?"

Marco stood up and threw her off him. She fell backwards into the water. She thrashed in the pool and sputtered as she stood up.

"What did you do that for, Marco?!"

"WHO ARE YOU?! GUARDS!" he shouted as he climbed out of the pool.

"Marco! It's me! Star!"

"YOU AREN'T STAR! DID ISHTAR SEND YOU?! YO, GUARDS!" He shouted as he backed away.

"Marco! Why are you doing this?!" she cried.

Guards busted down the locked door. They paused when they saw the woman in the pool.

Kevin rushed in with the guards. "What's going on?! Woah! Marco! Towel!" he said as he tossed Marco something to cover himself with. He looked at the blonde woman in the pool. "Star?! What are you doing here?!"

"THAT IS NOT STAR!" Marco said as he wrapped the towel around his waist.

"She's not? She sure looks like Star." He tossed her a towel to cover up and asked her, "You're not Star?"

"Kevin! It's me! Star! Your cousin!" she vehemently maintained. She began to move towards them.

"Stop right there!" Marco shouted as he took a fighting stance.

The woman stopped in the water.

"Marco?" Kevin asked.

"I'm sure, Kevin. I can tell she's not Star. Watch this." Marco said then asked the woman, "Hey! Not-Star! What's my middle name?!"

"Don't make me say it out loud! You've always been embarrassed by it."

"What's the name of the ice cream shop you like on Earth? We used to go there all the time!"

"I'm lactose intolerant. I never had the heart to tell you."

"What's the song I have set as my phone's ringtone? You always laughed when I sang it to you."

"You know the one. It goes like this..." She hummed a very generic tune.

"Who did you take to the high school prom?"

"You, of course!" she said confidently.

Marco shook his head.

"I HAVEN'T BEEN TO EARTH IN FIVE YEARS! HOW CAN YOU EXPECT ME TO
REMEMBER LITTLE DETAILS! UGH! I'M GOING HOME!

The woman went to a pile of clothes at the side of the pool and brought out a pair of dimensional scissors. She cut the air, but nothing happened.

"We travel with a Tramorfidian crystal to help keep attackers from appearing. Or from retreating," Kevin pointed out.

"I AM QUEEN STAR BUTTERFLY OF MEWNI! I DEMAND THAT YOU UNBLOCK MY EXIT!"

"Where's your wand? Star always has it near her. You could cupcake blast your way out of here."

"I didn't think I would need it to be with you! Don't you love me, Marco?!"

"The real Star wouldn't ask me that. She's never asked me that. Instead, Star asks me a question and I always answer, 'I'm holding her.' What's the question? You can't say you don't remember. The real Star knew it today."

"Will… Do… I…? … Who..." she stammered. Then her shoulders slumped. She stood in the water silently as she held the towel to cover herself.

Kevin signaled the guards. They pointed their weapons at the woman and restrained her when she left the hot spring.

"Impersonating a monarch. I should be able to convince the Queen of Xix to be lenient with your punishment if you are honest now."

"... I'm sorry." the woman's blonde hair shortened and became white. Her blue eyes changed color to red. Her skin turned grey. Her face shifted. Her body became less slender and more curvy.

"Marco, have you ever met a mimic before?"

He shook his head and asked, "What were you trying to pull?"

"Empress Ishtar ordered me to seduce you, Marco Diaz. If you betray Queen Star, she might void her consent for the contest."

"That is a ridiculous plan." Marco commented.

"The plan had many levels. I was to spit a potion into your mouth when we kissed."

"Poison?!"

"No."

"A love potion?" Kevin asked.

"A bewitching potion, an enthrallment potion, a charm potion. Many names for the same thing. If you were entranced with false love, you would not fight for your real love."

"Please spit the potion packet out. Let it fall on the floor." Kevin ordered.

The mimic did as she was told. Kevin took a guard's sword and pierced the waxy packet with the tip. The potion spilled out harmlessly.
"King Butterfly wasn't kidding when he told me that Ishtar was persistent!"

"What was your price?" Kevin asked.

"My sister. She's a prisoner of the Empress. If I was successful, she would be freed."

"And now that you've failed?"

"...She..." Tears began to fall from the woman's red eyes.

Marco looked into the woman's eyes. He regarded her for a long moment.

"I believe her. Just let her go."

"But the law states that she is to be brought to justice."

"This is how I was convicted of piracy. She was placed into a situation beyond her control. What else was she supposed to do? Leave her sister to die? The law needs to be flexible. Justice goes hand in hand with mercy."

"She'll report that she was successful to Ishtar."

"I don't care what Ishtar thinks. She'll be able to free her sister."

"And what about Star? Ishtar will taunt Star with this false seduction."

Marco groaned with disgust. He hoped Star was having a less stressful night.

Kevin signaled for the guards to release the woman.

"It doesn't matter. I won't be able to prove that I succeeded. The Empress will punish my sister for my failure."

"What's your name?" Marco asked.

"Mimi."

"Mimi the mimic?" Kevin asked skeptically.

"My family is from Port."

"How were you going to prove that you got into my pants?"

"You aren't wearing any. Have you had a healer look at that mole?"

Marco blushed. "Yes... It's fine."

"I needed details. The potion would have made you open up. There are things only lovers know about each other."

Marco pinched the bridge of his nose and sighed.

"You know what, Marco? It might be a good idea to let Ishtar think this worked. We'll meet you in your room to talk. Did you want to finish your bath?" Kevin asked.

"No. I actually need a cold shower."
Back in the farmhouse washroom Marco thought, "Star is going to be so pissed." He then sank his head beneath the warm water of the tub.

Meanwhile in the Kingdom of Mewni...

In her bedroom, Star was exhausting her repertoire of wrestling moves as she inflicted punishment on Marco Pillow. She was currently applying an inverted full nelson, also known as a butterfly hold.

"...you probably told her about our hiding place under the bleachers! And that spot I like kissed on... UGH! That kind of pillow talk is supposed to be just for me!"

Marc-pill-o received a double underhook slam. Star followed up with an elbow drop and transitioned into a rear naked choke.

"Marco's just lucky I'm working out my frustration on you instead of him!"

continuará
Over the hot meal, Marco and Kevin told Nana Gem about the events leading up to and occurring after the challenge.

"Starting tomorrow, you *will* begin training for the duel against Prince Tom." Nana Gem said authoritatively.

"King Butterfly told me that Tom doesn't even want to marry Star. I believe him. Tom had the opportunity to kill me, but he didn't do it. He's going to throw the fight."

"Would you wager your life on that? What about King Brad's? Your fates are intertwined. If you are killed in the duel, he will be immediately brought out to the fighting area. Prince Tom will be expected to... No. No matter your belief, you need to train as if the fight will happen."

Marco understood and nodded in agreement.

"So how do these things go?" he asked.

"You should hear it from an expert." Kevin said as he placed Star's spellbook on the table and flipped through the pages.

Glossaryck emerged from the book and looked at the three questioning faces around him.

"Alright... What'd I miss?"

"...So Brad issued the challenge and now Marco is his champion?" Glossaryck asked.

"Yeah. And why didn't you tell me that only a noble could issue a challenge?"

"We thought that they would buy the argument that you were supposed to be Star's fiancee before she was engaged to Tom."

"Well, they didn't."

Glossaryck snapped his fingers. "Dang."

Nana Gem's hand shot out and her fingers clamped themselves around his throat. "You sent him into conflict unprepared!" she shouted angrily.

"I thought I gave him what he needed!" came the choking reply.

"You should have given him more! Now Brad's life is on the line!"
Glossaryck tried to pry apart her fingers, but her grip was too strong.

"You will tell Marco all about royal engagement challenges or I will wring your tiny blue neck!"

He nodded vigorously in response.

Gem narrowed her eyes at him momentarily, then released her grip. Glossaryck gasped for breath.

"Okay…” he said hoarsely.

"Is there anything stopping Tom from forfeiting the duel?” Marco asked.

Glossaryck cleared his throat before answering. "Just his mother. The last defender who walked away was Lord Pat..."

==================================================================

"I, uh… Sir Bud, don't want Pat of Nelpon to marry Rhea of Olpon!"

Rhea blushed in embarrassment and smiled.

"Look, can we just cut him some slack?! A warnicorn stepped on his head during the war!” a nobleman said from the back of the gathering.

"He didn't even use the proper names for their kingdoms!"

"We know where he meant! His words may be slurred but their meaning is clear!"

There were murmurs of resignation. "Ugh. Fine."

"Princess Rhea, do you consent to this challenge?"

"I do," the princess said proudly.

Lord Pat shouted from his seat. "You would really rather marry that idiot, Rhea?!"

"He may not be as intelligent as some, but he understands what love is better than you!"

"A childish emotion, for a childish mind!"

"I assure you, Lord Pat, Sir Bud is no child. He is a real man!"

Lord Pat's face reddened with a mixture of embarrassment and rage.

"OH, SCREW THIS! I'M OUT! GO AHEAD, RHEA! WED YOUR IDIOT AND HAVE IDIOT OFFSPRING!"

"What about the trade agreement?!” The King of Old Elpon called out.

"All other agreements still stand! Old Elpon will get its medicine, and New Elpon will get its grain!"

"But I do not need *you*, Rhea! I will not stain my weapon or my honor with the blood of a feeble-minded fool!"

"Please. He would have kicked your butt."

"I'M GONNA MARRY THE PRINCESS! YAY!" Bud cheered.
"Tom should be able to walk away at any time without consequence. The challenge is a test of commitment and resolve. If Tom doesn't want to fight, then his engagement wasn't important enough to him to defend. Any treaties or agreements not dependent on the marriage itself would stand. But in this case, there aren't any. Star would be instantly engaged to Brad."

Nana Gem rolled her eyes.

"So why didn't he just bail out at the Gathering? Sounds like all he had to do was speak up."

"Loyalty? Ishtar is still his mother. She raised him after all." Gem suggested.

"Eh. It doesn't really matter. If Tom had managed to say that he didn't want to fight for Star during the Gathering, his mother would have made the argument that she was the defender since the engagement was 'negotiated' by her and not Tom. She would have selected another champion."

"Is there any way for Tom to surrender without his mother stopping him?"

"Sure. The time for that will be once the fight starts. The fight is left entirely to the fighters. He's pretty cocky, so he'll probably pretend to fight for a bit so it won't look like he was scared, and then yield. Though I can tell you that isn't a great idea."

"What about if Brad forfeits?"

"Well, he can't before the fight. You do know that Brad put up his royal land, any wealth, and his nobility, right?"

"Yeah."

"It's how the law makes sure that Brad doesn't flake. You can't make this kind of challenge and then not show up. If he chickens out, he'd lose everything. His land and wealth would be confiscated and given to Tom… Actually, to Ishtar."

"His title was put up too. Would Brad be stripped of his nobility and made a commoner?"

"He would be stripped of his nobility and be made dead. You too. Runners are chased down. There is no sanctuary."

Marco blanched.

"But once the fight starts… Well, let me tell you about the last time a fighter yielded."

"I YIELD!" cried out Wren as she threw down her spear.

"The challenger, Lady Wren of Sulpe, has yielded! Duchess Myna of Beon is victorious!"

Wounded and tired, Wren said to Myna, "Please take good care of Hank."

"Don't worry, Wren. I WILL!" she said before she plunged her spear into Wren's heart.

"WREN! NO!" the prince wailed.
"If either fighter surrenders, the winner has a choice. But Duchess Myna wasn't exactly known for mercy."

Marco thought of the upcoming duel. Of course, he wouldn't kill Tom if he yielded. And Marco would never yield. But, would Tom kill him if he did? Would he want him to?

"Hey! I just thought of something. What if I just knock Tom out?"

"Well..."

=====================================================================

It wasn't supposed to end like this. An unlucky errant kick by Stu had knocked Bob out.

The contest can end in one of only two ways. Knockout wasn't one of them. Only surrender or death.

Princess Robin of Klaatu and Sir Stu of Barada loved each other. But Lady Robin's family insisted on an engagement to Prince Bob of Nikto as part of an annexation treaty. Stu challenged, but King Ed was too proud and would not allow his son to forfeit. He said that if Bob didn't fight he was a coward. So the friends came up with an idea. A choreographed fight.

The performance didn't go according to plan.

Stu couldn't forfeit now to save his friend's life. A surrender needs to be accepted to be valid. So, within the next moments, Stu will be forced to kill his childhood friend here in the Verdant Coliseum of East Uaine, else his own life be forfeit.

"I am sorry, my friend."

Princess Robin covered her tear filled eyes as it was done.

=====================================================================

"If Prince Bob didn't want to marry Princess Robin, he should have yielded immediately. This isn't something you should take lightly, Marco Diaz. You need to be ready and willing to fight to the death." Nana Gem advised.

Marco nodded. He was pretty sure he was Stu in this allegory.

"This is so depressing. At least finish with something lighter. Tell him the story about Lady Kestrel and the non-consent." Kevin suggested.

"Ah, Lady Kestrel..."

=====================================================================

"I, Lady Kestrel of Plint, contest the engagement between my love, Baron Ray of Gasta, and that ho, Emira Saira of Wadia!"

"The insult notwithstanding, Baron Ray, do y-" a noble started asking before he was interrupted.

"No." Ray said flatly.

"But my love! We can finally be together!"
"No!" Ray repeated more forcefully.

"After I kill that succubus!"

A succubus from the gallery piped up, "Wut? Don't drag me into your craziness, you nutball!"

"DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND! NO! I DO NOT CONSENT TO YOUR CHALLENGE!"

"Ray, my love! We will have such beautiful children!"

"I am so sorry, Saira! I swear, I only went out with her once! Years before you and I met!"

Saira sat silently in her seat with her arms crossed over her chest and a very annoyed look on her face.

"That temptress has you under a love spell! I will free you!" Kestrel proclaimed.

"GET BENT!" he shouted.

"Lady Kestrel, Baron Ray has made his feelings clear."

"Yeah! Let it go!"

"RAY!" Kestrel screamed as she ran towards his seat. Guards blocked her path.

"Lady Swan! Please control your daughter."

"Please, Kes. This is over. It is time to go home."

"But Ray is still in the clutches of that... that... harpy!"

A harpy from the gallery piped up, "Hey!"

"This is so embarrassing to watch." a noble in the nosebleed seats whispered to her companion.

"Speak for yourself. Pass me the popcorn."

==================================

Marco smirked at the description of the surreal challenge. "Does that happen a lot? Non-consents, I mean."

"No. They are really rare because a potential challenger usually has an idea of whether their challenge will be accepted or not. But Lady Kestrel was... obsessed."

"She tried to crash the wedding and was eventually sent to live in the Dowager dimension."

"Ah, man." Marco sighed. "Is there anything else I need to be told about?"

"Just a few more things. There are rules against interference and unfair advantages. Your duel even happens at midday to avoid one fighter being blinded by daylight. The audience comes to see some fighting, so there's an undercard that starts in the morning just in case of a forfeit. You'll fight with spears like the ancient mewmans."

"Luckily for you, Kevin is one of the best with a spear. You will train with him." Nana Gem said.

"Well, I had a great teacher."
"It's the 34th of Zorshak now. There's still a few weeks before the 12th of Hurdoz. That's the fifth anniversary of Star's engagement and the deadline for her to be married." Glossaryck finished his explanation.

"It is settled then! You will make the most of your time here. It has been a very long few days for you. You must be exhausted and need sleep. Go to bed. I will make sure the soldiers camping outside are well fed."

Glossaryck yawned loudly. "Well, good night!" he said as he reached to close the spellbook over him.

Gem grabbed the cover and forced the book to remain open.

"Not you. We have other matters to discuss." she said pointing at the tiny blue man's nose.

Marco and Kevin bid their caretaker good night and made their way to the guest room.

"Top bunk!" Kevin called out.

Marco didn't mind. He was passed out in the lower bunk before his roommate was even halfway up the ladder.

Marco split the log with the axe and Kevin put another one on the stump.

"So, I know you can fight. You don't get out of the Underworld Arena without knowing how. Do you know anything about fighting demons?"

"Tom and I have gone at it a few times. But we never seemed to finish thanks to Star." Marco said before he swung the axe splitting the log.

"How'd you fare?"

"Tom seems like he loses limbs pretty easily."

"Do you carry a blade?" Kevin said positioning another piece of wood on the stump.

"Like a sword or axe? No. That would get you arrested pretty quickly where I'm from."

"So how do you manage to cut off Tom's parts?"

Marco put down the axe and performed a karate chop splitting the wood.

Kevin was impressed. "You'll have to teach me that one."

"But this last time, when I escaped Ishtar, he had me beat. If he wanted to, he could have finished me off."

Another log was placed on the stump. "So you don't know a demon's true weakness?"

"Is it ice? It's ice, isn't it?"

Kevin laughed. "That'll stop a demon, but it won't kill one. Their weakness is their heart."

Marco was silent in thought. He didn't want to kill Tom. But he'll sure hurt him.
“I heard about your career in the arena from Nana Gem.”

“What did you hear?”

“Not one kill.”

“Nope.”

“Why not? Your opponents would’ve killed you given the chance.”

“Because I had a choice. I don't want to kill. It was never a 'kill or be killed' situation.”

“What if you had no choice? Would you kill your opponent if there was no other way to win? No other way to survive?”

“...I don't know.” he said as he picked up the axe.

“You might find out soon.”

Marco thought of Star's first impression of football on Earth. She immediately assumed it was a battle. Mortal combat is a way of life here.

“Why is gladiatorial combat so popular? Hasn't anyone here ever heard of baseball?”

Marco swung the axe.

=================================================================

“So, have you ever fought with a spear?”

“I've never been much for fighting with bladed weapons. I studied some kendo, but I only used the wood training weapons.”

“Well, spear fighting has a lot in common with staff fighting. I know you're good with one since you used a staff to beat up that pirate captain in the arena. We'll start with that.”

Kevin tossed Marco a wooden staff.

“Show me what you got.”

Marco demonstrated his skills from years of training and practice. He skillfully executed a variety of swings and strikes. When he was done he tossed the staff back to his trainer.

“Pretty good.” Kevin said as he caught the weapon. “Show me again.” he said as he tossed Marco another staff.

Marco examined the new staff. It had a metal weight on one end. He went through his moveset again. It was not as natural this time.

“The weight of the blade will change the center of balance. Find the new center and try again.”

Marco tried again.

=================================================================

“So, you know a lot about me thanks to Mimi. But I don't know all that much about you. Like, how old are you?” Marco asked during a break in his training.
"Twenty-five." Kevin answered.

"Married?"

"No."

"Ever?"

"No."

"Girlfriend?"

"No."

"Ever?"

"Of course!"

Marco held up his hands in apology. "I thought early marriage was the norm around here."

"It is. I haven't found the right girl. Seems like I'm following family tradition and not getting married until later."

"Why do you think that is?"

"My royal title."

"You'd think that would be a plus."

"You would think that. But it's working against me. I'm not just a noble, I'm a prince. A lot of girls are intimidated by my title. And it seems like the ones that aren't are *only* interested in my title."

"That sucks. Is it the fact that your wife will be queen?"

"No. That's definitely not it. My wife won't be queen."

Marco was about to ask why not, but Kevin asked him a question first.

"I just realized that you can provide some unique insight. Why didn't the fact that you would become Mewni's king keep you from dating my cousin?"

"I always knew that Star was a princess and would become queen one day. But I never really thought about what would happen if we got married."

"You didn't think that marrying royalty was something to think about?"

"I thought about marriage, sure. Never talked with her seriously about it though. We were only eighteen when she left Earth five years ago. That's considered very young to get married there. And me becoming king? Star never even mentioned it. She always said her royalty and my lack of it was 'something that will work itself out'. Turns out, she was afraid the truth would scare me off."

"And now that you know?"

"If marrying Star means taking on this responsibility, then I will try to be a just and good king."

Marco put his foot on a nearby rock and tried to strike a regal pose.

"Your Majesty." Kevin bowed and laughed.
"Maybe the fact that I got to know Star as a friend first helped. I thought of her as Star. I didn't fall in love with royalty. I fell in love with her."

Kevin looked thoughtful.

"So, how is it that everyone is okay with me just coming in, marrying the queen and 'boom!' Hail to the King, Baby?!" Marco asked while doing an impersonation of an old rock star.

"That is one of those great questions that needs an expert. Star's father would have been the best one to answer. You do know that he was an outsider too, right?"

"I had my suspicions. He could be very un-kinglike at times. But I never asked. I wasn't sure if it would've been rude."

"But we do have someone who might be able to provide some answers."

==================================

"Great question." Glossaryck said while stroking his beard.

"I hope it has a great answer."

"It does. There's lots of reasons."

"Such as?"

"You do understand that as an outsider, the class laws don't apply to you, right? You're not a noble, but you're also not a commoner. The pool of marriageable nobles is smaller than you might think. Nobles here would really like to avoid inbreeding."

"That seems like a weird distinction."

"It also helps to prevent the consolidation of power. There are a lot of ambitious noble families that would like to marry into a royal line for power. It still happens, but it's slowed somewhat."

"Makes sense."

"But the biggest reason it will be accepted is because she chose you. The king should be someone the queen trusts completely. He's an extension of her authority and will. He's her top advocate and adviser. The queen needs someone to support her as well as challenge her. A yin to her yang. She's expected to choose someone worthy."

"So then why was Star being forced to marry Tom?"

"An agreement in the Great Hall of Mewni trumps everything. So until the challenge it was going to be Tom regardless of trust or love or worthiness or compatibility."

"Everyone is a little too strict when it comes to the law around here. Marriages shouldn't be forced."

"Star's mother would've agreed. She was always very stern and proper. Queen Rose had a very stern and proper prince in mind for her. But she knew that she needed someone a little wild. She chose River because she was attracted to his inner savage. It's surprising that they only had one child." Glossaryck said sleazily.

Marco plugged his ears. "La-La-La-La-I-can't-hear-you-La-La-La-La…"
"Boy, they were so loud. They could be heard all the way down to Star's room."

"LA!-LA!-LA!-HMM!-HMM!-LA!-LA!-HMM!..."

==================================

It had been another hard day of training. Marco's skills with a spear were improving, but he knew it would be a long time before he would master it.

Marco was sound asleep until loud shouts woke him.

"DIE FOUL BEAST!"

"WAIT!"

"HYAH!"

"NYET! HELP!"

"That came from outside!" Kevin said as he shot up in the top bunk.

Marco was already on his feet running. He grabbed a staff on his way out of the farmhouse.

When he got outside he saw Nana Gem attacking a monster with a spear. Expertly handling the weapon, she put her opponent on the defensive. Gem used the environment and maneuvered her opponent. A surprise kick caused the monster to trip backward over a stone and fall to the ground. The helpless monster could only stare up at Gem in fear.

"IT IS OVER!" She shouted as she prepared to thrust her spear into the monster to finish him off.

A last moment block by Marco's staff made the spear miss its target and plunge into the ground next to the monster's head.

"WAIT!" Marco shouted. He then said to the monster, "Stay down!"

"Why did you do that?! This spy was lurking in the tree! The Empress knows you are here!" shouted Nana Gem.

"Not vork for Ishtar!"

"You're lying, monster!" Kevin accused him.

"No! He's telling the truth. I know him. He doesn't work for Ishtar. He works for Ludo."

"Marco Diaz, is this evil beast your friend?!" asked Gem.

"Friend might be a little bit too far. But he's not an enemy. I've known him a long time. He helped me in the Arena."

"But he's a filthy monster!" Kevin protested.

"My name Yvgeny Bulgoyaboff."

Kevin and Gem looked confused.

The monster gave an exasperated sigh. "Just call Buff Frog."
Gem and Kevin were hesitant to allow Buff Frog into the farmhouse to talk, but Marco vouched for him. However, Gem drew the line at making a pot of what passed for coffee here.

"How did you know I was here?" Marco asked.

"Follow from Gathering to Tobi. Lost there, but know you would come this farm."

"Why?"

"Is royal land. Challenger King Brad own."

"That is a royal secret!" Kevin said.

"Am good spy. Find out these things."

"So, what brings you by, Buff Frog?" Marco asked.

"Ludo vant follow. Make sure you safe."

"Ludo? Why would that vile little beast care about Marco Diaz's safety?" Nana Gem asked.

"Monsters vant Marco Diaz king."

"But I fought against monsters for years."

"Why would monsters want Marco as king?" Kevin asked.

"He not fight because hate. Monsters hated in Mewni. But he not think monsters only evil. Maybe step to better life for monsters."

"I guess that explains why you helped me in Talo and the Underworld."

"Put good vord with Griffon's Nest. You would escape easy. Not expect Ishtar recruit."

Gem and Kevin's faces had the same disbelieving look but they said nothing.

"If he could find you here Marco, there's no reason to believe Ishtar couldn't do the same."

"She search near Tobi castle. Still believe Marco Diaz under love spell."

"Regardless, Empress Ishtar is persistent. We must remain on guard."

"Does anyone else know that Marco is here?" Kevin asked.

"Nyet. Scissors not vork. Cannot return with news quickly. You have crystal, da?"

Gem nodded and said, "The fewer that know he is here, the better. I do not trust you, monster. But Marco Diaz does. Do not give away our position." Gem ordered.


Nana Gem was cooking breakfast when she asked, "Kevin? Would you be a dear and feed the goatpigs, please?"
"Sure." he said as he left the kitchen to perform the chore leaving Marco and Nana Gem alone.

"Nana Gem, you seem like you have a close relationship with Kevin. Not many people would feel comfortable asking a prince to slop the hogs."

Gem chuckled. "Yes. I suppose I do."

"Are you close with the rest of his family?"

"His father is an old friend."

"How long have you been the caretaker here?"

"Oh, about ten years now."

"What did you do before this?"

"I was a royal servant."

"Before that, were you a soldier?"

Gem paused and looked up from her cooking.

"What makes you ask that?"

"Little things. The way you speak and carry yourself. And I saw you wield the spear. You were a natural with it. Were you the one who taught Kevin to use a spear?"

"It is good to know how to defend oneself. This can be a dangerous dimension."

"Stan Pines thought so."

Gem flinched slightly.

"Does Kevin know who you are?"

Just then, Kevin returned and Gem resumed her task.

"Kevin dear, you should take our guest out riding into the east forest today." she said calmly.

"...Okay. I'll get the mounts ready."

"...Is this like having someone take your brother out fishing on the lake?" Marco said half in jest.

"You're smart." Gem said with a smile.

Kevin and Marco rode to the east for a time before they arrived at the edge of a forest. They rode into the forest for a while longer.

Soon, they came upon a pair of stone obelisks by the side of the road.

"Marco, do you know where we are?"

"Yeah. I think I do."
They dismounted and approached the first obelisk. Marco read the inscription.

CEDRIC

ROYAL SERVANT

FRIEND

"He had no blood family. He was laid to rest here by the soldiers that found him." Kevin said.

Marco gave a moment of silence to pay his respects. Then he moved to look at the other obelisk.

"She didn't want a royal funeral. Just a royal servant's marker since she always said that her life was to serve. She asked to be buried here, rather than in the royal crypts in Xix. Do you know why?"

Marco held his breath.

"Don't worry, Marco. I know all about the secret of my parentage."

Marco exhaled.

"The public story is that she was buried next to her friend because no one should spend forever alone. But you know that's not why she was buried here."

"No, it's not. When did she pass away?" Marco asked.

"I was only three. I sadly don't remember too much about her. Just feelings of a kind and loving, but very sad woman."

Marco now knew why Star didn't have much to say about her. She died when Star was only a year old.

"When I was older, I was looking at a portrait of her when I realized that I look very much like my father but not a bit like my mother. I questioned my father, but of course he denied it."

"So how did you learn the truth?"

"During the Xix-Quosto war, my mother had traveled to Mewni Kingdom to give birth. She had a difficult pregnancy and it was further from the conflict. When I was fifteen, I followed the trail there. Longtime servants said that she had travelled with a royal servant. But the servant never left the royal quarters while my mother was there. After my mother gave birth and returned to Xix, the servant remained in the employ of my aunt, Queen Rose Butterfly."

"People still remembered fifteen years later?"

"Twenty years, actually. The child was my sister, Skye."

"I see. Your sister is the current Queen of Xix. I'm not sure you've mentioned her before. That's why your wife will never be queen."

"There are other issues in that regard, but yes. I've learned not to talk about my family too much."

"So what about you?"

"My family paid an official visit to Mewni when my first cousin, Moon, was crowned queen. Soon, my mother left Xix for Mewni to give birth again. The same royal servant attended to her. My family
kept its distance after that."

"Can't imagine why."

"When I was fifteen, I traveled to Mewni on my own. My first cousin once removed helped me find out the truth."

"Star."

"When I saw the royal servant, I knew who she was instantly. And I knew that she knew me."

"What did you do?"

"I said, 'Hello'. She said the same."

"That's it?!"

"Nothing else needed to be said. I knew the truth. And she had given up her children for a purpose. She wasn't going to risk that."

"This seems anti-climactic."

"Oh, just wait. I returned home to Xix and told my sister what I had discovered. She did not take it well. She accused me of disrespecting our mother's memory. She denied being a half-noble. She would not believe that our parents had a show marriage."

"I guess the truth is hard to accept."

"It was a lot to take. Skye had known a noble woman as her mother all her life. Maybe it was just easier for me to accept because she passed away when I was much younger. But whether my sister accepts it or not, it is still the truth."

"That was ten years ago. Then what happened?"

"At the time, father had just abdicated and my sister had ascended to the Xix throne. As queen, she forbade me to travel to Xix to see her again."

"That seems harsh."

"That was the last time I saw Star for a few years as well. We only reconnected a few years ago when we both attended a ball. That was when she asked me to continue the effort to reestablish dimensional travel to Earth as her own kingdom's research was proving fruitless."

"Why you?"

"Xix holds the largest and best deposits of the magic metal that makes dimensional travel possible."

"Wait. Are these deposits located on the border of Quosto?"

"That's right. The region was transferred to Xix by Queen Ladybird before her passing."

"A region valuable enough to go to war for."

"So, you've studied the history of this dimension?"

"No. But I think I should. I learned this from Stan Pines. How did the war end?"
"The war dragged on for a few years. It would have gone very badly for Xix if it didn't have the alliances it managed to secure thanks to its formal relationship with Mewni."

"You mean thanks to your mother and father's alliance marriage."

"If nothing else, my mother knew that she made the right choice for the greater good. But of course she still had her regrets."

Marco thought of Stan Pines. He had his regrets too. He should at least know that his leaving did help after all.

"After I was restricted from going to Mewni Kingdom, I protested to my father. But, since he was no longer king, he wasn't in a position to overrule my sister. At least not officially."

"But, unofficially?"

"You heard from the green monster that my father is the owner of the farm. That is a secret. I really should have found out how the secret was leaked."

"The farm is the land that was put up for the challenge."

"Right. And because my father owns it in secret, and because it is so remote, he can staff it with whomever he wants. He wanted to turn full rule of Xix over to my sister, so he abdicated the throne. He still serves as her representative at the Gathering of Nobles. Soon after he abdicated, an opening here for an experienced royal servant was fulfilled by the same one who helped my mother years ago. My father spends his time here when he is not needed by my sister."

"So, the royal servant..."

"Marco, you need to understand that this isn't something we're free to discuss. Not even in private. If the truth were to come out, it would undermine my sister's rule."

"Isn't that difficult?"

"I come to the farm often. Even though we cannot call each other family, it feels that way. I would like to be more open. But I can accept it, for now. My father accepts it too."

"Do you think your sister accepts it?"

"I wish I knew. She can be hard to read. She suppresses her cheek marks."

Kevin approached the second obelisk and brushed some dirt from the side.

"Your sister is wrong. You do respect your mother's memory. You know the truth and understand why she did what she did. Everyone has their reasons for doing what they've done. Your birth mother, your father, and your sister too."

Kevin smiled and nodded. "We should head back." he said.

"Yeah. Mind if I have a minute alone?"

"I'll go check on the mounts." Kevin touched the obelisk and said, "Goodbye, Mother." He then left for the mounts.

Marco crouched in front of the stone obelisk and thought silently.
He would not have made it here if Stan Pines didn't keep his promise to her. She believed that everything happened for a reason. That there was a greater purpose to everything they've all been through.

He hoped and prayed that was true.

Marco brushed some dust from the engraved words in the stone and stood.

DAISY
QUEEN OF XIX
LOVED
"Goodbye, Daisy Butterfly."

==================================

It was after midday when Marco and Kevin returned to the farmhouse. A carriage and a contingent of mounted soldiers was outside. They assumed that Kevin's father had arrived from Xix.

When Marco and Kevin entered the kitchen, they were greeted by a sight that made them pause. Nana Gem stood in the doorway to the kitchen, but said nothing.

Even though he had never seen her, Marco recognized the woman seated at the table. Just as he thought the moment he arrived on the farm, the resemblance was unmistakable.

"Hi, sis."

"I must commend you, brother. Everyone still thinks Marco Diaz is a fugitive."

"I thought it was pretty smart."

"The duel is scheduled for the 7th of Hurdoz. At the Cerulean Arena in Kolma. Father will come here and you will travel there together."

"You know, you could have just sent a messenger."

"I wanted to meet the man that father has tied his life to."

"Your Highness." Marco bowed in greeting.

"I encouraged father to leave this dimension, but he refused. He says that he owes it to mother."

"Of course he refused. What made you think he'd consider running?"

"He has never been fond of being royalty. Much like you."

"He'd become a fugitive. Alone and hunted for the rest of his life."

"He would survive."

"Some things are more important than one's own life." Marco said.

"Do you really think my cousin is worth more than your life?" Skye said to him.

"She is. And it's not like we're risking our lives for a sandwich or something." he said.
Queen Skye chuckled. "If father's champion does not appear, then the people will instead be witness to his execution by Prince Tom."

"Father could always fight the duel himself." Kevin pointed out.

"At his age? Against a demon prince? Let us be realistic, brother. There would be scant difference from an execution."

"Don't worry about me not showing. I'll be there." Marco said.

"Even though the fight is hopeless?"

"Hopeless? That's kinda pessimistic."

"The oddsmakers have you at 33 to 1 now. The line is still moving."

"Is it against the rules for a fighter to bet on himself? I'd hate to be kept out of the Hall of Fame."

"There is no explicit rule allowing or forbidding it. Do you have any money?"

"On me? No. I literally had to cough up my last coin in Talo."

"My father's wealth is tied up as his collateral. But, it would make sense to allow a fighter to wager. Of course, they may not live to collect if they wager against themselves. The only things that keep a challenger from glory here are defeat and death."

There was an uncomfortable silence.

"Brother, if the worst comes to pass, I expect you to assume father's responsibilities. You should marry and produce a royal heir soon. There are plenty of interested g-.

"Golddiggers." Kevin interrupted.

The queen rolled her eyes.

Marco thought that it sounded like Skye wasn't even considering marriage for herself. He wondered why.

"It is now time for me to return to the castle."

"You've only been here a few minutes."

"I have been here for hours, but I understand that you went to visit mother's grave. It is fine. I see now why you enjoy coming here. It is a like world separate from the burdens of royalty."

"Wait. Don't you come here too?" Marco asked.

"I occasionally visit mother's grave. But, no. This is the first time I have been on this land."

The Queen stood from her seat at the kitchen table.

"Goodbye, brother. I will tell father that you are still relentlessly searching for his champion."

"Farewell, Marco Diaz. I hope you will give Prince Tom a good fight."

"Nana Gem, thank you for your hospitality." Her voice cracked slightly and her cheek marks appeared briefly. Flower shapes. "It was very good to see you again."
With nary a glance backward, Queen Skye of Xix departed the humble farmhouse.

"It is not customary for a queen to bid goodbye to servants… Oh, dear... Excuse me." Nana Gem said as she abruptly left.

That night Marco had trouble sleeping. It was one thing to know that there was a class divide in this dimension, but another to feel it. As an outsider, his marriage to Star wouldn't even be questioned. But today he saw firsthand how people were kept apart.

Skye had never spoken to the woman who had given birth to her until today.

The days passed and Marco's training continued. When it was time, Brad arrived.

"Queen Skye will meet us there. It is time for us to depart for Kolma."

Kevin nodded. He hugged Nana Gem. "Goodbye, Nana Gem. I'll return after the contest."

"I'll make your favorite meal for you. Goodbye, Dear Prince Kevin."

"Father, I will ride for now." Kevin said as he climbed atop his mount.

"Marco, I have a gift for you." Nana Gem said holding out a bundle.

Marco opened the gift and held it up. It was red armor with a chainmail hood. A red and black nautical star adorned the chest.

"It would not be proper to have 'Red Hood' duel without one." Gem hugged him. "Fight well. Please make sure Brad comes home safely."

"I will. Thank you, for everything."

Gem and Brad shared a look. She turned and walked into the farmhouse leaving the door open.

Brad followed her inside and reemerged a short time later. His eyes were wet with tears.

"Now, we are ready." he said as he entered the carriage.

Marco followed him onboard.

"Did you enjoy your time on the farm? I hope you spent it training." Brad asked as Marco sat across from him.

"I learned a lot here thanks to your family."

Brad smiled and said, "That is good."

When the carriage started to move, Marco said, "Your daughter knows the truth."

"Who do you think secretly deeded this land to me and requested that Mewni send a particular experienced royal servant."

"So, she's known even longer than Kevin. But she stayed away."

"She was eighteen when she learned the truth. She loved her mother and the revelation was hard for her."
"Is that why she ordered Kevin to stay away?"

"My daughter forbade my son from visiting Mewni Kingdom for the same reason we stopped going there when she was four. The resemblance is too strong. But out here, we are safer."

"How did she learn the truth?"

"She was soon to be crowned queen and needed to know the secret in order to help ensure it remained a secret. I wish that I had told her sooner and not when I was confronted by her. She saw my heartmark and demanded to know why I still had it ten years after my wife passed."

"I didn't know you were heart bonded."

"Yes. But we did not undergo the bondbreaking ceremony before our marriage."

"Because no one knew you were bonded."

"No one knew about my wife's bond either."

Marco realized that was how Stan Pines knew about the bond.

"I assume members of your royal guard were chosen for their ability to keep secrets."

"The same qualifications that have stood since before Xix rose from the ruins of Mula. Royal guards must be great fighters with a strong sense of honor. Just as it was when I first met their captain."

"What did she say when you said your goodbyes to each other?"

"She said what you would say to someone you love when you fear that you will not see each other again. She said, 'Don't go.'"

continuará
Author's Notes: Comments and constructive criticism are always welcomed.

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Starfall by GolfAlphaMike

Chapter 26: Unyielding

==================================

Gossip spread across the dimensions like wildfire.

Marco Diaz turned out to be a philanderer and had suddenly abandoned Queen Star Butterfly for another woman.

This put Brad, the Former King of Xix, in a bit of a bind. He couldn't name another champion now. His only options were to fight against Prince Tom himself or yield at the start of the fight in a bid for mercy that he may not get.

Prince Kevin was supposedly still searching for his father's missing champion. But there has been no sign of Marco Diaz or Prince Kevin in weeks.

Once the venue was announced, general admission tickets quickly sold out. Among the nobility, demand was so high that luxury tickets were limited. Many nobles settled for general admission tickets. Scalpers made a handsome profit.

The scheduled date for the contest was very soon. The betting odds in favor of Tom had reached 60 to 1. Inns in Kolma filled with travellers from across this dimension and others.

By law, preparations for the contest had to continue despite there being a high likelihood of a no show by Marco Diaz. Ticketholders knew that they would be given a spectacle either way.

Also, there would be other entertainment. The undead underworld musicians, 'The Strolling Bones' would be performing before the main event.

The undercard was impressive as well. A jousting tournament, team battle, and some one-on-one exhibition fights. Dave had recovered from the Underworld Arena battle against Red Hood AKA Marco Diaz, and would be making his comeback. He was going to fight a hydra.

Meanwhile, all of this had an obvious effect on the Queen of Mewni.

The morning after Marco Diaz issued his challenge, the queen was clearly very happy. Flowers sprouted around her. Rainbows and hearts appeared. Magically created cute and fuzzy creatures followed her around. She wore a smile that pushed her cheek marks up close to her ears.

After that day's open court there was a dark change. She left the throne room in tears. Her father tried to console her but she locked herself in the royal quarters to be alone.

It was days before she emerged teary and unkempt. She came out only for necessary royal business. Her open court sessions finished quickly. Few subjects wanted to petition her when she was in a less than pleasant mood.
One time, a particularly socially inept noble, Baron Walt, came to open court to ask the queen for help. His son, Paul, was marrying for love into a much less prominent noble family. Paul's father had wanted him to marry a noble girl from a more respected and much richer family. He thought that surely the queen would help him convince his son not to marry for love. After all, she would be marrying Prince Tom because Marco Diaz had betrayed her.

The spell turning Baron Walt into a goatpig wore off just as the cook was about to slaughter him for dinner.

The message was clear. Now was a bad time to irritate the queen.

Later isn't looking too good either.

You know what? It would probably be best if folks just steered clear of her entirely for a while.

==================================

King Butterfly approached the door to his daughter's royal quarters to check on her. He could hear crying on the other side of the door.

"It is so sad. It seems that she rarely stops." said a servant at the door.

"Yes. She is still heartbroken. But she is the queen and needs to perform her duties. I will help her."

"Will you need me to assist you? The queen has not let any servant help her in weeks. We must wait until she vacates the room before we can enter to clean."

"No. She still does not want to see anyone if it is not necessary. Perhaps this will change after the wedding."

"Yes, your Highness." the servant said as she opened the door.

The king waited until the door shut behind him before proceeding.

He found his daughter seated at her desk with her chair tilted back on two legs. Her feet were up on the desk. She was eating a gnomefruit with one hand and reading a kingdom gossip magazine with the other. A boombox which Star had conjured by magic played a looped recording of her crying.

Star waved with her fruit holding hand to greet her father. She held the fruit with her teeth and with a wave of her wand placed the boombox by the door to mask their conversation.

"Good morning, Star. How are you today."

"Hi Dad. I'm glad that the contest is tomorrow. I don't think I could have kept this up much longer."

"Yes. It looks very stressful." the king said sarcastically.

Star waved the tabloid in her hand. "A demon woman that just gave birth in Wagma is claiming that Marco is her baby-daddy."

The king laughed. "Marco only broke through the dimensional barrier this past Smarch. I'm sure that he is very sorry for impregnating a woman he has never met months before he arrived in Mewni."

She swallowed her mouthful of food and laughed. She put down the magazine as she stood. She looked over at her white dress on the mannequin across the room. A smile curled her lips.
"You are in a good mood."

"I guess I am. Even though it's beautiful, I hated that dress because I was going to wear it for Tom. But now, I love it. Soon, I'm gonna marry Marco in it."

King Butterfly smiled. He was happy to see the joy that returned to his daughter's face after so many years.

"You can not be seen in a good mood just yet. Everyone still believes that Marco has abandoned you. You are still engaged to Tom until after the contest."

"Well, that brought me down."

"It was intended to."

"Way to go, Dad."

"You should get ready. We will leave for Kolma after today's business is complete. Countess Raven would like us to be her guests at her castle near the Arena. Duchess Paloma thinks it would be best to finalize the crop trade before your wedding. Baron Larry says that construction of the sewer system is being delayed by mole-men."

"Are they attacking workers?"

"No, they *are* workers. They are on strike. They say that they have not been properly compensated for their work."

Star sighed. She removed her crown and rumpled her hair with her fingers. She replaced her crown crookedly.

She then conjured a table with a cutting board. Pressing the side of her wand caused a knife blade to emerge from the top. She placed an onion on the board and sliced it in half. She picked up the cut onion and held it up to her face.

*snffffffffff*

Star's eyes reddened and watered. Her nose began to drip.

"Hmm. Better take another toot."

*snffffffffff*

Star said in a weepy voice, "Marco is gonna have to go on an apology slash explanation tour after we get married. Can't have his subjects thinking their king is a cheating convict coward."

"Ready?" her father asked.

==================================

Hushed tones followed Star in the hallway.

"The poor queen."

"She waited so long only to be betrayed by him."

"That jerk."
"She is always so sad now."

"She cries all night."

"My cousin's friend's brother-in-law's next door neighbor's girlfriend's former roommate says that she saw Marco Diaz at the Bounce Lounge surrounded by Succubi dancers. He left with three of them."

*gasp* "Scandalous!"

"That's nothing. My husband's co-worker's nephew's boyfriend's sister's boss' wife's friend's shiphand brother says that Marco Diaz made a ship full of Yamma monks walk the plank while carrying orphans."

"How could he know that?"

"The pirate captain let my husband's co-worker's nephew's boyfriend's sister's boss' wife's friend's shiphand brother go in order to spread tales of Marco Diaz's viciousness. Pirate raids will be easier if ships crews are frozen in fear."

"How dreadful!"

"How was the queen fooled into falling in love with such a heartless beast?"

Star thought to herself, "The rumor mill is working overtime. I might need to ask Kevin and Brad to vouch for Marco's character too."

=================================================================

Tom knew what he had to do.

In the arena tomorrow he would yield to whoever faced him. Former King Brad was in his late sixties. Tom could yield immediately and it would appear to be compassion.

But Tom knew that Star's tearful visage was just an act. Marco was in hiding and would definitely reappear at the challenge.

If Marco appears he would save face by fighting for a moment. Just to show that he wasn't afraid. Then he would yield.

His mother thinks that she has removed Marco from the challenge. He was certain that this had something to do with the prisoner who was released from the dungeons a few weeks ago. The woman who came for her looked like Star's friend from Earth.

He remembered her because she seemed very attracted to the occult. She had hit on him quite aggressively a few times too. Then she stole the keys to his carriage and took it for a joyride. Good thing insurance took care of the wreck.

But the woman who came for the prisoner didn't act the same. She seemed anxious to take the released prisoner and leave Underworld as soon as possible. Tom spoke to her, but she acted like they had never met. She was a doppelganger. A mimic. His mother had tried to use her in an attempt to seduce Marco Diaz.

Attempting to neutralize him in this way made sense. If Former King Brad or his champion met their demise now, before the actual contest, the finger would be pointed directly at his mother. Regardless of the investigation that would result, Star would claim an interference violation. Their engagement
would surely be ended.

But this way it would appear that Star had simply misplaced her trust and faith in Marco Diaz.

But why would the mimic take the appearance of the dark haired girl? He didn't think Marco was even attracted to her. She would have had more luck if she looked like Star. Or even their other friend. The one with the turquoise streak in her hair.

Like always, when it came to things about Earth, Tom said nothing. He knew that agents sent there by his mother always returned with no information. Tom pretended that he was similarly affected. He didn't know why only he could remember.

His mother was very controlling. But Earth was one dimension where her influence was limited. It was one of the few places he could be truly independent. It's too bad that travel there is impossible now.

His mother knew that Tom didn't want this engagement. She knew he could still yield. He wondered how his mother would account for Former King Brad.

Star would have Tom's children if their marriage took place. She would despise him for it, but she wouldn't jeopardize her kingdom out of defiance.

If she doesn't give birth to an heir within a reasonable time, it would be clear that she was actively refusing to do so. Royal magic users have never had fertility issues.

Except once. Centuries ago, Queen Damselfly didn't have more children after the presumed death of her daughter. No one ever figured out why.

He thought that he would be expected to have more than one child so that one could be Star's heir in Mewni while the other would be his heir in Underworld. But his mother seemed more focused on a Mewni heir and rather unconcerned with an Underworld heir.

Tom had long dreamt of simply breaking the engagement agreement, but he knew he couldn't. Technically the engagement agreement was made between Star and his mother. And as ruler, his mother had authority over the marriage of her heir. He was legally committed.

Breaking an agreement created in the Great Hall was something you simply did not do. It was heresy. The penalty was just too great. Not even his mother could stop his punishment. His cousin, Ceres, would probably be named his mother's official heir after he was put to death. Underworld is a large kingdom and needs a strong ruler. It would just be a matter of time until Ceres can't keep the kingdom united. There would be a demon civil war.

But the challenge was the way out. Marco Diaz had succeeded with the help of the Former King of Xix.

This would all end tomorrow. Well, mostly. His other big problem would continue. But at least it would be the only big problem he had left to face. His parents should have had more children. He would have fled to another dimension with Marina a long time ago. Maybe to Galafamor?

A servant ogre interrupted his musings. "Master Tom?"

"Hm? What is it?"

"Your mother has summoned you to the throne room."
"Very well."

A feeling of unease came over him. Like he was trapped.

Tom entered the throne room.

The armored elite guards stood unmoving at their posts. They were trained to ignore everything except threats to the Empress. Tom paid them little mind.

"My son, come closer."

Tom approached his mother's throne.

"Please, be seated beside me."

"In father's throne?"

"Yes."

"But that's the Emperor's throne. I'm not the Emperor."

"True. But you are your father's son. He would not mind."

Tom approached the ornate chair. He regarded it with respect. His father ruled from here. He ensured that Underworld was strong and respected.

He sat down slowly.

"It suits you."

"Too bad I might never rule from it. I would become Mewni's king if I marry Star."

"*When* you marry Queen Star. And while it is a shame that you will not rule here, your heir will."

"If I have more than one child."

"Even if you have only one daughter, it will be enough."

"Rulers aren't allowed to rule over two kingdoms, Mother."

"The old conquerors did not let that stop them."

"They were all defeated. I hope you don't think that Mewni and Underworld should, or even can, become one kingdom. There's miles of rock and magma between us."

"The first royal magic wielders were also conquerors. They conquered the above world and pushed the native monsters to the fringes of their society."

"I know. That's why so many monsters took refuge here, and why Underworld doesn't celebrate Mewnipendence Day. Demons are considered monsters by many from the above world."

"There is a difference. All those with demon blood are gifted with strong magic. You are an ifrit, a fire demon, like your father. I am a spirit demon. Your grandfather was an ahriman, a wind demon. Your cousin Ceres? A shadow demon. Do you not wonder how your daughter's demon half will manifest?"
If I sire a daughter with Star, any demon magic she has will fall to the wayside. Royal magic is the most powerful magic there is. Demon magic just can't compare."

"Only if it is neglected. Royal magic is powerful, but one should not rely on it alone. Demon magic can be useful too. The Katydid family might have lived longer if they practiced their demon magic."

"I didn't know they were demons."

"The queen's eldest son married a half demon who set aside her demon magic. Their daughter had just begun to manifest plant magic when they were killed. That is just one of history's many secrets."

"Secrets are a way of life for royalty."

"Yes, my son. Keeping, as well as discovering them."

Ishtar directed her son's attention to a candle on a stand between the thrones. "I want you to look at this, my son. This is just one of many candles around the throne, but this one is special."

"What's special about it?"

"It is a bond candle. Your father and I kept it here as a tiny reminder for each other. It ignites in the presence of one who is bonded. It had remained unlit since the night your father died. Until very recently."

Tom stared at the flickering flame. He kept his head. His bond may have been discovered, but his bond mate might still be unknown.

"They are used in a secret ceremony. Everyone knows that bondbreaking is done before a union of duty, but few know the method. The high nobles do not like to discuss this unfortunate ritual."

"Would you force me to break mine now?"

"One cannot have their heart bond broken against their will. But it can be done by either of the bonded. Perhaps you would like to tell me the identity of your bond mate? Succubi are very attractive. Is it the stable girl? Or could it be the castle's healer? She is a beautiful blood demon."

"No."

"I understand."

Ishtar stood and picked up the candle on its stand. It extinguished itself when it was moved far enough from Tom. She set it down on the opposite side of her throne.

"The last time the candle ignited was when one of my new elite guards approached. It was revealed to be the bond mate of your fiancee. You helped him to escape."

"No, I didn't. I didn't even know it was him until you said so at the gathering." he lied.

"My son, why do you try to deceive your mother? You said that he did not remove his helmet when he attacked you. But there were still flaws in your story. He would have had to know about dimensional knives. Dimensional blades have long been constructed as scissors to prevent accidental use and to avoid being mistaken for a weapon. Your knife is one of only a few still in existence. An ancient artifact passed down from father to son since before the kingdoms. Furthermore, he left the knife behind when he escaped. Most dimensional travellers know to carry their blades with them when they enter a portal lest they become stranded."
Tom was silent.

"My son, you were planning to yield."

Tom couldn't deny the evidence anymore. He straightened up in his father's throne and looked the Empress directly in the eyes. "Yes, Mother. I am. There is nothing you can do to stop me. You missed your opportunity to name a champion you can control."

"Why name a champion when you are the strongest fighter in Underworld? A mere Earth man cannot stand against you. And you will not yield."

"Yielding is the fighter's choice. And you can't fight in my place claiming to be the true defender. The rule against mixed gender duels is just one more archaic law still in effect."

"You are correct. It is your choice alone." Ishtar smiled. "I am parched. Would you care for a drink, my son? A glass of water, perhaps?"

Ishtar signaled a guard by the entrance. The throne room door was opened and a servant with light blue skin and dark blue hair entered. An undine. A water demon. She was carrying a tray with two glasses.

Tom did not need to see the fear in her three eyes. He could feel it in his heart.

"Serve my son first. He has been perspiring."

The servant approached Tom's throne and magically filled the glasses with cold water. She picked one up and offered it to Tom. Their fingers brushed as he took it.

"It will be okay." Tom said to her calmly.

As she approached Ishtar's throne, the bond candle ignited. Ishtar took the offered glass and drank. She placed the empty glass back on the tray.

"Blow out that candle." She ordered the servant as she pointed to the bond candle.

The servant immediately moved to do as she was told.

"Marina! Wait!" Tom called out but was too late. His glass of water shattered when it fell to the stone floor.

The candle flickered back to life.

"Bondbreaking will fail if extinguishing the flame is not done with full knowledge and acceptance of the consequences." Ishtar said.

Ishtar then turned to Marina. "Servant. Marina, was it? That is a bond candle. If you concentrate and wish to break your heart bond as you blow out the candle, it will be broken. If I order you to extinguish the candle and you fail to do so again, I will immediately and personally put you to death. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Empress." she said tearfully.

"It's alright, Marina. Your life is more important than the bond." Tom said trying to comfort her.

Tom could feel her anguish. He knew she could feel his. Neither wanted to break their bond. They have never come back for lovers before.
"I had wondered what caused the change in you years ago, my son. It appears that you needed the cooling touch of water to control the flames of your anger. But she is a commoner and cannot be your wife. It is a pity. This can at times be the tragedy of noble blood. Heartbonds can bring pain as well as bring joy."

Tom was silent.

"Your marriage to the Queen of Mewni is more important than you know, my son. Your heir with Star Butterfly is far more important than any love. Over thirty generations of planning and work by our ancestors will finally bear fruit."

Ishtar turned to Marina and said, "You will accompany me tomorrow. Our luxury seats are in the front row of the Cerulean Arena. Prince Tom will see you and be reminded why he will not yield. For if he does, I will kill you on the spot."

The elite guards barely had time to react. The throne room erupted in flame. In a flash, Tom was out of his father's throne and in front of Ishtar. He quickly formed a fire blade to thrust into his mother's heart.

A subtle motion by Ishtar instantly froze him in a solid mass of ice. The fires in the throne room ceased to exist.

The surprised elite guards silently returned to their posts.

The tray and glass Marina was holding had fallen to the floor. The Empress looked at the tearful and terrified servant. "There is no need to worry. My son has shown that he is willing to do what he must to save you. He will not hesitate to kill in the Cerulean Arena. After all, he was willing to kill his own mother for you."

Marina stared at her frozen prince.

"You and I will leave for Kolma immediately. My son will follow soon. You may take a moment to bid farewell to my son if you wish."

Inside the ice, Tom could feel her fear and sorrow.

"Goodbye, my prince." Marina whispered as she kissed the ice.

Ishtar spoke to her frozen son. "Do not worry, Tom. After you produce a royal heir, perhaps I will allow you to keep this servant as a concubine."

The Empress and her servant left the throne room.

Inside the demon prince, a flame of anger grew.

After a moment, all of the ice surrounding Tom instantly liquefied. He landed on the wet floor with a thud. He picked himself up and ran after them. When he opened the heavy doors, he saw that he was too late. They were gone.

He knew what he had to do.

==================================

Marco, Brad, and Kevin traveled from Xix to Kolma. They had spent the first night camping to avoid being ambushed at another noble's home. The second night they stayed at the arena itself. It
was the safest place.

The Xix Royal Guards still swept the challenger's dressing room, and the area surrounding it thoroughly, of course.

In the morning, Queen Skye arrived. She and Kevin wished Marco and their father luck, then they left for their seats. The trip to Kolma had been completely uneventful. They thought everything was going to be just fine.

==================================

Star woke in the guest quarters of Countess Raven of Kolma. She grumbled that the contest events started too early. But she smiled. At midday, Tom would yield and this would all finally be over.

Her wedding was originally scheduled for the 12th of Hurdoz, but she hated that day. She refused to have that day as her and Marco's wedding day. It was a terrible anniversary. It was the day that her engagement was forced on her. So she made other arrangements. There would be no more time wasted. No more waiting.

Kolma and Mewni were neighboring kingdoms. The Cerulean Arena was just across the river that served as their natural border. By the strict reading of the contest rules, it was a neutral venue.

When she was almost finished getting ready. There was a knock at her door. Her royal servant, Manfred, entered when beckoned.

"A messenger has arrived your highness." He paused to gather himself to deliver the news. "Empress Ishtar has discovered Prince Tom's heartbond and is now holding his bondmate. If Prince Tom yields in his duel, she will be killed."

"Oh, no... Marco!"

"The messenger is with your father."

Star didn't need to pretend to be in distress as she ran to her father's guest quarters.

==================================

It was late morning in the crowded arena. The undercard was almost over.

Sir Barry of Dopsi was the winner of the jousting tournament. The team battle was an upset victory for an underdog team of monsters. The one on one fights were hard fought, but resulted in no deaths today. Dave just wasn't the same as he was before. He was having trouble with the hydra. It appears that he tried to return to fighting too soon.

In the royal front row seats, King Butterfly spoke to his companion, "You should not appear interested in the other gladiatorial fights. You need to act more like the queen."

"You are right. I apologize, father."

"Dad." he corrected her.

On the other side of the arena, in a front row luxury box, Ishtar watched them. A servant sat beside her in silence.

==================================
Marco and Brad were waiting in the challenger's preparation room. Outside the room the full Xix Royal Guard still kept alert. While a pre-duel attack was not likely, it was not out of the realm of possibility.

Marco was wearing the chest armor that Nana Gem had given him. Brad had provided arm, leg, and foot armor. He was bare handed to better handle the spear.

A knock at the door sounded. They thought it was an arena official come to take them to the fighting area.

The door opened and a woman came in. Marco took a fighting stance. He had recognized her immediately, but he knew that it couldn't possibly be her. The woman looked like Jackie Lynn Thomas. He had only described Janna to Mimi the mimic. Marco wondered how this mimic found out what Jackie looked like. She looked a few years younger. Like Jackie did when she graduated high school.

"Who are you? I know you're not Jackie. You're another mimic. You might as well drop the disguise."

"Radiant Shadow Transform!"

The woman's appearance changed again. Her hair lengthened and the turquoise streak disappeared. Her green eyes became blue. Her body became more slender. Her face changed and hearts appeared on her cheeks.

"That's real cute, but that trick won't fool me again."

"Marco Ubaldo Diaz. It's me."

He wavered in his fighting stance and it began to drop.

"It was a nice move having the mimic look like Janna instead of Jackie. Ishtar wouldn't know the difference."

"Star!" he said as they came together in an embrace. They shared kisses of reunion.

"Marco, I'll wait outside the door. You only have a few minutes." Brad said as he left.

"I missed you, Star."

"I missed you too, Marco. I like your armor." she said noticing the star on his chestplate.

"How did you get in here?"

"I cast a spell on the guards. They're all in a trance. After I release them, no one will know I was even here."

Marco saw Star's expression. "What's wrong? You're not just here to wish me luck, are you?"

Star shook her head. "You know what Tom had planned to do, right? He was supposed to yield at the start of the contest."

"Right. We figured that part out. It made the most sense."

"He's not going to surrender anymore."
"Why not?"

"Because he's fighting for his heart bond mate. Ishtar has her."

"So I actually have to fight him." he realized.

"If you still fight him."

"What do you mean *if* I still fight him? Of course I'm still going to fight him. Tom won't give up for the same reason I won't. I'll just have to beat him the hard way."

"No! He'll kill you!"

"Gotta be honest. The lack of confidence in me kinda stings. But I *am* going to fight him anyway."

"Marco! I'm not joking! He has demon magic!"

"I know."

"We have to find another way!"

"Star! There is no other way!" Marco shouted as he pulled away from Star's embrace.

"BUT YOU'LL DIE!"

"If I'm going to lose you again, it won't be because I gave up without a fight! I've come this far! I'm going to go as far as it takes! I made a promise in the Great Hall that I would never stop fighting for you! If that means I'm going to die today, then fine!"

"NO! I RELEASE YOU FROM YOUR PROMISE!" Star screamed. "I release you! I release you...Don't go..." she sobbed.

"You can't release me. I didn't just promise you. I also made the promise to myself." Star pulled out the wand and pointed it at him. "I'll just stop you myself before the duel starts!"

Marco didn't flinch. He walked right up to Star and pressed his chest armor against the outstretched wand.

"Do me a favor then, Star." Marco said calmly. "Kill me."

"WHAT?!"

"Just kill me, Star." he said as he reached out and held her wrist. "Here." Marco lifted Star's hand and aimed the wand at his head.

"Marco… please…" Star begged.

"Tu eres mi vida. *You* are my life, Star. I was dead on Earth. After I lost you, I still breathed and moved, but I wasn't alive. Then I felt you call out for me. When I found my way to you, I came back to life. If you stop me now... if I lose you again... I will die. Just as surely as if you killed me yourself."

Star's wand hand trembled before she began to lower it.
Marco pushed Star's wand hand aside and held her tightly. The wand clattered to the floor.

"I have to do this, Star. There's nothing you can do but pray."

Star silently nodded.

He touched their foreheads together and they looked into each other's eyes.

"I love you. You are my North Star."

He reached up to touch her cheek.

"You are my light."

Tears fell like a waterfall.

He kissed her passionately. They both knew it might be the last time.

Star returned his passion with her own. Suddenly she felt him pull away. The cool air of his absence chilled her.

He gave her one last look of longing before he turned to go.

"I LOVE YOU, MARCO!" she tearfully screamed after him as he left.

Alone in the room, Star fell to her knees and prayed.

==================================

As they walked Marco spoke. "Kevin was right. He said that I might find out soon if I could kill someone if I had no other choice."

"Do you know the answer?"

"Not yet."

Brad nodded. "Any regrets?" he asked.

"No… Wait. Actually, yes."

"Oh? What is it?"

"A couple of people mentioned Xix barbecue. I never got to try some."

Brad chuckled.

Soon, they approached the entrance to the fighting area. Through the gate, they watched the 'Strolling Bones' play their greatest hits.

Marco thought that he recognized the band members. He had a crazy notion that they also toured on Earth under a slightly different name. They looked so alike.

An arena official said, "Former King Brad?"

Brad turned.

"You must now be taken to a special seat to await the result of the duel. Your champion will wait
here to enter."

Brad nodded. "Fight well, Marco."

"I will. And thank you for giving me this chance."

As Brad walked away with the arena official, he said, "I have one request. Give my champion a proper introduction. He is not fighting for me. He is fighting for her."

When Marco was alone, he knelt and said his prayers.

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"Father… Dad. I will return before the duel starts."

The sky began to darken over the arena. King Butterfly looked up to see the daylight being obscured by clouds.

"You should hurry."

She stood from her seat, walked through the entryway past the Mewni royal guards, and into the hallway behind the stands. She indicated to the guards to stay at their posts and not to follow. She entered a women’s water closet.

Queen Star Butterfly emerged after a moment. She went to the royal box to sit next to her father. She wiped her eyes as she sat.

"Are you alright, Star?"

"I'll be okay, Dad."

A few minutes later, a woman with a turquoise streak in her blonde hair emerged from the same water closet Star came out of. She took a seat in the stands near a luxury box.

==================================

Mimi the mimic did not leave the Underworld with her sister weeks ago.

Prince Tom had approached her. She didn’t realize that Tom had met the Earth woman she pretended to be. He knew Marco Diaz would not have been tempted by her appearance.

She feared that Tom would expose her deception to Ishtar. But Tom swore that he wouldn’t.

Mimi then realized that Tom wanted Marco Diaz to marry Queen Star. At the very least, Tom didn’t want to marry the queen himself.

Marco Diaz had been understanding of her situation and had given her the personal information she needed to free her sister.

He was a good person. Mimi decided then to stay and help him. She sent her sister home to safety and posed as a random Underworld servant.

Finding a female elite guard who wanted to escape was easy enough. There were more than a few that were conscripted into Ishtar’s service. The one she replaced was frequently assigned as a throne room guard.
Water closets are useful for switching places with someone. She didn’t even need all six minutes.

Mimi the mimic, disguised as Jackie Lynn Thomas, now sat in the stands of the Cerulean Arena of Kolma to witness the duel between Prince Tom of Underworld and Marco Diaz of Earth. She wondered who would emerge alive. Tom, Marco, possibly both? Maybe neither?

Her thoughts were interrupted by a smarmy question from the luxury box near her.

“How *you* doin’?”

Mimi looked up to see Prince Kevin of Xix giving her his best smoldering look.

“Would you like to join me in these royal luxury seats, gorgeous?” he offered, obviously not realizing who he was hitting on.

Prince Kevin was really not her type. "No, thank you, your Highness. I'll just stay down here with the commoners." she replied.

"Aww. Are you sure? We have drinks. Royal Vodak. The good stuff."

"For someone who thinks your privilege is hindering your search for love, you have a strange habit of drawing excessive attention to it." said the woman seated next to him. She then said to Mimi. "Please excuse my brother. He has had difficulty in romance lately. Though perhaps you would care to join me in these luxury seats after all. I promise he will not be here to annoy you. He will exchange his seat with yours."

His sister, Queen Skye. Now she *was* very much her type.

"Yes. That would be wonderful, your Highness. I accept."

"You know, sis, I don't think-"

"Out." Skye commanded him. She never broke eye contact with Mimi.

After the exchange Mimi sat in the luxury seat.

“How *you* doin’?” Queen Skye asked.

"I am fine, your Highness."

"Yes. Yes, you are."

"Though perhaps, your Highness, I would be even finer with a drink?"

"Of course. And please, call me Skye."

Her smile made her new companion blush.

"And you can call me whatever you wish, as long as you call me."

Kevin overheard his sister's conversation. He sat and grumbled in the general section feeling very silly and dejected.

"Man, this is some minotaur flop."
"Get yer beanuts here!" a snack vendor shouted.

A thrown bag of beanuts bounced off Kevin's head.

The announcer spoke through an amplifying cone. "This duel will determine who is the true fiancee of Queen Star Butterfly of Mewni! The official challenger has asked that his champion be given a proper introduction! Presenti-"

There were the sounds of a scuffle as the announcer was cut off.

"I vill do honor!" Buff Frog said as he shoved the announcer away from the amplifying cone.

"Presentink Champion of Former King Brad of Xix Kingdom! Respected by mewman, demon, and monster! Defeat twenty three of strongest convict gladiator by self all at same time! Only one able to break through unbreakable block from Earth dimension! Blood Moon love of Queen Star Butterfly! The Red Hood! MAAARCOOO DIIIIAAAAZZZ!"

"Oh! So that's his name?" Ludo said.

Buff frog sighed.

Marco entered the fighting floor of the arena to thunderous cheers and booing. He took a moment to wave to the spectators and look out at the crowd.

Brad was alone in a special luxury box seat. Front row, next to an access stairwell leading to the arena floor. Three armored Kolma guards surrounded his box. Marco understood that if he fails here and dies, Brad would be brought out to Tom. "At least I won't see it." Marco told himself in a bit of dark humor.

Some distance from their father were Kevin and Queen Skye. Marco saw them wave to him. They had no idea that anything was wrong. The training Kevin gave him on the farm was really going to be put to the test. Marco could only wave back. He wondered why Kevin wasn't in the luxury box with his sister. Is that another Jackie lookalike with her?

He turned to see Ishtar in her front row seat. There was a blue demon woman with her. The woman looked like she would rather be anywhere but there. She was obviously Tom's lover. Next to her, the empress glared at him with pure hate in her three eyes.

Marco decided the best thing he could do was ignore her. He made no indication that he even noticed her. Yeah. That'll show her.

Marco heard someone call to him over the din of the crowd.

"Swabbie!"

In a front row seat was the captain of the cargo ship he worked on. Marco approached him.

"I thought you were lost at sea during the pirate attack. Had you said you were Queen Star Butterfly's Marco Diaz, maybe I would have given you free passage."

"Would you have believed me?"

The cargo ship's captain laughed. "Nay. Probably not."
Marco smiled.

"I promised you a swabbie's pay when we reached Kolma," he said as he tossed a leather pouch to Marco.

Marco caught the pouch and felt the coins inside.

"Bet it all on me." Marco said as he tossed the pouch back to the captain. "I hear it's long odds. Give the winnings to the family of the sailor I replaced on the crew."

As if on cue a demon woman dressed in a leotard tuxedo approached.

"Wagers?"

"Odds?"

"Seventy four to one in favor of Prince Tom."

"All of it, on Marco Diaz." the captain said as he handed her a swabbie's wage.

The bet taker gave him a claim ticket.

"I be takin' that wager as well!" a gruff voice shouted.

Marco looked to see Pirate Captain Morgan nearby. A succubus demon was under each arm.

"Just made me prettier, I told ye!" he said with a laugh. "I be countin' on ye, Matey! I'll get me plunder yet!"

Marco smiled and nodded.

The succubus under Captain Morgan's right arm tossed the bet taker a pouch. "All of it on the Red Hood! Marco Diaz!" he said.

These faces from his time here in Mewni all appearing together now just made it clearer for Marco. This is it.

Marco saw her. The royal box seats she shared with her father were elevated to give them a better view. He looked up at his North Star. Emotions played across her face. She looked at him and did her best to give him a worried smile.

"I can do this. I *will* do this for her." he said to himself. "I will not fear."

"Would you monsters get out of here?! Go back to your section!" The announcer said to Buff Frog and Ludo as he reclaimed his position at the amplifying cone.

He cleared his throat.

"Presenting the defender! The Prince of Fury! The Raging Demon Flame of Underworld. The betrothed of Queen Star Butterfly! PRINCE TOMMMM!"

Marco watched as Tom, dressed in black armor, entered the fighting area to applause and jeering. He seemed unconcerned with the audience.

Marco saw it in his eyes. Determination. And regret.
Soon, an old, short, and balding official indicated for Marco and Tom to approach.

"You should both know the rules, but I will repeat them now. Once the duel begins, it will end only by yielding or death. If a fight ends by yielding, the victor must either kill the defeated fighter immediately, or clearly state that they are allowed to live. In the event one fighter falls unconscious, their opponent must end the fight by killing. If the the conscious fighter does not do so in reasonable time, their life will be ended by immediate execution for disrespecting this dueling tradition. I will be watching the duel for rule violations. This will be a fair fight. I expect an honorable fight."

More arena officials rolled out a large weapon rack holding numerous spears. Monks chanted and splashed the weapons with water and salt.

"All of these spears have been purified. They hold no magic of their own. Choose your weapons."

Tom approached and selected a demonic looking black spear. He grabbed it off the rack and stepped away.

Marco looked at the various spears. They were all different. He noticed a simple one among them. A strong wood shaft and a sharp metal blade. He gripped it and pulled it from the rack. Stepping away, he held the spear and found its balance.

"Prince Tom, are you ready?"

"I'm ready."

"Marco Diaz, are you ready?"

"Yeah."

"Go to your marks and await the starting signal."

Marco and Tom went to their marks.

An arena official approached the royal luxury box where Star was seated. He handed her a few small objects.

"Your Highness, the duty to signal the start is yours."

She stood in her seat. The arena became absolutely silent. Then Star spoke.

"Marco Diaz."

They looked at each other like they were all alone in the arena. Their heartbond may have been broken, but at this moment they would have sworn that they could feel each other.

"Keep your promise to me. Keep your promise to yourself."

He would never stop fighting for her.

"You are my true love. You are my best friend."

And she was his.

"You are my hero." Her voice broke as she finished.

Star took a deep breath and closed her eyes.
Marco and Tom turned to face each other. They gave each other a nod. It was time.

When Star opened her eyes again, she held up the tiny bell and struck it with the tiny hammer.

*BWOOOOONG!*

The crowd roared in excitement.

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continuará
Marco had hoped to get a feel for Tom as a spear fighter to figure out a strategy, but Tom began his attack aggressively. He charged at Marco and thrust his spear at the limit of its range.

Marco parried the spear with his own and tried to counter. He still didn't want to kill and hesitated with the sharp point. It didn't matter. It wouldn't have succeeded anyway.

Tom dodged the point and brought the head of his spear back. It scraped against Marco's armor with a metallic sound. Tom followed up with another thrust which barely missed him.

He knew that spears are hard to use close up, so Marco tried close the distance between them. Tom deftly maintained his range.

He tried attacking, but Tom was more experienced with a spear and defended skillfully. There was no need for Marco to hold back. He was losing.

They had fought in the past. But those were just street brawls. Star always stepped in between them to stop their fights. And when they fought during Marco's escape from Ishtar, Tom had him beat. Star wasn't there to help him here like she had in the past. She couldn't help him now.

She looked on anxiously from above.

Tom swung his spear down, slashing at Marco. The sharpened blade left a glowing red arc in the air. Tom was using fire magic.

Marco jumped back to dodge. When Tom's spear struck the ground, a wave of flame raced along the ground towards him. Marco dove to the side to dodge the fire.

Brad stood in protest. "This contest is unfair! Prince Tom is using demon fire magic!" It sounded half hearted. Like a lawyer objecting simply because he is expected to.

Ishtar responded. "The strength of magic is a natural part of any demon! Trying to prevent him from using fire magic would be akin to tying his arm behind his back! It is not the fault of my son that Marco Diaz has no magic to match it! Both you and your champion should have been aware of that when you issued the challenge!"

The official signaled and the announcement came. "No foul was committed! The duel must continue!"

None of this surprised Marco. He was told that this would be the case.

The fight continued uninterrupted.

Ishtar appeared pleased at how the duel was progressing. Her son's opponent was simply outclassed.

They kept fighting for only a short time until Tom backed away. Marco let him retreat. He was struggling and needed a momentary breather.
But Tom wasn't allowing him a break. Tom held his spear over his shoulder and the entire length turned to flame. He charged at Marco and threw his flaming weapon while running.

Marco dodged the spear but couldn't help following it with his eyes as it flew past him. The fire went out as it hit the ground.

The small distraction was enough. Using jets of fire on his feet, Tom closed in quickly. Marco's spear would be hard to use at close range.

Marco tried to move but the demon was fast. Marco moved to dodge a punch thrown at his head. A blade made of magic fire materialized in Tom's other hand.

As his punch missed, Tom reached over Marco's shoulder and grabbed the red chainmail hood. He yanked it while thrusting with his fire blade.

Marco resisted and the chainmail hood came off with a snap. Nana Gem had crafted it to do so. She knew that an opponent could grab it in a fight.

Not expecting the hood to be breakaway, Tom was caught off balance.

Marco was able to back away. He had gotten lucky just now and he knew it. He wondered if Tom was just toying with him.

Regaining his balance, Tom dropped the red chainmail and passed his fire blade back and forth between his hands.

Tom had thrown his spear away. Marco tried to attack again thinking Tom would have a harder time blocking without it.

The demon prince saw it coming. A slight movement and Marco's spear missed. Tom struck with his fire blade.

Marco's eyes went wide as the fire blade plunged into the chestplate of his armor. He dropped his spear. The momentum of the attack made them fall to the ground together. Tom landed on top of Marco's body.

Gasps and applause sounded from the crowd.

King Butterfly had to restrain his daughter. She was screaming. Ragged, raw screams of denial and despair. Her tears poured like a rainstorm as she called out his name.

"MARCO!"

He lay unmoving on the ground.

Star's thoughts echoed and looped in her mind. "Marco is dead. Tom killed him. Marco is dead. Tom killed him. Marco is dead. Tom killed him. Marco is dead. Ishtar killed him... My love is dead."

She wanted to die with him.

"NO!" she cried in her father's arms. "No. Marco. No…"

Ishtar looked upon the scene. Her son had fought and was victorious. The queen's hero had failed. With a satisfied smirk, she looked up at the royal seats.

A shadow spread over the arena and the midday light grew dim.
The demon prince withdrew his hand and his fire blade dissipated. The armor his opponent wore was melted around the puncture. Smoke wafted around the chestplate and from the hole. Tom looked into the face of the fallen fighter on the ground… and received a surprise headbutt. Tom's nose broke with a crunch.

Marco shoved Tom off of him and scrambled to his feet.

The crowd cheered. The fight wasn't over yet.

"Marco! He's still alive!" Star exclaimed in relief.

"Hot! Hot! Hot! Hot! Hot! Hot!…" Marco chanted as he hastily reached for the straps on his shoulders.

While the dazed demon held his broken nose, Marco unfastened his armor. The pierced chestplate fell away.

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"Marco, how do you intend to withstand Prince Tom's fire magic?" Nana Gem asked over a farmhouse lunch.

"Well, I brought this."

Marco reached into his waist pack and withdrew the tightly folded cloth. He unfurled it and displayed it to Nana Gem and Kevin.

Nana Gem felt the thin cloth while Kevin read the message around the giant question mark printed on the blanket.

"The World Famous Mystery Shack, Gravity Falls, Oregon." Kevin read aloud.

"The only mystery is what good you expect this to do you, Marco." Nana Gem commented.

"It's a fire resistant emergency blanket. I can tell you from experience that it can stop dragon fire."

"Maybe it would be useful if you could take it into the duel with you. But you can't. You can't even take your own spear. The only things you take into the duel are the clothes and armor you wear." Kevin pointed out.

"Aww, man."

"But, I know of a good use for this blanket." Nana Gem said.

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The under armor garment made from the emergency blanket had worked. It had withstood Tom's fire magic. But it wouldn't do so again. It was smoldering. Marco had to get it off of him.

Unfastened from the chest piece, the rest of the torso armor was quickly removed. The upper and lower arm guards were no longer attached to anything. He was able to slide them off easily. Marco was grateful that Mewni armor was easy to get in and out of.

The fire resistant shirt was almost burned through. Marco tore it away leaving him shirtless.

Tom had recovered. He quickly reformed a fire blade and attacked.
Marco caught Tom's thrusting arm and twisted it. He forced the fire blade back into Tom's side.

Both men seemed rather surprised at this.

With his opponent momentarily unable to defend himself, Marco threw an elbow into the side of his head and pushed him away. Tom landed on his face.

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Marco realized what just happened. Without the weight and restriction of the armor covering his upper body, he was faster and more agile. He had only been practicing with the spear for a few weeks and until today had never used one in a real fight. But disarmed, his training kicked in automatically. He had to rely on the skills that have been battle tested for years.

This was the mistake he made on the pirate ship. The pirate captain was practiced and skilled with the cutlass. He wasn't. The pirate captain was used to fighting on a rolling and pitching deck. He wasn't.

He was fighting the pirate's kind of fight.

But their rematch in the Underworld Arena was different. Marco defeated not just the Pirate Captain, but also twenty three opponents at once by himself.

He fought his own kind of fight.

During the escape from Ishtar he had trouble in a one-on-one fight against a guard. Marco was wearing most of the heavy Elite Guard armor. If he wasn't wearing it, maybe Tom wouldn't have gotten the better of him that time.

This duel was Tom's kind of fight. Marco needed to change that.

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Marco quickly undid a few fasteners on his legs. He then took hold of the belt supporting his leg armor and unbuckled it. He slid it from the belt loops. Fortunately Marco still favored slim fit jeans. They didn't actually need a belt to stay up.

He kicked his legs and feet. The armor covering them came off easily.

Uninjured by his own magic, Tom got to his feet. He looked at the smoking hole in the side of his black armor.

"Alright, Tom." Marco said as he picked up his spear. "Now I'm ready. Come at me, bro!"

"Hey! I thought you were bonded!" Tom said as he attacked with his blade.

Marco was much faster unhindered and Tom's attack missed. Armor might have offered protection against the spear, but not against fire magic. He was better off without it.

"I was! But Star broke our bond!"

Tom attacked repeatedly, but Marco was able to stay just out of range.

"That's rough! I'm sorry for you!" Tom said.

"You know who tricked her into doing that?!!" Marco asked.
Tom made a backhand slash and before he could draw his fire blade back, Marco took the opportunity. He swung the end of his spear at the demon's fire blade. The sharp metal blade was sliced cleanly off.

At first, Tom thought Marco had made a huge mistake. But Marco kept the headless spear rotating and hit Tom in the face with the other end. Marco had turned his spear into a staff.

Marco answered his own question. "YO MAMA!"

The severed metal head of the spear stuck in the ground.

The weapon's balance had moved to the center. The staff had less rotational inertia, and Marco could handle it more easily. Marco was freer to use both ends.

His opponent's fire blade would easily cut the wood staff. He avoided attacks and blocked them by striking Tom's forearms.

Marco and Tom went on for a time. They seemed more evenly matched. The fight was no longer a blowout. Would this be a test of endurance? Something had to sway the tide of battle eventually.

Marco wondered why Tom hadn't turned the arena into an inferno. Was Tom's magic limited? Marco realized that Tom wasn't fighting angry. Even after the momentum of the fight shifted, he was still all business. He was cool and collected. Was is fire linked to his anger?

He had changed. He used to have a terrible temper. When Janna crashed his carriage, Echo Creek almost burned down.

During a break in the action, Tom's eyes flicked in his mother's direction. No, not his mother. Towards the woman next to her.

She had caused the change in him. I guess finding love can do that to a person. Marco resisted the temptation to look at Star. He needed to focus on the fight.

Suddenly Tom fell to his knees. Marco wondered if Tom actually going to yield.

Marco stole a glance at Star. She was covering her mouth in horror.

Tom looked towards Ishtar and screamed, "WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?!"

Marco looked towards the empress. The woman next to Ishtar was crying. A thin grey ribbon of smoke rose from an extinguished candle.

"Your bond with her was keeping your anger subdued! You do not need love to defeat him! You need power, my son!"

"NO!"

The daylight vanished and the arena grew dark.

Tom turned toward Marco. He saw the glow of anger in his eyes. Tom lashed out in rage, "I will destroy her for this, AFTER I DESTROY *YOU*, MARCO DIAZ!"

Something was swaying the fight, all right. Just not in Marco's favor.

Marco dodged a huge blast of fire. He knew that Tom did not aim it carefully. The demon was enraged.
Tom stomped his foot and a line of fire zigzagged its way along the ground toward Marco like a snake. Two more followed. The fires chased him like they were alive.

Marco tried to run but a wall of fire blocked his path. Marco turned to find another wall of flame. He was trapped. He had no protection and was armed with only a wooden staff.

Tom prepared another huge blast of fire.

Marco refused to close his eyes. He would face his death head on.

"I'm sorry, Star. I tried."

A bolt of lightning arced across the clouds. The crack of thunder was heard and the rainstorm that had been threatening started.

The fires in the arena were doused by the deluge. Tom's fire blast fizzled and died in his hands.

Few in the crowd were prepared. Spectators yelped as they tried to cover themselves with their own cloaks but no one departed. They were here to see a show.

Star could have easily materialized an umbrella, but she didn't. She was overcome with relief and wanted to feel the cool raindrops. She and Marco shared a look and laughed. Maybe the universe was on their side.

Ishtar protested to the official. "The fight is now unfair! My son cannot use his natural magic in the rain!"

Brad countered. "Mother Nature is not biased! If Tom were a water demon, you would not complain! Marco Diaz did not make your son's weakness fall from the sky!"

The official was shaking his head and signaling. The announcer could be heard. "Duels are not stopped for inclement weather! The contest must continue!"

Without fire, Tom rushed for his discarded spear.

Marco charged to meet him. Water splashed where he stepped.

Tom had recovered his spear. He thrust it angrily at Marco as the distance closed.

Marco knocked the attack aside with his staff. Tom blocked the counterattack. Water flew from their weapons. Lightning and thunder accompanied their battle.

Tom slashed wildly at Marco who blocked the blade with the middle of his staff. Marco twisted his body and his staff connected with Tom's chin.

Even without his fire magic, he was still tough and recovered quickly.

With his staff, Marco was a close match against Tom's spear and could stand his ground. But Marco needed to be more than a match. He knew the rainstorm might not last long. He needed to finish the fight quickly while he still had a chance. Tom was still enraged and might not realize that all he had to do was wait for the rain to stop.

Tom swung the spear down wildly. Marco held up his staff to block as he stepped into the attack. As wood hit wood, Marco let go of his staff and wrapped his hands around the spear's handle. He pulled it against his shoulder. He knew he would have a bruise. The spear's handle slid against his skin as he closed in on Tom. When the distance was right Marco tightened his grip and placed a strong front
kick into the plate armor on Tom's chest.

Tom stumbled back as he lost his grip. He was now unarmed.

Marco threw the spear as far away from them as he could. Now Marco had the advantage. He stepped over his staff as he moved in on Tom.

Tom attacked with a punch, and Marco caught his arm. Tom blocked a punch with his free arm and a side kick with his leg. They locked and grappled.

Marco did something unexpected. An important part of Marco's physical training was stretching and flexibility. A scorpion kick came from behind Marco's head right into Tom's third eye.

It wasn't a very powerful kick, but it was enough. Tom was staggered by pain. And Marco took the opening to flip the demon over him.

As Tom fell headfirst to the ground, Marco attacked a weak point in Tom's armor with a karate chop. The demon's armor clad arm fell away. The cheers in the audience grew to a frenzy.

Marco wrestled with Tom on the ground. His remaining arm was quickly restrained and Marco twisted it behind Tom's back. He forced Tom face down into the mud.

Tom struggled, but Marco held him securely. Tom tried to fight using his severed arm. Without a body to anchor it, it flailed and slapped at Marco impotently.

"Just yield, already!" Marco pleaded.

"No!" Tom coughed as he lifted his face from the mud for a moment.

Marco forced Tom's face down again.

"Yield! Please!"

Still face down in the mud, Tom shook his head in defiance

Flashes continued to light the skies above the arena and thunder shook the stands.

Soon, Tom's struggles grew weak. Marco could hear Tom's lover calling out his name.

Marco looked up at Star and saw her somber expression. Star had grown up in Mewni. She understood combat and battles of life and death. She believed he was going to kill Tom.

Marco came to a realization.

He looked to see that Tom's lover was in tears. She was screaming in denial.

But Ishtar still wore a look of confidence. She saw his career in the Underworld Arena and knew that he wasn't a killer. Even now, she didn't think he would kill her son.

She was right. He needed to find another way.

He rolled Tom onto his back in the mud. Marco was on top of him. Holding Tom's arm so he couldn't block, he balled up a fist and brought it down repeatedly. Water and mud flew with each punch. Drops of blood flew from Tom's mouth and sprayed them both as Marco punctuated each strike with a word.
"Sorry."
*thock*
"Tom."
*thock*
"I."
*thock*
"Hope."
*thock*
"You."
*thock*
"Live!"
*crack*
Marco felt Tom go limp. He stood and let Tom's arm drop. Tom's breathing gurgled as his chest rose and fell.

The official signaled and the announcer was heard. "MARCO DIAZ HAS RENDERED PRINCE TOM UNCONSCIOUS! THERE IS ONLY THE FINAL BLOW LEFT TO BE STRUCK!"

"You do not have the fortitude to kill my son, Marco Diaz! Not even now!" Ishtar taunted.

Was she right? He still didn't know. This wasn't a case of kill or be killed just yet.

But it sure did look a whole lot like one.

Tom could no longer yield. Not that he would. Tom would rather die.

The storm slowed and the last drops of rain fell. Beams of daylight broke through the clouds as they parted.

When the official told them the rules, he said that there were only two ways for a duel to end. Yielding or death. But he was wrong. There was one more way.

He remembered the movie where the hero had to fight his own father who had turned to evil. The hero believed that there was still good in him.

He had to believe it now.

The official tapped his wrist. Marco had better hurry.

Marco grabbed the collar of Tom's armor and dragged his unconscious body to the wall of the fighting area. Marco sat Tom up against the wall. He unfastened the black armor and removed Tom's chest plate.

Marco then walked to Tom's spear and picked it up from the mud.
The sounds of the crowd rose. The arena seemed to vibrate with the energy.

A demon's weakness was the heart. He had to believe that, or else he wouldn't be able to do this.

"Empress Ishtar!" Marco called.

Ishtar locked eyes with his.

"So, are you gonna save your son…” Marco shouted as he reared his hand back to throw the spear.

"...OR NOT?!!" he hollered as he hurled the spear through the air toward Tom.

Ishtar's eyes went wide with disbelief.

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Watching from the Plains of Time, Father Time slowed down the action and squealed with glee,
"This is so... DRAMATIC!"

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The spear sailed towards it's target. It was airborne for only a moment. But to all those watching, it seemed to hang in the air for hours.

It was a perfect throw. Everyone could see its path. The spear flew as if it was being guided towards its destination. Tom's heart. Everyone in the arena knew that Tom was about to die.

For Marco, Star, and Ishtar the sounds of the crowd faded away to silence.

A sudden bolt of magic from the stands knocked the spear from its path. It clattered harmlessly to the ground.

Ishtar was holding her wand in front of her. She had fired the magic blast. A mother had saved her son.

The crowd roared in shock and surprise.

Brad leaped up from his seat and shouted. "Interference! Empress Ishtar deliberately prevented Marco Diaz's victory!"

Ishtar stood silent in her seat with an expression combining relief and disappointment. The woman next to her was silent, but the joy was apparent on her face.

The official signaled and gestured vigorously. Quickly the announcement came. "Blatant violation! Empress Ishtar has interfered with the duel and prevented the death of Prince Tom!"

"Former King Brad's champion, Marco Diaz, is declared the victor of this duel! The engagement between Queen Butterfly and Prince Tom is ended! Queen Star Butterfly's fiancee is now Former King Brad of Xix!"

"Yes!" Marco threw his fists up in victory.

Brad shouted, "Star! Our engagement is not working out! I think we should see other people!"

Star stood, smiled, and shouted back, "You're right, Brad! It's over between us!"
She then turned to look at her hero standing triumphant in the fighting area. He was smiling at her.

Star shouted so Marco could hear her. She amplified her voice by magic so everyone in the arena could hear her.

"MARCO! WILL YOU MARRY ME?!

"YES, STAR! YES!"

Star leapt down from her elevated seats and gracefully landed on the arena floor.

Star and Marco ran into each other's arms. Her feet lifted as they held each other spinning in their embrace. Drops of water sprayed outward, glinting in the light. Tears of joy flew from their eyes.

He looked at her as he set her down. She was drenched by the storm. Her wet blond hair clung to her face. Her damp clothes adhered to her body, highlighting her curves.

She looked at him. The blood, sweat, and mud had been washed away by the rain. Her hero was clean... and shirtless.

"Can you find the North Star for me?" he asked with a whisper.

She whispered her answer. "You're holding her."

They closed their eyes and sealed their engagement with a kiss.

Fanfare sounded in celebration. Pixies flew overhead showering them with flower petals. The crowd erupted in a thunderous storm of cheers and applause.

It was a very emotional scene.

When the kiss ended, they laughed and shared a happy smile.

"You won."

"I won for you."

"No. You won for both of us."

Another announcement came. "Empress Ishtar of Underworld! By ancient law of this dimension, you are under arrest for interfering with an engagement challenge duel!"

Star and Marco watched as armored Kolma guards swarmed around Ishtar's luxury box seats. The woman with Ishtar was removed from her seat and was moved away along with the surrounding spectators.

"Oh, yeah! That reminds me! I've been waiting to do something for almost five years!" Star said excitedly.

"What's that?" Marco asked.

Star turned to look at Empress Ishtar, surrounded by guards in her seat.

"HEY ISHTAR! DO YOU LIKE APPLES?!

The Empress stared at the couple.
"I JUST GOT ENGAGED TO MARCO! HOW DO YOU LIKE THEM APPLES?!!" Star gloated.

Ishtar's face twisted with rage.

A blast of magic knocked the surrounding Kolma guards away. A few landed in the arena.

"YOU FOOLS!!" Ishtar screamed. She seemed to float as she leapt from her seat onto the fighting floor. Holding her wand, she advanced on Star and Marco.

A Kolma guard who landed in the arena moved to block her path.

"Hal-"

The guard was cut off as Ishtar backhanded him with her wand. The guard skidded across the arena floor until he hit the wall.

"DO YOU THINK YOU HAVE WON?!!" Ishtar's voice took on an bizarre quality.

Ishtar summoned a huge ball of magic energy. With a wave of her wand hurled it at Star and Marco.

Star materialized a large shield. When the ball of magic energy collided with it, there was a huge explosion. Star and Marco were knocked down.

The screaming spectators began to evacuate the arena.

"I WILL END THE BUTTERFLY LINE!"

Star and Marco recovered. "Ouch."

"What the...?! That shouldn't have happened!" Star said.

"Why not?!"

"That shield was royal magic! It's supposed to be able to stop any other magic!"

"I HAD HOPED TO SEE THE LAST MAGIC LINE JOINED!"

Ishtar prepared another attack.

"I DESIRED TO WITNESS THE BIRTH OF THE ULTIMATE MAGIC HEIR!"

Another ball of magic energy hurtled towards them.

"Don't block it straight on, Star!"

Star summoned another shield but angled it. Ishtar's attack was deflected towards the emptying stands.

"MY GRANDDAUGHTER WOULD HAVE BEEN A GODDESS!"

There was an explosion and screaming.

"Oh, no!" Star exclaimed.

"INSTEAD I WILL SETTLE FOR THE SATISFACTION OF DESTROYING YOU!"

Star moved the shield to lean over them. Another blast was deflected.
"Marco! I need you to get out of here!"

"What about you?!"

"YOUR MAGIC LINE WILL BE REBORN AFTER YOUR DEATH!"

"This has been a long time coming. I have to fight her."

"I'll help you!"

"No. You can't help. No one else can."

"YOU HAVE ONLY DELAYED THE INEVITABLE!"

"Some people are hurt. You can help them." Star said to him.

"But-!"

"You have to let me face her, Marco. Just like I let you face Tom. I have to do this."

"THE BUTTERFLY LINE WILL ONE DAY BE JOINED WITH THE OTHERS!"

"... I believe in you, Star."

Ishtar curved her next blast. It hit the shield straight on and destroyed it in an explosion.

Star and Marco were not there when the dust cleared.

Ishtar spotted Marco running along the wall of the arena.

"YOU!"

Ishtar prepared to blast Marco, but a giant cupcake blast hit her from behind. She turned her attention to look.

"Yo, she-bitch." Star spun her wand in her hand like a gunfighter. "Let's go."

"FOOLISH GIRL! DO YOU REALLY THINK YOUR MAGIC CAN COMPARE TO MINE?!"

Ishtar asked incredulous.

"I'm your huckleberry." Star said calmly.

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continuará
Queen Star Butterfly and Empress Ishtar stood across from each other in the Cerulean Arena.

Star's whole life had been leading up to this battle. Ishtar was secretly another royal magic holder. Ishtar wanted to join her royal magic with Star's through their bloodlines and had been plotting to do so since the day Star was born. Star wondered which bloodline had survived. Had her ancestors found a way to keep the others from being reborn?

Marco had reached Tom. He was still unconscious. Marco picked him up in a fireman's carry and headed for the staircase to access the stands. He picked up Tom's severed arm on the way.

Star and Ishtar waited.

He couldn't help her. This was her fight. He would have wanted to help, of course, but this would be a battle between powers with which he couldn't hope to contend. He was powerless to stop it.

Carrying Ishtar's injured son, Marco stepped into the stands.

"FORM GLEAMING SWORD!"

Star pressed the top of her wand into her other hand. As she pulled them away from each other, a glowing pink blade grew as if she was drawing a sword from its scabbard.

Ishtar snapped her wand like a whip. A blade of black crystal sprung into existence. Her wand was now a sword as well. Magic power wafted from it like smoke.

With furious screams Star and Ishtar charged at each other. Magic sparked as they attacked, parried, and blocked. Though their blades struck with great forces, the two warrior women wielded their magically constructed weapons as if they had almost no weight.

Star brought her sword down in a powerful overhead strike. Then another. Again and again. Star let her hate flow. She needed power to win.

Ishtar blocked these strikes. Then on one last block, Ishtar pushed their swords to the side. Releasing one hand from her wand weapon's handle, Ishtar backhanded Star in the face.

Star tumbled to the ground. As she looked up, Ishtar was already bringing her sword down.

Star rolled to avoid the sharp blade. It embedded in the ground. Bits of rock flew and mud boiled to dirt and vapor.

Laying on the ground, Star held her wand up.

"RAINBOW FIST PUNCH"
Ishtar was knocked back by the fist. Her anger grew.

Star had taken the opportunity to rise to her feet.

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Marco set Tom down. He wheezed as he breathed.

Tom's lover approached and said, "I can feel the water he breathed in."

"Can you help him?"

She kneeled next to him. "I can draw the water out. But, I must be careful. It will take time. He cannot be moved until it is done. We will be safe here. The Empress will be mindful of her son's safety."

"Alright. What's your name?"

"Marina."

"Please stay with him, Marina. I'm going to see if anyone else is hurt."

==================================

Ishtar attacked with her blade and Star blocked.

With their weapons pushing against each other, Ishtar screamed, "GEOLUREAD GUARDIAN TALON!"

A large floating orange bird foot appeared and grabbed the pink crystal blade. With a twist, it snapped off of Star's wand like a twig.

Star backed away.

"DIM SUM SOUS CHEF MUD GOLEM!"

The mud in the arena gathered into a huge brown golem in a white jacket and toque. It grabbed the bird foot and threw it into an hot iron wok.

It moved to attack Ishtar, but a swing of her black blade wiped the golem from existence.

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The man screamed in pain.

"Hang on! Try to pull your leg out!" Marco said as he strained to roll the boulder.

"Marco!" Kevin said as he ran up.

"Kevin! I need your help to move this! On three! One, two…"

==================================

"OBSIDOZEN SLICERS!" Ishtar screamed as she swung her crystal sword. The blade detached and spun like a buzzsaw. Then it multiplied in the air. There were now twelve blades spinning towards Star.
"KERBEROS QUARTET!"
Four three-headed dogs appeared and caught the spinning blades in their mouths.

"Where are your sister and father?!
"I told them to get out! I told my father to keep Skye safe! Xix needs its queen!"
"Keep the pressure on! The bleeding is slowing down!"

"STRAWBERRY ANNIHILATION!"
A bright red beam of energy emerged from Star's wand. Berries could be seen in the beam.
"VOID FOENESTRA!" Ishtar shouted in response.
A swirling black hole opened in the magic beam's path. The red energy flowed into it and disappeared.

The woman was dragging a barely conscious man towards an exit. But she was petite and he was not.
"Help us! Please!" she cried.
Marco and Kevin moved the man to the relative safety of the hallway under the stands.

"ARGENT ACHERONTIA BOMBARDIERS!"
A swarm of moths appeared in the sky and dove towards Star.
"HYPER PURPLE BUG ZAPPER!"
A large caged UV light appeared. The flying bombs were collected in the light and fried to ash before they could explode.

A section of seating had collapsed into the hall below. A man was trapped underneath a wooden beam and was having trouble breathing.
Marco and Kevin struggled but couldn't move the beam. It was pinned by debris. Kevin found another beam and they tried to use it as a lever to free the man. But it splintered and broke.
"No good! We can't move it!" Kevin lamented.
Marco stood over the man and prepared to strike. A look of fear appeared on the trapped man's face.
"Don't worry."
Marco hit the beam sharply. He broke the wood, freeing the man without hurting him.

"PASTEL PACHYDERM STAMPEDE!"

A herd of delicately colored elephants thundered towards Ishtar.

"SIMPLEX ALBUS RODENTIA!"

A single plain white mouse appeared on the arena floor. The stampede parted and flowed around the mouse and Ishtar, like cars around a traffic cop.

"SURPRISE!"

Star leapt off the back of a powder blue elephant and landed a flying kick in the middle of Ishtar's chest.

Ishtar dropped her wand and in an instant, Star had picked it up.

"ATLAS PEBODY APERTURE CAVE!"

A blue ring appeared and Star tossed Ishtar's wand into it.

"Where are your parents?" Marco asked.

"Where's my Daddy?!" the child cried.

"Don't worry. I'm going to get you out of here."

"DO YOU THINK I NEED THAT TRINKET?! YOU WILL DIE BY MY OWN HAND!"

Ishtar held her hands out in front of her.

"RELEASIO DUPLEX DEMONIUS INFESTICA!"

Her arms turned into squirming purple tentacles.

"Ooh! A battle!" her right arm exclaimed excitedly.

"Can we eat her bowels?!" her left arm asked.

"YES! FEAST UPON HER!"

Running through the hallway beneath the stands, Marco saw Skye and Brad. He also saw the woman with them, but put off his question. "Not important right now."

"Marco! Where is my brother?!" Skye asked with urgency.

"He's still inside! We're trying to help the injured people in the stands!"
"I'm going back in with you!" Brad said.

"No! I need you to watch him!" Marco said indicating the child he found in the stands. "His family might be out here looking for him!" Marco said to Brad before he turned to the child. "You'll be safe with him."

Marco ran back inside.

The tentacles stretched out to incredible lengths and attacked. They swiped and stabbed at Star.

Star dodged the tentacles and rapid fired blasts at them.

The squirming limbs contorted and avoided Star's attacks. They were faster than the one that she had infected Marco with.

Ishtar stood by and let her monster arms attack.

A tentacle swept Star's legs out from under her. Star fell and the other monster arm took advantage of the opening. It wrapped around her and began to constrict. The other limb joined it and helped to squeeze.

With the monster arms unable to dodge, Star used the spell she formulated to help Marco years ago.

"EXORCIZAMUS CRINUS PERPETUUS!"

Beams of light streamed out from between the coils of tentacles.

"No! What's happening?!” the monster arms cried out as they shrank and reformed into Ishtar's arms.

The Empress tried to renew her spell.

"RELEASIO DEMONIUS INFESTICA!"

Nothing happened.

"It's a permanent seal! You can never use that spell on yourself again!" Star told her.

Marco emerged from the entrance to the stands in time to see Star seal Ishtar's monster arms away permanently. Star was still holding her own. He briefly thought of his own monster arm and how Star had cured him.

Marco looked across the arena to see Kevin helping an injured man. Marco saw a woman holding her leg in pain. He went to her and carried her towards the exit.

Ishtar attacked with a clawing swipe. Magic trailed in the air from her fingertips. Star blocked her attack with a magic scratching post. Ishtar's fingers were caught in the carpet and sisal rope.

Star was just keeping up with Ishtar using magic. But she knew better than to rely only on her magic. She turned to the martial skills she had developed from fighting her entire life.
Star doubted that Ishtar had ever resorted to hand to hand fighting. The Empress was a master of using manipulation to achieve her goals. Political scheming, not personal combat, was her specialty. Ishtar may have been trained by the finest warriors, but fighting skill needs to be tested in real battle. This was one area where Star had an advantage.

Star went on the offensive as Ishtar freed her hand. Her attacks flowed into each other, giving Ishtar no opportunity to counter. She strengthened her strikes with magic power. What she was going to do took time to prepare. She needed to create an opening.

She leapt up and kneeled Ishtar in the chin. Upon landing she grabbed Ishtar's arm and spun her away. Her enemy was off balance.

"SUPERSONIC LEECH BOMB!"

Green, slug-like creatures with flashing purple eyes adhered to the ground around Ishtar.

"CICINDELINAEGIS BARRIER!" Ishtar screamed as a golden shell formed around her.

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King Butterfly was helping to triage the wounded. He took the woman Marco was carrying.

"I know you are in pain, but you will be alright." He said to the woman.

Kevin approached after helping an injured man to the ground.

"Are there still wounded in the stands?" the king asked.

"Tom is still in there. He couldn't be moved while his girlfriend was-"

There was a series of explosions heard from the arena. Marco ran toward the sounds.

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As the leech bombs exploded Star began. She closed her eyes and concentrated. The hearts on her cheeks glowed. As she held her wand in front of her face, she opened her eyes. Her normally blue irises glowed white with power. Star twisted as she jumped in the air.

The explosions had ablated Ishtar's protection. Star timed her spin and was pointing her wand downward towards her foe.

The blast was powerful enough to shatter thick duraquartz crystal. The spell was many times stronger than the first time she used it trying to rescue Marco from Toffee. It struck Ishtar at close range. Smoke filled the arena floor.

Star landed gracefully. She needed a moment to recover. Her cheek hearts lost their luminosity. Her magic would replenish given enough time, but she felt weakened.

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Marco emerged from the exit. He couldn't see Star or Ishtar through the ash filling the air.

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Star smiled briefly, but the smile was lost when a voice called out from the clouds of dust.
"ARIES BASHING ASSAULT!"

The magical battering ram hit Star hard and her wand flew from her hand. She rolled on the ground as she landed.

Laying on the ground, Star looked up to see Ishtar emerge naked from the smoke. Her robes had been blasted away. Star couldn't believe it. Ishtar had withstood one of her strongest spells.

"FOOLISH GIRL! A SINGLE MAGIC BLOODLINE CANNOT RIVAL TWELVE! THE ROYAL MAGIC OF THE BUTTERFLY LINE ALONE CANNOT DEFEAT ME!"

No longer bothering to suppress them, marks appeared on Ishtar's cheeks. Hearts. Her cheek marks and eyes glowed red. Then a bright incandescent white heart appeared on her skin. Then another and another. She shined like a spotlight as the white hearts covered her skin.

Her long red hair came to life and gathered on top of her head. Four extra arms sprouted from the sides of her torso. Four long translucent red wings grew from her back. They beat rapidly and Ishtar's body lifted into the air. She hovered a few feet above the ground. The wind from her wings cleared the arena of dust and smoke.

Star was shocked. Ishtar could control the royal transformation. The physical manifestation of her magic power. She finally understood. Ishtar wasn't just another magic holder.

She was the holder for all of the royal magic bloodlines.

All, that is, except for one.

Hers.

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Marco had heard Ishtar gloating but didn't realize what had happened. But now that the dust had been blown away, he saw.

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It all made sense to Star now. The royal magic bloodlines couldn't be reborn because they didn't really die. This was why Ishtar was so focused on having her son sire the next Butterfly heir. Her daughter with Tom would have been the ultimate magic being.

"Mother!" came the hoarse cry.

Star turned to the stands to see Tom in the stands where Marco had deposited him. His face was still battered and bloodied. His lover was with him.

"Stop this madness!" he coughed out.

Ishtar turned to look at him but didn't speak.

Tom was right. This was madness.

"HATE!" Ishtar spat out as she flew at Star like a bullet. Star tried to dodge, but a glowing white hand reached out and grabbed her. Ishtar was too fast.

Star remembered the last time she took this form. She was strong enough to lift and carry a car. She felt that strength in the five fists that struck her while a sixth held on to her.
After the lightning fast assault, Ishtar threw Star and she hit the arena wall.

Without thinking Marco's ran towards her.

Star's whole body hurt and she was dazed. She heard someone calling her name.

"STAR!"

Star turned towards the voice. He was in the front row of the stands behind her.

Ishtar gathered energy for a huge magic attack.

"MARCO! RUN! HIDE!"

He didn't leave.

Star quickly gathered her own magic.

With a wicked sneer, Ishtar loosed her attack.

Star did the same.

The magic blasts collided and there was a bright flash. There was silence.

"Star, look at this." She directed her daughter's attention to a board game on the table.

"Oh, I've played this game before, Mom. Chest."

"Chess, dear."

"Right. It's an Earth game."

"Yes. One that has quite the following here in Mewni. A traveler introduced it here when he brought it with him many years ago. Do you know how to play?"

"Marco showed me how. There's only a few pieces left."

"Yes. I halted the game because I thought that it might demonstrate a very important lesson for you. Look at the pieces as if you were the player for this side. What do you see?"

Star looked at the board and thought hard.

"I can't win. If I do this… this... or this…” Star said making some moves. "...you'll capture this piece. And that's the point of the game."

"Very good. That is the king. The most valuable piece."

"If that's the most valuable piece, why do they call it the king?"

"The name was held over from Earth. Most of the ruling monarchs in their history were men. But you do not need to think of the piece as a king if it does not suit you. It can represent anything you
value. Something you need to protect. It can be your child, or perhaps it can be your kingdom."

"I know something they got right. The most powerful piece is this one. The queen."

"Yes. It is the most versatile and powerful piece. It greatly affects the outcome of the game. It must also be protected."

"Well, yeah. Obviously. Were you trying to teach me something else with this, Mom?"

"You have already seen that no matter what you do, you cannot win. But the other side is still able. What do you do?"

"Keep playing until I lose, I guess. Or surrender to stop the fighting."

"Admirable, but incorrect. There is still something else you can do."

"What?"

"If you cannot achieve victory for yourself, then the next best thing is to deny victory to your opponent. A stalemate is not as good as a victory, but not as bad as a loss. Show me how you would do this."

Star stared at the board and moved a piece.

"No, Star. If you did that, I would do this." Her mother moved another piece. "Your loss would come within a few moves."

Star reset her move and moved another piece.

"Also incorrect."

Star tried several moves and her mother pointed out how they would fail.

"There is a piece you seem hesitant to move."

"But, I thought that was supposed to be protected."

"Yes, but there are exceptions. If you move your queen here, then your opponent must move hers to counter it."

"I would lose my queen."

"It is not ideal, but it is acceptable in this case. Because while your opponent will take your queen, you will also take theirs."

Star's mother pointed out that her opponent's queen could be taken on the next move.

"And in this case, your opponent will not be able to capture your king without it. By sacrificing your queen, and denying your opponent their victory, you have saved your kingdom. Or your child. Or your king."

Star stared quietly at the lonely pieces.

Her mother spoke softly. "A kingdom without a ruler. A child without a mother. A king without a queen. They would be very sad. But they would survive. And for them, the game would go on."
Star nodded in understanding.

The queen rested a hand gently on her daughter's shoulder.

"Star, did you know that it is possible for queens to return?" she asked.

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Star came to and shook off her disorientation. She had been out for only a few seconds.

Ishtar still hovered unscathed in the center of the arena. From her high vantage point, Ishtar scanned the stands of the arena. She was looking for Marco's heat. Fires in the arena obscured his form, but he couldn't hide forever.

Star knew that when Ishtar finds Marco, she will kill him.

Star had to face the truth. She couldn't win this fight. Not through power. It was just a matter of time before Ishtar takes her victory.

Unless Star does something drastic.

She had to use the one advantage she had over Ishtar. She could still think clearly. And while transformed, Ishtar couldn't. Ishtar was acting almost entirely on instinct.

Star knew that a regent would be named to rule when she was gone.

Star conjured a giant curtain. Ishtar would be hard to fight, but easy to fool. She just needed to hide what she was doing.

Everyone was afraid that if she died, the last remnants of royal magic would die forever. Without the authority and power bestowed by royal magic, the entire dimension would destabilize politically. Warlords and conquerors would eventually rise up thinking their strength was unchecked and unmatched.

Behind the screen, Star opened a large dimensional portal with the scissors she carried.

It would take time for the kingdom to destabilize enough for a succession war to start. But it will not come to that. All thirteen lines would return and restore order when the time was right.

Star wished that it didn't have to end like this. She wanted to live a long and happy life with Marco beside her. But her duty to the people had to come first. She hoped he would understand someday. She hoped he would forgive her. But she made her peace. It wasn't really a choice. It was the only thing she could do.

Mewni should survive under a regency long enough for her magic line to be reborn and reclaim the throne. That is, if this plan works.

"May the magic of the Butterflys someday return to the universe."

Marco emerged from under some debris in the stands. He had been thrown a section away in the last magic explosion. He was hurting, but luckily not injured.

"DIE!" Ishtar screeched when she saw him.

"ISHTAR! NO! I'M OVER HERE! FIGHT ME!"
Ishtar paid her no attention and gathered her magic for a large blast.

Star needed to get Ishtar to ignore Marco and focus on her. She hoped it would work twice.

"DAGGER CRYSTAL HEART ATTACK!"

The sharp red crystals sped towards Tom.

"SON!"

Ishtar used her magic blast to vaporize the red shards. With the attack neutralized, Ishtar turned her anger towards Star.

Star was playing on the strong instinctive behavior of the royal transformation. The instinct to protect your children.

"I'M YOUR ENEMY! I'M THE ONE YOU WANT TO KILL!"

Ishtar gnashed her teeth and sped towards Star.

"KILL!"

Star felt the heat of the hidden portal behind her.

"STAAAARRR!" Marco screamed as he ran towards her. He wouldn't reach her in time. He was too far away.

When Ishtar was too close to stop in time, Star magically dismissed the curtain. They would leave this dimension together and their battle would end.

Time slowed for Star and memories flashed in her mind.

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"D- Do you remember?...

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"I love you, Mom."

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"All hail the Queen of Mewni!"

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"I want to be with you too...

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"Even the greatest magic cannot stop death forever…"

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"Because you're already MY queen..."
"I'm holding her..."

"Can you find the North Star for me?..."

"I love you..."

"There's a lot you don't know!..."

"The most important and special Star..."

"Oh, I'm always mad. But I'm happy that you're safe."

"Now, let Marco go!..."

"I don't need a hero. I need a friend..."

"How did you know my name?..."

"You're my favorite..."

"I don't want you to leave..."

"We're sending you to train in a safer dimension..."

"You are my light..."

Star closed her eyes.

"Marco... goodbye."

Tendrils of magic energy grabbed Star’s ankles. Her eyes snapped open as her feet were sharply
pulled out from under her and she fell backwards.

As Star fell, she saw the raging hate in Ishtar's red eyes as she flew over and past her. A glowing white hand reached out to grab Star, but barely missed.

Ishtar flew over and past her into the portal as Star landed on her back on the arena floor. She scrambled to her feet and pulled the portal closed.

"Star!" Marco cried as he reached her and wrapped his arms around her. "Are you alright?"

"Marco!" She cried as she returned his embrace.

Marco looked at the air where the portal had been. "What will we do if she comes back?"

"... She's not coming back."

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Ishtar only saw a glimpse of an orange landscape before the searing heat blinded her. It was hot enough to melt lead. She wasn't burning. Burning requires oxygen and there was none here. Ishtar was broiling.

She tried to scream from the sizzling pain, but the weight of the atmosphere had crushed the wind out of her lungs. She was suffocating. She struggled to take even a tiny breath and choked on the thick toxic air.

She tried to use a spell to protect herself but it was no use. The pain was too intense. Her mind was consumed by agony. She could not invoke her magic.

Then her suffering ceased.

The royal transformation had ended. She knew she was herself.

She felt a close presence.

"...

The piece of her soul that she had cast away as a sacrifice returned to her.

"My husband…"

"...

Her soul was whole again.

"James, my love…"

"...

She felt the presence touch her spirit.

"Please take me away from this terrible place. Please…"

The last remains of her body would soon be reduced to nothing.

"..."
"I am sorry…"

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One after another, twelve falling stars appeared in the sky over the Cerulean Arena of Kolma. They were bright enough to be seen even in the day.

"You would have died too..." Marco said shaking. He felt the fear hit him.

"It was the only way I could think of to stop her. She was going to kill you. I had to stop her." Star whispered.

"No... Star... No..." Marco was crying. "Did you forget? I don't want to live without you!" He held her to him tightly.

"Shhh... It's okay. I'm still here with you." she cried with him. "We're oka-"

Her words were cut off by Marco's lips.

"..."

The kiss and embrace went on for a long while.

"Ahem."

No reaction.

"..."

Their kiss deepened.

"Ahem!"

Still oblivious.

"..."

It became very uncomfortable to watch when their hands began to wander.

"AHEM!"

Marco and Star's eyes popped open and they held very still. Their lips were still connected. They reluctantly ended the kiss. They held hands as they turned to find an audience.

Tom was being supported by King Butterfly and Kevin.

"Tom. I'm sorry." Star said.

"I know. You did what had to be done." His voice sounded congested

"Are you alright?"

"No. She was my mother. But I'm still angry at her. At the things she's done. But she gave birth to me. She raised me. I don't know what to feel."
"I can't believe you both tried to kill me while I was helpless."

"We weren't trying to kill you." Marco said.

"Marina said that you threw a spear at my heart!" He coughed.

"True. But I believed you wouldn't die. So did Star when she attacked you."

"We believed she would save you because deep down, she was still your mother."

Tom was silent. He nodded.

Marina approached. "I'm sorry your highness. It was the only way I could move you."

She returned Star's wand to her.

"You saved me!"

"You were willing to die for him. For each other. Just like Tom was willing to die for me. I couldn't let that happen."

"Thank you, Marina."

"You'll take care of Tom, won't you?" Marco asked.

"I will."

"The plans are already in place for the wedding in five days." King Butterfly said.

Marco responded, "You know, after everything that's happened, that seems like a really long time away."

"No more waiting. I've already made other arrangements. We're gonna do it tonight." Star said.

The King pinched the bridge of his nose. "Star. We have talked about this. Please mind your phrasing," he said.

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continuará
It was sunset. A young couple stood in front of a marble monument.  
"You were right. I should have had more faith. Mothers really do know these things. We're getting married tonight. I wish you were here with us to see it."

"Thank you for sending Star to Earth. I never got a chance to say that to you."

"I love you, Mom."

"*We* love you."

A magenta, diamond shaped petal blew on the wind and landed near the inscription.  
MOON BUTTERFLY  
QUEEN OF MEWNI  
LOVED  
The pair paused to reminisce in silence before they departed.

"Where are we? I know we aren't on Earth. Look at the planets in the sky! It's bloody amazing!" a woman said.

"That is a dead giveaway, isn't it? We are in the Kingdom of Mewni in the Mewni dimension." a man answered her.

They approached a guard at the entrance. "Hello! I am Lord Thyme and this is Lady Terra. We have a special pass." The man said as he held up a blank piece of paper to the guard.

"Please go right in."

The man held out his arm for the woman. "Shall we?"

As they entered the circular chamber she looked at the stained glass dome overhead. "Look at this place!" she said

"Beautiful isn't it? We're in the Great Hall of Mewni."

People were beginning to fill the seats surrounding the main floor.

"Doctor? What are we here to see?"

"We're here for a wedding!"
The woman looked around. "I don't see a minister."

"They don't need one here. Treaties, agreements, or promises made in the Great Hall of Mewni are considered binding."

"So the bride and groom will just promise to be husband and wife?"

"Simple, right?"

"This place is lovely, but shouldn't there be flowers at a wedding?"

"Just wait. I think you'll enjoy what happens."

Two floating unicorn heads passed by. They were flanked by large men in black masks.

"Now, Cupcake, remember you're just being furloughed for the day as a courtesy to the queen. Your sentence can't be commuted until the next gathering of nobles. So try not to make any other deals with malevolent cosmic beings until then."

The smaller of the two floating beings groaned. "Yes, Daddy."

"Doctor, those guests are floating horse heads!"

"Oh, they have bodies, but only their heads project into this plane of existence. They're royalty."

"Really?"

"Nobles have come from all over to see this wedding. See? Over there is the royal family of Xix. Former King Brad and his children. Prince Kevin and Queen Skye. Is that the Prince's wife? No, of course not. Not yet. It looks like the Queen also brought her royal companion. Over there is Sir Paul and his wife. Just married last week. And over there is Queen Rhea of Old Elpon, King Bud and just some of their children. Their clan took up quite a few seats. The bride and groom also opened as many seats as they could to the Mewni commoners, so we should hurry and claim a good spot."

As they moved, he bumped into a man.

"Oh, I'm terribly sorry. I didn't see you there."

He looked at the man. He had pale purple skin, three eyes, horns… and a bandaged nose. He looked ill. A blue colored servant was helping him.

"Are you alright?" the doctor's companion asked.

The man sounded raspy when he spoke. "I'm alright. But I think I need to sit."

"You're King Tom of Underworld! You're still recovering from today."

"Yeah. Still weak from almost drowning."

"You'll recover. And you will rule well for many years."

"Thanks for saying so." He covered his mouth with his arm and coughed.

"Maybe I shouldn't be here." Tom said.

"Oh, but you must be here! The wedding ceremony will be brief. You're the ruler of your kingdom
now aren't you?"

"I haven't officially ascended to the throne yet, but I suppose that's true now that my mother is gone. Her... our... dealings with the Queen of Mewni are why I'm not sure I should be here."

"Understandable. But after the... incident between your kingdoms. You being here, with the consent of the Queen, will help to show that there will be no lasting animosity. Your mother acted alone."

"My mother may have acted alone. But I was too submissive. My deference cost us all dearly. I should have done more to stop her."

"Or maybe things happened for a reason."

"Maybe."

"We won't keep you. You should get to your seats. King Tom, Queen Marina, please be well."

They departed to find seats in the upper rows.

"Tom, you did not correct him when he called you King." Marina said.

"No. It's something I've been thinking about. I am thinking of returning the Underworld ruling titles to the old titles. There will never be another Empress. Or Emperor. Those titles were changed to hold the Underworld apart from the rest of the dimension. They separated us."

"You also did not correct him when he addressed me as Queen."

"No. I didn't want to. I want to hold onto this dream as long as possible."

"How did he know my name?"

Tom looked, but the pair had disappeared among the crowd.

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"What makes this wedding special?"

"This wedding marks the beginning of a new golden age for this dimension. They and their descendants will bring a level of justice and prosperity not seen here for centuries."

"Sounds wonderful."

"This is one of the great love stories of the cosmos along with 'Romeo and Alien Juliet'. It hasn't been published by your time, but you should read 'Scarlet Luna' by Sable P. Mine. We'll find a copy in the future. Or, perhaps we could see the theatre production."

The woman held up a program. "Queen Star Butterfly of Mewni and Marco Ubaldo Diaz of... The groom is from Earth?"

"People here are masters of dimensional travel. But for the past five years travel to Earth has been blocked. Marco Diaz was trapped there too until he found a way through."

"But, doctor, we just came from Earth."

"Yes, but we came from England in the year 787. The dimensional block didn't exist then."
"How long have they been engaged?"

"Oh… About eight and a half hours."

"Eight and-?! Why are they getting married so quickly? Is this an arranged marriage? Did they just fall in love?"

"No. Their souls have been bound together longer than either of them realize."

The seats soon filled to capacity. Suddenly, flowers sprouted, grew, and bloomed filling the great hall. Gasp of delight sounded through the audience. There was a path through the flowers to a cleared area at the center of the floor.

A man near the entrance loudly announced "All rise to welcome the bride and groom!" Musicians began to play a wedding march.

Everyone in the Great Hall of Mewni stood as they appeared at the entrance.

He was handsomely dressed in royal attire. A red jacket with gold epaulets. Trousers with calf-high riding boots. There was not a trace of apprehension visible in his expression. He was unafraid. He was ready for this step. A smile curved his lips.

She was resplendent in her white gown. Brilliant and beautiful. The joy was plain on her face. She radiated happiness. Though it was now evening, her glow seemed to light the hall like the day.

More flowers bloomed as they walked arm in arm down the path. When they arrived in the center of the floor, they turned to look at each other and held hands.

The audience quieted to hear the words they spoke to one another.

"Marco... I love you with everything that I am. You're my best friend. Thank you for forgiving me for not being able to come back for you. Thank you for never giving up on finding a way back to me. Thank you for being brave and fighting for me when I couldn't. Thank you for everything you are. You have always had my back. And now there is no one I would rather have at my side. I never thought that I needed a hero, until I needed you."

"Star... I love you more than can be expressed with words. You're my best friend. Thank you for hanging on until I could find you again. Thank you for trusting that my heart will never wander. Thank you for believing in me and letting me fight for you when it looked hopeless. Thank you for fighting for everyone when no one else could. Thank you for being my North Star. I will follow wherever you guide me because my home is wherever you are."

They were crying. They couldn't help it. They paused to collect themselves before continuing. Sniffles could be heard through the audience.

"I, Star Butterfly, promise you, Marco Ubaldo Diaz, that I will take and hold you as my husband and I will give myself to you to be your wife, if you will accept me."

"I, Marco Ubaldo Diaz, promise you, Star Butterfly, that I will take and hold you as my wife and I will give myself to you to be your husband, if you will accept me."

In unison, Star and Marco said, "I accept you."
The kiss they shared made clear to every witness that this union was not only about duty.

When they parted they gave each other a smile, then Star nodded to her father who was waiting at the entrance to the hall.

He strode to the center and kneeled before her. "Queen Star Butterfly, my daughter, I now step down as the King of Mewni, so that you may crown the one who will rule by your side."

"King River Butterfly, my father, I relieve you of this royal burden." she said as she lifted the crown from his bald head.

He wiped a tear from his eye as he stood and went to his reserved seat.

"My husband, please kneel before me."

Marco got down on one knee. Unlike other crownings, Star did not go behind him. She stood in front of him and held the crown above him.

"I, Star Butterfly, Queen of Mewni, hereby share the Crown, all the privileges afforded by it, and all the responsibilities demanded by it, with my husband, Marco Ubaldo Diaz Butterfly."

While looking into his eyes, Star placed the king's crown on his head.

"Rise now as my king, Marco."

When he rose Star exclaimed, "All hail the King of Mewni! Long may he reign!"

Applause and cheers filled the Great Hall of Mewni.

An outburst sounded from the gallery. "Yay B-Fly! And you're welcome, Earth-Turd!"

The hall was bathed in a ruby light, and the musicians began to play. The piece started simply, like it could have been played on a music box. But soon it grew and swelled as more instruments joined.

The bride and groom found themselves in each other's arms. And just like the first time they waltzed with each other to this music, it was as if they had known this dance forever. As they moved with each other, they vowed to never let go.

The end of the dance approached all too soon. They knew that they would now spend a long time greeting guests and accepting their congratulations. That simply would not do. Let them all send their best wishes later.

As the final notes played, the queen drew her king into a kiss. He swept her up into his arms and swiftly carried her to the exit. When the lights of the hall returned to normal, they were already gone.

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"That was lovely." said the doctor's companion as she wiped her eyes.

"Short, simple, and sweet."

"Did you see how fast he carried her away after their dance?"

"I did. How do you think a carriage managed to peel out?"

"I hope the reception banquet begins soon. I am famished."
"Sorry. The banquet that was supposed to be the reception doesn't happen for a few days. They didn't even attend. It will be an absolute rager though. The bride's father invited everyone to party for the sheer fun of it."

"For a wedding as important as this?"

"They didn't want to delay their marriage by even one day. Just this morning, they both survived mortal combat. They would have come to the Great Hall straight from the arena bloodied and in tattered clothes if they could have."

"That would make for terrible wedding photos."

"But what a story for the grandchildren."

"I suppose that's true. Well, what shall we do about dinner, then?"

"Since we're here, let's just hop over to the Kingdom of Xix. The barbecue there is fantastic!"

They entered a blue police box that would have been crowded inside with two people. The door to the blue box closed and with a repeating abrasive sound it disappeared.

Marco carried Star bridal style to what was now their private quarters. Once inside, he let his wife stand and she pulled her husband into a sensual kiss.

The room had been romantically decorated. Lit candles bathed the room in a warm glow. Flower petals were sprinkled around the room and on the bed.

Without a word, she began to undo the buttons of his jacket. At the same time, he reached behind her and began to undo the ties on the back of her white dress. Kisses continued as they undressed each other.

Once she unfastened the last button of his jacket she began to push it off his shoulders and down his arms. Her hands caressed his body through the fine silk shirt he wore underneath.

Marco allowed the jacket to fall. Star turned around and gathered her hair over her shoulder so he could more easily untie her dress.

"You know, Star..." he said as he caressed her body through satin and silk. One arm wrapped around her waist and held her close.

"Mm?" she questioned as she leaned forward to let his other hand work to undo her dress. She seductively looked back at him over her shoulder as she rubbed herself against him.

Because of the anticipation, he fumbled with the ties of her dress, but he calmed himself enough to keep going. Once enough ties were undone, he pushed her dress off her shoulders. He placed kisses upon the nape of her neck.

"...there's an expectation..." He turned her to face him again.

"...about what happens on the wedding night." He kissed her lips as she freed her arms from the dress.

"Yes." she sounded in agreement as she opened his shirt.
"But if you think..." He paused in awe as the top of her dress fell below the low cut bra she wore under the bridal gown. His hands caressed her exposed flesh.

"...if you feel that it has been..." He gasped for air as she ran her fingernails across his chest.

"...too eventful... a day..." Her dress fell to her waist. He moved his hands to feel the warm skin there.

She moaned as she kissed the muscles of his chest. She pulled the shirt down and he moved his hands to help get the garment off his body.

"...we can slow down..." Marco got on his knees and placed kisses on her soft curves. While planting light kisses around her navel, he returned his hands to her waist. He pushed the dress past her hips and the dress fell to the floor.

"...and continue this..." As he rose he made a trail of kisses up her body. When he reached her face, their lips met again.

"Mmm-hmm?" she uttered as they kissed. Her hands lingered on his abs as she moved her hands down them to his belt. She undid the buckle and pulled the belt from the loops.

"...whenever you feel..." His hands felt her thighs and his fingertips ventured just under the lacy edges of the panties she wore.

"...ready." He reached behind her to undo the clasp of her bra and grinned as it was tossed aside.

Star giggled at Marco's joke offer. She couldn't stop now. She didn't want to stop.

"So cute." she said before she nipped at his jawline and ran her hands through his hair.

Suddenly, she grabbed hold and pulled his face to hers. "I *am* ready. Now." she demanded before she gave him a deep probing kiss.

"Mmmm?" he growled into the kiss as he kicked off his boots.

She broke the kiss before releasing her grip on his hair. "Remember? No more waiting. Besides, do you realize that today's our anniversary?" Star said stroking his back.

"Well, I suppose today will be our wedding anniversary."

"Yeah, but I meant it's also our *other* anniversary." she said as she knelt and pushed the last of his clothes down his legs.

She ran her fingertips along him as she rose again. They gathered each other into another embrace.

"When we first told each other how we felt? I think you're a few months off." he said as he enjoyed the feel of her nearly naked body against his.

Star giggled then looked him in the eyes devilishly. "No. Our other, *other* anniversary."

A look of realization crossed his face.

"Oh, *that* anniversary!"

They both blushed and smiled as they remembered.
"But I guess the day doesn't really matter, Marco. Because now I'm yours every day."

"I've always been yours, Star."

Kisses again grew in ferocity. He caressed her body as she pressed herself to him. She snaked her leg around his and began to rub it up and down.

As he grabbed her thighs and lifted her above his waist, she wrapped her limbs around him. He carried her to the bed. With one hand he ripped away the covers then leaned over the exposed sheets. She let go of him and fell onto the soft bed.

Marco paused to take in the sight of his queen laying before him. Her cheek hearts dark and red. Her eyes beckoned him to her. He would not be able to control his craving for her much longer.

Star looked up at her her king. She could see that he wanted her. His excitement was obvious. She was trembling with desire for him.

She reached out to him, pulled him onto her and took his lips in hers.

She broke the kiss and whispered into his ear. "I expect a husband to make love to his wife on their wedding night." she said lustily.

"No more waiting." There was a hunger in his voice. "But that doesn't mean we won't take our time tonight." He said smiling as he sat up on his knees.

Star smiled as she arched her body upward. His fingertips trailed the length of her slender legs as he slowly slid her last delicate garment down.

They explored each other in ways that pleased them both. Their arousal rose like an unstoppable ocean tide. Their passion grew and merged like a wildfire.

When the need for each other would no longer be denied, he was above her again. They savored the feel of skin on skin. The sensations and emotions of this moment overwhelmed them. They gazed into each other's eyes.

"I love you."

"And I love you."

With those simple words, they rejoined and again became one.

It was magic.

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continuará
"How is the patient?"

"No change. He still thinks he went to another world to find a princess."

"Isn't this the same delusion that's in his old file?"

"He's kept the delusion to himself for the last few years. It looks like it increased in severity a few months ago. He's been off his meds."

"Involuntarily committed by his parents?"

"Went missing for a while. Found him in Oregon. Cops had to taser him. He came at them with a pair of scissors."

"He's lucky he just got locked up and not shot!"

"He's had a few incidents since he got sent here. Dr Morgan had to subdue him. He was put in isolation before his eval."

"Says in his chart that we have to make sure he doesn't swallow anything?"

"He swallowed a dollar coin. Coughed it up at the eval. Tried to bribe his way out of here."

"For a dollar?"

"He thought it was a gold doubloon or something."

"Says here that he's prone to violence?"

"He thought he was in some kind of gladiatorial arena. He thought that if he proved he was the best fighter, someone would get him out of here. He actually does know how to fight. He managed to fight off more than twenty orderlies including big Dave right after he busted Dr Morgan's prosthetic leg."

"Didn't he lose that leg in the Navy?"

"Marines. And that's nothing compared to what he almost did to Tom. Almost killed him."

"How?"

"Patient made a spear out of a mop handle. Threw it right at Tom's chest. Dr Ishtar luckily knocked it away. He set off the sprinkler system too. That was the last incident. That reminds me, we should make sure he never sees Dr Ishtar. He believes she's gone forever. He really didn't get along with her. Thinks she's some kind of demon queen."

"Is this guy being transferred out?"
"No. We figured out how to keep him calm. Play along with his delusion. He got along fine with Brad, Kevin, and Gemma. He was convinced he was at a farm."

"Think he'll have another violent incident?"

"No. He thinks he's married to his princess who is apparently queen now. Thinks he's the king. He'll be locked up here for a long time."

"Hey. How long have those been there?"

"The glow in the dark stars? A while. We even arranged them as constellations on his ceiling. Orion, Perseus, Hercules..."

"Warriors?"

"Seemed appropriate. We also have Argo Navis, Gemini, Ursa Major... But you know what he'll stare at all day?"

"What?"

"Polaris. We placed it so he can use the Big Dipper to find it. He says it's special and important."

"Hey, so he's worked real people into his delusion, right? Who's his princess, really?"

"Nobody. She doesn't really exist. She's a just a product of his imagination. He claims she's the North Star."

"How sad."

"Yeah..."

"Hey, Brad says that there's a good barbecue joint on 19th Street. We were going to go there for lunch. You comin'?"

"I want to, but I'm a little short."

"I'll cover you. How much do you need?"

"I need about tree-fiddy."
He opened his eyes and looked down. The woman lying on his chest was still sleeping. Relief swept over him.

He loved her. They had married last night. She was his wife. Her long mane spread over him like a golden sheet. She was so beautiful.

But, he wondered if this perfect moment was real. He couldn't help it. He needed to make sure.

He moved his hand to touch the small of her back. His hand was warmed by her heat.

She stirred from his caress. Her blue eyes fluttered open and she smiled.

"Mmmm. Good morning." she purred.

"Good morning. I didn't mean to wake you yet." he said softly.

She moved to lay beside him on the bed. He rolled to face her and his hand slid to her hip. She looked into his eyes and asked, "What's wrong?"

"I think I had a bad dream."

"You think?"

"In the dream this was all just a delusion. A fantasy. I was back on Earth alone. You only existed in my mind. Or maybe that's the real world, and you're my beautiful dream. But I want... I need you to be real, Star. Please. Promise me that you're real and not just a dream."

She reached for his hand and pressed it to her cheek. "I'm real, Marco. This is for real. We're together again. We're married and it's real. I promise."

He felt her love and concern for him. A question formed in his mind. "How did you know something was bothering me?"

Star smiled and scooted away from him on the bed. Their bodies were no longer touching.

"Can you feel me?"

"No. You're way over there."

"Close your eyes."

Marco closed his eyes.

"Now look for me in your heart. We're always touching there."

Marco recognized it. He felt her. It wasn't physical contact. It was her feelings. He could feel the link
between their souls.

"I'm sorry I left Earth while you were sleeping. You felt so alone. You didn't know to look for me."

Star reached out to touch her husband's chest.

"This is how you'll know for sure that I'm real."

Marco looked down to where his wife's fingers touched him.

The heartmark had returned. He almost cried.

"Whenever you wake up, even if we're still in bed together, look for me through our bond. You never have to feel alone again."

Marco pushed his fears from his mind as they moved to be close to each other again in the bed.

He put his hand on hers and held it. Guiding her hand to his face, he slowly brushed her fingers against his lips. He savored the sensation and kissed them gently. The hearts on her cheeks grew redder.

"I love you, Star."

"I love you too, Marco."

He released her hand and she returned it to his chest. Her eyes slowly shut as he brought his face close to hers. Her pink lips looked soft and luscious. He wanted to feel them with his again. To taste them again. Closing his eyes he brought his face closer. The barest of brushes. She followed as he pulled away slightly.

A little stronger now. As they touched, her lips nipped at his, trying to catch them. He let them be captured and she pressed her lips against his. As they did, his tongue lightly touched hers and she faintly moaned. The taste was delicious.

They didn't need the heart bond to know what the other was feeling now.

Their kisses continued. Hands now roamed. They stroked each other's bodies. He ran his fingers through her hair. Her hands felt the muscles of his back and shoulders.

Kisses moved from their lips. To faces. To necks. Hands were searching. Intimate places were touched. Soft and sensual kisses danced on skin. Excitement and passion grew.

She kissed his chest and began a trail of light kisses downward.

The door to the bedroom burst open and Manfred rushed in. "Good Morning your Majesties! We must hurry to get you both readEEEEEE...!"

"AAHHHH!" Startled, Marco and Star scrambled to cover themselves with the sheets.

"MANFRED! DIDN'T ANYONE TEACH YOU HOW TO KNOCK?!" Star screeched as she threw a pillow at him.

Manfred darted from the room, slamming the door behind him. He shouted from the other side, "I am sorry, my queen! But I did knock! Neither of you answered! We thought you were still asleep! It is already very late! The crowds of people are waiting to see you!"
"Well, that settles that." Marco said.

"Settles what?"

"Whether this is real or not. That definitely wouldn't have happened if this was my fantasy." he said with a slight grin.

"There any other clues that this is real?"

"Well, I think I remember now that the Loch Ness Monster was a doctor in my dream."

"A doctor? Well, there you go. That's just silly. Nessie is a lawyer."

They laughed together, naked and happy in their bed.

Star shouted at the door. "Check back in like twenty minutes!"

"Twenty-five!" Marco added.

They smiled at each other and returned to what they had started.

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"Most people will never get the chance to personally witness a royal wedding. So it's customary for a royal couple to wear their wedding clothes when they greet their subjects for the first time as husband and wife. Will you help me get dressed?"

"Only if you help me get dressed first."

As Star buttoned his shirt, she looked at the red nautical star on Marco's chest. Heart bonds are formed by only the rarest and strongest love. But no one had ever heard of one being reformed after a bond breaking. But then again, lovers with broken heart bonds have never married before either. Was that it? Or was it preserved by the blood moon? Maybe hearts bonds had reformed before, but the lovers decided to keep it a secret. Did the unified soul of the first heart bond lovers decide to give them a second chance? Perhaps her royal magic had something to do with it? Or were they just really, really lucky?

Star decided that these questions were for others to ponder. She was content to simply be thankful. Sometimes miracles are not meant to be questioned. She turned her mental efforts to resisting her baser urges as Marco tied her dress. The tingle of his fingers on her body did not make that easy.

Their clothes were wrinkled from being discarded and forgotten on the floor last night. But with a wave of Star's wand, they were as fresh as a mountain stream.

Marco took a moment to appreciate his wife's beauty before he held out his arm for her. "Ready, my queen?"

Star smiled and held his arm. "Let's do this, my king."

It was time to meet the people of their kingdom. Star and Marco left their quarters to face the universe together. As they walked, they were reminded of the first time their relationship became public.

==================================

The Monday morning after Marco and Star became a couple, they decided not to take the bus and
instead took the time to walk to school together. Marco wondered if anyone could see that he was extra happy today. Star was convinced that she was glowing.

They kept stealing glances at each other during first period. But no one seemed to notice.

Star's second period class was French and Marco walked with her. His class was just down the hall, so this wasn't unusual.

"Okay, 'Bye Star. I'll see you after class."

"Bye Marco!"

They had planned to keep the fact that they were now in a relationship a secret for a little while. But that secret didn't even outlast the morning.

Without thinking, they gave each other a kiss on the lips. It just happened like it was the most natural thing in the world.

All motion in Echo Creek Academy ceased. Wide open eyes focused on the new couple. Gaping mouths were were rendered speechless. You could have heard a mouse fart.

Star and Marco finished their kiss and smiled. But then they realized what had happened. They could feel the attention on them like a blanket.

Ferguson was the one to break the silence.

"Soooo... this is new. When did this start?"

"Friday night?" Star responded.

"Okay."

Marco and Star wondered if that was the end of it.

Alfonzo set up a folding table and chair. He sat down and put on a transparent green dealer's visor. He placed a metal cash box on the table.

Ferguson opened his locker and brought out a megaphone. "ALL RIGHT LISTEN UP! A RESULT IS IN! ALL WINNING WAGERS WILL NOW BE SETTLED! COME FORWARD WITH YOUR TICKETS!"

Some students brought out pink slips of paper and one by one presented their slip to Alfonzo. Money changed hands.

"What the heck is going on?!" Marco demanded.

"A little wagering on you two getting together. I need to put a little money aside for college." Ferguson said.

"And I need seed money for my llama importing venture!" Alfonzo piped in.

"You guys were gambling on whether Star and I would get together?!"

"What? No! Do we look like we want to just give money away?" Ferguson said.

Star and Marco had confused looks on their faces.
"Everyone could see that you two becoming a couple was just a matter of time. The bets were on *when* you guys would get together."

Marco closed his eyes and pressed his fingertips against his temples as he took a deep breath. He opened his eyes to see Star clamping her hands over her mouth holding back laughter.

Marco began to laugh as he asked his girlfriend, "Oh, this is funny to you, huh?"

"Yeah, kinda!" she said through her giggles. "Everyone saw it coming, but us!"

"Hi guys." said a voice drawing their attention.

"Uh… Hi, Jackie." Marco did his best to look contrite. "I'm sorry I ran out on our date."

"No, you're not."

"No, I'm not."

"Me neither." Jackie said.

Marco smiled.

"But, I am sorry if I hurt your feelings."

Jackie smiled.

"Jackie! I need to talk to you!" Star said as she grabbed Jackie pulling her into the French classroom. "'Bye Marco!"

Marco waved goodbye to the two and started down the hall. He didn't feel the need to see who made what in Ferguson and Alfonzo's makeshift casino.

"Jackie? Did you know that this would happen?" Star asked.

"'Know' is a strong word. I just had a feeling that you two needed a little push."

"I know you like him too. Why would you do that for us?"

"Well, it certainly wasn't for this." Jackie said as she pulled out a pink paper from her pocket. She crumpled it and threw it in the trash. "The over on my bet was next month."

Star understood now that Jackie had sabotaged her own bet by helping them along.

"I didn't realize what a catch Marco would have been until it was too late. Until you came along. You bring out something in him that even he didn't know was there. You bring him to life. So it's okay. Some things are meant to be and some other things aren't."

Star gave her a giant hug. "Thank you, Jackie. You're a good friend."

"I don't believe this!" came a voice. It was Principal Skeeves.

Many students tensed up.

"I cannot believe that a gambling den is being run in this school!" Principal Skeeves said as he produced a pink paper from his pocket and placed it on the folding table.

Alfonzo looked at the paper calmly and counted out a few bills, placing them on the table.
"I AM SHOCKED! SHOCKED I SAY!" he proclaimed loudly as he walked away pocketing his ill-gotten gains.

"How was your day?" Mrs Diaz asked as Marco and Star entered the kitchen.

"Well, there was an underground gambling ring unearthed at school." Marco said.

"My goodness! What were they betting on? Basketball? Horses? Ooh, I know! Boxing."

"Us." Star said.

"You?"

"They were betting on the date when Star and I would become a couple. Apparently everyone saw it coming for a while." Marco said.

"Oh! Thank you for reminding me!" She turned to call out through the kitchen door.

"Rafael! It's time to pay up!"

"But, Angie honey! They might not have made the under if you hadn't helped them along! Doesn't that count as fixing the bet?" Mr Diaz protested.

"DON' MAKE ME BUST YER THUMBS!" Mrs Diaz demanded.

"Nooo! I just need a few days! You'll get your money!"

Marco sighed. "Is there anyone who didn't see this coming? Ludo and his gang, maybe?"

"No. After today's after school fight, I saw Man-arm hand over some money to Spikeballs right before he gave me a thumbs-up."

Marco wondered how Spikeballs managed to make that gesture.

"But I think I know someone!" Star said.

"Call Mom." Star said to her mirror.

The mirror rang a few times before it was answered.

"Hello? Star?" said the queen as her image appeared in the mirror.

"Hi Mom. Is Dad there with you?"

"Hello Star! I'm here." he said as he moved into view from the side.

"Um. I have some news. Marco and I have started... dating."

Marco stood beside Star and waved. "Hello."

"Oh? Are you telling us that you two are now in an exclusive committed relationship?" the queen asked. A hint of curiosity could be detected in her otherwise stoic demeanor.
"It sounds so weird when you say it like that, but yeah!" Star said as Marco nodded.

"Tell us, when did this change in your relationship status occur?" the king asked. His curiosity much more obvious than his wife's.

"Friday, sir." Marco answered.

The queen subtly smiled.

"NOOOO!" the king lamented. "You couldn't wait just one more day?! The over your mother offered was on Saturday!"

The king produced a small leather pouch that jingled. He silently held it out to the queen who took it and placed it in the bosom of her dress.

"Ugh. You guys too?!" Star complained.

"I'm actually pretty impressed." Marco said. "Your highness, you got the timing exactly right."

"Well, dear boy. A mother knows these things."

Star and Marco approached the doors to the balcony overlooking the main courtyard.

"The people are going to love their new king," she said as she reached for his hand.

He took her hand in his and said, "They love their queen. I'm just the misunderstood bad-boy who married her."

"You're adorable."

The doors opened and Manfred loudly heralded their presence to the gathered people, "All hail the Queen and King of Mewni! Long may they reign!"

Together they emerged onto the balcony and looked out at the cheering crowds gathered to see them.

"My wishes and prayers came true. Maybe I'm the one who's dreaming," Star said as they waved to their people and smiled.

Marco said in reply, "Well, then, you had better kiss me before you wake up."

Husband and wife shared a kiss as applause and cheers erupted from the crowds.

para ser concluido
The Queen of Xix's royal assistant approached the carriage as the doors opened. "Welcome home, Queen Skye. I am glad you are safe."

"Thank you, Simon. It was quite a shock to see that Ishtar wielded such magic power. It is fortunate that my cousin, was able to defeat her." the queen replied as they walked together.

"Where do you believe Ishtar acquired such a powerful wand? Was it one of the lost royal wands?"

"Judging by its power, perhaps. But that will be difficult to know for certain now. Queen Star disposed of Ishtar's wand during their battle."

"There are a few witnesses that claim Ishtar was ranting about joining Queen Butterfly's magic with her own."

"Mere imagination. I was there. Ishtar said little beyond incoherent threats."

"I understand, my queen."

There was a short pause before Simon spoke again.

"There is more news my queen. Are your brother and father traveling home?"

"No. My brother and my father are on one of their 'trips'." the queen said as she held up both hands and curled two fingers on each.

"I see. This news is rather important. The prince's research team has achieved a major breakthrough."

"Have they, now? Send a messenger and have my family recalled. Also send word to Mewni. The Butterflys will be very interested in this news."

"Are you certain, your highness? Your cousin and her new husband are… a bit preoccupied at this time, are they not?"

The queen of Xix laughed. "That is one way to put it. But it will be fine. This breakthrough will be Xix's wedding gift to them. After all they have been through, they deserve a honeymoon trip."

"Yes, my queen."

"Oh, Simon, there is one more thing. I have made a new friend at the contest. She will be coming for a visit soon. Please prepare the adjoining quarters for her."

"An extended visit, your highness?"

"Let us not get ahead of ourselves. But, perhaps…"
"These scissors are the product of research and experiments conducted a few years ago. The metal ore has been processed and purified to previously unnecessary levels." said the research lead.

"And that's why these have the ability to break through the dimensional block?" Prince Kevin asked.

"This approach had been unsuccessful. But now, they are able to pierce the barrier."

"What changed?" Former King Brad asked.

"After we received the news of Empress Ishtar's death, we went back and retested the results of old experiments. We believe that without Ishtar's magic to maintain it, the dimensional block is already weakening. Combined with these super-refined scissors, creating a dimensional portal to Earth is now possible."

"That's great! We can visit Earth anytime, then?" Star asked.

"It's not quite perfect though, your highness. A dimensional portal can only be opened to a specific region of Earth. A weak point in the barrier between dimensions."

The research lead turned to her assistant. "What was the name of the location again?"

The assistant flipped through some notes. "Schmebulock. Our scout got the name from a local gnome."

Marco laughed and said, "I think I know where the portal goes."

"In time, we expect the blockage to weaken even further. Eventually, the possible travel area will widen and lower quality scissors will regain the ability to create portals to Earth. Though that may be years away."

"A limited run of these special scissors are being produced as we speak. But for now, these are yours." Skye said as she handed the new scissors to Star. "And we did not get the chance to say 'Congratulations' before you departed your wedding ceremony."

"Thank you. Thank you all." Marco and Star said.

"You are very welcome." Brad said.

"Are you going to travel back to Earth immediately?" Kevin asked.

"Soon. There's something we absolutely need to do first." Marco replied.

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Star and Marco stood at the order window of a Xix barbecue stand.

"We'll take one order of Mula style goatpig ribs, one order of Talo glaze ostrichicken, some pixie bread, and two iced paopu-ades."

"And a side of sukebind slaw."

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epílogo continuará
In the three months since the fight that destroyed his home, Bearicorn had only managed to replace a few items of furniture. Some pieces were practically irreplaceable.

He returned to his cave with a small treasure. Carson the gnome had found him an antique cobalt porcelain tea set… which Bearicorn almost dropped in surprise upon entering his cave.

Every bit of destroyed furniture had been repaired. Even the one of a kind Louis XIV armchair that had been broken over his head.

A round Chippendale tea table was positioned in the center of the cave. It was meant to be noticed. On it was a box of Sir Harry's Magic Horn-gaine for Bears and a note.

B.,

I know that this doesn't make us even. We still owe you.

-M.B.

P.S. I enchanted your Victorian wall mirror. You should call your friends. They miss you. -S.B.

Bearicorn looked at the initials again. "M.B. and S.B.?" he said aloud.

He looked over to the ornate oval wall mirror. He wondered if it was really enchanted as he approached it. How did Marco manage that?

"Call Lobster Claws."

It rang briefly.

"Hello? Bearicorn?! Hey everyone! It's Bearicorn! How ya doin', buddy?! We we've been hoping to hear from you ever since we found out that Marco Diaz broke through the dimensional barrier! He married Star Butterfly!"

The name tickled his memory. "Star?"

"Yeah! Marco married Star! They're the king and queen of Mewni now!"

"Oh, Star!"

"Hey, what happened to your horn?"

Another Sunday at the gift shop. It was a rather quiet morning. Not as many people as normal. Dipper sat behind the cash register reading. Mabel was straightening a shelf full of souvenirs.

The door chimed as it opened. Dipper looked up from his reading and blushed a bit as he noticed that
the customer was a very beautiful blonde woman. "Hello." he said.

"Hi! Do you know who owns the motorcycle parked outside? The one with California plates."

"Uh, yeah. It's mine." he smiled.

"Can I talk to you about it?"

"Uh-oh. Did something happen to it?!"

The woman giggled. "No, nothing like that. It's just that my husband likes it a lot and wants to buy it from you."

She's married. Typical. He relaxed a bit.

"And he sent a pretty face to negotiate. Smart." he said.

"Is his plan working?" The blonde asked.

"It might have." Dipper said with a smile. "But the bike's not for sale."

"Really? We'll gladly pay you double what you paid for it."

His eyebrows were raised. But he had made a promise. "That's tempting, but I have to say no."

"Not enough? How about triple?"

"Ooooh... I can't. You see, I promised to sell it back to a friend when he comes back to town."

"Five times." the blonde offered.

His resolve started to crack. His friend would understand, right?

"You can't sell the bike! You promised!" The Mabel interjected.

"Ugh. She's right. I'm sorry. You're wasting your time. The motorcycle's really not for sale."

"Not even for ten times what you paid for it? But that's my final offer."

Dipper was shocked. This had to be a joke. "But, you don't even know how much I paid for it."

"C'mon." the blonde said as she reached into her purse. "You really think I'd make an offer like that if I didn't know exactly how much you paid for it?" She withdrew a leather pouch. It made a jingling sound as she placed it on the counter. "My husband tried to warn me that you'd fleece us. We're just lucky there's no sales tax in this state."

An old man then appeared in a puff of smoke.

"WELCOME TRAVELLER, TO THE MYSTE..." the words died on the lips of the old man when he saw the woman.

"Hello, Stanley."

Stan felt young again. He went to her and embraced her. When she returned his embrace, he allowed the emotions to wash over him. Tears filled his eyes.

Mabel's hands covered her mouth as she gasped. Her pupils seemed to grow and block out the
whites of her eyes.

Dipper stood wide eyed and dumbfounded. A man entered the door but Dipper didn't look away from the embrace. He silently reached into his pocket and fished out the motorcycle's key. Without a word he dropped it into the man's open palm.

Stan knew they couldn't stay like this forever and reluctantly broke the embrace.

"You must be Star. It is my great pleasure to meet you, your highness."

Mabel noticed the man who had entered. "Marco! You made it back!"

"Mabel! Dipper! Mr. Pines! Have we got a story to tell you!"

"Hugs!"

Everyone joined.

=================================

Star and Marco shared their story with the Pines.

Mabel and Star hit it off as friends immediately and were practically BFFs before the end of the tale.

"This is going to make a great book!" Mabel exclaimed.

"Dipper, I heard that you're trying to further your great uncle's work." Star said.

"Weirdness isn't exactly a field of study. But yeah! Anomalies. Things that people don't believe exist but actually do. And how it all fits together."

"Your great uncle was a brilliant man, but he had only partial knowledge. Whatever he could piece together here. What would you say to a year long apprenticeship with a very learned being… in Mewni?"

"That would be amazing! Eeeee!"

"The apprenticeship starts in a few months. Here's a list of things you'll need to bring."

"Pudding cups?"

While Dipper and Star were talking Mabel pulled Marco aside.

"Marco! Remember that thing we talked about?" she whispered.

"I haven't forgotten. I'm going to talk to her about it."

"Mabel! Grunkle Stan!" Dipper called out. "I just got an apprenticeship in Mewni!"

Stan was silent for a moment until he said proudly, "Good for you, Dipper!"

"You don't think it's too dangerous?"

"Ha! The only danger you'll see is being crushed by a pile of books. It's not like you'll be sailing the high seas as part of a pirate crew!" Stan laughed. "Besides, you're a grown man. It's time for you to strike out on your own."
Mabel looked somewhat sad. "That's great, bro."

"Mabel, I don't have to…"

"No! This time you're going! Grunkle Stan's right. We're not kids anymore. We both need to be able to do some things for ourselves."

Dipper smiled. "Thanks, Mabel."

"What about you, Mabel? Is there anything we could do for you?"

"Well…"

==================================

At Star's request, the others went outside leaving her to talk to Stan alone.

"Stanley, you do know that my Great Aunt Daisy is gone, don't you?"

"Twenty-two years ago. January 27."

"So you already knew."

"The second it happened. I felt it and I knew."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be. Sounds like everything happened for a reason after all."

"But, still…"

"Yeah. But, still…"

There was a quiet moment between them.

"Stanley Pines. Thank you for everything you've sacrificed, and for keeping your promise."

Star then gave Stan a kiss on the cheek.

"We'll never forget it." she said then left to join the others.

Now alone, Stan smiled to himself.

==================================

Dipper asked, "Are you sure you guys can't stay longer?"

"Sorry, but being rulers means we can't stay away from the kingdom for too long. But we promise to visit as often as we can." Star replied.

"Yes! Please come back soon. Promise!" Mabel said.

"We promise." Marco replied.

"Where are you kids going next?" Stan asked.

"Back to Echo Creek. I want to re-introduce my wife to my parents."
"You're going to ride the whole way?" Dipper asked. "Why don't you, you know..." He made a scissors gesture in the air with two fingers.

"The only place on Earth that can be reached with scissors is here, and will be for a while." Star pointed out.

"Besides, to get to where you're going, sometimes you need to take the long way." Marco stated.

The Pines family said their goodbyes.

Marco and Star walked to the motorcycle. He put on the helmet, while she manifested her own pink helmet using magic.

"Star, this is something I've wanted to share with you. You're my first passenger." Marco said as he mounted the bike.

"Really?!" Star was excited as she got on the bike behind him and wrapped her arms around his body. "You know, I thought you'd never ride one of these. Didn't you always tell me that they weren't safe?"

"I guess that I learned that you can't be safe all the time."

"So which way are we going?"

"We're going west to the ocean. Then we'll take the Pacific Coast Highway all the way south. Hang on tight."

"Whatever you say, Wild Man."

Marco jumped on the starter. They both waved to the Pines family as they rode away.

As they watched the motorcycle leave the Mystery Shack parking lot, Stan's voice changed.

"Ah. Don't you just love happy endings?" he asked rhetorically.

Dipper jumped and looked at Stan's eyes. Yellow with slits for pupils.

"Relax, Pine Tree. I'm not here to cause you trouble this time. I just wanted to see them off. But I suppose I could have done that anywhere. All-seeing." He said as he pointed to his eyes.

"You're not going to mess with them are you? Please don't." Mabel pleaded.

"Aw. Don't worry. I wasn't going to. At least, not today."

Dipper and Mabel groaned.

"Anyway, can't stay long folks. I gotta get ready for my date. She just got out of the slammer. Hopefully she's willing to play 'Godfather' with me."

Eyebrows raised.

"That was innuendo... 'cause I'm hoping to find a horse's head in my bed. 'Bye!".

Dipper and Mabel were silently horrified.

Stan's eyes returned to normal.
"Yeah, I'm going down to the lab to drink that image away." said Stan.

==================================

"Doop-tee-doop-tee-doo. Lookin' for my booze." Stan sang to himself as he looked through the cabinets of the dark lab.

"Stan Pines."

He turned towards the voice in the shadows.

"Was wondering if you'd come by, Brad."

Brad emerged from the shadows and approached. "I should have visited sooner. I am sorry."

"Well, if you're here to deliver sad news, someone beat you to it. Not that I didn't already know."

"I am actually here to apologize for my cowardice years ago. I did not even say goodbye when you left. I could not bear to face you after the plans were laid."

"Eh. Probably for the best. You would have had black eyes and no teeth when you married Daisy."

"You know that I respected her sacrifice, do you not? We never shared a marriage bed."

"I know. That would have been weird. Besides, Captain Crystal would have had your head."

Brad chuckled. "True."

"Heard that you have a nice farm together now."

"The only place for us to be together."

"Surprised you didn't just leave Mewni together after your daughter took over as ruler of Xix."

"I am not as brave as you. We were already too old to start over. The Mewni dimension is our home, such as it is. We wanted to be together in our own home. Not as exiles."

"Daisy always wanted that for you."

"Daisy always wanted that for everyone."

"I did get married to someone else a few years after she was gone. It lasted six hours. She knew my heart wasn't in it."

"It was just not the same, was it?"

"Nothing ever could be."

"Daisy should have been able to visit."

"Too risky. Couldn't have your kids following and finding out she wasn't really their mother. They would have been too young to understand."

There was a moment of quiet before Brad spoke again.

"I was told that you succeeded in finding your brother."
"Yeah. We were already old men by then. But even though he's gone now, I'm glad that we had a few more years of adventures together. Don't think that you're too old for that.

Stan poured two drinks and offered one to Brad.

"And don't sell yourself short when it comes to bravery either. I heard that you stuck your neck out for the Diaz kid."

"Trying to make up for past shortcomings and pay back old debts. Daisy sacrificed her own happiness for my kingdom. I had no way to repay her. But by helping her family, maybe I could alleviate a small part of the debt."

"When we said goodbye, she made me promise to help her family if I ever got the chance. She wanted to believe that we met for a reason."

"To thwart the plans of a malevolent and immensely powerful magic being?"

"I've still got an undefeated record."

"Then she met the right man. She knew you were a fighter. You would persevere, find your brother, and keep your promise. She had faith in you."

Stan smiled.

"Here's to Daisy." Brad said holding up his glass.

"To Daisy." Stan said.

They both downed their drinks.

==================================

"I should go. It was good to see you again, Stan Pines." Brad brought out a new pair of dimensional scissors and opened a portal.

He then placed the scissors on a lab table and said, "Queen Star wanted your family to have these. You should visit Mewni. There's a large portrait of Daisy in Xix Castle. You should come to see it."

"I got something better today. Just for a second, it felt like we were together again. But I do plan to go there again one day."

"Farewell, Stan Pines."

"So long, Brad."

The portal closed after Brad stepped through it.

Stan approached the table with the dimensional scissors.

==================================

In the living room of Stan's mind Bill Cipher rejoiced.

"Yes! YES! Unrestricted dimensional travel! Oh, boy! Everything's about to get WEIRD AND WILD!"
"No, it's not." Stan stated flatly from his worn out recliner.

"No, it's not. Sorry, got a little excited there for a minute. I'm not dumb enough to go up against Royal Magic."

Stan humphed. "So why did you help the horse princess, anyway? We know it was you."

"For a date. She knows how to do things with that horn of hers. Things I want done."

Stan took a swig directly from the whiskey bottle and shivered.

Bill laughed. "I'm just joking. I would have helped her for free. I just wanted to see how much she was willing to pay."

"For free, huh?"

"I was waiting to see if that house of cards would fall down on it's own, but Ishtar got too close. So I opened the window to let the breeze in before she could finally add the Queen of Hearts. I know you think I'd welcome Weirdpocalypse 2: Electric Boogaloo, but you're wrong."

"Well, not too long ago I'd be right. The Zodiac changed you, Cipher."

"Yeah, well, dying tends to do that."

Stan glared at Bill in his mind.

"Don't give me that look. The Zodiac had a price. Sixer sacrificed himself willingly. He was going to the first time too if you had just shaken his hand."

Stan scoffed as the living room of his mind morphed into a medieval style castle courtyard.

Bill Cipher looked at Stan who now appeared younger.

"I'm surprised that this place still exists in your memories."

"It still exists for the same reason you still do. Some things can't really be erased. Like that Marco kid's memories."

People from Stan's memory appeared in the distance.

"Shouldn't you be leaving for your date? I'm meeting someone here."

"Yeah, yeah. I'm goin'. I'm goin'."

Bill Cipher paused before he disappeared.

"So, when will you be going back to this place for real?"

"Soon enough."

Both of them knew that was true.

==================================

Marco and Star rode toward the ocean through the green trees of the Pacific Northwest. Star breathed in their scent. She had missed Earth.
Marco guided the motorcycle down the coast, hugging the curves of the road through hills and valleys.

Star felt exhilarated but not afraid. She trusted Marco with her life. They would always protect each other.

At times, she would raise her wand or her fingertips and release a little magic in the air. It trailed behind them like streamers.

It had been so long since she had felt this kind of happiness. She held on to him, feeling the muscles under his clothes as they moved to control the motorcycle.

He had given up his home for her. Mewni was his home now. A home they would share. She vowed to make Mewni a home he would be proud to live in. They would change it for the better. They would change it together.

At dusk, they stopped at a beach to watch the sun light the sky on fire as it sank below the horizon.

It was dark as they approached San Francisco. Star marveled at how the lights made the fog glow as they crossed the bridge into the city.

They would stay the night before they continued their ride south. The next day, they resumed the trip much later than originally planned. For although it was not too late when they checked into their room, it was very late when they slept.

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epílogo continuará
Rafael and Angie Diaz missed their son. Marco had disappeared on a trip to Oregon.

The young man who bought his motorcycle claimed that he didn't know where their son went, but he did say that Marco made him promise to sell the motorcycle back when he returned.

The man's great uncle had an extensive record. Names had to be invented for some of the crimes he had committed. The last people seen with Marco were him and his family. The Diazes were certain they were hiding something.

But the investigation stalled. The police said that they were not sure that any crime had been committed at all, and that sometimes people simply run away from their problems. Marco had been having many problems.

The police said that they would keep searching, but the town was remote and surrounded by wilderness. If someone wanted to, they would have little trouble disappearing.

With no leads, they advised the Diazes to go home. There was nothing they could do but wait and hope.

Marco's parents just wanted to know that their son was alright. But it's been months since anyone has seen or heard from him.

Rafael often looked at the pictures of his son on the wall. He had been doing this much more often ever since his son vanished. He had looked at them so often that he was surprised to find something new in one.

"Angie? Who is this girl with Marco in this photograph?"

Angie looked at the photo in question. It was a photo of their son with a blond girl who was hugging him from behind and resting her chin on his shoulder.

She looked up towards the picture of Marco and Emily and compared the blonde girls in the two pictures. It wasn't her. That was impossible anyway. Emily had to leave before Marco was even a teenager. In the picture with the unknown girl, Marco was practically a man.

She didn't recognize the girl, but there was something about her that she couldn't quite put her finger on. She had a pink heart on each cheek. Face paint? Was this picture taken at a carnival?

"I don't know. I feel like I should know her. But I just don't know."

"I feel the same way. ¿Quién es ella? Is she the girl Marco said was his novia?"

"I don't think so. All he had to do was point at this picture to prove that she wasn't imaginary."
"You know, I look at these pictures all the time. But this is the first time I ever notice this girl."

Their conversation was interrupted by the sound of a motorcycle pulling into the driveway.

Marco entered the front door to see his parents.

"Hi Mom. Hi Dad. I'm back."

"Marco! You're home!" his parents cried as they rushed to embrace their son. "Where have you been?! We've been worried sick! We thought something terrible had happened to you!" Everyone was crying.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry I left without saying anything. But I had to. I'm alright now. Everything's better now. I promise." Marco said over his tears.

"Marco. Why did you disappear like that?" His father asked.

"I promise to explain everything. But first I need you to meet someone."

A blonde woman entered the front door.

Marco began to speak. "Mom, Dad, this is..."

"...Star." his parents finished.

"Do you remember me?"

Mrs. Diaz gathered her in a hug. "Yes. Yes, Star. We remember. We remember everything." tears fell like sleet.

Marco and Mr. Diaz joined them. "Oh, Star. Marco, we're sorry! We're so sorry! Everyone forgot her but you."

"It's okay. It's okay. It wasn't your fault." Marco looked at his parents. "Dad, Mom, there's something else." Marco began.

"We know, Marco. We already know. We can see it in you both. You've married. Star is your wife."

"Marco is your husband now, Star. You are part of our family."

"Aww. Who spoiled the surprise?" Star said through laughter and tears.

In the Diaz home, emotions raced for a long while…

==================================

"You're moving to Mewni?"

"Star and I are married, Mom. And Star is the queen. She needs to live in Mewni. That means that I need to live in Mewni with her."

"I guess that's true... This is just a bit of a surprise."

"I know, Mrs Diaz. But I need my king. And it doesn't mean that we won't visit as often as we can."

"And we're putting in a mirror downstairs so you can call anytime."
"Maybe you can visit us in Mewni!" Star suggested.

"That sounds like a wonderful idea!"

"But, honey. The newlyweds don't need us around so soon." Mr Diaz said.

"Oh, please. Us being just down the hall didn't stop them before."

Marco and Star blushed.

"But maybe we can come to help when they have children!"

"Okay! With that, I think that Star and I are heading up to bed." Marco announced.

"Yes! Good Night you two! And welcome back Star."

"It's good to be back." Star said giving Marco's parents a hug before she disappeared up the stairs with her husband.

"Royal Grandchildren..." Mrs Diaz whispered after they had gone.

"Honey, no pressure."

Where are we going, Marco?"

"I was going to sneak you into my room so we could spend the night together. Shhh. I know it's a school night. Maybe my parents will think we're studying."

Star laughed and said, "I meant, why don't we go to mine? There's so much room for activities. And it's soundproof."

"But your room is gone. I thought you noticed when we pulled up to the house."

Star opened the door to the guest bedroom.

"I don't remember my room being this plain."

"I've only looked in this room a few times since you left. I hate seeing it like this. It feels lifeless."

Star walked into the room and and looked out the window overlooking the yard. "The Obscuring Spell is really convincing." she commented before she drew her wand.

"SPARKLE GLITTER BOMB EXPAND RESTORE!"

With a sparkling flash of magic, the sterile guest room was replaced with the multi story tower that was Star's room.

"Wow! You brought it back just like it was!"

"I didn't really bring it back. It was always here. It was just hidden by another reality. It's kinda hard to explain."

"So everything in your room has just been sitting untouched for five years?" Marco said as he eyed the covered laundry hamper.
"Uhhh…"

They approached the hamper cautiously. When it was opened, they were relieved to find the contents relatively safe.

Marco dragged his finger across a wood surface and found it rather dust-free. "You know what? I don't think time passed in here." he said.

"You should move your stuff in here! This can be our room whenever we visit!"

"You're right. I'll move my things in the morning."

"You sure? I could move everything by magic now."

"I know that you probably won't turn my room into a black hole… again. But it's okay. My stuff can wait 'til tomorrow."

A look of realization came over Marco. "Except...!"

Marco left the room briefly and returned carrying a shoebox.

"What's in there?"

"Some things you gave me." he said with a smile. "I noticed that you reappeared in one of the pictures on the wall downstairs. Better make sure these are safe."

They sat together on the bed and opened the box.

"Huh. They're still blank." he said somewhat disappointed while looking at the photos and papers.

"I can't believe you still hung onto these even though they're blank."

"I guess I was hoping that they would come back someday. Just like I hoped you would."

"Aww. That'll happen eventually. Just like the picture downstairs. The Obscuring Spell is wearing off."

"I never did get to read this one." Marco said indicating a blank piece of pink paper. "What did it say?"

"I told you not to worry about your mark and that it looked good on you. I told you about our bond, what it meant about our feelings, and how you could find me in your heart. I told you that I love you. And then I told you how wonderful that night was." Star said smiling.

Then her face turned a little sad. "I told you to use my mirror to call me in Mewni. I tried calling it from over there, but now I know why you never picked up."

"Hey, now. Don't be sad. It took a little while, but we're together again. We were able to find each other when the time was right."

Star pushed him down on the bed and kissed him in response.

She sat up and asked "So, Mr Marco Butterfly, why didn't you come running when I gave you these?" She held up the empty photos.

"Because, Mrs Star Diaz, the letter that came with them promised 'someday'. And I still remember
our talk on the beach that night. So, I was willing to wait until you were really ready and came to me. I wasn't going to pressure you to make someday into right away. No matter what those pictures did to me."

"And what did they do to you?"

"They made my arm sore."

Star fell back on the bed laughing.

After a moment, she propped herself up and said, "Speaking of pressure, I think there's something we need to talk seriously about."

"Is it about my parents?"

"Well, it's not just them. We didn't talk about marriage before I left, even though we totally should've. Maybe we shouldn't put off this conversation like we did that one."

"I understand."

"So, how do you feel about us having kids?"

"I want them. I want us to have them. I want you to have mine. Someday."

"Everyone in Mewni wants that to happen too. And soon."

"Never mind them. Never mind my parents. What do *you* want?"

"I *do* want them. Not because everyone expects it of me. *I* want them because they'll be ours. Maybe they'll have blonde hair and your cute little mole."

"I'm pretty sure genetics don't work that way."

Star smiled. "But, first I want to spend some time together as just you and me." She laid back down on the bed and threw her leg over him. "I missed you."

"Then that's what will happen. We'll have children when we decide that the time is right."

Marco was rubbing Star's leg.

A mischievous smile appeared on her face. "You're right, Marco. I guess you don't need to move all your stuff over right now. It's not like you'll be needing your jam-jams anyway."

Marco laughed.

"And since these are still blank..." Star said as she put the papers and photos back in the shoebox and placed it on the nightstand. She got off the bed and went into her walk-in closet.

Star quickly reemerged wearing nothing but a smile and one of Marco's red hoodies that she had kept her closet. "...I'll just reenact them for you."

He was enthralled by her show.

"It won't just be your arm that's sore in the morning."
epílogo continuará

==================================

Author's Notes: Smut levels... rising...
Epilogue 4: Commitment

Starfall by GolfAlphaMike

Epilogue 4: Commitment

Jackie heard a knock on the door and wondered who it was. She opened the door to find a very upset looking blonde woman.

"I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU TRIED TO STEAL MARCO FROM ME! YOU KISSED HIM BEHIND MY BACK! I THOUGHT YOU WERE MY FRIEND, JACKIE!"

"HEY! I WASN'T STEALING ANYBODY! YOU ABANDONED HIM! DO YOU EVEN REALIZE HOW MUCH YOU HURT HIM?!! HE WAS A TRAINWRECK! HOW COULD YOU DO THAT TO HIM, STAR?!"

Memories came flooding back to Jackie and she understood.

"Star!"

"Hi Jackie! Hugs!" she said as she wrapped her arms around her stunned friend.

"You're not mad at me?"

"No! You lost your memories of me. Besides, that was like four years ago! Oh, by the way, Marco and I just got married."

In minor shock, Jackie returned Star's hug.

"I'm sorry about your Mom, Star."

"Thanks, Jackie. It's been a few years now, but I still miss her everyday."

"She did raise you to be queen."

"That's right. Queen Star Butterfly of Mewni. Last Holder of Royal Magic."

"How is that going?" Jackie asked.

"Pretty well, considering how I was crowned. Things have really improved since then. The people aren't as destitute. I've built infrastructure and schools and even helped to end some wars."

"Look at you, all regal and stuff!"

"Told you I was born to lead. Literally. There's still so much to do. Big changes are coming."

"And now you have Marco to help you."

"That's right!" Star said with a smile. "He's going to be a great king."

"His parents must be thrilled! Did they tell you how to find me?"
"Yeah. They're in touch with all of Marco's old friends. They thought he might have tried to contact someone. So many people left town. We thought we were going to have to wait to see you again like Ferguson and Alfonso. When did you move back here?" Star asked.

"Only a month ago. I hadn't planned to move back, but I broke up with another boyfriend. Longest relationship ever. Almost six months."

"Oh. I'm sorry."

"It's okay. It just never seems to last for me." Jackie said sadly.

"Jackie..."

"When Janna said that she was moving back home, I offered to move in with her."

"Where is she anyway?" Star asked.

"She's at the office."

"I never thought Janna would be all werk werk werk werk."

"A lot changed after you left. It's weird now that I look back on it. It's like there was a hole in my mind."

"You guys couldn't even miss me."

"Just Marco. Ugh. And no one believed him." Jackie covered her face with her hands.

"I was so afraid he would hate me for not coming back."

"Him? Never. He held on to what he had with you. We wondered why he never dated. You know, we thought he was still a virgin. You ruined him for other women."

Star laughed. "That's not true. He did try dating again."

"Did he tell you that I remembered you for a second?"

"Yeah. He said that was the moment he knew that he couldn't move on. He felt so guilty."

Jackie then looked down. "I'm sorry I kissed him, Star."

"I know. You didn't remember me, so it's okay."

"What did you do when Marco told you?"

==================================

"Marco! While Star is out, we should go to the police so they can close your missing persons case." Marco's father called out as he approached the door to the tower room.

Not hearing a response, he reached for the handle and found the door unlocked. The moment the door was cracked, he heard Marco protesting his entry.

"¡Ay Ay Yi! Marco! You're lucky it was me that found you. Imagine if your mother saw you like this!" the elder Diaz said with humor in his accented voice.

Marco's face was reddened in embarrassment. Unable to cover himself, he sighed in resignation as
his head fell back against the pillow.

"Ugh." Janna grumbled as she entered the front door of the home she shared with her friend.

"Hey. Hard day?" Jackie greeted her.

"Yeah. I might've made a mistake taking this job."

"That bad?"

"It's just so… not me." Janna said deflated.

"I know we've talked about this before, but why did you choose that major in college?"

"I don't know. The money?"

"You know what you need? Some good news. They found Marco… alive."

"They did?! Where was he?! What happened?!" Janna said with a mixture of surprise and relief.

"He just showed up at his parents house last night."

"It's been like three months! Why did he disappear like that?!"

"He got married." Jackie said matter of factly.

"WHAT?!" Janna began to tear up. "Aww! Our little boy has finally become a man!"

Jackie rolled her eyes.

"Wait. But who did he get married to?" Janna asked.

"We used to know her."

"We did?"

"We went to highschool with her."

"That doesn't narrow it down, Jackie. A lot of girls had a crush on him."

"Yeah, like you." Jackie teased.

"You're one to talk. You even managed to go to prom together." Janna teased back.

Jackie shrugged. "And we went on a date, once."

"Didn't he ditch you both times?" Janna jabbed.

"Ouch. Just for that, I'm not telling you who his new wife is."

"Aw! C'mon!" Janna whined.

"You have to guess."

"Leah? Hope?"
"No. Someone we *used* to know." Jackie reminded her.

"Can I at least have a clue?"

"Sure. She was a princess."

"Oh, no! Did Brittney get her claws into him?"

"Ew. No. Not what I meant by princess."

Janna struggled with her memory. "Was it that weird girl? The one who wore horns on her head..."

Jackie's face lit up. Janna was remembering on her own.

"...with the glasses and braces? What was her name? She went with a nickname like a screen name. Something-fan? Something-fan thirteen?"


"What's that?" Janna asked.

"Video of Marco's wedding." Jackie said putting the disc in the player.

"Was Marco here?"

"No. His wife was."

"But, who- ?!"

"Just watch! Prepare to have your mind blown!"

They sat on the sofa and watched as a picture appeared on the screen.

"Wow! A stained glass dome? What church is this?" Janna wondered.

"His wife is not from... she's foreign."

"Those flowers appeared from nowhere! Who puts CGI in a wedding video?"

The camera turned to the entrance while still zoomed out. Two figures appeared in the door as a voice announced the entrance of the bride and groom. A wedding march began to play.

Marco was easy to recognize, even at a distance since Janna knew to look for him. "There's he is. Why is he dressed like that? He looks like he joined the army with Sgt Pepper!"

"His wife's family is really important where she's from." Jackie said.

"That explains why there are so many people. Why are they dressed up in costumes? Halloween was months ago."

The camera zoomed in. The picture was now clear enough to see the bride's smiling face clearly.

"All right, let's see Marco's woman! Blonde, huh? He always did have... a... type..." Janna's words trailed off then her hands covered her mouth in shock.

The camera followed Marco and his bride down a path to the center of the domed room where they
stood facing each other.

"So, do you recognize her?"

Janna nodded but was silent until the end of the bride and groom's vows. The tears began to stream down her face.

"Star." Janna managed to choke out.

Jackie was happy that Janna remembered one of their closest friends. She decided to give Janna more time to process everything and they continued to watch the video.

Next the queen crowned her king and they shared their first dance. Then it was over. The groom had escaped with his bride.

"Janna?" Jackie asked concerned.

"Too bad the camera didn't follow them. If I had known they were getting married, there would have been a hidden camera in the honeymoon suite!"

"Janna, you're such a perv." Star said as she emerged from behind the sofa.

Janna screamed in happiness and hugged her. "At least tell us how the wedding night was."

"Oh, you know. Up and down." Star joked.

The three girls laughed.

"Why did you disappear?" Janna asked.

"It's a long story."

"Ugh! Five years! Everything is different now. Magic is real again. I missed my calling. I was going to study the paranormal after high school. But after you disappeared, I forgot about everything."

"Well, Janna. Marco wanted to talk to you about that. Let's all go eat! We can really catch up. You know what I haven't had in years? Chinese food!"

There was a ringing from Star's purse. It was Marco's phone. She borrowed it for the day since he was with his parents.

"Hello?" Star said as she answered.

"Hello, Star?"

"Oh, Mrs Diaz. Perfect timing. I'm with friends of ours. I was going to ask Marco to meet up with us."

"There's a little problem. He's being held."

"Has he been arrested?! Did the cops find out about the piracy thing?"

"No… um, piracy?" Mrs Diaz said slightly confused.

"What's happening?! Is he alright?!"

"Don't worry, Star. He's fine, but he got sent to the mental health hospital. Again. We went to the
police so they could close his missing persons case. We thought it would be quick. But they asked where he had been for the last few months, then yadda yadda yadda, now he's being held for another psych eval."

"Tell Marco to hang tight. I'm on my way."

"Marco, you've stopped taking your medication. That's why your delusions have returned." the doctor said.

"Doctor, I'm not delusional. I've never been delusional."

"Marco, I know this is difficult to accept, but what you're experiencing isn't real. It can seem very real, but it isn't. When you were taking your medication, you realized this."

"Look, I know that I could probably get out of here quickly if I just agree with you and say that magic isn't real. That Star, my wife, isn't real. You'll up my dose, and I'll promise to take my meds, but I won't. Well, I'm not going to do that this time. I don't want to have to spend my visits back to Earth looking over my shoulder for the guys with white coats and butterfly nets. Ironically."

Marco looked at the clock. "She should be here soon." he said softly to himself.

"Marco, I don't know why your parents are going along with this. They were the ones who brought you here the first time. But now they say that they were wrong."

"They remembered the truth."

"More like there's an external reason for your delusions. You've always claimed that you don't take recreational psychoactive drugs, but I need you to be truthful. Maybe your parents got into your stash?" the doctor said.

There was a knock on the door.

"Doctor? A woman who claims to be married to Marco Diaz is here." a nurse said before stepping aside to allow a woman into the room.

"Marco! Are you alright?" she said.

"I'm fine, Star." he said as they hugged. Marco then turned to the doctor. "Doctor, this is my wife, Star."

"Hello." Star said holding out her hand.

The doctor shook her hand. "Hello. I'm Doctor-

"Marco isn't crazy." Star interrupted.

"Mrs Diaz. Marco is severely delusional."

There was a short pause before Star spoke again. "Sorry, I heard you say 'Mrs Diaz' and I thought Marco's mom was behind me. Anyway, Marco is perfectly sane."

"Marco has been very consistent in his description of the girl who was living with his family. You match it perfectly. I was convinced that you didn't exist. When did you meet, again?"
"When we were fourteen."

"And that was when you moved in with the Diaz family as an exchange student from…"

"Mewni."

"Right. Mewni. And you stayed with the Diazes for four years?"

"Yes. Until I graduated from high school."

"And then you returned home?"

"I left because of a family emergency."

"Hmm. Just like a previous exchange student. Why didn't you come back? Marco always said that you would verify his story."

"I was stopped from coming back."

"Was it an immigration issue?"

"Kinda. The dimensional route to Earth was made impassable by a curse."

"Uh-huh." The doctor said incredulously. "I guess this is a good place to bring up the other part of Marco's… story. He says that you have a magic wand?"

"Yes, I do." Star said holding up the wand for the doctor to see. "This is the Royal Magic Wand of Mewni."

"Royal. Because you're a princess."

"I'm actually a queen now."

"Right." The doctor said as he pressed a button on the desk phone.

"Star, why don't you just prove to the doctor that you have magic power." Marco suggested.

"Because, I wanted to see if I can get you out of here without magic. It's good practice for negotiations."

"I guess it would have been a bit of overkill to bust me out of this place with…"

"I was going to go with giant neon gorillas." Star said.

"Mrs Diaz. What you and your husband are telling me defies all sense and reality. I'm sorry, but it would be best if we hold Marco here for a while for his own safety."

"You're not releasing him?"

"We can't. Not while he is in the middle of a delusional episode."

Orderlies came in and approached Marco.

"Okay Marco, we're just going to take you to your room. We don't want a fight."

Marco sighed, but remained calm.
"Don't worry, Marco! We'll get you out of here soon." Star reassured him.

More orderlies entered and approached Star.

"I'm sorry. But it's my opinion that you are also having a drug induced episode. We're going to hold you for evaluation as well."

Magic energy arced around Star.

"And here we go." Marco said.

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"Hey there, King Butterfly." Jackie greeted him.

"Hi guys." Marco said as he got into Jackie's car.

"How was your stay at the funny farm?" Janna asked.

"Eventful, but thankfully, short."

"You know what we need after all that? A drink." Star suggested.

They departed in search of a chinese restaurant with a bar.

==================================

The doctor sat in a destroyed office. The door had been ripped from the frame by a large neon green primate. The office lights had been smashed. Flying anglerfish provided the only illumination. Seated at the desk, the doctor completed notes in Marco's file.

PATIENT ASYMPTOMATIC. DOES NOT PRESENT SIGNS OF ANY MENTAL DISORDER. RELEASED TO SPOUSE. NO FOLLOW UP NECESSARY.

When the file was closed, the magically summoned beings disappeared. The office was now dark. The doctor opened a desk drawer and withdrew a bottle of scotch.

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The friends caught up over drinks and dim sum.

"You never corrected the Doctor when he called you 'Mrs Diaz.'" Marco said to Star.

"Yeah, that's going to take a second to get used to. We need to go by my name in Mewni. Kinda part of the whole royal lineage thing. But I was thinking, when we're here, we should go by yours. After all, Earth is our escape from royal duty."

Marco smiled. "So you get to be Star Diaz after all."

"Star Butterfly-Diaz."

"Hey, Star, would it still be weird if I date that hot demon ex of yours? Since you didn't marry him, he's available now, right?" Janna then turned to Jackie. "Dibs!"

"You can't. No dibs."

"But you've already got this handsome specimen locked down." Janna said putting her arm around
Marco’s shoulder.

The words reminded Marco of Star’s discipline earlier in the day.

"Look at him! He’s blushing. Don't hog all the fine ones, Star."

"It's not that. He's already got someone. JanTom isn't going to happen. And I'm going to need my keys back, Janna." Marco quipped.

"Aww." Janna said deflated as she handed the keys she just picked from his pocket back. "I've lost my touch."

"How long are you guys planning to stay in town?" Jackie asked.

"We can only stay a few days this trip." Marco answered.

Star explained. "There's a lot to get started on now that a new king has been crowned. It doesn't normally happen in this order. Usually a princess is already married and they ascend together. The high nobles want to meet with the new king soon. But we'll come back as often as we can."

"And we'll need to pick you up when it's time." Marco said to Janna.

="Marco, do you have everything you need?"

"Yes, Mom."

"You'll come back to visit soon, won't you?"

"We will soon, Mom." Marco said.

"Please take care of each other, you two."

"We will, Mr Diaz."

"Then come give your family a hug." Mrs Diaz said.

Star, Marco, and his parents had a group hug.

"Mind if we join in?" Janna asked.

"Of course, dear." Mrs Diaz said opening the group hug to Janna and Jackie.

"I'm glad you both came back safe." Jackie said.

"Thanks Jackie. Us too."

After their goodbyes, the Queen and King of Mewni left for their kingdom together.

epílogo continuará
"Hi."
"..."
"Whaddaya mean my work is done?"
"..."
"I… I knew it would be soon, but right now? I'm still as strong as an ox!"
"..."
"But what about-"
"..."
"I know they're grown. But... I didn't even say goodbye."
"..."
"Are you sure they know?"
"..."
"I know, she does. Him, I'm not so sure."
"...!"
"I'm just kidding. I know."
"..."
"Really? So that's what happens?"
"..."
"Hey! Mystery solved!"
"..."
"I've missed you too."

"Grunkle Stan! It's time to get up!" Mabel called out from the kitchen. It was late in the morning, and
the tourists would start to show up soon.

"Dipper? Can you go wake up Grunkle Stan? He gets too grunkly if he doesn't have time for coffee in the morning.

Dipper nodded and left the kitchen.

After a while Mabel began to wonder what was taking them so long. She was just about to leave the kitchen to follow when Dipper reappeared in the doorway.

By the look on his face she knew right away that something was wrong.

"Mabel. Grunkle Stan is gone." Dipper said.

"Did he leave?" she asked in a voice both hopeful and dreadful at once.

"No." he said as the tears started.

==================================

A public viewing and funeral was held in Gravity Falls. Most of the town came to pay their respects. Some of the more skeptical mourners poked his body to make sure it wasn't some sort of trick. Maybe a wax figure to take his place just so he could rob a gold depository and then escape to South America or something.

But it was no trick. Stanley Pines was really gone.

Well, that part wasn't a trick anyway.

The casket containing his body was switched out with an empty one before the burial in Gravity Falls. One last con. Just like he would have wanted.

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"I can't believe Mr Pines is gone." said a heavy set man while sniffing.

"I know, Soos. Nobody called to tell me he was even sick." A tall redheaded woman said.

"I do not think he was ill, Wendy. Perhaps it was just his time. He did one last thing he promised to before the end." an asian woman said.

"How are they holding up, Candy?" Wendy asked.

"Dipper is sad but poor Mabel is taking it much harder. She and Stan were always close." said Candy.

"Kinda reverse from before. Dipper took it pretty badly when Ford… you know." said Wendy.

They looked to see Dipper and Mabel being comforted by a very sturdy looking woman and a blonde woman in a black designer dress, shawl, and dark sunglasses.

"I will go to them." Candy said.

Candy exchanged places with the blonde woman who came to talk to Soos and Wendy.

"It's still hard to believe the Pines family has royal friends." the blonde said.
"That's the part you find unbelievable, Pacifica? We went through a hole in spacetime to get here."

"Please. Portals to other dimensions are sooo last decade. But two queens, two kings, and a prince all came to see him put to rest. We're talking about a man who once tried to market alien sweat as a weight loss supplement."

"Yeah. Moving stuff with my mind was fun while it lasted." Soos quipped.

The group laughed at the memory. They then looked around at the other mourners.

"I was confused at first. I thought the woman with King Brad was his wife. His kids look kinda like her. Did you know that they never met Stan?"

"Yeah. They said that they just wanted to pay their respects. Besides, their mother is buried here." Pacifica answered.

"Mighty understanding of King Brad to let Mr Pines be buried next to her." Soos said.

"He said it would be petty to deny this to Stan or to her." Pacifica said. She then asked, "Is Dipper still taking the apprenticeship?"

"In a few weeks. But it's not just an apprenticeship. There's a lot of field work. He could be out of touch for long stretches, if not the entire time. He offered to not go, but Mabel insisted that he still take it." Wendy said.

"Mabel doesn't want him to miss this opportunity because of her." Soos said.

"Is she moving back to Piedmont?" Pacifica asked.

"Naw, Dude. Melody's residency is ending and we're coming back to Gravity Falls. I'm going to help run the Mystery Shack again while Dipper is away. She won't be alone. We'll be there for her." Soos said.

"At least someone will be. Pacifica's got her companies to run, Grenda married Marius and left for Europe, Candy left for college, and I moved to the East Coast."

Soos put his hand on Wendy's shoulder. "Don't feel bad. Everyone has to live their own lives eventually. And Dipper can't be the one person Mabel relies on most forever. Someday that'll change."

Both Pacifica and Wendy were silent in thought.

"Hey! What are we talking about?!" said a rough and loud, yet feminine voice.

Both Pacifica and Wendy yelped. "Grenda!"

"So why the puzzle anyway?" Grenda said pointing at Stan's stone obelisk.

There were two others like it here. The far left one was for a servant. The middle one was for a queen. That was plainly written on their stones.

But the stone on the right was cryptic. On the front was a series of numbers.

0 -494 -38 -475 19 -38 361 152 266 171 361 -38 76 -57 437 342 779 665 1045 741 836 741 912 418 722 665 855 475 874 798
Above the numbers was a laurel wreath surrounding the word 'XIX'.

"It's so people can learn something about him. But only if they care enough to figure it out." Soos said.

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"...His spirit has traveled to the next plane. So we now offer his mortal remains to the ground with the respect and honor he deserved." Brad said.

Save for a few sniffles, everyone was silent as the casket was lowered and covered with soil.

"Grunkle Stan... you were nothing but a nuisance, and I'm glad to be rid of you." Mabel said.

"I'll miss you too, Grunkle Stan." Dipper said as he let Mabel cry on his shoulder.

Marco muttered "Whaaa…?" as his eyebrow shot up.

Wendy whispered to him, "It's something they would say to each other at the end of every summer when they had to go back home but knew they'd see each other again."

"I think it's sweet." Star said.

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"Okay, Bro! I'm circling the date on the calendar. One year." Mabel said.

"One year. Are you sure you still want me to go? Will you be lonely without me?"

"Don't worry about me. Besides, Grunkle Stan was right. You're a grown man. You need to do this for yourself. So would you get out of here already!" Mabel said smiling. "But before you go, Sincere Sibling Hug?"

Dipper smiled and gathered his sister into a hug.

"Pat, pat." they said together as they patted each other's back.

"Okay, here I go." he said as he opened a portal with the dimensional scissors.

"Dipper? I hope you find what you're looking for."

"Me too, Mabel. Me too."

After he was gone and the portal closed, Mabel performed a one-two punch combo in the air.

"Match made!"

==================================

He arrived outside. For security reasons, the Secret Library used a crystal that prevented dimensional travel.

He looked at the building that he would call home for the next year. He wondered why they had bars on the high windows. They seemed inaccessible and were too small for a person to fit through.

As he pulling his bags from the carriage he was approached by a woman.
"Mr Pines?"
"Yes. Hi."
"Hello Mr Pines. I've been expecting you."
"You can call me 'Dipper'."
"Alright, Dipper. But maybe you should use your legal name when you sign in."
"Okay."

The woman approached and put her arm around his shoulder. "So, are you ready for the apprenticeship?"

"Am I? This is so exciting! An actual secret library of the paranormal, magic, and multidimensional history."

"Uh-huh! All sorts of witchy stuff."

"I'm gonna learn it all!"

"Impossible to learn it all. There's too much for one lifetime. Much less one year."

"We'll just see about that."

"Well, don't chain yourself to the racks. You're here to contribute, not just learn."

"Maybe they could use copies of the journals?" Dipper said as they approached the entrance.

"Is that why you're carrying such a big backpack? Isn't it heavy?"

"It's not so bad. I'm used to it. Besides, I usually don't carry them all at once. By the way, do you have blank books? I'm ready to start another volume." Dipper said as the doors opened and they entered the building.

"I'm sure that can be arranged. But first, here's where you need to sign in." the woman said as she pointed out a book on a podium with a quill and an inkwell.

As Dipper opened the sign in log the pages seemed to flip by themselves until suddenly a small blue being appeared and floated above the book.

"Grrrrrreetings!"

"Whoa! You're a Book Elf!"

"Ooooh. Someone's been skipping ahead! Slow down kid, ya just got here. Allow me to introduce myself. I am Glossaryck of Terms. I'm the head librarian here. I see that you've already met the other apprentice, Janna."

Dipper looked at Janna. "Hey! I thought that you worked here!"

"Whatever gave you that idea?" Janna said feigning innocence.

Dipper grunted in mild annoyance.

"First thing you need to do is to sign in." Glossaryck said.
The pages of the log book flipped on their own to the open entry. Dipper took the quill, dipped it in the inkwell and filled in his name.

The book suddenly slammed shut.

"Goodbye! Security!"

Confused, Dipper shouted as guards approached. "What'd I do?!"

"I was told to expect a 'Dipper Pines' and you aren't him."

"No! I *am* Dipper Pines!" he pleaded.

"Well, Dipper, you didn't sign that in the log," Glossaryck said as he made the air quotes gesture.

"Dipper is just a nickname! I signed in with my real name because the log was an official document!"

"I wish I could just believe you."

Dipper tried to think of a way to prove who he was. His driver's license would do him no good since it also had his legal name.

"Wait! I can still prove I'm Dipper!"

He took off his hat and pushed his hair back from his forehead.

"See?! This is why I'm called Dipper!"

"Is that a bent scepter?"

"It's a pot! It's called the Big Dipper! It's a constellation from Earth!"

Glossaryck looked at Janna who shrugged but gave a subtle nod. He then gave a signal to the guards to hold off.

"You make a strong case, Mr Pines. But you gotta give me more than that."

He then just hovered silently making a 'gimme' gesture with one hand.

Dipper looked at him incredulously. "Are you asking for a bribe?"

"Money? I would never ask for something so crass."

"So what do you want?"

"Pudding." Glossaryck pointed at his mouth.

"Of course!" Dipper said relieved.

Dipper wondered why that was on the list of supplies. Now he knew. And he had one in his coat pocket.

Or he thought he did. His pocket was empty.

"Aw, man!"
"You know what, G? I'll cover him this time." Janna said as she produced a pudding cup from her bag.

"Oh, Janna! You always seem to have some handy when I want it most." Glossaryck said as he opened his mouth and allowed Janna to spoon feed him.

"Do... you two already know each other?"

"Uh-huh!" Glossaryck mumbled with a full mouth.

"Glossy here used to live in Queen Star's spellbook. She's a friend from high school."

"There'll be plenty of time for everyone to get to know each other later." Glossaryck said swallowing the last spoonful of pudding. "Right now, you two should move into your rooms. Your training starts tomorrow at dawn!"

With the pudding cup finished, Janna threw the empty plastic container into the wastebin next to the log's podium. She began to walk towards the residence hall while Glossaryck floated beside her.

"It's good to see you again, Janna! What's it been? Five years? Remember when you accidentally summoned Kroxta'ah, The Devourer of Skulls?"

"Yeah! That was a fun ski trip." Janna laughed.

As they left Dipper retrieved the empty pudding cup from the wastebin and looked at the label. Hirsch's. A brand only sold in Oregon.

Dipper narrowed his eyes. "I've got my eye on you, Janna." he said quietly to himself.

As if she heard him, Janna turned her head to wink at him.

Dipper opened one of his journals to the entry for Book Elves. At the bottom of the page he wrote a small note: 'Likes: Pudding'.

A staff tapped Dipper on the shoulder. He turned to see a diminutive monster wearing an animal's skull as a hat.

"Hey! Could you move it along? Some of us have places to be."

All the guests had arrived and were waiting for the guests of honor to return via dimensional portal.

"Hard to believe it's already been a year." Hope said.

A blade poked through the fabric of reality and cut a path between dimensions.

"They're coming!" Alfonzo shouted.

Jackie held two cocktails to offer them when they emerged. Mabel had remembered to make Dipper's drink weak.

Dipper emerged slightly ahead of Janna. Guests began to greet him, but he was reaching back into the portal and saying, "C'mon Janna. It'll be okay."
When he helped Janna through the portal, everyone at the party gasped in surprise then went silent.

"Well, this is somewhat unexpected!" said the wax head of Larry King.

Grenda took the drink meant for Janna and said, "Well, she's not gonna be needing this!" before taking a sip.

Candy took the drink meant for Dipper and added extra alcohol before handing the drink to Mabel.

"Here. You can use this."

Mabel looked like her brain had frozen and would need a moment to defrost. Her face was stuck in an open mouthed expression.

Soos chuckled. "Dude, you're in so much trouble."

Disbelief, questions, and congratulations then erupted from the guests.

Dipper and Janna still held each other's hand. With her free hand, Janna rubbed her swollen belly and smiled.

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Mabel managed to corner her brother alone.

"Dipper! What the heck, Bro?!"

"I know, Mabel. Isn't it wild?"

"Why didn't you tell me… anything?!"

"Well, when things first started between us, we decided to keep it low key. Then it got more serious and things happened. Then we got sent out on assignment. While we were interviewing a monster shaman she started throwing up. The monsters thought we were just being polite. By the time we got back to the library, we decided to just tell you and everyone in person."

"But…"

"Janna and I are getting married."

"What?!"

"No one else knows yet. I wanted to tell you first. Mabel, listen. I know this seems crazy. It *is* crazy. But I'm doing this."

"Are you marrying her because she's pregnant?"

"No! I love her. I'm marrying her because I want to."

"Okay, okay. Slowdown. Don't you feel like you're leaping in headfirst here?"

"I'm not gonna just dip my toes into the shallow end. This time I'm going to do this like you would. I'm cannonballing into the deep end."

Mabel was silent.

"I know this is a huge surprise. But I hope you can be happy for us."
"Janna! What happened?!" Jackie asked.

"Well, Jackie, when a man and a woman love each other very much, they do a special hug…"

"Stop joking around! Are you and him a thing?"

"Uh-huh! We were constantly working together, and getting to know each other. Growing closer. This was probably bound to happen."

"Do you love him?" Star asked.

Janna nodded and blushed. "I love him. I do. You know how you always said that being with Marco just felt right. I finally get it. This just feels right."

"Then I'm happy for you! Hug!" Star tried to give Janna a hug, but her belly made it awkward.

"You're already getting big!" Star exclaimed.

"Aren't you scared, Janna?" Jackie asked.

"Actually I'm terrified… but I'm also really happy."

"Then I'm happy for you too." Jackie said.

"Uh… Not that it matters now, but why didn't you use that spell I taught you a long time ago? It's practically foolproof and has no side effects… other than occasional synesthesia." Star asked.

"Sev'ral Timez tastes like mango salsa." Jackie said.

"I never got a chance to try it before you disappeared. After you came back, I had to find my notes from high school."

"And…?"

"I had such sloppy handwriting. My 'b's look like 'p's."

With a snort, they all started laughing.

"So Jackie, what about you and that guy you brought to the party?" Janna asked.

"He's her booy-friennd!" Star teased.

Jackie blushed. "He's renting a spare room from the Diazes. We met after you left. He actually already knows Dipper. C'mon, I want to introduce you."

"He's also my-" Star began before she was interrupted.

Ferguson poked his head into the conversation. "Hey, sorry! Janna, your baby-daddy is calling for you."

"Hang on, guys. Looks like I'm wanted."

Janna joined Dipper in front of the guests.

"Thanks everyone for coming to welcome us back! Since you're all here together, we have an
important announcement!" Dipper said.

"We're getting married!" Janna blurted out.

"Hey! We were supposed to say that together!"

"Sorry! I got excited!"

Amid the applause and cheering, they shared a kiss.

An overweight tattooed cherub at the back of the crowd shouted, "AW, YEAH! LOVE RULES!"

The party was ending and people were saying their goodbyes.

"My limo's here. So I better say goodbye. I'm like so happy for you, Dipper." Pacifica said as she gave him a hug.

"And you better take good care of him." she said to Janna.

"I will. I promise." Janna said as she drew Pacifica into a hug.

Pacifica was surprised but was alright with it. She just smiled and said goodbye.

"I'm riding with Pacifica to the airport, so I have to be going too. Bye, Dipper! Congratulations again!" Wendy gave him a hug.

"Thanks, Wendy."

Wendy then gave Janna a hug. "Hang on to him. He's a good one."

"I know." Janna said.

After they had gone, Dipper held out his hand to Janna who gave him Wendy's wallet, and the keys to Pacifica's luxury car.

"Really? Wendy can't get on the plane without her ID, and Pacifica's car is on the other side of the country."

Janna just shrugged and said, "Just practicing."

Dipper half smiled and ran out after them. "Pacifica! Wendy! You dropped these!"

Janna was alone with Mabel.

"I heard you wanted to talk to me alone." Janna said.

"You stole something else." Mabel said.

"No, I didn't."

"Yeah, you did. You stole Dipper."

"He said it was a mutual breakup. She even seemed to like me."

"No, not from her. From me."
"He thought you would be happy. He even thought you set us up."

"It's not that I'm not happy for him. Or for you. But I guess that I thought that this would be more of a gradual thing. You know, he'd come home telling me he met a girl. Then he'd spend more and more time with her. I'd tease him about falling in love and he'd be all embarrassed. And there would be the right time, you know, and I'd grill him about it. Then he'd talk about buying a ring and I'd help him. But we skipped all that. I know I shouldn't let this get to me, but this is such a big surprise."

"It didn't happen overnight. I'm sorry you didn't get to see it as it grew. But things happen when you're pushed into a closet with someone. For a year."

They smiled at each other.

"We've always been there for each other. Even when he was with his ex. But you two are getting married. You even have a baby on the way already. So you're his priority now. Just like that, things have changed."

"I know it's a big change for everyone. We agreed that we wanted to raise the baby here. So I'm moving here to be with him."

"You are?"

"Can you imagine Dipper wanting to live anywhere but here?"

"No. But what about you?"

"I went to highschool with a magical princess from another dimension. I think I can handle it."

Mabel laughed.

"He told me about how your family always looked out for each other. I'm not trying to take him from you. He's still your brother. I'm actually jealous of you. I was an only child."

"Well, I've never had a sister before."

"I should thank you. If Dipper and I had met here, I'm not sure we would have wound up together. I didn't take the apprenticeship to meet your brother. It was something I wanted for myself. Falling in love with him happened on its own. The time we spent together in Mewni was... just right."

They smiled at each other again.

"You know, I kind of understand. One of my closest friends started a relationship while I was gone. We had always been there for each other at the start... and the end. But this guy seems differ-Oooh!" Janna said as she touched her belly.

"What's wrong?"

"The baby's kicking. Wanna feel?"

"Really?"

"Yeah."

Mabel put her hand on Janna's belly.

"I felt something! Hi! I'm your Auntie Mabel!"
"With the authority vested in me as the eight and one halfth President of the United States, I now
pronounce you husband and wife."

The bride and groom looked over to Nessie.

"As a lawyer, I assure you that this is all perfectly legal."

"You may now kiss." said Quentin Trembley.

Cheers and applause accompanied their kiss.

"Introducing Mr and Mrs Pines!"

"It's this one, Marco." Star said as she knocked on the door.

"Come in."

They opened the door to see Dipper. He had a tired, but happy look on his unshaven face. He had
clearly slept in the chair.

Janna was sitting up in the bed. She was looking down at the bundle in her arms.

The newborn looked back up at Janna with unfocused eyes and let out a small yawn.

"Hi guys!" Star whispered loudly.

Marco placed the completely regular, non-magical flower arrangement on the table with the others
next to a stuffed multibear from Mabel.

"Star! Marco! Come see what we made!" Janna whispered back.

Star's face lit up at the sight. "So cute! You must love him so much!" she squealed.

"Oh, I do! I love him. He's my little man." Janna said as she wiped a tear away.

"Hi, little guy!" Marco said waving his hand trying to get the baby to look in his direction.

"Janna was a trooper. Seventeen hours in labor." Dipper said.

"Whoa! I can see why." Marco said reading the information card on the side of the hospital bassinet.
"Nine pounds, eight ounces."

"That's right. You're already so big and strong." Janna said to the cooing newborn.

"Um, Janna?" Star began.

"Yeah, Star?"

"Can I please hold him?"

"Sure, Star."

She sat beside Janna on the bed and carefully accepted the baby boy.
"Oh, my gosh, you're adorable." Star said.

Marco just looked on and smiled.

That night, laying in bed, Marco could sense a feeling of longing coming from Star.

"Hey. What's on your mind?" he whispered as he stroked her skin.

Star turned to face him. Even before she spoke, Marco knew what she was going to say. He felt it too.

They were happy. Happier than they had ever been. But seeing their friends with their growing family today made them feel something. And the feeling grew stronger with every passing moment.

"Marco?"

"Yes, Star?"

"It's time." she said softly.

"I know." he whispered

"I love you."

"And I love you."

epílogo continuará
The king entered the lair and waded through the waist deep debris. The creature was here, lurking. It was difficult to say who was the hunter and who was the hunted. But the king was ready. Facing this creature was the king’s duty.

"My king."

"Yes, my queen?"

"I must assign to you a very important royal task."

"Oh? What is this task?"

"A creature is about to wake and will soon make its return. Its presence will adversely affect the kingdom. You must face it. This is the king's duty."

"I see. Then I will rally the royal guard and deal with this monster immediately."

"No, my love. You must be the one to face it."

"I fully intended to lead the assault myself, my princess."

"No one else can help you in this task. You must face the creature alone."

"Very well, then! I have faced danger alone before! I alone shall defeat this danger as well!"

"It is not your task to vanquish it, my husband."
"It is not?"

The king's duty is to subdue the creature, not to destroy it."  

"I must tame this creature? I must say, this is a very unusual task."

This creature is different. Although it is aggressive and wild, it is not just a mindless beast. Behind its eyes lies the glimmer of thought."  

"My wife… How can you know this?"

The creature and creatures like it have appeared in the past. For generations, men of the royal family have been charged with this duty. And now the duty falls to you, my prince."  

"For generations you say? Why have I not heard of this before?"

"The king's duty is of paramount importance, but it is a secret task. A quest without glory. The only praise you will ever receive for it will be mine."  

"That is the only reward I desire, my dear. Where shall I locate this creature?"

"When it shows up, you'll find it in its lair. It's really close by."  

"Okay. But how will I know when it shows up?"

"Oh, believe me, you'll know."

The king plowed through the lightweight debris while searching for some hint of the creature's location. On the other side of the lair, he saw the piled material stir. The creature was there.  

The material shifted wherever the creature moved beneath it. It seemed to swim through the debris quickly. This was the creature's environment. The king was at a disadvantage, but he was determined to accomplish his royal task.  

The movement ceased. A moment later, the king was struck from behind. The attack was superficial, but he still felt its sting. He turned quickly but only caught a glimpse of the creature's tail end disappearing under the detritus. The king was surprised that it was able to get behind him unnoticed.  

It was now masking its movements underneath the debris, leaving no sign of its location. It was able to elude him easily. Its own coloration provided camouflage in the material. The creature was toying with him. It knew it had the upper hand.  

Stealth was not an option for him, for the creature could see heat. The king knew that he stood out in the lair like a bright beacon. To be on even footing he needed to draw the creature out into the open.
"Come out, come out, wherever you aaaare..." the king sang, trying to taunt the creature into revealing itself.

There was a heavy silence. Just for an instant the king lowered his guard. His hand dropped down into the debris.

Without warning, his arm was grabbed and he was quickly dragged beneath the material. Debris scattered and flew in the commotion. Disoriented, he tried to stand but his feet could not find the ground. His leg was grabbed next. The king reached out with his free hand and searched blindly for the creature's body. He was not strong enough to free himself from the creature's grip. His remaining arm and leg were soon captured by the creature's numerous grasping limbs. He was at its mercy.

The creature breached the surface of the material and easily hauled the helpless king out. Beating its wings, it flew briefly, carrying him to an area piled with debris. The creature pinned him on his back with his hands above his head. A sticky resin oozed from the creature. It hardened almost instantly, binding his arms against something rigid. He was now trapped. The creature loomed over him, staring down at his face as if it were gloating in victory.

The king, though captured, had not yet given up. "I am here for you." he said.

The creature seemed to grin. It's glowing eyes and white teeth stood out in contrast against the creature's dark skin. It salivated with hunger.

The king trembled when he felt the creature's tongue. Teeth scraped against his skin. The king fought against his restraints. He needed to break free.

The maw of the creature opened and engulfed him. It attempted to swallow him whole. The king struggled to remain calm. But his heart raced as he witnessed the creature feasting upon him. The feeling of being devoured drove him near madness.

He tried to maintain focus. If he could free himself quickly, he would still be able to fulfill his duty before the darkness took him.

But it was already too late. The creature gorging itself on his flesh was too much. He felt his strength fade as his life force spilled from him. His spirit was consumed by the creature. His essence drained, he felt as he had been taken to the afterlife.

With its feeding ended, the creature let him fall from its slavering jaws. The king was only barely aware. The darkness began to overcome him. It would have been so easy to accept its sweet embrace.

But his royal task was not complete. He could not give in to even a little death until his duty was done.

The creature moved and began to taste and bite his neck. It still hungered.

He summoned his remaining strength. He pulled and strained against the resin binding his limbs. He heard the crackle of his bonds beginning to weaken. The creature ceased gnawing his throat.

After another try, the hard, but brittle substance gave way. Bits of the resin fell from his wrists. He wrapped his arms around the creature's body and held firmly. He bit at its neck as payback.

The creature yelped in surprise. It grabbed at him with its many limbs. Nails raked across his back.

Soon, the man had the creature on its back in the scattered soft material. He knew that he wasn't
strong enough to overpower the creature. It was allowing this. He let go, sat up, and kneeled between its legs.

He paused to look at the creature. She was exotic and alluring. Dark purple skin glistened with a sheen of sweat. A pale lavender mane gathered on top of her head. Her translucent wings were folded behind her back. A pair of the creature's six arms lay at rest beside her head on either side.

Leaning over her, he reached out with both hands and intertwined their fingers. He was careful not to hurt her. While his hands held two of hers, a second pair of her hands traced the contours of his chest. Her fingers brushed his skin lightly. A third pair of her hands stroked the sides of his body. They grabbed and squeezed his backside. Her slender purple legs had wrapped themselves around his, and were pulling his body closer.

He watched as her bosom rose and fell with her breathing. The nipples on the peaks of her violet breasts were stiffened and the color of dark cherries. Looking further downwards he saw her slightly swollen belly. This was the reason the creature was agitated. The reason it was awakened.

The creature sought comfort and security. The man knew that she needed her mate. He brought his face close and looked into the creature's glowing heart shaped eyes. He rested his forehead against hers.

"I'm here for you, Star." he said in a low, soothing voice.

She needed him. The king's duty wasn't about him. This was all for her, his queen.

"Mar… co…" she spoke.

Though her ability to think clearly had been hampered, she still recognized him. He looked at his wife's face. Though some features were now fantastic and unusual, she was always beautiful to him.

The hearts on her cheeks were now the same enticing dark cherry color as her nipples. He felt a warmth when he thought of the connection. He briefly wondered if pheromones were affecting him.

Her moist lips glistened and tempted him. Making sure to keep his weight off her belly, he leaned down and kissed her. She responded eagerly. Her searching tongue darted into his mouth and intertwined with his. After a few moments he broke the kiss and moved from her lips to her face and neck. Slowly he made his way kissing and licking down her body. He was gentle with her tender breasts, lightly nibbling and suckling her nipples. He felt her body shiver from the sensations.

Her four free hands were caressing him and guiding him downward. As she touched his face, he placed light kisses on her hands and playfully nipped at her fingers. He released the two hands he was holding as he made his way down over her belly. He fondled her thighs and bottom. Her breathing grew more and more ragged the lower he traveled.

When he reached his destination, he looked up to her face, wordlessly asking for permission. A sexy smile was the answer he sought.

She gasped as he began. Her hands grasped at his head. Fingers tangled themselves in his dark hair and held his head there. A pair of her hands ran themselves over her body and massaged her flesh. She cupped her breasts and pinched her sensitive nipples. Her last pair of hands clutched at the scattered purple material surrounding them, desperately trying to find a handhold to brace herself. Sounds of passion escaped her lips.

He found her delicious. She was sweet like honey, and addicting like a drug. He kept up his gentle but steady stimulation. He savored her nectar as it flowed.
Very soon, her body began to shake. His arms wrapped around her thighs as her legs gripped his head, securing him. She cried out as the feelings crested and overcame her.

After the tremors of pleasure passed, her legs relaxed and released their hold. He slowly began to make his way back up her body. When they were face to face, he kissed her and shared her taste. She caressed his head and licked his lips greedily.

"Star, I- whoa!"

His words were interrupted when she suddenly rolled him onto his back and straddled him. A pair of her hands rested on his thighs and supported her weight as she sat up to display herself. With another pair of her hands she gripped his waist for control and began to grind herself against him. Her last pair of hands grabbed his. She pressed his palms against her breasts.

At first, he thought her pleasure would be enough, but he was wrong. She needed all of him.

He felt her heat and wetness. He saw the expression of need on her face. He desired her. His strength had returned. They were both ready.

She released his hands. Now free to roam, they travelled the curves of her body. He relished the feel of her warm and smooth skin.

Soon she changed position and lifted her body up slightly. With one of her lower hands, she reached down between them. She guided him as she slowly lowered herself. His hands found her hips. She bit her lip and held still when she reached the bottom.

The hot rush of sensations threatened to finish him quickly, but he pushed the feeling back down. He needed to last. He had to make sure she got the satisfaction she sought.

She groaned blissfully as she massaged her neck and ran her fingers through her lavender hair.

She started to move slowly, adjusting her position for the most pleasure. Her pace increased steadily and he began to move his hips to meet her motions.

Their bodies moved in rhythm. Grunts and moans of ecstasy filled the air. The look on her face was one of pure joy.

"YES!" She cried out.

This was not about duty. This is what they both desired. This joining. Being one with each other. Time and space had no meaning. This was their whole Universe.

He felt the pressure building and knew he wouldn't be able to hold back again. So he ran his hand up her thigh, slid his fingers between them, and rubbed her lightly.

Suddenly, her wings fluttered open and spread wide. They began to beat rapidly. She pulled him up and held him to her bosom. She wrapped all of her arms around him. He was powerless to resist her as he felt their bodies lifting. Her calves slipped under his thighs, holding his body to hers as they rose into the air together. She threw her head back and her mouth opened to silently scream in rapture.

He felt her as she peaked and followed her over the edge. His hands gripped her hips. He held on as she continued to ride him. He buried his face between her breasts and grunted with pleasure. His eyes squeezed shut as he hissed with his own release.
"Star!..."

More petal-like purple hearts showered from her skin. Blown by her wings, they swirled in the air around them.

They were in Heaven.

Eventually, she came down from her zenith. Her body relaxed as they landed together softly. He pulled himself up to a sitting position to support her in his lap. His arms slid around her back beneath her wings. Still panting heavily, she rested her head against his shoulder. They held each other quietly as their breathing steadied.

Her wings slowly folded down behind her as they shared a tender kiss. He reclined in their embrace back into the material covering their bed and she laid her head on his chest. The thick layer of delicate purple hearts was very soft and comfortable. The aroma was reminiscent of vanilla and jasmine. As they lay together, he stroked her tenderly, enjoying her body heat.

"I love you, Star." he whispered to her.

"... love… you..." she uttered faintly.

He smiled at her unexpected response and felt her body go limp as her breathing deepened.

He had fulfilled the king’s duty.

His wife was hidden inside this otherworldly form. Her more familiar self would re-emerge soon, but he wouldn't witness her transformation. He could no longer keep his eyes open and his consciousness slipped away.

The darkness had arrived. The little death, la petite mort, had come to claim them both.

==================================

He woke completely buried in purple hearts. They fell from him as he sat up slightly. The wondrous creature was gone. But in her place next to him was a beautiful fair skinned woman with long blonde hair. His wife. She was wearing a light blue silk robe. She smiled at him when she saw him wake.

"Hi Marco!" she sighed as she leaned over him. "Sooo good. Thank you." she said before she placed a loving kiss on his lips.

He noticed a fruity taste. "But, you did most of the work there at the end." he said with a grin.

She giggled happily as she rubbed her belly. "Is it getting a little weird?"

"It's getting a little wild. And it's pretty awesome."

"I'm glad. You know what? That's the second relapse in less than a week."

"Was it? I haven't been keeping track."

"The creature is going to show up more often as time goes on."

"Looking forward to it."

Star smiled and sighed contentedly. "You were born for the king's duty."
"Should it even be called the king's duty if I'm enjoying it? Why not call it the king's privilege? Or the king's sexy surprise treat?"

"Oh! So you enjoy letting a horny she-monster just use you for your hot bod, do you?"

"Use me? But, she said that she loved me! Now you're telling me she only wants me for her own gratification?" Marco said jokingly.

Star laughed. "Aw. I hope you don't feel cheap. She needs you. Imagine if she had to spend months stuck like that. She would have a hard time being the queen if she could barely think. She's lucky to have you. Not every king is so willing to fulfill this duty."

"If my queen needs me to face the creature again and offer my body to her as a sacrifice, then I will! For the good of the kingdom!" he said with exaggerated pride.

"My king is so brave!" Star giggled as she praised him.

"I admit that I was a little bit apprehensive that first time with the creature. But since your ancestors survived, I thought I might make it out alive too."

"Were you afraid that I was going to hurt you?"

"I wondered if maybe there was another royal magic line. The Mantis line." Marco bent his elbows and wrists simulating the insect's pose.


They laughed together and recalled the day a few months ago when Star first revealed the king's duty to Marco.

==================================

Star approached her husband in the throne room. He was going over notes from the last Gathering of Nobles.

"My King?"

Star liked to start conversations with him this way if it was an official royal matter.

Marco looked up and smiled. "Yes, my Queen?"

"Just a sec." she said holding up one finger. "Guards. I must speak with the King in private. Please wait outside the throne room."

The guards saluted sharply before departing the throne room in a swift but orderly manner.

Star could feel his curiosity through their heartbond. She concentrated to mask her true feelings for the surprise.

"I have a job for you Marco. A royal task."

"What is it, Star?"

"A creature is coming. When it gets here, it will make ruling Mewni kinda hard. Taking care of this creature is a job for the King. We call this task the King's Duty."
Marco’s face turned serious.

"Alright, Star. I’ll tell the Royal Guard to get ready."

"Not so fast there, Marco. This is *your* job.

"I wasn't gonna just send the Royal Guard. I was going to lead them."

"I know. But I what I mean is that no one else can help you. You have to take care of this by yourself."

"Oh. Okay. I've fought one-on-one before. I guess I'll have to fight this creature by myself too."

"This job isn't exactly a fight, Marco."

"It isn't?"

"How do I put this?... You just have to calm the creature down."

"Like, tame it? This sounds like a pretty weird job."

"This creature is special. It's not just an animal. It's wild and aggressive. But it can think. Kinda."

"How do you know all this, Star?"


"I think I got it, Star."

"Anyway, Marco, now I'm asking you."

"Okay. But, if this is a periodic problem, why is this the first I'm hearing about it?"

"We don't mention the king's duty until it's time. It's a really important job, but it's also kind of private. I'm the only one who'll ever thank you for doing it."

"Star, I'm not your king because I want to show off. I'm your king because I want to be with you."

Star smiled.

"So where do I find this mystery creature?"

"When it shows up, you'll find it in its lair. It's really close by."

"Okay. But how will I know when it shows up?"

"Oh, believe me, you'll know."

A 'pwip' sound was heard as a purple heart appeared on Star's face.

"Star?!"

"Marco. The creature… is me." Star said with a grin. "I'm about to start having Mewberty relapses."
"Oh, no! Are you going to be okay?! What do I do?! You're not about to go collecting boys again are you?! And why are you smiling?!

Star giggled as more hearts appeared on her face.

*p-pwip-pwip-pwip*

"Now, why would I care about boys when I already have a mmmaaaaann?" Star slurred the last word and the irises of her eyes turned into hearts. She blinked and they returned to normal.

*p-pwip-pwip-pwip-p-p-pwip*

"I'll take care of you, Star. I promise. You'll be okay. I'll do anything to help you. It will all be okay. I'm here for you. But… why is this happening?!

Star reached for Marco's hand. Her whole arm turned purple when she touched him.

*p-p-p-p-p-p-p-p-p-p-p-p-p-p-p-pwip*

"Because..." She grabbed his hand and pressed it lightly against her belly. "...Magic."

She stopped masking her happiness and let Marco share in it. Purple hearts sprinkled from her skin. She caught a few in her other hand and threw them into the air like confetti.

"Congratulations, Marco." she said as she smiled. "It's a girl."

"Star..." Tears formed in Marco's eyes as a smile spread over his face. He wrapped her in his arms.

She tilted her head to accept his kiss. Happiness and love radiated between them. It filled their soul. Purple hearts sprang from her skin.

When their kiss ended, Star's face around her mouth was covered in purple hearts. She looked like she had been in a pie eating contest.

They both laughed.

"How do you know we're having a girl?"

"I can already feel her royal magic. Our baby is the next Butterfly heir." Star said as she squeezed him in their embrace. A small pile of delicate purple hearts was beginning to form around their feet.

Marco squeezed her back. "Oops!" he said before he loosened his arms.

"Don't worry, Marco. We're not that fragile." she said as she traced star patterns on his chest with her finger. Purple hearts sprang from her fingertip where it touched him.

"And now, because of the royal magic flooding my body, the creature is waking up. And that's where you come in, my king."

Marco's eyebrows rose.

"The creature... it has certain needs, you see. It needs to be soothed and calmed. It needs to be tamed. It needs the comfort of its mate. It needs love."

A look of realization formed on Marco's face.
"Star..."

"Please, Marco... I need you." she said huskily.

A drop of sweat appeared on his brow. He looked like he was about to explode. He managed a smile and a nod.

*pwip*

After she gave him a less than subtle grope, Star pulled away with a sultry laugh. The tip of her tongue wet her lips as her eyes darted up and down over his body.

*pwip-pwip-pwip-pwip-p-p-pwip*

Her voice took on a tone that was regal and at the same time seductive. "Oh, my. It appears that the creature will arrive sooner than expected, my king. Therefore, as Queen of Mewni, I hereby command you to find the creature in its lair in about ten minutes."

Star turned to leave the throne room but then paused to look back at Marco over her shoulder.

"Don't wear anything... complicated." she said with a lecherous grin.

After Star had departed, Marco took a moment to collect himself. They were having a baby girl. His heart was still leaping for joy. He was going to be a father.

But for now, he only had a moment to reflect on this. He had urgent orders from the Queen. And it was his duty and pleasure to serve.

==================================

It was very quiet as Marco approached the doors to the royal quarters. He wondered what awaited him in the creature's lair.

He opened the door to find the inside of the room covered in deep piles of purple hearts and vines. They spilled out of the entrance like he had opened the door after a snowstorm.

"It's only been ten minutes!" Marco thought to himself as he waded into the room. He now realized that the first time the creature emerged was only a preview.

Despite the piles of material, he managed to close and lock the door.

There was a cocoon in the room. It had already opened and was empty.

He ventured further into the room. "Star? Where are you, Star?"

The creature stood and emerged from beneath the debris. The royal metamorphosis was already complete. Purple hearts fell like flower petals from her naked body. The winged creature looked silently at Marco with glowing heart shaped eyes.

A smile appeared on her face.

"Mmaarr-cooo."

In the blink of an eye, the creature had pounced upon him. Together they fell into the fluffy piles of purple hearts.
Marco just realized that he should have undressed beforehand. He would have to apologize to the royal tailor later. His ripped clothing might be beyond repair.

"It's only been a few months. And the creature is only going to get needier. Think you can keep her tamed for a few months more?"

"I have to be honest. After the baby gets here, I'm gonna kinda miss being the creature's royal booty call."

"Well, she might not still have purple skin or four extra arms, but that wild sex beastess will always want you." Star said as she caressed Marco's chest. Her hand drifted down past his abdomen until it found what it sought.

Marco groaned with pleasure. Then his stomach growled loudly.

"But first, you need to eat. The creature is still lurking just beneath the surface and could return at any moment. You'll need your strength."

"Oh, I've got plenty of energy."

"Uh-huh. That's why you passed out afterwards."

"I seem to recall putting you to sleep too."

"It was late."

"It was the middle of the day."

They laughed together.

"I had some food brought for the both of us before you woke up, but I was sooo hungry! I ate it all. Sorry." She pursed her lips and did her best to look apologetic. Only breadcrumbs and a few berries remained on a nearby plate.

He smiled as he looked at her and reached a hand out to caress her belly. "That's okay. You're eating for more than just yourself."

She smiled. "I'll have some more food delivered. I'll cover you in a pile again so the servants don't get a show."

He laughed. "Well, I appreciate that. But there's no rush." he said as his hand found its way inside her silk robe to touch her bare skin.

She closed her eyes.

"This is everything I want..." he continued as he moved his hand down between her legs.

Her smile grew as she enjoyed the contact.

"...to eat." he finished as his fingertip slid across her for an instant.

She squealed in delighted surprise, then grabbed a berry from the plate and scooted away giggling.

She loosened the tie on her silk robe and let it fall open. Leaning back and posing herself for him she
said, "Well, my king..." as she traced berry juice across her body in sensitive spots before letting the tiny fruit rest on her navel. "...bon appétit."

He smiled. She remembered her French.

Looking at him through half lidded, seductive, blue eyes, she curled her finger to beckon him to her. He started to creep towards her like a hunter stalking his prey.

They both laughed when a tiny purple heart appeared on her forehead with an audible 'pwip!'

The arrival of the Butterfly princess was heralded by a cry and a falling star.

"She's here, Star. You did it. She's beautiful."

"Marco... Please let me see her. I need to hold her." Star said exhausted.

Marco sniffled as he placed his daughter into his wife's arms

Star looked down at the tiny person in her arms. This miracle that was theirs.

"Hello little one. I'm your mommy and I love you." Star said as she began to weep for joy.

Marco smiled and kissed Star on her forehead.

Author's Notes: There it is. I hope it wasn't too cringey. Did the story need this level of smut? No, of course not. I could have gotten away with the flashback of Star revealing her pregnancy to Marco. But I wanted to dip my toes into the smut wading pool.

I have no plans to write any further descriptive erotica such as this. I feel like I accomplished what I set out to do for this chapter. I wanted to write a sex scene where you cannot simply switch out the characters. This scene and setup simply won't work without Marco and Star.

The next chapter is turning out to be quite long. A little bit more characterization.

Not much else to say here, but I hope you enjoyed the smut.
Epilogue 7: Choice

Author's Notes: AWW YEAH! SVTFOE SEASON 2 STARTS JULY 11, 2016! GET HYPE!
Comments and constructive criticism are always welcomed.

==================================
Starfall by GolfAlphaMike
Epilogue 7: Choice
==================================

He woke up and reached out for her only to find empty air. He sat up in the bed and looked over to her side. She wasn't there.

Awake for only ten seconds and he already missed her.

It was still early, so he laid back down to wait for her to come back to bed. He let his thoughts wander and reminisced about the path his life had taken to her.

==================================
"Sister? We need to talk. I'm turning down Lady Laraline's proposal of marriage."
"Another one, Kevin? What was the issue this time?"
"She was a shallow and transparent opportunist. She had eyes only for my royal title."
"You have courted women using your royal title before!"
"For casual company! Not for a serious relationship!"
"Our kingdom needs an heir! This was our agreement! I accept the burden of the crown until an heir is ready! Your heir!"
"Did you really want me to marry a parasite like her?!"
"I would like to turn the kingdom over to an adult! At this rate, I will be an old woman before an heir is ready!"
"You could always get married yourself, Skye!"

She shot her brother a hard look.

"What? Everyone needs to sacrifice for the kingdom." Kevin said smiling.

Skye humphed.

"How are things with your royal companion?" Kevin asked.

"Very well, actually. Her sister will be coming for a visit soon. Ishtar framed her for a crime in order to secure Mimi's service. She is actually a lovely person. She might have made a good match for you. It is a shame that she is not a noble."
"Neither is Mimi."

"It is of little consequence since we can not marry."

"I've been told that in some regions of Earth, it's allowed for those of the same gender to marry." Kevin told her.

"Interesting."

"This is a good time to tell you that I've decided to leave this dimension for Earth for a while. I've done research and already made preparations." Kevin said.

"Are you planning to marry someone of the same gender? I had no idea." Skye joked.

"Haha. You're a funny queen."

She smiled.

"Did you know that I made the list of the 100 most eligible bachelors in MMM?"

"Well, Mewni Monarchy Magazine is not exactly known for quality journalism."

"The point being!... I'm known here. But on Earth I wouldn't be. My royal title wouldn't factor into any Earth woman's feelings."

"This seems a rather extreme response to a tabloid."

"Do you think I should approach this like father did?"

Skye laughed. "Please, Kevin. As if you would find another woman as selfless as mother."

"Which one?" Kevin asked.

"Either."

=================================================================

"You suuuure you don't want to stay here Prince Kevin? My brother's room is available while he's in Mewni." Mabel said with hearts in her eyes.

"I appreciate the offer, Mabel, but I must politely decline. Any dimensional travellers must pass through Gravity Falls and I'm trying to be discreet."

"So where will you go?" Soos asked.

=================================================================

"Thank you for your help. I'm sure we'll meet again soon."

"Take care, Prince Kevin." Mabel said.

"So long, Kevin Dude." Soos said.

Kevin smiled and waved as he boarded the bus.

As the bus departed, he looked out the window at Mabel.
"It's too bad. She's cute." he thought to himself.

He had asked her to just call him 'Kevin' a few times. But Mabel just couldn't avoid including his title. He wondered whether or not she would be so interested if she didn't already know he was royalty.

"Oh, well. I knew this wouldn't be so simple."

=================================================================

"This will be your room, Kevin. This was Marco's old bedroom."

"Thank you, Mrs Diaz."

"Please, call me Angie."

"Are you sure that it's alright? My cousin still calls you Mrs Diaz."

"I've been trying to get her to call me Angie since she came back into our lives. But 'Mrs Diaz' is too ingrained. So I'm starting early with you."

"And here are your bags," Rafael said.

"Thank you. You didn't have to do that for me."

"It was no trouble! You brought only a few things."

"Yes. I'm immersing myself in Earth life. No one should know I'm royalty. Which means no royal comforts. Not even money. Which also means that I need to find a job to pay rent."

"Oh, Kevin! We are family! You don't need to pay rent."

"Oh, but I insist. Besides, a job will force me to go out and meet people. It's part of my whole Earth-style living plan."

=================================================================

"Kevin! Order up!"

Kevin retrieved the plates of food from the window and brought them to the customer's table. He had gained a new appreciation for the castle servants back home. Especially during banquets. This job can be strenuous.

Another server, Erica, approached and quickly said, "Hey Kevin my boyfriend is here I need to go on my break can you watch my section? 'Kay thanks bye!"

Before Kevin could protest or agree she was gone.

He groaned in annoyance and approached a table with three women seated at it.

"Hello. Welcome. I'm Kevin. I'll be your server today. Can I start anyone with a bevera…?"

Kevin looked at the women seated at the table. It was the blonde that caught his attention.

"Mimi?! What are you doing here?!"

The woman looked confused.
"Who?" she asked.

Kevin could not find even a trace of recognition. Impossible, even for a mimic.

It wasn't Mimi.

He looked more closely. She looked exactly like his sister's royal companion. Well, not exactly. This woman seated in front of him appeared a bit older.

"Hey, you okay?" asked one of the brunettes at the table.

"Huh? Oh, sorry! It's just that your friend looks exactly like one of my sister's friends. What are your names?"

"I'm Leah. This is Hope…"

"Hello." Hope said with a smile.

"...And this is Jackie."

"Hey." Jackie said.

"Hi." Kevin said.

==================================

"Hey, Kevin. Those girls in my section were talking about you. The blonde one thinks you were hitting on her." Erica said.

"No, no. It was just a misunderstanding."

"Really? 'You look like my sister's friend' sure sounds like a pickup line." a voice sounded from behind Kevin.

He turned around to see Mimi, er... Jackie there. She slipped a piece of paper into his hand.

"You're cute. Call me."

==================================

Kevin stood in front of the house phone and dialed.

It rang briefly before a voice picked up.

"Hello?"

"Uh, hi, Jackie. This is Kevin. From the restaurant. Yesterday."

"Oh, hi! Um... Why are you calling from the Diaz's?"

She knows the Diazes.

"I just recently moved into town. I'm renting a room from them. How do you know them?"

"I went to highschool with their son and daughter-in-law. They're friends of mine."

Oh, dung. It all makes sense now. Star and Marco know Jackie. That's why Mimi and Jackie look
Kevin mentally berated himself for allowing such an obvious conclusion to escape him.

"So how do you know the Diazes?" Jackie asked.

Kevin knew he was treading on dangerously thin ice. If Jackie found out that he was Star's cousin, his non-royalty cover would be blown.

"I..." Kevin looked at the wall of pictures. "...I'm an old exchange student of theirs."

"Really? I thought I knew all of them from when they came to school."

"...It was during a summer. Has Marco never mentioned me? That scamp."

"Well, I'm glad you called. Do you have any plans tonight?"

Kevin's brain advised him, "Say you're busy say you're busy say you're busy say you're busy say you're busy..."

"I'm free."

"D'oh!" went his brain.

Kevin fidgeted nervously while he waited.

"No need to feel weird just because she looks like the queen's royal companion." he told himself.

He took a deep breath.

"She looks like your sister's lesbian lover." his brain teased.

A hand touched his shoulder.

"Kevin?"

He turned to find Jackie there. She had dressed up and looked very attractive.

"Hey. Did you wait long?" she asked.

"Hi, Jackie. No. Not too long at all." he stammered.

"Oh, no! She's hot!" his brain shouted.

"I have a sister. But she was older and had more responsibilities. What about you?"

"I'm an only child. I just had close friends. I even went away to college with one."

"I didn't go to a proper school."

"I find that hard to believe."

"Well, my sister and I had private tutors. But that's not the same as going to school."
"Until you stayed with the Diazes."

"I've led a rather sheltered life."

"Is that why you left home?"

"I wanted to make new friends."

"Where are you from?"

"...France."

"Fantastique! Je veux améliorer mon niveau de français!"

"...But we moved to Iowa when I was very young. Yup. Iowa. The land of corn."

"I thought it was 'The Hawkeye State'?"

Kevin prayed that she had never visited Des Moines.

Kevin walked Jackie home.

"Is this your house?" he asked.

"It's my parent's house. I used to share an apartment with a friend, but she had to leave for a once in a lifetime opportunity."

"This is actually rather close to the Diazes."

"Which would make it convenient if you wanted to see me again." Jackie said.

Kevin smiled.

"I had a nice time tonight."

"I did too."

"Good night."

"Good night."

"Your parents seemed very nice when they answered the door." Kevin said.

"Thanks. You haven't mentioned your parents."

"My father… he was big in politics back home."

"Is that why you and your sister were home schooled?"

"That, and there were no good schools there."

"What about your mother?"
"My mother passed away when I was three."

"Oh. How sad."

"My father never remarried, but has a long time girlfriend. She does her best to be like a mother to me."

"And your sister?"

"It took a while for my sister to warm up to her."

=================================================================

"Hey Kevin what are you doing tomorrow night?" Erica asked.

"I have a date. Why?"

"With that Jenny girl you met here?"

"Jackie. Yes, actually."

"She your girlfriend?"

"I… I'm not sure. We've been seeing a lot of each other. But I'm not sure."

"So that's a no then?"

"...I guess… not."

"So it would be okay if you took me out sometime!"

"Don't you have a boyfriend, Erica?"

"Oh I stopped seeing him Tuesday."

"It's only Thursday."

"The point is that I'm free to date who I want just like you. Just like Jenny."

=================================================================

"Jackie? We've been seeing each other for a little while now."

"Uh-huh." She said as she held his hand as they walked to her door.

"I need to ask you something."

"Sure, Kevin."

"Are you seeing anyone else? I'm not trying to be possessive, but I just need to ask."

"What? No. Have I done something to make you think that?"

"No. I'm asking because something happened recently. I was asked out on a date by someone at work."

"Do you want to go out with this someone?"
Kevin shook his head. "I turned her down, for a number of reasons. But mainly because I don't want to date anyone but you."

Then he looked Jackie in the eyes. "But I can't just assume that's what you want."

She locked eyes with his. "Well, that is what I want."

Kevin smiled.

"You're way too gentlemanly. Looks like I need to take the lead here." Jackie said.

She stood close, reached up, and pulled his face to hers.

Their lips met.

Time seemed to stop.

"Good night, Kevin." she said with a giggle.

Still stunned by the experience, he just said, "...Good night, Jackie."

She smiled as she closed the door.

"Are you alright?" Mr Diaz asked upon finding Kevin sitting in the living room looking very anxious.

"Oh, Rafael. I think I may have messed up quite royally."

"What is the matter?"

"I didn't think my plan all the way through."

"What is there to think through? Just vive la Tierra vida."

"I didn't tell you or Angie this, but I actually came here because I was looking for love."

"¿Amor? Why did you not tell us? We know the perfect girl for you! Jackie Lynn Thomas! She is Marco and Star's amiga! I am sure they would introduce… Kevin?"

Kevin held his face in his hands.

They were on the beach and Jackie was teaching Kevin how to surf.

"Now do a push up on the board like this." Jackie said as she demonstrated.

Kevin watched and copied her.

"You're still learning so I'll show you the easier but slower way. Bring your knee forward and put your foot between your hands."

"Like this?"

"Good. Now stand up. Keep your knees bent."
Kevin repeated the steps a few times.

"You're a fast learner. I think it's time for us to get wet."

"Do you think I'm ready?"

="This is nice. Us just sitting out here on the water like this." Jackie said sitting atop her board.

"You're very at ease out here. Almost like this is your natural habitat." Kevin said.

"I've been accused of being a mermaid. Thanks for sharing this with me."

"Thanks for teaching me."

Jackie smiled and leaned in to give him a kiss.

"And this wave's yours! Paddle!" Jackie shouted laughing.

Kevin almost stood up before he was flipped upside down.

"Woooh!" Jackie cheered as he surfaced.

Kevin just laughed.

="Mr and Mrs Diaz?" Star said as she entered the front door with Marco.

"Hello? Mom? Dad? We just wanted to make a surprise visit!"

Kevin popped up and looked at them over the back of the sofa. He looked disheveled.

"Hey! Kevin! So how's living-"

"Marco! Hi! Living with your parents has been just as good as I remember!"

Marco looked confused.

"Hi, Kevin! I-"

"And you must be Star! Marco's parents told me he got married! Come here! Let me give you a proper hello!"

Kevin quickly came from around the couch and wrapped Marco and Star in a hug.

"Please just play along. I'll explain later." he whispered.

There was an awkward pause.

"...It's so... nice to meet you... Kevin, was it?" Star patted his back as she acted.

Slowly Jackie rose into view from lying on the sofa while adjusting her shirt.

"Hi, guys." she said sheepishly while blushing.
"Whoa, Jackie!" Star exclaimed.

"Jackie? What are you?… So, I see you've met Kevin." Marco said.

"We've met, yeah."

"Your parents aren't here. They went on an overnight trip for an art festival." Kevin said.

"Marco, I thought the exchange students that stayed with your family all went to our school. I didn't know one stayed during the summer." Jackie said.

"...Yeah. That was before we started really hanging out. Did I not tell you about Kevin? My bad."

"Where's his picture on the wall?" Jackie asked.

"Fire!" Star shouted. "Uh, yeah. There was a fire that burned his picture. That was my fault."

Kevin came back from walking Jackie home to find the sofa turned around to face the front door. Star and Marco were sitting with their arms crossed. Kevin felt like a child that had been caught misbehaving.

"Hi, gu-"

"Why doesn't she know you're my cousin? Or from Mewni? Or even a prince?" Star asked.

"Is it because you think she'll only want to be with you because you're royalty?" Marco asked.

"I'm afraid that she will want to be with me because of it, and at the same time I'm afraid that she won't want to be with me because of it."

"You messed up. Your title wouldn't have mattered to her." Star said.

"How do you see this playing out? We can't keep lying to her too. She's going to find out the truth eventually. It would be best if she heard it from you." Marco said.

"Is this just a game for you? Jackie's our friend. We don't want to see her get hurt again." Star said.

"No, Star. I really care about her. I don't want to hurt her."

"Then you need to tell her the truth. And the sooner the better." Marco said.

"Yeah! And before you-" Star leapt off the sofa onto her feet.

"Were you doing it with her?!" she said accusingly while pointing to the sofa.

Marco jumped to his feet.

"No! We haven't gotten to that point in our relationship. That's why I took her home. We never spend the night together. You just interrupted us kissing… vigorously."

"Don't even think about third base until she knows the truth! You should still be on first!"

"I know. But she gave me the signal to steal second."
"That was a wonderful dinner Mrs Thomas."

"Thank you, Kevin."

"Jackie tells us that you're managing the restaurant now." Jackie's father said.

"Yes, sir. It was a bit of a surprise. The previous manager quit suddenly."

"Is that what you want to do for a living?"

"As a career? No, sir. The restaurant is a job. I took it so that I could live here."

"What would you want to do as a career?"

"Dad. You're interrogating him."

"It's alright, Jackie."

"Yes, I just want to know if Kevin has ambition. Not like that Blake fella."

"DAD!"

"Hush, dear. She was young when they dated." said Jackie's mother. She then turned to Kevin. "If you and Jackie get married, where would you want to live? Here or Iowa?"

"OH MY GOSH! MOM!"

At the end of the evening, Jackie and Kevin were outside sitting on the front porch swing together. "I can't believe my mom listed all the guys I ever brought home to meet them. I wanted to die of embarrassment." Jackie complained.

"You don't have to be embarrassed. Everyone has a history."

"Not everyone. Marco didn't. Star was his first girlfriend. Even Star had a boyfriend before him."

"Did that ever seem bother him?"

"Yes and no. There was a whole ugly thing involving her ex."

Jackie seemed to change the subject.

"Have you ever been engaged, Kevin?"

"I turned down a few proposals because the marriage wouldn't have been about love."

"A few?"

"Does that bother you, Jackie?"

"No. I turned down someone too."

"Why?"
"Because being seen with me was more important than being with me. I was a trophy to him. He wasn't the first guy to make me feel that way. Seems like a lot of people think I'm just a pretty thing and not much else."

"That's appalling. You're a person and not just an object for others to covet. You love the outdoors and animals. You like ham but hate bacon. You speak French. You enjoy sports that involve a board. You're outgoing and intelligent. You're thoughtful of others. You're-"

Kevin stopped when he saw that Jackie was beginning to blush.

"If all they cared about is what you looked like, then they're all fools. You're more than just beautiful to me. But I can only ask you to believe that."

"I believe you." She said as she held his hand.

She believed him. The moment the words left her lips, he felt an enormous pang of guilt. Even though he was telling her the truth about how he feels now, she shouldn't believe anything he says. He was a liar.

Jackie looked into his face to see a look of sadness and regret. "What's wrong?"

Kevin looked away. "I need to tell you something, and it's going to change the way you feel about me. But you deserve to know the truth."

Jackie waited for him to continue.

"I... I'm a prince."

"You are? Why would you hide that?"

"Because that title is the first thing people see about me. Usually it's the only thing they see. The only thing they care about."

"Well, that doesn't matter to me."

"There's more... I'm Star's cousin. I'm not from this dimension."

"You're *that* Kevin? But you can't be Star's cousin. You don't look anything like her"

"No. That's a lie too. Probably the biggest lie of them all. But I'll tell you everything, Jackie. The whole truth."

Kevin took a deep breath. He had to do this.

"Jackie. What I'm about to tell you is known by only a few people. My kingdom has long been told that Daisy, Star's grandaunt, is my mother. But that's not the truth..."

==================================

"...This is probably Xix's most closely guarded secret. And now you know it too."

Jackie said nothing.

"I'm sorry, Jackie. I understand if you hate me now."

Jackie was quiet for a long while.
Kevin stood up and said, "I will leave Earth tonight. You will never have to see me again. Goodbye, Jackie."

Jackie reached out for his hand and looked up at him from the swing. Her expression wasn't one of anger. Instead she had a look of concern.

"Please, don't go."

She stood and wrapped her arms around him. He returned her embrace.

"I'm sorry I lied to you. I don't deserve to be with you."

"You've been forced to live a lie your entire life."

"What do you mean?"

"Would you be a prince if your kingdom knew who your mother really was?"

"No. The law says that my sister and I are illegitimate. Bastards. We would be exiled along with our birth mother."

"You aren't just afraid that someone would want you only because of your title. You're also afraid that no one would want you without it."

The truth of her words hit him like a battering ram. Tears began to form in his eyes.

She looked him in the eyes and said, "This doesn't change my feelings. But it's up to you to believe me when I tell you that... I love you, Kevin."

"I love you too, Jackie."

=====================================================

"We wanted to tell you sooner, but Kevin dug the hole. He needed to be the one to fill it back in." Marco said.

"We were gonna tell you if he took too long." Star said.

Jackie humphed pretending to be offended but held Kevin's hand and smiled.

=====================================================

"Thanks everyone for coming to welcome us back! Since you're all here together, we have an important announcement!" Dipper said.

"We're getting married!" Janna blurted out.

"Hey! We were supposed to say that together!"

"Sorry! I got excited!"

Among the applause and cheering, they shared a kiss.

An overweight tattooed cherub at the back of the crowd shouted, "AW, YEAH! LOVE RULES!"

=====================================================
"Hey." Kevin said as he wrapped his arm around Jackie's waist.

"Hi." Jackie said in response.

"What's wrong? You sound sad."

"Janna found someone who loves her. Just like me."

"That doesn't sound like something to be sad about."

"It's not. I'm so happy for her."

"Buuut?..." Kevin prompted.

"But we both started down these new paths without each other. Before I met you, I thought Janna was going to come home after a year and ask to move in with each other and we would carry on like we always did. But before she left, she wasn't really happy. She had a job she hated and a few failed relationships. Why would she want to come back to that? Now she doesn't have to."

"She found a guy who loves her for who she is. She's probably got all kinds of witchy things she learned. She's getting married. She's going to be a mom. She's moving here to Oregon."

"And you feel like you're going to grow apart."

Jackie nodded.

Kevin said, "I think she probably feels the same way. The life Janna left behind a year ago wasn't still waiting for her whether she wanted to move back or not. You two were close. I met you while she was gone. A new boyfriend was always the sort of news you shared."

"But you've done this before. You let someone go because it was for the better. I know you're sad now, but in time you'll feel good about this too."

"What do you mean?"

"I know about the triangle that existed between Star, Marco, and you."

Jackie laughed.

"Not exactly something I was going to tell my boyfriend."

Kevin laughed.

"You did more than just take a step back. Even though you still had feelings for him, you helped them when they needed help. You can't deny that they're happier for it."

"All of us are. Marco, Star, … me. But, it's times like this that I'm jealous."

Jackie suddenly looked apologetic. "I'm sorry! I didn't mean that you… I…"

"It's okay, Jackie. I know what you meant. They married their best friends. They never have to let go. Not even a little."

Jackie looked towards Dipper and Janna.

"She seems so happy. She always had a soft spot for the bookish type."
"My mother always believed that some people were destined to meet for a purpose greater than themselves."

"I wish I could have met your mother."

Kevin smiled.

"By the way, Jackie? Who is Akeem?"

"I don't know an Akeem."

"Janna called me that for some reason."

==============================================================

"Nana Gem? Father? We're here."

"Kevin! You're back. It's been too long." said Gem as she embraced him.

"And who is this lovely creature who looks like but is clearly not my daughter's royal companion?"

Brad asked.

"I wanted you both to meet my girlfriend, Jackie Lynn Thomas from Earth."

==============================================================

Kevin helped Jackie with her mount.

"Are you all set, Jackie?" Nana Gem asked.

"I think so. My family used to take me riding when I was young. This feels familiar. We'll see you tonight!"

Jackie kicked her mount and headed off.

"Yeehaw!"

"You had best pursue her." Brad said to Kevin.

He climbed atop his mount and chased after her.

==============================================================

"It had been ten years since they were together. No calls. No letters. None could be risked. But they still loved each other."

Jackie held Kevin's arm and leaned on him as they sat on the blanket beside his mother's grave.

"'Lay me to rest where I met him.' That was her last request. Her way of saying that even until her last day she longed to be with him. Before he passed away he told his family his wish to be laid to rest next to her. I wonder if he knew his time was short."

"Does it bother you that your parents had a marriage of convenience?"

"My parents were proof that men and women can be friends without romantic feelings arising. No one ever saw that kind of affection between them. As I grew older I began to understand that their hearts lay elsewhere. This is sadly all too common among the nobility."
Jackie was silent.

"It's very pretty here." she said.

They both looked around. The area was covered in colorful flowers all the way up to the edge of the road.

"This only happened recently. They're considered a blessing. They're royal flowers."

Jackie looked at them and smiled. "They sound like the color blue."

"But, these flowers aren't blue. How can something sound like a color anyway?" Kevin wondered. He only heard the breeze and the songs of a few jayhawks.

One landed on top of the newest marker.

"Has anyone else solved the puzzle?" Jackie asked.

"Not yet. But his marker hasn't been here very long and this is a detour from the main road. Not very many travellers pass by here. Also, these are servant's markers. It's difficult to tell that these graves are significant from the road."

Kevin suddenly realized something.

"Wait a minute… did you just say 'anyone *else*'?"

"Uh-huh." Jackie said smiling while indicating a notebook page filled with pencil scratches. The bottom of the page was folded over hiding the writing there.

"How'd you do that?"

"I saw that all of the numbers were divisible by 19 and make a plus and minus pattern. Once you get the quotients, then the difference between all adjacent numbers is 26 or less. That's a simple number to letter code."

"I got that far too. But I couldn't figure out the rest."

"The next step of the solution uses the number 19 again. It's printed on the stone." Jackie said pointing to the word 'XIX' surrounded by laurel wreaths.

"But that's not a number. It's the name of my kingdom."

"An old Earth civilization, the Romans, wrote their numbers that way. Also, the laurel wreath was worn by the Roman ruler. The Caesar."

"A caesar cipher just shifts the letters by a number of places. And we already used the number 19 as part of the solution. That can't be a coincidence."

"But it's still gibberish."

"The last step is the hardest. It's coded using a keyword."

"But how did you know the key?"

"Oh, Kevin. If you can't find the key here, you haven't been paying attention to your own story."
Kevin looked around him and smiled. He whispered something into Jackie's ear.

She giggled and said, "That's right."

Jackie unfolded the bottom of the paper and showed him the solution.

"I am very impressed. How did you learn to do that?"

"I used to pass coded messages in class with Janna when we were kids. She always used the name of her crush as the key."

"What did you use for your key?"

"It doesn't matter. You're my only key now."

==================================

One moment they were casually riding back to the farmhouse, and the next moment Kevin was in hot pursuit.

Jackie cried out for him as her mount left the road and raced into the woods.

He wasn't sure why her mount bolted, but it mattered little. It was nearing dark. It would be bad if he lost her. He drove his mount hard to catch up.

After a few minutes of chasing her, he managed to grab the reins of Jackie's mount and brought it to a stop in a meadow. His heart was racing as he dismounted and helped Jackie down from her mount.

"Are you alright, Jackie?!" he said as he held her against him.

She nodded as she squeezed him in return. "I'm okay. But that was scary. Can we stop here for a little while?"

"Of course."

Kevin took their mounts and tied them to a tree some distance away.

"It's a little chilly. Can you bring the blanket?"

It was actually a very warm evening.

==================================

They lay facing each other sharing tender kisses. She used his arm as a pillow as he stroked her curves with his other hand.

They needed to catch their breath.

After a while he looked down at his chest.

"What are you doing?"

"Wondering why I'm not marked. I love you so much. And what we just shared was... incredible."

Jackie smiled.

"But, no bond. Just thinking about what that means."
"Star told me the legend of the heart bound lovers."

"Did you know that she was bonded to Marco the night before they were separated? Their bond kept them together in their hearts. They needed it."

"Stan and Daisy. Brad and Crystal. Even the very first heart bond lovers. They all needed their bonds because they were going to be apart."

Kevin had not considered this before.

"Tom used to have a terrible anger problem. But his bond calmed it. He needed that bond. It made him a better person. Now he has to learn how to control his anger without it."

"And now Star and Marco are bonded again. After everything they went through, they need the extra reassurance that the bond gives."

"Bonded couples have always regarded it as a gift." Kevin said.

"And it is… for them. But other people would consider it a crutch. Or worse, a burden."

"And what do you think of it?" Kevin asked.

"We don't need it."

"Do you remember when you confessed to me that you were really a mewman prince? I felt your guilt about lying to me. I felt your fear that I would hate you."

"But I also felt your hope that I would forgive you. You loved me and you wanted to be able to tell me. I could feel it."

"We share our feelings with each other because we choose to. I love you. And I want you to know."

"A heart bond might mean that two people are meant to be together. But not having a heart bond doesn't mean the opposite. It means that two people have to decide for themselves."

Kevin gently held her hand, brought it to his lips, and kissed her fingers.

"I love you, Jackie. Marry me."

Jackie gasped.

"I never want us to be apart. We might not have a heart bond, but we're meant to be. I choose to believe that. I feel it."

Tears began to form.

"Marry me, Jackie. Please be my wife. Give me the honor of being your husband. Let me spend my life trying to make you as happy as you make me."

Jackie squeaked out "Yes" as she began to cry.

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"We should head back."

"Aww."
"Well, we could have had more time if you had just seduced me earlier."

"What? In front of your mother?"

They laughed as they dressed.

"Let me help you with your mount."

"Can I ride with you? I don't want to risk getting separated again."

Kevin smiled as he helped her onto his mount and climbed on behind her.

Jackie whistled sharply and her mount followed them obediently.

==================================

"Prince Kevin! Welcome home!"

"Thank you, Simon. Is there still time for a last minute visitor to open court?"

"Of course, Prince Kevin."

Simon opened the throne room door for him.

"Hi, sis." Kevin said as he entered.

The queen's cheek marks reappeared.

"Kevin! You've returned! Welcome back!"

Skye collected her composure and suppressed her marks.

"Ahem. This is unexpected. Have you been to visit father?"

"I just came from him. I hope you don't mind that I went to see him first."

"Of course not, brother. Did you find what you sought on Earth?"

"I've actually returned as a petitioner."

"Oh?"

"I've come to ask for your blessing to marry."

"That is wonderful news! And who is the woman you have chosen to be your wife?"

Kevin signaled Simon to open the door to allow her in.

"Queen Skye of Xix, I am Jackie Lynn Thomas of Earth." she said as she curtsied.

"..."

"..."

"..."

The queen signaled the guards for privacy. They left quickly.
Skye straightened up in her throne. "Now, you can see how this might present a bit of a quandary don't you?"

"There will be gossip, of course. I'm sure you're not looking forward to the articles in MMM. But everything has an innocent explanation."

"And how would you explain the situation?"

"You took on your royal companion to vet her as a marriage prospect for your brother. You kept the true nature of your relationship with Mimi out of the public eye, and no one else is aware of Mimi's abilities."

"Simon knows."

"Simon! Do you know anything?" Kevin asked him.

"Me? I know less than nothing, Prince Kevin. I am completely unaware that Mimi the mimic is the most valuable source of information in this kingdom."

Skye smirked and stood from the throne. She approached Kevin and Jackie.

"Well, she is lovely."

"Of course you would think so." Kevin jabbed. "But her true beauty is inside."

"Jackie Lynn Thomas. Do you care for the prince?"

"I love Kevin, your highness."

"And will you bear an heir who will lead this kingdom when my own rule ends?"

"We'll have children. But they'll be given the choice whether or not to accept the crown. We won't force them."

"WHAT?!" The queen turned to the prince. "This was not our arrangement! What will happen to Xix if your child chooses not to rule?!"

"I'm sure that our cousin will have more than one child. You can ask one of them if they would like to rule Xix."

"What if I forbid this union?!!" Skye shouted.

"We're not asking for your permission! We're asking for your blessing! And if the queen won't give us her blessing, then we'll just marry without it!" Kevin shouted in return.

Skye and Kevin were locked in a stare off.

A duplicate of Jackie appeared from the private royal entrance. She approached and gently placed her hand on the queen's shoulder.

"Skye, there's no need to worry. I'm sure everything will work out in due time."

Skye's hard expression softened.

"Wow. I guess Kevin wasn't hitting on me after all. I really do look just like his sister's friend." Jackie said in amazement.
"Did he tell you what happened when we first met? He hit on me, and I shot him down."

"Well, of course. Have you seen us?"

They laughed and spent a moment mirroring each other's movements with amusement.

"But what do you really look like, Mimi? The real you." Jackie asked.

Mimi's hair turned white, her skin grey, and her eyes red as her form shifted to its natural shape.

"Very pretty. Exotic. Why don't you just keep this appearance?"

"Sadly, I would not be accepted. People think mimics are monsters. We are not trusted because of our abilities. But the queen accepts me. That is enough. Besides, I would be less able to serve her if my nature were known."

"Mimi, dear. We've talked about this. You help me, but you don't serve me."

The queen sighed and turned to Jackie. "Well, this is awkward. I was quite fond of Mimi's borrowed visage. If I were to give my blessing to your union, she would have to choose a new appearance."

"I have already selected a new one, Skye. Would you like to see it now?"

"Oh, yes, please."

Mimi's hair shortened and turned brown as she changed.

"Chantelle?!” Jackie said.

"Queen Star provided a book with many choices on the off chance that I would need to change my appearance."

"My, my, my! Very attractive. I quite like it." Skye said.

"May I make a small suggestion, Mimi?" Jackie said.

"Yes?" Mimi said.

"Chantelle was only eighteen when her pictures were taken for the yearbook. You will be happier with her appearance now. Her butt wasn't anything special then. But today it has become a very nice badonkadonk."

"I do enjoy a large booty. I must admit. My brother will confirm this." Skye said.

Everyone in the throne room burst into laughter.

"There is one other form I was using. Though Prince Kevin was rather neutral on it."

"I don't remember judging anything."

Mimi's form changed again.

"Are you certain?" she asked.

"Erica?!" Kevin said in complete surprise.
"Rafael, Angie, thank you for allowing me to stay in your home. But now that Jackie and I are getting married, we will be sharing a home of our own."

"How wonderful! Congratulations!" Angie said.

"We are happy for you! When is the wedding?" Rafael asked.

"We're going to wait until after Janna has her baby." Jackie said.

==================================

Jackie and Kevin elected to have their wedding on Earth, at the church in Echo Creek. All of their friends and family were in attendance. Marco served as best man. Janna was the matron of honor.

"Having pledged your commitment to each other before God and these witnesses, I now pronounce that you are husband and wife. You may now-

The bride and groom were already in the middle of the first kiss of their marriage to the accompaniment of applause and cheers.

"-oh, go ahead."

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The reception was a simple affair but was all they wanted and needed.

Before too long, the bride and groom were sent off in a manticore drawn carriage to the Galafamor dimension for their honeymoon.

Eventually they returned to Earth to live their wedded life together.

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"I thought we could stay in tonight and watch a movie. It's relevant." Jackie said.

They cuddled together on their sofa as the movie played.

"But when I marry, I want the woman to love me for who I am, not because of what I am."

"And who are you?"

"I am a man who has never tied his own shoes before!"

"Wrong. You are a PRINCE who has never tied his shoes. Believe me. I tied my own shoes once. It is an overrated experience."

==================================

How long had he been daydreaming about Jackie? She should be here in bed with him for real.

Kevin threw on a pair of pajama bottoms as he got out of bed to find his wife. He went to the kitchen. Although she wasn't there, the coffee maker had been turned on.

She didn't have work today and she would have told him if she was going out. She had to still be here.

He went back down the hall and stopped at the bathroom door.
"Jackie? Are you in there?" He said as he knocked.

There was no answer. Something was wrong.

He looked down and saw red. It was coming out from under the door. Fear gripped his heart.

"JACKIE!"

Without thinking, he bashed the door open with his shoulder. The sight of a large red pod inside the bathroom greeted him.

Fear was replaced with confusion.

Kevin looked around to see the room covered in red flakes. He picked up a handful and examined them. They were delicate like flower petals.

He turned his attention back to the pod. Red vines crept along the floor and walls. He took a closer look and touched the surface of the pod. It was translucent, like frosted glass. He was surprised by a hand as it pressed against the inside the shell. Suddenly five more hands did the same. Two glowing eyes opened.

Kevin backed away into the hall.

The shell crackled loudly before it split open. A winged, red creature that was inside stood up.

"JACKIE?!!"

She smiled and then lunged at him.

He dodged her by diving down the hall towards the kitchen. He scrambled to his feet and made a break for the front door.

A sticky stream of red diamond shaped petals flew from the creature's hands sealing the front door shut.

Kevin knew that he would be cornered in the kitchen. He stood in front of the archway and dodged again as the creature charged. She missed him and passed into the kitchen. For some reason she stopped to focus on the coffee pot.

He took the opening and ran for the bedroom. He was almost at the door when he tumbled to the floor.

He rolled over and sat up to look. A sticky web of red hung between her hands and his legs. It hardened quickly.

The creature smirked. She had caught him.

He brought his fist down and shattered the red resin. He would have to thank Marco for showing him how to break wood and cement with his bare hands.

He dashed through the open bedroom door, closing and locking it behind him. But he knew that it wouldn't keep the creature out forever.

The knob jiggled.

He needed help. He turned to the mirror on the wall across from the door.
"Please be home."

==================================

The king was enjoying some one on one playtime with his daughter. She gurgled happily as she stacked colorful wooden blocks on each other.

The king had personally sanded down the sharp corners and edges of the wooden blocks for safety.

The mirror rang, signaling an incoming call.

"Answer"

"Marco! Thank goodness someone answered!"

"Hey, Kevin! How are you?" Marco picked up his daughter and held her up to the mirror. "Say 'Hi, Uncle Kevin!'"

The baby just stuck her hand in her mouth.

"Marco! Something's happened to Jackie! She's been transformed into a monster!"

"What?!" Marco said looking at his right arm suspiciously while holding his daughter in his left.

"What kind of monster?"

"The kind Ishtar transformed herself into during her battle against Star!"

"That's impossible!"

"Where is Star?! Maybe she can help!"

"She's not here! She's at a Society of Women Sovereigns meeting with your sister!"

A beating sound came from the bedroom door.

"Jackie will break through the door soon. I can't... I won't fight against her. So, Marco, this may be my farewell. It's important that Star know what has happened. Please help Jackie. Tell her that I love her, and... not to blame herself for what happened to me." Kevin said tearfully. He was trying to hide his fear.

With the sound of wood splintering a red arm and hand burst through a hole in the door. It clawed at the edges of the hole making it bigger. Flakes fell like red leaves. A second crimson arm burst through. Then a third.

The red arms withdrew and a red face with glowing eyes appeared in the hole.

"Ke...viinnnn...!" it sang.

Marco saw that it was definitely Jackie.

"Kevin. Kevin! Listen to me! Jackie's not going to hurt you." Marco said.

"But...!"

"You're going to be fine. Just like I was fine. Trust me."

"But what's happening?!!"
"It would be better if Star explained this to you and Jackie. For now, don't be afraid. She might look
different, and she's probably not much of a talker, but it's still Jackie."

Kevin was silent.

"Oh, and Congrats!" Marco added.

"What?!"

A loud crash was heard. The creature had ripped the bedroom door from the hinges and thrown it
aside.

Marco turned his head to look away as Jackie tackled Kevin. He shielded his daughter's eyes with
his hand.

A hiss could be heard for a moment before the mirror shut off due to the dropped call.

"You're gonna get a new playmate!"

Marco said to his daughter.

She just babbled and laughed in response.

Jackie was roused by the sound of knocking at the front door.

She was confused. Her memory was fuzzy. She had a strange dream. An erotic dream.

The knocking continued.

She groaned. "Kevin? Wake up, Babe. Someone's at the door."

Kevin groaned.

Jackie sat up and looked at her husband next to her in bed. He was a withered and desiccated husk.

Okay, it wasn't that bad, but he did look very tired. And naked.

The knocking grew louder.

Jackie got out of bed and realized that she was naked too. She looked around the room.

"What the heck?"

It was a disaster. Their bed was broken. The door had been torn from the frame. It lay in splinters in
the hall. Their bedroom was covered knee deep in a red material. Jackie scooped up a handful of the
material. They were paper thin red diamonds.

Jackie dug her robe out from under the debris and put it on. She carefully went into the hallway and
stepped over the broken bedroom door.

She was taken aback by the huge cocoon in the bathroom. It was cracked open and empty. Vines
spread out from the cocoon. More of the red diamonds were piled around it and covered the floor.

She had seen this before.
Red. The rash. She was in the kitchen when she saw as it began to cover her whole arm. She saw in the bathroom mirror that the rash had spread to her face. The cocoon. She remembered breaking out. She remembered what she had done next.

Whoever was knocking at the door would not stop.

"Whoo iis iiit?" Jackie sang nervously. "Please be Star. Please be Star. Please be Star." she muttered.

"It's Star!"

"And Janna! We know you're in there, Jackie!"

"We know you're hiding something!"

Jackie rushed to the door in relief. She tore away at the sticky red material binding the door shut. When she was able, she pried the door open.

"Hi, Jackie! Hugs!" said as they gathered into a group hug.

"We're so happy for you!" Janna said.

"Happy?! Have you looked at this place?"

"Not that! We know you're pregnant!" Janna said.

"What?!"

"And you're having a girl!" Star said.

"...

"...

"...

"Um, you did know you were pregnant, right?" Star asked timidly.

"...

"KEVIN!" Jackie called out as she ran to the bedroom.

Everyone was sitting at the kitchen table.

Kevin looked at the clock and asked, "How did you guys get here so fast?"

"And where are Marco and Dipper?" Jackie asked.

"Last minute airfare out of Portland with only two seats on the flight so the guys are back in Gravity Falls with the princess and Junior. But, never mind all that!" Janna answered.

"Star, so when you transformed into that flying purple... creature, it was biology, and not a magic wand accident like you told everyone?"

"Biology isn't the best word for it, but you get the idea." Star said.
"I recognized it as Ishtar's fighting form. I saw it myself."

Star said, "It's not a fighting form. I mean, it does increase your strength. And speed. And your stamina. And lets you fly. And you're more focused. And your reaction time is better. And your magic is more powerful. And-

"So it *is* a fighting form!" Kevin pointed out.

"Eh. Potato, Po-tah-toe. We call it the royal transformation." Star shrugged.

"So, your wand, it's just a ruse?" Kevin said.

"The wand is special, but I don't really need it. The Butterfly royal magic is part of me. And now royal magic is a part of you, Jackie."

Jackie put her hand on her stomach.

"We're having a magic baby." she said.


"But, why us?"

Janna was flipping through a book with a gold foil pine tree and the number '8' on the front as she said, "The old legends about royal magic said that it had a will of its own."

"All the other royal magic families met tragic ends." Kevin pointed out.

"No. The magic lines didn't end at all until Ishtar died." Janna corrected him. "It's been a little while since Ishtar died, and now the royal magic wants to return. Your daughter is just the first."

"How do you know that this is how royal magic returns?" Kevin asked.

"Research. We had to get access to the deepest part of the library to piece together this information. Glossaryck was less than forthcoming until we found the legendary tapioca fountain."

Janna opened the journal to a marked page. "The last time a royal was reborn was almost nine hundred years ago. The only magic wielding member of the Mayfly family had died of an illness."

Janna flipped to another part of the book. "Just a few years later, a woman from a minor noble family in Elpon became a six armed, flying, teal colored creature."

Janna turned to another marked page. "That family claimed the magic bloodline name and ruled for another few centuries until the last Queen Mayfly and her family were killed in Pixtopia during a cave in."

"But Star, why isn't this also happening to you?" Jackie asked.

"It *did* happen to me. When I was pregnant with my magic heir."

"Why didn't you tell us?"

"Hey! I don't tell you guys *everything* that goes on in my bedroom."

Star pushed away from the table to stretch and rubbed her growing belly.
"But this time it won't. Baby number two doesn't have royal magic."

"And won't have to rule someday… My sister wants our child to rule Xix when she's old enough."

"That's years away. And I know you want to let her decide when the time comes." Star said.

"Nobody else knows about her magic power. Everyone in Xix will want her as queen if they did." Janna said.

Kevin held his wife's hand above the table. He could tell she was afraid.

"I don't know if I'm cut out to do this." Jackie said.

"Don't say that, Jackie. Of course you are." Kevin said.

"Star had her mother. But I'm not a magic queen. What can I do for her?"

"The same thing you would do for our daughter if she wasn't magic. Raise her to be a good person. Just like her mother."

Star held Jackie's other hand.

"And I'll help you with the magic." she said.

"We'll all be there for you, Jackie." Janna added.

"Thanks, guys."

Jackie saw everyone looking… staring at her.

"What's everyone looking at?"

"You have… something…" Kevin said pointing to his cheek.

Janna handed Jackie a compact mirror and Jackie saw the discoloration on her cheeks.

Red diamonds.

"What's happening?" Jackie said.

"You've got a magic baby in your belly. The magic is spreading through you. Humans don't normally have magic. But now you do." Janna said.

"Are they permanent?"

"Probably… not?" Star sounded unsure of her answer.

A red diamond appeared on Jackie's neck with an audible *pwip*.

"We'd better go." Janna said as she put the journal in her bag.

"Right." Star agreed as they got up and walked through the living room to the front door.

"Why the sudden rush?" Jackie asked following them out of the kitchen. Kevin was close behind.

"Believe me, I'd love to stick around and watch. But you're about to get reeeally possessive." Janna said.
"Call us later!" Star said as she and Janna left in a hurry.

Kevin and Jackie were now alone in their living room with their new state of being.

Jackie started to weep.

"Hey, hey. Don't cry." Kevin said as he embraced her.

Red diamonds began to appear rapidly on her skin.

"I'm sorry…" Jackie choked out.

"You haven't done anything to be sorry about. I should be the one apologizing to you. Parenthood is already a huge responsibility. To add the burden of royalty, and now on top of everything, magic? You weren't given a choice. If you had only married a human, then you wouldn't have had this thrust upon you. You must resent me."

"No. Kevin, no... I'm not sorry about our baby. We wanted her. We stopped using the protection spell and we were going to let nature take its course. I'm going to be a mom. I'm happy we're having a baby. And it's not the magic either. We're not alone. We'll have all the magical help we need."

"Then why are you sad?"

Jackie's tears flowed. "I attacked you. I'm a monster…"

"Oh, no! Jackie, no! You're not a monster! Please, don't cry."

"I forced you to-"

"You didn't force me to do anything. I admit that I was afraid at first. I had only ever seen a creature like that in battle."

Kevin held her face. Her tears made wet trails over the marks on her cheeks.

The red petals were starting to pile up around them..

"But it was you on the inside. And once I realized what it was that you wanted… It was actually… magical."

Jackie's tears began to slow.

"And the creature… while it was strange… it was also very beautiful. Like my wife."

He kissed her and held her to him to let her know that everything was going to be alright.

"I love you."

"I love you, too."

Jackie wiped her tears on his shirt.

Suddenly she pushed him away.

Kevin was confused until he saw her smile at him.

With rapid *pwip* sounds, the red diamonds showered from her skin and soon buried her. They hardened and set into the shell of the cocoon with surprising speed.
The living room was covered with a deep layer of red vines and diamond petals.

It only took a short time before the metamorphosis was complete. Kevin was waiting for her when she emerged. This time he wasn't afraid.

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They lay together in the soft piles of red petals. It felt like laying in satin and smelled like roses.

"Is this what it will be like until the baby is born?" Jackie asked.

"I could get used to it."

"Mm-hmm..." Jackie agreed.

He moved his hand to her belly and smiled.

"A daughter." he said.

Jackie put her hand over his.

==================================

Months passed until early one morning, before first light, a bright falling star appeared in the sky.

And with the day spread news that a girl had been born to the royal family of Xix.

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"Jackie? Are you sure?" Kevin asked.

"Yes. I'm sure. She has to understand her choice. We can't keep her away from this place. This is her home as much as Earth is." Jackie said.

"She needs to know Earth too."

"We'll figure something out."

"So what shall we call her?" Kevin asked.

Jackie looked at their newborn daughter. The beautiful and magical girl in her arms.

"Dawn."

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epilogo continuará

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Author's Notes:

Jackie is admittedly kind of a Mary Sue in Starfall. Kind. Smart. Beautiful. Unselfish. Understanding. Etc. But she wasn't a central character so I thought I could get away with it. I subscribed to the idea that she was the #1 Starco shipper despite her own feelings. Her role in the main story was to act as a sort of catalyst for Star and Marco's relationship.
My original plan for Starfall did not include any sort of closure or happy ending for her. I was going to leave her future open ended. But as I wrote, I soon realized that would be a huge disservice to her. Plus, I needed someone to give birth to a reborn magic line.

This chapter turned out to be the longest one since chapter 12. I thought I would just be doing a few short chapters as an epilogue. But, you know what? Screw it. This epilogue has already turned into a light sequel so the epilogue chapters can be as long as they need to be.

Thank you to everyone still reading.
"I can't imagine that this will occur often, if ever at all."

"This will not greatly affect the social order. Not to mention that it requires the aid of a noble."

"Some of us still think that a distinction between Mewni commoners and outsider commoners should be included in the language of the law."

"Unnecessary legalese."

"Then why don't we put the matter forward for consideration?"

"Non-nobles may challenge a noble engagement, provided they do so through a noble proxy who will put up the required collateral."

"All in favor?"

A chorus of agreement sounded.

"All opposed?"

A chorus of disagreement sounded, but its volume was distinctly lower.

"The law is modified."

"Congratulations King Butterfly. You sponsored this revision and gathered the necessary support."

"Well, the issue was very personal. If a commoner, no matter their native dimension wants to risk their life for their love, then let them try."

As Marco returned to his seat next to Star, he accepted the congratulations of some who supported the change. There was some grumbling, of course.

"With that complete, let us move on to other matters."

"Before this Gathering of Nobles comes to an end, I would like to make an announcement." Tom said.

All eyes were on him as he rose from his seat and walked down to the main floor of the Great Hall.

"I have ruled the Underworld alone for some time now. It is time for me to take a wife to rule by my side."

"A splendid idea! Have you already selected a fiancee?" a nobleman said.
"I have. She is not known for shying away from the spotlight, so I will allow her to introduce herself."

"What up, Home Fries?!"

The gathering roared with displeasure.

"Is there a problem?" Tom asked.

"Problems! Plural!"

"Princess Pony Head was convicted of stealing a Top Secret scroll from the Secret Library and recklessly using it!"

"Hey! I did my time!" Pony Head said.

"And I commuted her sentence," Star said.

"Curious that you would ease her punishment for a crime that directly benefited you!"

"I ain't even sorry. It's good to be the queen."

"That is Queen Butterfly's way! She commuted her husband's sentence for piracy as well!"

"We've already trod this ground. Everyone here knows that they would have become pirates as well if they were placed in the same circumstances as King Marco had been!"

"Yarr!" Marco said.

A chorus of pirate grunts sounded from the gathered nobles.

"But there is also the indisputable reality that a union between Emperor Tom and Princess Pony Head can not possibly produce an Underworld heir!"

"Kids aren't the only reason to get married! Maybe we're getting married for companionship! Hanging out with me is awesome!" Pony Head said.

"Then just become his royal companion! That's what that role is there for!"

"But then we would not have the alliance marriage which will benefit both our kingdoms." Tom said.

"But what about an heir?! It is your duty to plan for the future of your kingdom!"

"If I have no children, my cousin could rule after my reign ends."

"Your cousin Ceres is young, naive, and easily manipulated! Her shadow magic is weak compared to your fire. She does not inspire the confidence of the underworld subjects. The underworld will destabilize!"

"Tom! You must reconsider this path! We insist that you select another bride!"

"Our engagement announcement was simply a courtesy to this gathering. My selection of a bride is not up for debate."

"I, Lady Laraline of Nagma, contest the engagement of Princess Pony Head of the Pony Head
Kingdom and Emperor Tom of Underworld!

"Emperor Tom, an engagement challenge has been made. Will you allow-"

"No. Please sit down, Lady Laraline."

"Aww, Tom! You're no fun! I would have loved a fight!" Pony Head said as her horn sparked with magic energy. "But if any nobleman wants to issue their own challenge, I will allow it. You can take up the argument with Tom in your duel."

Tom fashioned a fire blade and menacingly made a slicing motion.

No noblemen issued any challenges.

"I will issue a challenge."

Everyone looked to where the voice came from in the gallery. A demon woman stood from her seat.

"I, Marina of Underworld, contest the engagement of Princess Pony Head of the Pony Head Kingdom and Emperor Tom of Underworld."

"We do not know you. Are you a noble?"

"No. I am of common blood."

"Already putting the changes to the law to the test are you?"

"Do you have a noble sponsor?"

Skye stood in her seat next to Marina "I will sponsor her challenge."

"Queen Skye!"

"Why would you risk this?"

"Perhaps I take after my father. But mainly it is because Underworld is a powerful and influential kingdom. Underworld stability impacts this dimension's stability as a whole. A legitimate heir will contribute to this."

"Marina, was it? Do you even know Emperor Tom?"

"I was once a servant in the employ of his mother. But I am not sure anyone in Underworld would remember me."

Star whistled nonchalantly.

"Emperor Tom has already disallowed a challenge from a noblewoman. It is preposterous to think he would allow a challenge from a common-"

"I'll allow the challenge." Tom said.

"Whaaaaaaaaaa?!" Pony Head said in an exaggerated voice.

"Well, Honey, let's face facts, you don't even have a body."

"I do so have a body! A magnificent body! Just because it lies beyond the nega-neck-plane of existence doesn't mean it's not there!"
Marco whispered to Star. "Just to be clear, Pony Head has a pony body, right? Not some weird alien-fish body or something?"

Star shrugged. "It's a big mystery."

"Now that I've had a moment to reflect on it, the nobles do bring up a good point. Underworld does need an heir. I'm sure that Marina and I would have strong and beautiful demon children."

"Darn your sudden but logical betrayal, Tom! Very well, I will step aside for the greater good of your kingdom!"

"According to the law, this formalizes Emperor Tom's engagement to Marina." Queen Skye pointed out.

Marina proceeded from her seat down towards Tom on the main floor.

"Wait! I, Lady Laraline of Nagma, contest the engagement of Marina of Underworld and Emperor Tom of Underworld!"

"No, Laraline! I refuse your challenge! Again!"

A few comments calling her 'thirsty' came from the gallery.

"Emperor Tom! You cannot seriously be considering making this common born hussy your Empress?!"

Tom reached for Marina's hand and held it gently. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath then counted down from ten in his head.

He gave the offending noble a hard three eyed stare and said, "That is my future wife you're insulting."

Tom turned away from him and told the gathering, "And no, I will *not* be making her Empress of Underworld."

Eyebrows were raised at that statement.

"But, Emperor Tom, I thought that you said you were taking a wife because you had ruled alone for long enough."

"I will address your concerns shortly."

Tom turned to Marina and spoke to her in a clear but rushed voice.

"Marina, I promise to take you as my wife if you accept me as your husband."

"Tom, I promise to take you as my husband if you accept me as your wife."

"I accept you." They said together.

Star fired a bolt of magic upwards towards the glass dome. Over the bride and groom it exploded into a flock of skeletal birds, and a shower of black flower petals and black rice. A traditional demon wedding blessing.

A kiss sealed their union.
Tom turned to face the gathered nobles as he spoke. "My next act will be my last as Emperor of Underworld."

"Are you stepping down?"

"As sovereign ruler of Underworld, I cast aside the title of Emperor and take on the title of King."

Tom fashioned a crown of fire and held it above his wife. He let go and it hovered over her head.

"Claim this crown with your magic and declare to all that you are my queen."

Marina reached up around the crown, as if to grab it, but held her hands inches away. Using her magic she changed the crown of fire into a crown of water.

"All hail the Queen of Underworld! Long may she reign!" came the call from the gallery.

The applause started slowly, but soon grew to fill the Great Hall. Though many of the nobles were confused.

"What just happened?"

"Everything just changed."

==================================

Modifying a law is difficult. Empress Ishtar had tried to close a marriage law loophole for years. Queen Star fought against it every step of the way.

But opposition was lower for this change. There were more than a few nobles who welcomed the change so that they might marry their own commoner lovers.

All this had to be done quickly. Less than two months.

Tom and Marina were now free to share their home openly. He was her king as he had always been. But she was now his queen. They were now married.

The plan had worked.

King Marco advocating for a change in the engagement challenge law based on his own experience with Former King Brad of Xix.

Tom and Pony Head's engagement to provide an opening for a challenge.

Queen Sky's noble sponsorship of her challenge.

Queen Star obscuring Marina's very existence to prevent her illicit, but not wholly secret relationship with Tom from becoming a point of contention.

It was frustrating that such machinations needed to be employed. After all, illicit relationships such as theirs are not unheard of and are often overlooked so long as discretion is practiced.

And only so long as the relationship does not result in children.

The protection spell was widely regarded as foolproof. Passed between women on scribbled notes like a recipe for gnomefruit pie. No one ever passed along the fine print. Under certain rare celestial conditions, the effectiveness of the spell may be reduced in demons.
But there was no longer any need to worry.
The life already growing within Marina's womb would be safe.

==================================
Tom sat quietly. He stared at the candle between the two thrones. It remained unlit.

He missed their bond. He missed the calm he could rely on to quell his anger. He had to fight the urge to burn that noble to a crisp for insulting Marina in the Great Hall.

He wondered if he would be so merciful again.
"Tom?" came a gentle voice from the woman standing beside him.
"Marina!"
"You were so deep in thought. You were staring at the bond candle. Were you thinking about our bond?"
"I was."
"If it saddens you, perhaps we should remove it from the throne room?"
"No. It actually serves as a reminder. It lit for us once. But now we need to share our love through words and deeds. And I can't rely on the bond anymore to hold back my temper."
"You did not rely on it as much as you think. And you have done so well in the time since it was broken."

Tom admittedly could not recall when was the last time his anger flared.
"But if you need me, I will always be here with you." Marina said as she touched his hand.

Tom held her hand gently and found comfort in it.
"Join me, my queen. It is time."

Marina took the throne next to him. The throne once sat upon by the Empress.

The royal assistant opened the throne room doors and announced the first of the day's petitioners.
"Yvgeny Bulgoyaboff and his son Piotr Bulgoyaboff."
"Buff Frog! This is a surprise!"
"Your Majesties!" he said with a bow. "I come for two reason. First to offer congratulations on your wedding on behalf Ludo and monsters who serve."
"We thank them for their sentiments." Marina said.
"Second reason is son. I raise many children but Piotr different. Smarter. Is meant for more. Ask that he be given education."
"We have thought of starting a school for the common classes, but it will still be some time before it is ready. For now, we will speak to the rulers of Mewni Kingdom. We will ask them to accept you as an exchange student in their school. When our Underworld school is ready, perhaps mewmans will
be encouraged to attend as exchange students as well." said the king.

"You will be an ambassador for monsters. Do your father proud." said the queen.

"A dryad. She will possess plant demon magic." Marina said carrying the newborn princess in her arms.

"What will be her name?" Tom asked as he softly touched the nubs that will grow into horns on his daughter's head.

"Ivy."

Author's Notes: I image demons in SvTFoE to be beings with a natural affinity toward a type of magic (fire, water, plant, air, spirit, shadow, light, etc.) and not actual demons (in the Biblical sense). That's just what everyone calls them.

Not much else to say here except that I'm trying to get to the story finale before the season 2 premiere on July 11. Tick-tock.
Epilogue 9: Sight

Starfall by GolfAlphaMike

Mabel had flown across the country for this. The book sold slowly at first, but soon built a small fan following. But when it was featured on a daytime talk show, it exploded.

She sat behind the table with a copy of the book propped up as a display.

MEET SABLE P. MINE, AUTHOR OF SCARLET LUNA: BOOK I, SUNDAY 2:00PM

Mabel had to throw out her first draft. Everything she assumed, everything she thought she knew, was wrong.

It wasn't love at first sight like in a fairy tale.

At first, Marco thought Star moving in with his family was a life altering disaster. They may have become friends quickly, but love took a while longer. He still had a crush on Jackie. Star even developed her own crush on someone else while she and Marco were just friends.

Then there was Prince Kevin and Jackie. At first glance, their story was a fairy tale. The handsome prince comes to rescue the beautiful and fair maiden from a life of loneliness.

But Jackie wasn't a maiden in need of rescuing. And Kevin was like an anti-Cinderella. Instead of becoming a handsome and dashing prince, he became an everyday schmoe. His lie of omission clouded the start of their relationship.

The start of her own brother and sister-in-law's relationship involved booze.


Way, way back.

Which was why she found herself standing at the sign-in podium of the Great Library of Secrets.

"Dipper said you would be able to help me find information on the…" Mabel looked at her brother's note. "...Seventh Mula era, before the Great Decline."

"Well, that depends. You got something for me?" Glossaryck said.

Mabel held up a pudding cup. Tapioca.

"Ugh. No thanks. Your brother and his girlfriend found an endless source of that stuff. I'm done with that flavor for a while."

"So, it's flavor you want, eh? I think I got what you need, friend."
Mabel held up a dessert cup. She peeled back the foil cover and scooped out its green contents. The transparent substance jiggled.

Images of the wiggly spoonful reflected in Glossaryck's irises. Tears of joy and wonder formed in his eyes at the first taste.

"SO DELICIOUS! WHERE HAS THIS BEEN ALL MY LIFE?!"

"That's not even the best flavor." Mabel said holding up another cup of gelatin. This one was red.

Glossaryck scratched his neck anxiously.

==================================

Mabel was seated at a table in a back corner of the library. Stacks of books on genealogy, history, wars, and magic surrounded her. Weeks of research had turned up this.

She was shocked. The story had been romanticized and sanitized.

The version of the story in Dipper's journals, the version that had been told in Mewni for almost seven hundred years was just a fairy tale.

Though different regions and kingdoms added their own details and flair, the basic fairy tale story was always there. The commoner Max of Lur and Princess Nova Firefly of Mula were bound by the Blood Moon and fell in love. But Nova was promised to marry Lord Jon of Kipen in order to stop a war. Max challenged Lord Jon to ritual combat for Nova's hand in marriage but lost and was killed. Nova's spirit died with Max, but her body stayed alive to fulfill her royal duty. She ultimately failed as she and her daughter sired by Lord Jon died in childbirth. When a new ruler of Mula rose, the royal wand of the Fireflys and its magic had vanished.

Mabel recalled the original version of The Little Mermaid. The downer ending didn't make this any less of a fairy tale.

The tale was used to reinforce the class separation. It also reinforced the idea that royal marriages are about duty first, and about love only after that.

But Max of Lur and Princess Nova Firefly were real people, and they didn't just fall in love at first sight.

Mabel wondered how this history was buried. But then she remembered how knowledge about the very nature of royal magic was hidden.

The story coincides with the start of the Great Decline. The period when the royal magic bloodlines slowly ended but didn't return.

For the last few centuries, the royal magic queens used a spell to hide the fact that royal magic was passed through magic bloodlines. But the other queens are all gone now, and their spells eventually wore off. Star is the last one left. She won't use her magic to hide this anymore. Mabel may be one of the first people in a long time to come seeking this particular information.

"Even fairy tales aren't fairy tales." Mabel said to herself.

==================================

Lur wasn't a kingdom. It was a city-state with no noble class. Fear that its ideas on government
would spread made it the target of economic sanctions. Lur was mired in poverty. Without a noble class to establish alliances through marriage, they were isolated diplomatically. But because it was mountainous and strategically unimportant, it was left alone militarily.

It's largest and most powerful neighbor was the royal magic Kingdom of Mula. The Queen of Mula, Queen Firefly, thought that a land, however small, that governed itself without nobles went against the natural order. The fact that Mula and Lur shared a border was disturbing to her. She felt it was an invitation to disaster.

Information about Max of Lur was sketchy at best. There were things that made it seem like he had been a farmer. Others made him out to be a soldier, or a merchant, or a local politician. It all seemed to conflict.

But there were a few things that were clear. Something that all the kingdoms wanted had been discovered in Lur. Max was sent as part of an envoy to make a deal with Mula before someone came in and tried to simply take it.

Max was appalled by the conditions in which commoners in Mula lived. Though it was poor and isolated, the people of Lur lived in better conditions.

The leadership of Lur would have rather destroyed the resource rather than turn it over to a kingdom that treated its own people so poorly. But they knew that it was impossible to destroy an entire mountain range. They also knew that alone they would not be able to thwart an invasion.

The thirteen royal magic kingdoms were founded by conquest, after all.

The people of Lur wished that the motherlode of dimensional ore had never been found.

But as terrible a choice Mula may have seemed, it was still better than Lur's other neighbors, the lands of Kipen and Gib, and the royal magic Kingdom of Quosto.

Queen Firefly was difficult. She wanted too much and offered too little. Max instead tried to reason with her daughter, Nova. The queen-to-be. Maybe she had some influence on her mother.

Nova turned out to be naive. She had been shielded from the realities of how her kingdom treated common people.

When Queen Firefly found out that Max was speaking with her daughter, she forbade contact. Princess Nova did the only logical thing. She snuck out to meet with him. Repeatedly.

It was during these rendezvous that her eyes were opened. She saw the stark differences between the lives of commoners and nobles. She heard how Lur was isolated because their people did not want to be subject to a ruling class that did not have their interests at heart.

He told her that as queen, she would have the power to change things. She could be the voice of all the people, not just the nobility. She could become their light.

It was also during these meetings that their feelings for each other began.

At first, Nova thought Max was self righteous and condescending. So certain that his people's way was better. That nobles were selfish and uncaring.

At first, Max thought that Nova was spoiled and ignorant. So unquestioning of her mother's actions. That nobles always had the right to rule.
But Nova saw the passion with which Max defended his homeland. He feared that his people would be conquered by invaders. They already had so little. He saw his own people reflected in the commoners of all kingdoms.

Max saw how Nova never turned away from the hardship and injustices she witnessed. She wanted to lift her people up, not hold them down.

Eventually these glimpses into each other led to feelings. And eventually to love.

It's not clear if Max and Nova ever actually became lovers during these secret meetings, though they certainly had the opportunity.

Eventually Nova and Max were caught. Queen Firefly ordered Max ejected from Mula and told never to return. Having caused a diplomatic incident, Max was exiled from his homeland. Nova and Max thought they would never see each other again.

King Fred, the Stone Demon King of Underworld was a practical joker. And despite his power, had a soft heart. He secretly granted Max asylum in Underworld and dispatched his young son, the wind demon, Alec, to invite Princess Nova to the upcoming Blood Moon Ball.

Alec was young and not yet of marriage age, so Queen Firefly thought that Nova would be attending only as a diplomatic gesture.

As was almost certain to happen, Nova and Max were reunited. The moment their hands met on the dance floor, the ruby light of the Blood Moon chose to bind their souls together for all eternity.

Nova and Max were the last people bound by the blood moon before Star and Marco. But this was different. Nova and Max were already in love when they were chosen, but Star and Marco weren't. Not yet.

Queen Firefly was incensed and would have retaliated against King Fred in ways both excessive and petty had other events not occurred. Lord Vic, the ruler of Kipen had been assassinated. Her personal squabble with Underworld would have to wait.

Kipen accused the neighboring land of Gib of being behind the assassination which they denied. Skirmishes across their border quickly escalated to war. The tide of war favored Kipen. Gib petitioned their ally, Mula, to intervene on their behalf. But Mula knew that if they did, Kipen would appeal to their ally, Quosto, to do the same. The war would only grow in size.

But Lord Vic's son, the new ruler of Kipen, Lord Jon, offered a resolution. Kipen would cease their vengeance and return to their pre-war borders, if Mula would agree to an alliance.

Queen Firefly agreed only if the alliance was sealed by a marriage between Princess Nova and Lord Jon. In Queen Firefly's eyes, this solved two problems. It would stop the conflict without direct military intervention. And her daughter's relationship with the foreign commoner, Max, would end.

As heir, Nova was obligated to obey her mother.

At the next Gathering of Nobles, Max attended as the guest of King Fred. Max issued his engagement challenge which Nova allowed. Lord Jon was expected to yield the engagement. He did not love Nova, and Kipen already had its alliance which Mula would be required to honor.

But Jon did not yield and the duel took place. The fairy tale usually says that Max of Lur was stabbed through the heart, but in reality, he bled to death when an artery in his neck was severed.
The fact that Max was fighting with a sabotaged spear is historically known. It's why weapons are now ritually purified before duels. But that fact is never mentioned in the fairy tale. It ruins the narrative.

Her grief when Max died was the last time Nova showed any emotion. She turned cold. She married Lord Jon as she was required, but never showed him even the slightest kindness or courtesy not required by law.

It seemed to matter little to Lord Jon.

Before too long Princess Nova was with child. She still showed no joy to anyone. Not to her husband. Not to her mother. Not even to herself. Her light had gone out.

Mabel thought about the circumstances surrounding Nova's death while giving birth. Her baby supposedly died as well. But Mabel understood what must have happened. The baby must have survived, carrying the Firefly magic bloodline with it.

Mabel's thoughts ran through the rest of the royal magic families. A few decades later, Queen Silkmoth and her young daughter died in a fire. But the princess must have survived as well. Was she forced to have a child against her will?

Each of the royal magic bloodlines ended under strange circumstances. And for all of them it was plausible that the magic bloodline could have secretly survived.

After Princess Nova's death, the mourning Queen Firefly withdrew to prepare for the end of her magic bloodline and its eventual rebirth. Mula's influence waned.

Capitalizing on Queen Firefly's open disdain for her daughter's relationship with a commoner, Queen Ladybird offered social reforms benefitting commoners if Lur would enter a treaty. They were promised autonomy and protection from invaders. Lur commoners would be given a voice with the Quosto monarchy. All this in exchange for the rights to the ore found in the Lur mountain range.

Becoming a protectorate of Quosto was their best option so Lur agreed. But as time went on the division between the two lands blurred. Lur's autonomy was never openly challenged, but instead it withered because the value of a royal magic ruler increased as the other royal magic families ended. Lur eventually became just another territory of the royal magic kingdom of Quosto.

Centuries passed and Quosto's own royal magic line neared its end. In order to keep the still very valuable resources of magical dimensional ore from being used for conquest, the last Queen Ladybird ceded the Lur region to Xix. The strongest remnant kingdom of old Mula.

The feared war eventually came. The Kingdom of Xix defended the Lur region with the aid of its allies including the last remaining royal magic kingdom. Mewni.

There were still unanswered questions. Who conceived the plot to unify the magic bloodlines?

Was it Lord Jon of Kipen? But he didn't suggest the alliance marriage. Queen Firefly of Mula did.

Was it her? But that would mean ending her family's rule and her grandchild being taken and hidden.

Was Gib framed for the murder of Lord Vic causing the Kipen-Gib war? Quosto wound up gaining the most. Did they set this into motion?

And why would King Fred trick Queen Firefly? Everyone believed that the Blood Moon choice couldn't be controlled. Was King Fred in control? Did he have foresight into who the Blood Moon
would choose? Or was he just in it for the lulz?

Star and Marco could wait. This was the tale Mabel needed to tell.

"Erhmaghad! I love the how Nadia escaped the castle to meet with Maddox for the first time! It was so intense!"

"I feel like it wasn't necessary for Maddox and Nadia to fall in love. Why couldn't they just be friends? Girls and guys can be just friends."

"King Flint was my favorite character. He broke up all the drama with humor."

"I feel like Lord Jonah was misunderstood. He did what he did because it was expected of him. Just like Nadia."

"How long before book two comes out?"

"Why didn't the common people rise up against their oppressors? Were Queen Fox and Queen Lynx that powerful?"

"Why did you kill Maddox? Nadia died without him."

"I think Lord Jonah and Maddox would have made a cute couple."

"I heard that your next book will take place hundreds of years later in what's left of the Mandrake kingdom. Is that true?"

After Mabel had been signing books for a few hours, the bookstore closed off the line. There were only a few people left.

A man approached the table and held out a copy of the book. It was open to the inside cover for her. Mabel looked at the man. He was dressed somewhat eccentrically. His boots didn't go with his pants, which didn't go with his shirt, which didn't go with his hat.

"Hipster." Mabel thought.

"Hi. I'm a big fan. Can't wait for your next book."

"Thanks! What's your name?"

"Leo."

"Should I make this out to you?" She asked.

"Yes, please."

Mabel began to write.

Dear Leo,

I like your hat!

Sable P. Mi-

"Why did you change Nova and Max's names?" Leo asked.
Mabel's pen slipped leaving a long blue smudge on the inside of the book cover.

"Sorry! I'll write you a new one."

"No, that's okay. When people ask me why Sable P. Mine's signature has a giant smear in it, I can say that I surprised her."

"Where are you from, Leo?" Mabel asked as she finished her pen name signature as best she could.

"Eagma."

"No, you're not. There's no such place."

"The old kingdom of Agma may have broken into three parts, Northern, Southern, and Western, but locals on the eastern coast of Nagma, call it Eagma."

"Well, Leo, today I learned something."

"So who told you the original fairy tale?"

"The Queen of Mewni."

"You know Queen Moon Butterfly?"

"Oh! Did you not hear? She passed away. Her daughter is queen now."

"I didn't know she had a daughter. Oh, wait… that's right. Princess… Star?"

"Did you, like, just remember that she existed?"

"Yeah, I guess I did. Did she burn the place down yet?"

"When was the last time you were home, Leo?"

"It's been years."

"I really want to talk to you some more. I'm almost done here. Can you wait around for a bit?"

Leo smiled and nodded. "Thanks." He said as he took his signed book and stepped aside.

A woman approached the table.

"Hello. I loved your story. My sister is an even bigger fan. She would have loved to meet you."

"Well, thanks. Is this book for her?"

"Yes. Can you make it out to Anne?"

Mabel and Leo had dinner together at a bistro near the bookstore.

"So, Leo. Why'd you come to Earth?"

"I was asked to leave the Mewni dimension for a while."

"Yeah? Who'd you piss off?"
"Lord Rick of Nagma."

"How long were you supposed to stay away?"

"Long enough for him to marry his daughter off to someone else. He disapproved of our relationship."

"But no one came to pick you up and bring you back."

Leo shook his head.

"I'm so sorry. And you've been searching for a way home."

"Unsuccessfully. But then I read your book. Even though you changed the names, I recognized the plot instantly."

"Yeah, well, The Wizard of Oz is really just Homer's Odyssey."

"There were subtle clues too. The fireflies that surrounded Nadia the first time we meet her. The red and black pattern of Queen Lynx's clothes."

"You knew about Mewni so I wanted to meet you. But you authored your book under a pen name. Your publisher wouldn't tell me your real name so I couldn't contact you directly."

"So you waited for my book tour."

"That's right."

"Leo, do you want to go home?"

"Yes!" He said practically in tears.

"There, there..." Mabel said patting his shoulder.

Leo collected himself. "I had almost given up seeing my loved ones again."

"Like your girlfriend."

"..."

"What's wrong?"

"I've been gone so many years. She has probably moved on by now."

"Don't be so sure. I know a guy who couldn't see his girlfriend for years. But when he finally saw her again, she was still holding on and waiting for him. It was true love."

"You would know, right?"

"Not really."

"If you can express these kinds of feelings on the page, then surely you must be an expert on love."

"I'm just writing what I've seen. My friends and family found the kind of love you write stories about. But I've never really been in love. You would know better than me."

"Ms Mine..."
"Mabel. My real name is Mabel."

"An anagram! Mabel... Snipe?"

"So close. Pines."

"I am glad to know you, Mabel Pines."

Mabel smiled.

"Leo, can I ask you a question?"

"Of course."

"Is your girlfriend a manatee?"

Mabel Pines had told Leo to meet her in Gravity Falls when her book tour was over. Her family had the means to open a dimensional portal.

Leo got his affairs in order, bid farewell to the friends he had made over his years on Earth, and boarded a bus across the country.

Just like every single person on Earth who knew of her, save one, Leo had forgotten that Princess Star Butterfly existed. But the memory loss didn't affect Leo in any noticeable way. The Kingdom of Mewni lay on the other side of the Indigo Sea from his home. He only knew Princess Star Butterfly by reputation and had never even seen her in person. It was like he had forgotten the answer to a trivia question.

He had been sent to Earth without a pair of his own dimensional scissors and didn't have the ability to leave on his own. Someone was supposed to open a portal back when it was time. But the months stretched into years.

Leo had simply been caught in the crossfire of Empress Ishtar's conflict with Princess... Queen Star Butterfly.

There was no point in staying angry. Empress Ishtar was dead.

Soon he would return to his homeland. To the shores of Eagma. To his family. To his brothers and sisters. To his parents.

To her.

Mabel was optimistic. But deep down in his heart he knew better.

The taxi arrived at a house outside of the town. The Mystery Shack. It was a tourist trap. He had been to many places like this in his search for a way home. He had spoken to many psychics, magicians, and mystics. All frauds and tricksters.

The entrance had a 'CLOSED' sign in the window, but Leo knocked anyway.

The door was opened by a dark-haired woman. She was dressed in the garb of a fortune teller.
This did not look promising.

"Hey! We've been expecting you!"

"Did the spirits tell you I was coming?" Leo asked skeptically.

"If by 'spirits' you mean my sister-in-law, Mabel, then yes. You can call me Janna." she said as she beckoned him to come inside.

He found himself inside a souvenir shop. Most of the items were just nick-nacks with the name of the business on them. But there were a number of macabre items. What appeared to be a mummified winged monkey was on a shelf behind the cash register. A jar of eyeballs seemed to follow him as he moved through the room.

Leo saw a flash of brown fur move out of the corner of his eye. A monster! It was small. Was it a juvenile?

"Whoops! Sorry!" The woman said apologetically. She then turned to the monster and said, "Not yet, Junior. Wait until we open."

The monster lifted its head revealing that it was just a child in a costume.

"You must be Leo." said a voice behind him.

Leo turned to see a man dressed in a dark suit. He was wearing an eyepatch, but it was flipped up revealing that he still had both eyes. He wore a red fez with a fish-like symbol on it.

The resemblance was uncanny. This was Mabel Pines' twin brother.

"Yes, I am."

"I'm Dipper Pines. I see that you've met my wife and son." He turned to the boy in the headless costume. "Son, can you go and get Auntie Mabel?"

The boy nodded and left through a side door.

"If you don't mind my asking, what is this place?" Leo asked.

"This is the World Famous Mystery Shack! We house the finest collection of the unexplained, the occult, and magic!"

"I've been to places like this before. They're usually fake."

"But you're not from around here. You should know that monsters, demons, the undead, and magic are all real."

"I haven't seen real magic in a long, long time."

Leo froze as Dipper picked up a mace.

"Can I offer you something to drink?" Dipper said as he pressed a button on the handle. The mace opened like a flower revealing a swirling blue vortex of energy.

Dipper stuck his hand into the vortex. His hand reappeared out of thin air in front of the vending machine on the other side of the room. He rhythmically hit the side of the vending machine and a can of Pitt Cola was dispensed. Dipper's hand picked up the can and he pulled it through the vortex. He
closed the magic mace and handed the drink to Leo.
"Magic!" Leo exclaimed.

"It's not magic. I just know how to get a can without putting money in."
Leo laughed with relief. This was finally really happening. He was going home.

"Leo! You're here!" Mabel said as she entered holding the child's hand. "Bro! Can you get the scissors?"

"Slow down, Mabel. He just came cross country." Janna said before putting her arm around Leo. 
"You should at least stay for lunch!"

"I would like that."

"Hmm… No wallet. Looks like lunch is on Mabel!" Janna said.

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"You can open a portal home with these." Dipper said as he handed him the dimensional scissors.
Leo opened a portal and handed them back.

"I suppose this is farewell. Thank you all for helping me. Especially you, Mabel. I'm glad that we met."

"Goodbye, Leo. And good luck. We have a mirror. Let us know how you're doing." Mabel said.
Leo smiled at her and entered the portal.
After it closed, Dipper said, "I'm surprised that you let him go so easily."

"What?" Mabel said as innocently as she could.

"We could totally tell that you liked him, Mabel." Janna said.

"I thought you were going to offer to go with him." Dipper said.

"C'mon. He has someone at home. Besides, we just met. We haven't spent enough time together."

==================================
Leo called out as he entered his family's home, "Father? Mother? It's me."

"Who is… Leo? LEO! You're home!" his mother screamed as she saw him.
She ran to embrace her son.

"Hello, Mother."

"Husband! HUSBAND! Your son has returned home!"

"Leo? You're here!" his father exclaimed as he came to greet him.
Soon Leo found himself surrounded by his brothers and sisters.
"Leo! Welcome home!"

"We thought we would never see you again!"

After the initial clamor calmed, Leo's eldest brother, Ken spoke. "Leo, I married during the time you were gone."

Ken brought forth a young boy.

"This is my son."

"What's your name, little man?"

"Leo." the boy said.

==================================

"...I immediately recognized it as the story of Nova and Max. The author had a connection to Mewni. Her family had helped Marco Diaz break through the dimensional block from Earth."

"We need to thank this family somehow."

"Father? May I use the family scissors? I want to try something."

Leo's father retrieved a box with a pair of dimensional scissors. Leo took them and unsuccessfully attempted to open a dimensional portal to Earth.

"Dimensional travel to Earth has been impossible for years." Ken pointed out.

"No. Somehow it is possible. Mabel Pines indicated that the Butterfly royal family make visits Earth."

"Maybe we can visit Mewni Kingdom and speak to them during open court?" Leo's brother Tim said.

"Yes. I think that we should."

"Leo, have you been to visit Laraline?"

"No. I planned to wait for the right time to avoid a scene with her husband, whomever she married."

"She has not married yet."

"No sane man would have her." Tim said.

"Tim! Hush!"

"I think that Lord Rick has realized by now that it was not you who made her difficult. It was her own nature." Leo's sister Cat said.

"She wasn't so bad."

"Will you visit her?"

==================================

Leo visited when Lord Rick was away. He didn't want to cause a scene.
"Leo?" she said when she saw him. "Leo! It's you! You came back!"

"Hello, Laraline. How have you been? I have missed you. It's good to-"

"You're just in time!"

"Time for-?"

"My dad arranged a marriage for me with Count Gus."

"Oh. Count Gus? He's a good man. A kind man. I'm happy for-"

"Gus is a dung salesman!"

"That's understating it a bit. His ranch produces enough crocattle dung fertilizer for three kingdoms."

"But he's still just a dung peddler! I don't want to move to Apta! Can you imagine me living in Apta? It's boring! It smells! It's in the middle of nowhere! And I think he has a thing with the stableman."

"Then why would he agree to the engagement?"

"He's getting older and wants an heir! Can you imagine me with a rug rat? I don't want kids! They're a drag!"

"I'm sorry-"

"I need you to contest my engagement!"

"Laraline, we've talked about this. I'm of common blood. The only way for us to be together as husband and wife would be to leave this dimension forever. You have always been against the idea."

"Well, I'm a noble. I can't just give up my title and status. I don't want to leave. What would I do without my family's fortune?"

"I thought that it was because you didn't want to leave your family?"

"But did you hear? King Tom used a new loophole to legally marry some common demon servant girl."

"Did you mean Emperor Tom? I heard that he had married, but I didn't know-"

"All you have to do is show up at the next Gathering and speak up. Gus will back down. I'll make sure of that. I'll convince my girl Circe to be your noble sponsor. You need one. She'll agree or else I'll tell everyone what we did when we travelled to the Dowager dimension last year. She'll never be able to show her face again."

"Wait, what happened last-?"

"You'll probably need to put up your family's wealth."

"But my family has their own commitments. My brother has a family of his own now. My family's construction guild was just hired to build a new infrastructure project and needs to pay worker salaries."

"Construction workers are replaceable. There's boatloads of jobless commoners who'll work for your family when the workers you have now walk away."
"But-"

"C'mon, Leo! Don't you want to go back to how it was before? Us travelling and partying and having a good time!"

"We're both older now. We need to consider every-"

"Don't screw this up for me, Leo!" Laraline snapped. She then gave him a beguiling look. The one that always overrode his sense of reason. "We can be together again. Wouldn't that be nice?"

"...

"You'll be there, won't you?"

Leo nodded.

"We can decide later whether we actually get married or not."

As she left, Leo realized something.

"She never even asked how I was."

====================================================================================================

"I think that concludes the final official item on the agenda. Does anyone have any other concerns they need to discuss before we adjourn this Gathering?"

Why was he even here?

Laraline seemed like a completely different person than the one he left behind all those years ago. But was she really? Or did he simply not see her for the person she was? Had he been holding on to this ideal image of her so he would keep trying to get home?

She didn't love him. Not anymore. Perhaps she never did.

And he had changed too.

That part of his life was long over. He had to move forward.

"Well, Leo?!" Laraline asked with a demanding tone.

There was a long uncomfortable silence.

"Who, me?" he said.

====================================================================================================

"Leo of Nagma." Manfred announced.

"Eagma." Leo corrected him before bowing to the Queen and King of Mewni.

"Your Majesties."

"Leo! It's good to meet you." Star greeted

"Mabel told us that you were trapped on Earth when Ishtar's curse was cast. We're sorry that happened to you."
"Cut off from any support, I was fortunate to meet some good people. It was an experience, but I think it changed me for the better."

"I heard that you were separated from someone?"

Leo saw Queen Star reach for her husband's hand.

"Yes. But it was not the same as your separation. We were not meant to be. I hope that she finds happiness in her marriage."

"Did you leave behind many friends on Earth?"

"I did. I was sad to say goodbye to them. But they understood. They knew that I had an opportunity to return home. I hope to see them again someday. That is actually why I have come to you today. My family's pair of dimensional scissors cannot open a portal to Earth. But it is possible, isn't it? You do have a way to return to Earth, don't you?"

"Well, yes. We were there just last month to visit my parents." Marco said.

"We will send word to Prince Kevin of Xix. He's actually the one you want to talk to about this." Star said.

"Prince Kevin? He married the friend of Mabel Pines' sister-in-law, didn't he?"

"Yes. But Jackie is our friend too."

Leo called a few weeks later.

"Hello, Mabel."

"Leo! How are you? I'm sure you've been spending time reuniting with your family."

"Yes. My family was very glad to see me home. One of my brothers got married while I was gone. My brother now has a son. The child was named after me in memorium."

"I'm sorry you weren't there for all that."

"It's alright. They find my stories of my time on Earth fascinating."

"How did things work out with your girlfriend?"

"She did not marry in my absence."

Mabel was happy for him, but admittedly a little bit disappointed.

"She was hanging on for you!"

"Um… Would you mind if I came to visit? I would like to talk to you in person."

"Sure."

Mabel heard a portal open outside. She opened the door to find Leo.

"Oh! You meant now!"
"I hope I'm not intruding."

"No. It's alright. Come in. So what happened when you were reunited? I bet it was romantic!"

"Well…"

=================================================================================

"...The royal family of Xix provided me with a pair of dimensional scissors capable of cutting a dimensional path to Earth. To Gravity Falls. To you, Mabel."

"Are you saying…?"

"Oh! I'm not declaring my love for you. We haven't known each other long enough for that." Leo said while waving his hands in front of him.

"But it's not too early to say that I'm attracted to you. And since I now have the ability to visit you easily, I would like to get to know you better. If you would like to get to know me as well, that is."

"I would like that." Mabel said while blushing.

"Have you started writing your next book?"

"Uh-huh!"

"So what is book two going to be about?"

"It's going to be about a foreign traveller who falls in love with a princess during a war."

=================================================================================

epílogo continuará
Her mother and father told her that something had happened to her aunt and they needed to travel to Earth as soon as possible.

A few years before they got married, her parents had been separated by a dimensional travel curse. Now, her family didn't risk travel between dimensions separately. Which meant that she and her younger brother, Dommy, had to travel to Earth with them.

Not that she or her brother minded. They both enjoyed going to Earth.

Her aunt wasn't actually her aunt either. She was just called that. She was really a close family friend. And something had happened to her. Her parents said it was nothing terrible, just important.

Whenever she asked her parents what they meant by that, they just blushed and tried to change the subject.

Thank goodness Auntie Janna was willing to tell her anything she wanted to know. She didn't know why her parents were being so dodgy. Auntie Mabel was just having a baby. She already had one child. But news of this new baby had everyone spun up.

And now the Butterfly family found themselves outside the main gate of the house. Her father says that it's rude to just emerge from a portal into someone else's living room.

Her parents didn't seem to be surprised that her cousin Dawn and her parents were there as well.

Auntie Mabel's house was bigger than a typical Earth house. For a hundred and fifty years, it had been the home of a very wealthy local family. But when that family lost most of their fortune, the house was bought by a local inventor. He passed away a few years ago and his son put the house up for sale.

Thanks to the sales of Auntie Mabel's books they were able to buy the house at a reduced price. The house had a reputation of being haunted after all.

After everyone greeted each other, they pressed the buzzer.

"Hello?"

She recognized the voice on the intercom as that of Auntie Mabel's son.

"It's us! We're all here."

"Wait there. I'll be right out."
In a moment, the gate opened.

"Hello everyone! Aunt Janna is already inside."

"We should probably get in there too!" Star said to Auntie Jackie before saying to the men and children, "Can you all wait out here?"

"Aren't we allowed to see Auntie Mabel too?" Dommy asked.

"We'll come and get you when it's safe - I mean - time." Star said.

"You know, in the meantime we should all just go to the Mystery Shack. There's something I want to check." Auntie Mabel's son said.

"That's a good idea." said Kevin.

==================================

Her father and uncle walked ahead of them. Dommy and Dawn were walking together slowly and falling further and further behind.

She was talking to Auntie Mabel's son. He was still so young, but it was obvious that he was the smartest person she had ever met.

"So what did you want to check at your Uncle's house?"

"I want to run some tests in the lab on this stuff." he said holding up a mason jar.

She took the jar to take a closer look. The mason jar was filled with grey flakes. No, not grey. The flakes just had a matte surface. They were silver. And the flakes all had a uniform shape. Were those clovers?

"Where did you get this?" she asked.

"My parents' bedroom was full of this stuff. You do you know what these are, don't you?"

She knew exactly what they were. It had already happened to her. And her cousin Dawn was a ticking time bomb.

==================================

When she walked in she greeted her Uncle Dipper warmly.

"Hi Uncle Dipper!" she said with a hug.

"Hi, Princess!" he said in return.

"Uncle Dipper? Would it be okay to use the lab? I got a shedding sample from my mother."

"Sure. You know the code for the door. Let me know what you find out." Dipper answered.

"I'll join you in a bit." she said then joined the conversation with her father and uncles.

After he had gone, she punched her father's arm. "Why didn't you and Mom just tell us that Auntie Mabel is giving birth to a royal magic heir."

"Well w-we-" Marco stammered as he turned red.
"There are some things about royal magic and having children that we're supposed to keep quiet about until it's time." Kevin said.

"If you're talking about the 'King's Duty' I already know." she said making the air quotes gesture. "And I know what happened when Auntie Jackie got pregnant with Dawn."

"You know, after being a trained as a scholar in the Library of Secrets, you'd think my wife would be able to keep one." Dipper said.

"Since Janna has spared me from a very uncomfortable talk with my daughter, I guess now we can talk freely about it." Marco said.

"Leo needed to be educated on what to expect. And why. I'm surprised that he didn't know already." Kevin said.

"Mabel didn't know either." Dipper said.

"I'm surprised that Auntie Janna didn't tell her about it a long time ago. She told me." she said.

"You had a reason for knowing. Mabel didn't until now. I mean, she knew about rebirth, but not the how."

"Which magic bloodline is it?" Kevin asked.

"Well, Leo's from what used to be part of Agma." Dipper said.

"So, the Silkmoth line?" Marco surmised.

"Makes sense."

"But, why now? Mabel and Leo have been married for years. Jackie and I had only been married a short while when it happened to us."

"And I thought it would only be reborn through a noble family?"

"The old legends about it said that it had a mind of its own. It chose when it would reappear. And to whom."

"The King of Nagma is going to throw a fit. He might think this is a coup."

"The other nobles are going to have a problem with a non-noble royal magic holder too."

"This is assuming that Mabel and Leo would want their daughter to become the ruler."

"Don't you think that choice should be hers? Even Dawn still has to make a decision and she's already a teenager." she stated sternly.

There was a pause before Kevin answered her. "You're right of course."

She turned around to see that her brother and cousin had not been following and had disappeared.

"Where'd those two go?"

==================================

"Aunt Janna forgot to bring my mother her copy of 'Mewberty and You' when she rushed over to
our house. Remind me to ask for it before we head back." Mabel's son said as he used the spectrometer.

The old dot matrix printer noisily printed out results.

"Oxygen and Hydrogen. That's not surprising. Carbon, calcium, nitrogen, some other trace elements..." the young boy said as he read the results.

"What does that mean?" she asked.

"These results are typical of organic matter... hmm... except... Interesting."

"What is?"

"An unusual amount of silver."

"SILVER?!" came the loud voice behind them.

The two jumped in surprise and turned to the intruder.

"Junior! We're doing science here!" Mabel's son scolded.

"Hello, my Royal Flower." Junior said as he approached her.

"Hi. I missed you, Stanley." she said as she embraced him.

"I missed you too, Daisy." he said as he gave her a peck on the lips.

The gold stars on Daisy's cheeks seemed to shine.

"Hey! This is a PDA free lab!" the younger boy said.

"Heh. You're not even into double digits, Jeffrey. You just don't understand yet."

"Don't patronize me, Junior. You still need my help with your trigonometry."

Junior threw up his hands apologetically. "Sorry, sheesh!"

He then approached the jar with the sample flakes.

"Silver, eh? How much of this stuff is there?" Junior said tapping the glass jar.

"My parents' bedroom is covered over one meter deep in it."

Dollar signs appeared in Junior's eyes.

"You know, I could steal- I mean- borrow a truck from the Gleeful boys and haul that stuff out of there for you."

"This material violates physical laws on conservation of matter. Its existence is tenuous."

"Eh?" Junior grunted confused.

"It's magic. It's going to vanish soon." Daisy clarified for him.

"Aww."
She giggled at his frustration.

There was the thumping sound of a person running down the stairs
Dipper appeared in the stairway and looked at the princess.

"Something happened! Daisy! You need to get upstairs!" he said to her.

"Dad?! What's wrong?" Junior said.

She was already running.

==================================

When she got upstairs she saw her brother in the kitchen animatedly talking to her father and uncles. The right side of his face and his right hand was covered in red.

"Dommy! What happened?! You're bleeding!"

"No, sis! I'm not bleeding. It's…"

She got close and looked at her brother. He was right. He wasn't bleeding.

His arm and face was covered in red flakes. Each flake was circular surrounded by points. Like a circular saw or a sun. Like the marks on Dawn's cheeks.

"Where is my daughter?" Kevin asked.

"We were taking a path through the woods on the way here. She told me to run and get help."

"Why were you in the woods?" Marco asked.

"Never mind all that!" Junior interrupted. "Dawn needs our help!"

He ushered the men outside leaving Domingo Diaz Butterfly alone with his sister.

"That was a close one. You need to be more careful" she said as she brushed the red flakes off his face.

"I know."

"C'mon. They need our help."

"Dawn will be fine, right? Isn't this is supposed to be over relatively quickly?"

"Yeah, but it's not just Dawn that I'm worried about."

==================================

Daisy and her brother ran through the woods towards Auntie Mabel's house to the spot where he left Dawn to get help.

It was easy enough to find. Just go to where the hanging red vines and carpet of red flakes was the thickest. But they found the empty shell of a red cocoon.

"Oh no. Dawn is out there somewhere." Dommy said.
"I think we have other problems. Where is everyone?"

The siblings stood in the all too quiet woods.

Daisy drew her wand from her purse.

"Is that absolutely necessary?" Dommy asked.

"Relax. I'm not going to hurt her. But she's faster and stronger than us. We might need the edge."

"Hello?! Is anyone there?!" came the distant voice.

"Is that…?" Dommy started to say. But his sister was already running towards the voice.

Following the calls into the woods, they looked around at the trees, but saw nothing.

"Stanley?! Where are you?!" Daisy called out.

"Up here!"

The siblings looked up to see Junior suspended in a tree in a cage of red resin.

Daisy fired a bolt of magic which dropped the still cocooned Junior to the forest floor. The resin shattered on impact.

"What happened?" Daisy asked as they helped him up.

"Dawn was too fast. She snatched me up before anyone could react."

"What about the others?"

"My dad said that I would be the one Dawn would go after. They used me as bait. But when it didn't work, your dad went to get your mom. Mine and Dawn's dad chased after us but she doubled back and lost them."

"Well, what now?" Dommy asked.

"I guess we wait for Dawn to turn back to normal." Daisy said.

"Yeah, but that be anywhere from a few minutes to a few hours. Mother said that Grandmother Moon took a few days. She could be anywhere when that happens."

"She's going to be drawn toward… Junior, how many teenage boys live in Gravity Falls?"

"Enough. But we're on the outskirts. Only a few people live out this far. There's Frankie Valentino. Then there's Adam and Caleb Gleeful."

Daisy groaned.

=================================================================================

The three approached the beautifully maintained home of the Gleeful family.

The door was opened by Adam and Caleb's rotund but cheerful father, Gideon.

"Well, Hello, Princess Daisy!"
"Hello, Mr Gleeful." she said.

"Have you come to visit Adam? He'll be so happy to see you again. Are you still involved with the Pines boy?"

"I'm standing right here, you know." Junior said.

"We're looking for my cousin, Dawn. We think she may have come by here. Have you seen her?"

"Why, no. I can't say that I have. Is she looking for a prince? My Caleb is still quite smitten with her."

Dommy held his tongue.

"Are your sons home?" Daisy asked.

"I do believe they're in the garage."

Mr Gleeful led the trio to the side of the house. He then pressed the button on the remote opener.

The garage door lifted to reveal a heavily customized truck covered with a thin layer of red flakes. A large hole had been torn in the back wall of the garage.

"We're too late. She's already been here." Dommy said.

"MAH BABIES!"

"Don't worry Mr Gleeful. I'm sure they're fine. We'll find them." Daisy said.

----------------------------------

"So now what?" Junior asked as they entered the Mystery Shack.

Daisy asked her brother a leading question. "You know who could help us, right?"

"Forget it."

"C'mon, bro. Dawn's lost in the woods. Do it for her."

Dommy groaned and said, "Fine."

They climbed down the stairs to the lab. Jeffrey wasn't there, but he had left an experiment running. He was trying to extract the silver content from the earlier sample.

"My Dad still doesn't know that I cracked the combination to the safe." Junior said as he spun the dial.

After he finished entering the combination and turned the handle to open the safe, Junior withdrew the Pines family dimensional scissors and handed them to Dommy.

"Here. You drive."

----------------------------------

The three emerged in front of the entrance to Underworld Castle. The castle guards recognized the Butterfly royals and allowed them entrance without question. Junior stuck close to Daisy. This place always freaked him out.
"Stanley and I will go say hello to her parents. You go talk to her." Daisy said to her brother.

Dommy knew where her room was.

Princess Ivy opened her door when she heard the knock. She was greeted by the sight of her ex-boyfriend.

"Hi, Ivy. We need to talk."

"So let me get this straight. You want me to help you find Dawn?"

"Yes. Will you help us?"

"Does anyone know you and her are dating?"


A drop of sweat rolled down Dommy's face. "It's hot down here." he said.

"You don't fool me Domingo Diaz Butterfly. I saw the way you looked at Dawn. You always liked her. Even while you and I were dating."

Dommy was silent for a moment before he spoke. "I'm sorry."

"For breaking up with me?"

"No, not for breaking up. I'm sorry that I hurt you. I learned something that changed things between Dawn and I. I should have been truthful about why I broke up with you. It wasn't anything you did or didn't do. It was me."

Ivy's face softened.

"It's been a while. I guess it's time for me to forgive you."

They smiled at each other.

"There's a lot going on that I can't explain right now. But I- Dawn needs your help."

"Why didn't you ever bring me here?! It's so awesome!" Ivy exclaimed when she saw the forest surrounding Gravity Falls.

"There are forests in Mewni."

"What, like the Silly Forest? It's not like this! Everything is so GREEN!"

"Silly Forest?" Junior asked

"Our grandfather lives there. The Forest of Slightly Increased Likelihood of Injury. S-I-L-I." Daisy
"You mean The Forest of Certain Death?"

"It's not that dangerous if you go in prepared."

"Ivy, can you ask the forest where Dawn is?" Dommy asked.

Ivy put her hands on a tree and closed her eyes. Using her plant magic, her hands grafted and merged with the wood. Her eyes opened and glowed a luminous green. Ivy spoke but her voice seemed to surround them in the forest.

"Near the foothills of the mountain range to the east. Dozens are trapped there."

"Dozens? I thought you said only three teenaged boys lived out this far." Dommy asked Junior.

"That's all- uh, oh."

"What?"

"I just thought of more teenage boys out here."

"Why didn't you mention them before?"

"I didn't think of them because they aren't human! We need to go see them first! Maybe they haven't gone to war yet!"

Daisy, Dommy, Junior, and Ivy found themselves in front of a cave.

"Hey! Chutzpar?! Macholaur?! Pituitar?! You guys here?" Junior called out as they entered the Man Cave.

Manotaurs emerged from the back of the cave. The one known as Macholaur shouted. "Stanford Stanley Pines! Why have you brought females to the Man Cave?! It is forbidden!" He pointed at Ivy. "This one in particular absolutely reeks of flowers and girly things!"

A plant sprouted from the dirt around Mascular's feet. It grew suddenly and wrapped Macholaur in green vines. After slamming him into the ground like a rag-doll a few times, Ivy released him. The plant shrunk and disappeared into the ground.

"We're looking for a girl that might have come here! Did she take the teenage boys?"

"There are no boys among the Manotaurs! There are only men and those who are almost men!"

"The red flying female that stank of magic and estrogen took all on the brink of full manotaurhood! We are forming a war party to take them back!"

"Wait! No! That's not necessary! We can bring your young ones back without violence!" Dommy protested.

"Dawn is super powered and unpredictable right now too. She would tear them into tiny bits if she feels threatened." Daisy whispered to Junior and Ivy.

"Violence is the Manotaur way!"
"Fighting is a last resort! We aren't there yet! Give us a chance to bring them back peacefully first!"

"We go into battle according to Manotaur law! Who are you to demand otherwise?!"

"He is Domingo Diaz Butterfly! Warrior Prince of Mewni!" Ivy shouted.

The Manotaurs all laughed.

"Butterfly?! A boy with such a girly name cannot possibly be a warrior!"

"Fine! If you want a fight, then I'll fight your best! If I beat him in unarmed combat, you give us time to bring your calves back!" Dommy retorted.

"Why should we bend the law for you?!"

"Oh, I see! You're chicken! Bawk-bawk-bawk!"

The Manotaurs scowled and began to argue among themselves.

"I'll fight him!"

"No! I'll fight him!"

"I'll show you who's chicken!"

Chutzpar held up his hand. "Stop! We will send forth our largest and strongest! Domingo Diaz Butterfly will fight MUSCULAUR!"

The crowd parted to reveal an enormous Manotaur flexing his massive arms. The ground shook with his every step.

Dommy took a fighting stance he adapted as a combination of his mother and father's fighting styles.

"FIGHT! FIGHT! FIGHT!" Junior chanted.

==================================================================

"Well, we've got a few hours." Daisy said.

"Is Dawn still not back to normal?" Dommy asked

"Her captives are still gathered in a small area." Ivy said touching a tree.

"Hey, Champ! Nice job with Musculaur! A twenty one second knockout!" Junior said to Dommy as he put an arm around his shoulder.

"I wish I didn't have to do that."

"Eh. It's their way. They respected you enough to fight you."

"Stanley? How do they have children when there are only males?" Daisy asked.

Junior just shrugged.

==================================================================

Daisy, Dommy, and Junior peered down from a cliff overlooking the clearing. A red figure sat in the
middle. In the surrounding trees, captive adolescent males were imprisoned in red resin cages

"There she is. She's still transformed." Junior said.

"It's been hours." Dommy said.

"Before we get too close, we need to make sure Dawn doesn't attack you."

"How?"

"RADIANT SHADOW TRANSFORM!"

After a short transformation sequence, Dommy and Junior found themselves dressed as very pretty princesses.

"Yellow's not really my color." Dommy said wrapping his now long hair in a ponytail.

"The bust on this dress is too tight." Junior said.

"She'll ignore you if she doesn't realize you're boys."

"Alright. Let's go." Dommy said.

==================================

The three approached Dawn cautiously. She was seated on the ground in the middle of her captives. Her six arms were wrapped around her chest and knees.

"Dawn? Hey, it's me. Daisy. I'm here to help you."

Dawn's glowing eyes stared silently at Daisy.

"Is it safe?" Junior asked holding his dress as he walked towards them.

"She's tired. She should have changed back a long time ago."

"Why hasn't she?"

"I'm not sure."

"Princess Daisy! My sweet! You've come to rescue me!" said a cherub faced boy. He was suspended from a tree limb in a red resin cage.

Daisy rolled her eyes. "Hello, Adam." she said as emotionlessly as possible.

"I knew you cared about me after all!" Adam said.

"He can see me, right?" Junior asked Dommy.

"She's not here for you, big brother. She's here for her cousin." said a similarly cherub faced boy. "Some evil doer has cast a spell on my poor Princess Dawn! But she has captured my heart just as she has captured all of me."

"You hush your mouth, Caleb! Princess Dawn didn't only kidnap you. She also took me, Frankie Valentino and and all these monsters!" Adam said.

Everyone looked up to see Robbie and Tambry Valentino's son in a cage. He silently waved in
"What do we do now?" Junior asked Daisy.

"I guess we wait as long as it takes."

"At least Dawn's safe and not lost in the woods alone." Dommy said.

"Domm… y…" Dawn said.

A plant sprouted from a tree next to Dommy and formed a humanoid… mewmanoid… demonoid… person shape… whatever. Ivy emerged from the shape.

"Is it safe?" she said as she put her hand on Dommy's arm.

Dawn's expression instantly changed from neutral to enraged. She pushed off from the ground like a sprinter and flew towards Ivy who was frozen in surprise.

Dommy acted on instinct and tackled Dawn before she could reach the dryad. Dommy found himself airborne hanging onto Dawn who was trying to shake him off.

"Do something!" Dommy shouted to his sister.

"Do what?!"

"Change her back with magic!"

"But I don't know what's keeping her transformed!"

One of the young manotaurs shouted, "You should have let them fight! A girl fight is a rare spectacle!"

Daisy came to a realization.

"It's them! There's too much boy energy here! Dawn's caught in a feedback loop!" she said.

Daisy looked at Junior in his pink dress and came up with an idea.

"RADIANT SHADOW TRANSFORM!"

==================================

Dommy felt Dawn change in his arms. Her extra arms and wings vanished in a shower of red flakes. Her skin and hair changed back into its natural color.

"Dommy?" she asked in a tired and confused voice.

"Hang on, Dawn!"

They were falling. The landing was going to hurt. Dommy rotated them so he was under Dawn and braced himself for impact.

But the tree limbs seemed to reach out and slow their fall. They landed in a soft pile of leaves. The impact was not as bad as it could have been.

Ivy had used her magic to catch them.
Daisy ran to her brother and cousin.

"Are you guys okay?!"

Dommy groaned. "Dawn? Are you okay?"

She nodded and groaned in response. "I'm sorry..."

"I'm just glad you're safe."

He wasn't sure Dawn heard him. She was asleep.

Dommy looked up at Dawn's captives. They were all wearing poofy princess dresses.

"Fortitaur is confused by these clothes!"

"Butchtor has never felt so free!"

Daisy freed Frankie Valentino and the teenaged manotaurs and sent them home. She decided that she would free the Gleeful boys only when they were ready to leave.

"It's getting late. We should bring Dawn back." Dommy said.

"Should we wake her up?" Junior asked.

"I will wake the princess with a kiss!" Caleb Gleeful said.

"Can it, Caleb!" Junior said.

"If we can't wait for her to wake up on her own, I could make a stretcher using magic." Daisy suggested.

It was at that moment when an off-road vehicle driven by a heavy set latino man pulled into the clearing. It was Salvador Ramirez.

"Hey dudes and dudettes! You guys need a lift back?"

"Sal! Great timing!" Junior said as he picked up Dawn from the ground.

"How did you know we needed a ride, Salvador?" Daisy asked.

"I go where I'm needed. Like my father before me."

"I'd better head back to the Underworld." Ivy said.

"You're not coming with us?" Dommy asked.

"If your parents see me, they'll know that you left this dimension without them. I know you aren't allowed to do that."

"Thank you for helping us, Ivy." Dommy said.

"Dawn was my friend too."

"She's still your friend. She'll want to apologize to you when she wakes up."
"I know it was just her magic hormones getting the better of her. Tell her I'm ready to talk again when she's ready."

Dommy smiled at her. He cut a dimensional portal and Ivy went through it to her home.

Daisy and Dommy sat in the back of Sal's 4x4. They laid Dawn across the bench seat with her head in Daisy's lap.

Daisy rolled down her window and freed the Gleeful boys with her magic.

"We'd offer you fellas a ride, but we're full up. You should probably hurry and get home. Bears come out at night." Junior said from the front passenger seat right before Sal peeled out.

Their parents did not have luck in their search efforts. They had returned to the Mystery Shack and were counting on them to find Dawn. They were waiting when Sal dropped them all off. They took Dawn and laid her down on the couch. Junior thought his father would be more interested in how the Manotaur delayed the end of Dawn's transformation, but he seemed more relieved that he and Dawn had been found safely.

While Daisy and Dommy were explaining, Junior slipped away and went down to the lab. He found his young cousin there asleep in front of an experiment. Junior looked at his notes.

"Speed of electrolytic extraction of silver from dissolved solution insufficient. Resorted to chemical precipitation of silver salt by addition of TMT. While successful, extracted silver begins to decay within 30 minutes and dematerializes completely within 1 hour."

"So much for that idea." Junior said to himself.

He opened the safe and placed the dimensional scissors inside before locking it again. He then turned to Jeffrey and said, "C'mon, squirt. Your Mom says that you'll be staying here for a while."

Jeffrey stirred and said, "It didn't work."

"It's alright. Thanks for trying." Junior said.
"Mom, you were only fourteen when you went to live with Dad's family. And it's not like we're going to be alone. Dommy will be with me. Uncle Dipper and Auntie Janna are here."

"And Junior…" Marco said.

"We'll worry about you and your brother." Star said.

"Today we tracked down Dawn and stopped the Manotaurs from going to war. We can handle it."

"We haven't asked-" Marco started before he was interrupted.

"There's plenty of room! Of course they're welcome to stay!" Janna piped in.

Marco gave her a look that said 'Really?'

"I want to stay on Earth too." Dawn said.

"Dawn! You're awake!" Jackie said.

"Mom, Dad, I want to stay too. I'm not allowed to use magic at home."

"Well, Dawn, no one knows about your magic powers yet." Kevin said.

"Someday they're going to find out. If I had gone into Mewberty at home, the secret would be out already. And I can't even handle my magic."

"I'll help her to practice!" Daisy said.

"You always said that I had the choice whether to accept the crown from Auntie Skye. But I've lived in Xix my whole life. I need to live away to know what my other choices are."

"We'll all be just a portal away. You don't have to worry." Dommy said.

"..."

"...

The adults all huddled together to have a private conversation.

==================================

Mabel heard the buzzer from the master bedroom. Sometimes she wondered whether buying the old Northwest mansion was a good idea. The house was so large and they didn't have any servants. She decided to let Leo sleep. He deserved the rest.

She had to get dressed and wade through the silver colored debris in order to make her way out of the room and down to the front door.

She answered the door to find her son along with her nephew and her friends' kids.

"Hello, mother! I'm just here for some of my things. I'll be staying over at the Mystery Shack for a little while."

"Hi, Auntie Mabel! Congratulations!" said everyone as they hugged her.

"Kids! Hi! Are your parents still here?"
"No! They agreed to let us stay!"

After a while Junior, Jeffrey, and Dommy left to let the girls talk. Dawn and Daisy had something to ask Mabel.

"The Mystery Shack isn't small, but six people? Seven on nights Jeffrey stays over? It's going to be crowded!" Mabel commented.

"That's something we wanted to talk to you about, Auntie Mabel." Daisy said.

"Our parents agreed to let the three of us stay and Auntie Janna and Uncle Dipper say that we can stay at the Mystery Shack. But our parents would feel a lot better if Daisy and I stayed with you."

"Our parents said that it was our responsibility to ask you. We know it's kind of a weird time. We'll understand if you say no. But Dawn and I can help around the house! We can help with the baby when she gets here!"

"We won't be a bother! We'll even share a room!" Dawn said.

"Sharing a room is what makes staying over fun!" Mabel said.

"Are you saying we can come live with you?" Daisy asked.

"Of course you can!"

"Yay!" The girls hugged Mabel excitedly.

"You'll all have to go to school with Junior."

"Our parents said that they would talk to the principal after we settle in."

"Did your mom and dad not want you to live under the same roof as your boyfriend, Daisy?"

"They're ones to talk. They lived together when they were younger than me."

"And since Daisy is going to help me practice my magic, my parents said that I should live with her."

"Are you sure they just didn't want you sleeping down the hall from Dommy?"

"My parents still don't know that we know we're not really related." Dawn said.

"Her dad tried to convince us that 'Crimson Luna: Book II' was just a book about astronomy."

"Speaking of which, is Book III ready?"

"It is! But I'm going to hold off publishing for now. I'm going to be busy for a while."

"Don't worry. We'll bail at the first sign of your symptoms. So you can, you know... 'get busy'." Daisy said making the air quotes gesture.

Dawn and Daisy then called out up the main staircase towards the sleeping quarters.

"HI, UNCLE LEO!"

"Hi, girls!" was heard from upstairs.
"I like your cheek marks, Auntie Mabel!" Dawn said.

"Thanks! But how does the magic choose a symbol? Why couldn't it have been something cuter? Like happy faces?" Mabel asked.

"Clovers are lucky!"

Mabel smiled and said, "I guess I am. Leo and I always wanted more children. Jeffrey is so mature for his age."

"Auntie Mabel, you said that Jeffrey takes after his great-granduncle, Stanford Pines, didn't you? Why is Junior's first name Stanford?" Dawn asked.

"My brother always said that if he had a son, he would name his son 'Stanford' in memory of our Grunkle Ford. And I was going to name my son after our Grunkle Stan. But when Junior was born, I was still single with no boyfriend in sight. So I suggested 'Stanley' as Junior's middle name."

"He took your son's name. That does sound like something he'd do." Daisy said.

"Have you thought of a name for the baby? You're having a girl! A new royal magical princess!" Dawn asked.

"If my daughter is a magic princess then she should have a magic princess name, shouldn't she?"

"How about, Dove?" Daisy suggested.

"Too many girls in Mewni have bird names. How about Brooke?"

"Violet?"

"Pearl?"

"Venus? No. Sorry. It sounded bad the second it left my lips. How about Blossom?"

"Leaf?"

"Autumn?"

"But she won't be born in the fall. She'll be born in the-"

"Summer!" Mabel said. "It's perfect!"

"Summer Silkmoth. I like it!" Daisy said.

*pwip*

"...That's our cue to go!" Dawn said.

"We'll see you later Auntie Mabel!" Daisy said as they quickly left.

"Do you think we'll need to magically embiggen our room at Auntie Mabel's?" Daisy asked as they walked to the Mystery Shack.

"Like your mom did at your Grandparent's? I think our room is probably already huge! Living on Earth is going to be so much fun! I can finally let loose with magic!" Dawn said.
"We should practice now! Try to summon a cloud for us to ride to the Mystery Shack."

Dawn concentrated and the magic flowed from her hands forming a smiling cloud.

"It tingles!" she said.

The cloud grew dark and its expression changed to anger as a lightning bolt erupted and struck the ground in front of them.

"Eh. Close enough." Daisy said.

"What do you think the guys are doing?" Dawn asked as they climbed aboard.

==================================

"It's class warfare on the field!" Dommy stated.

"Nobody wants to see a pitcher miss the ball. People want to see more hits!" Junior responded.

"If they want a pinch hitter in that spot, pull the pitcher out. The plusses have to be weighed against the-"

The sound of thunder followed by a loud crash was heard at the front door. When he opened the door, Junior was met with the sight of Daisy and Dawn laying in a heap on the porch.

Daisy sprang to her feet. "Stanley! Auntie Mabel said yes! We're going to be living with her."

"Aww."

"I know it's not like living in the same house. But we'll be close."

"You're right, Daisy. And you get to go to highschool with me."

"And me too. At least until I graduate early." Jeffrey said.

"The three of us need to pack!" Dawn said.

"Uncle Dipper? Can we use your scissors to stop by our homes?" Dommy asked.

==================================

Star and Marco returned to the royal quarters after a long day with the King of Rall.

"Kids?! We're home!" Star called out.

Only silence responded.

"Star…"

"Oh, right. They're on Earth."

"It's been a long day. And this is going to take some time to get used to."

He felt it before his wife began to tear up.

"Hey. I'll be okay." he said as he took her in his arms.
"I already miss them, Marco."

"I know, Star. I miss them too." he said as he kissed her forehead.

"Is this what my parents felt like when I left?"

"Of course it is. You were their only child."

"It was their idea to send me to Earth."

"That doesn't mean they wanted you to go."

"They're growing up so fast. It seems like just yesterday I was still carrying them." Star said.

The main entrance to the royal quarters opened and their children entered.

"Mom? Are you crying?" Daisy asked.

"Kids!"

"Hi, Mom. Hi, Dad." Dommy greeted them as they all hugged each other.

"What are you doing home?" their mother asked.

"We needed to get a few of our things." he said.

"But not everything. We'll need our rooms when we want to come home to see you." their daughter said.

Star sniffled.

"Do you not want us to go?" Daisy asked.

"Of course we don't. We've never lived apart. But we'll be alright. You both need a little bit of independence." their mother said.

"You can't have us watching over you all the time. And we can all be together when we miss each other too much." their father said.

The family continued to embrace for a moment longer.

==================================

"Junior, before everyone gets back, we need to have a talk." Dipper said to his son.

"Even though you and Daisy have been exclusive for a while, her living so close changes some things. You're going to be spending a lot more time with each other." Janna said.

"Is this conversation gonna make us all uncomfortable?"

"Yes." his parents said in unison.

"Then let me make this easier on everyone. We're waiting."

"That's good. But it's easy to say that now. You're a handsome young man. And she's a beautiful young *cough*fertile*cough* woman. So I made you something just in case." his mother said.
"You had these printed out and laminated?!) Junior said looking at the index cards with the protection spell.

"I proof-read them first." his father said.

"More like, 'broof-read' them, eh? Right? Get it? 'Cause I was an accident!" Junior joked.

His mother swatted his arm. "We love you to death. But we're still too young for you to turn us into grandparents."

"Okay, okay!" Junior counted the cards and asked, "Why'd you print out extras?"

"We're not blind, son. Those are for Dawn and Dommy." his father said.

"Xix doesn't need another heir just yet."

"And we've decided that you're ready for more responsibility. We're giving you permission to use the dimensional scissors whenever they're needed."

"Try to remember to put them in the magic charger after you've used them next time. I almost ran out of gas last week."

"Sorry, Mom."

==================================

"Dommy, do you have everything you need?"

"Yes, Mom."

"Auntie Mabel and Uncle Dipper both have dimensional scissors, but ask permission first." Marco said.

"You'll come back to visit soon, won't you?"

"We will soon, Mom." Dommy said.

"We'll come to check on you occasionally. We'll be over next week to enroll you in high school." Marco said.

"And we're going to ask your Auntie Pony Head to check in on you sometimes." Star said.

"Please take care of each other, you two. Watch out for your cousin too."

"We will, Dad." Daisy said.

"Then come give your family a hug." Star said.

Star, Marco, and their children had a group hug.

"We love you."

"We love you too."

When they were ready, Star cut a dimensional portal back to Gravity Falls. Daisy and Dommy grabbed their bags and waved as they went through.
After the portal closed, Star and Marco stood quietly in thought for a moment.

"The kids are away." Star said.

"Mm-hmm." Marco sounded in acknowledgement.

"..."

"..."

They held hands as they sprinted for their bedroom.

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epílogo continuará

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Author's Notes: Yup. I'm trying the ol' next generation handoff gambit.

The point of this epilogue is to give the sense that this world that's been built up has a life of its own. It has a history even though we don't know everything that happened. And it will go on even after this story stops being written.

I'm trying to establish the characters, relationships, settings, and situations. But I'm not going to go into them too deeply. I want to leave a little wiggle room for reader's imaginations to fill in the gaps.

It's also why I don't describe what any of the original characters look like. In chapter 12, I described Brad as having jet black hair. I am removing that detail because it really doesn't matter what he or anyone else looks like. What my brain thinks Brad looks like can be different than what your version looks like and both are correct.

What they all look like is up to your imagination.

Likewise, where the story goes after the last chapter will be up to your imagination.

I will now segue awkwardly into an announcement. The next epilogue, Epilogue 11, (Chapter 42!) will most likely be the finale of 'Starfall'.

I had hoped to finish this fanfic before the premiere of Season 2 on July 11, 2016, but real life and a case of writer's block prevented that.

Sorry.

Starfall takes into account only Season 1 of SvTFoE. We don't know where Daron Nefcy is taking her characters and creations storywise. I have no doubt that there will be major plot conflicts with this fanfiction interpretation of her characters.

It's actually why I did not include Toffee, Ms Heinous, the cleaved wand, or the Spades theory in Starfall. I was trying to keep this fanfic plausible for as long as possible.

So this story is about to be rendered obsolete. I'm going to try and think of it as a writing time capsule.

Thank you to everyone still reading. See you all soon!
Epilogue 11: Secrets

Author's Notes: ...I still function…

Sorry for my longer than expected absence. I had some motivational problems that needed to be strangled into submission.

I refuse to let this work turn into an abandoned story.

I had previously said that this chapter would be the last. But as it turns out, ending the story is turning out to be more work than I thought, and will take a few more chapters than originally projected.

It was suggested by Knead-Boric in his review of the previous chapter to make a list of whose children are who's, GRRM style.

These are the children in order of relative age eldest to youngest.

Stanford Stanley Pines AKA Junior (Dipper and Janna's son)

Daisy Diaz Butterfly (Star and Marco's daughter, possesses royal magic)

Domingo Diaz Butterfly AKA Dommy (Star and Marco's son)

Dawn (Jackie and Kevin's daughter, possesses royal magic)

Ivy (Tom and Marina's daughter, possesses plant demon magic)

Jeffrey (Mabel and Leo's son)

Summer (Mabel and Leo's daughter, possesses royal magic but too young to use it)

Comments and constructive criticism are always welcomed.

Is anyone still out there? taptap Hello?... Is this thing on?...

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Starfall by GolfAlphaMike

Epilogue 11: Secrets

==================================

A man in a hooded cloak approached a run down shack. Accompanying him was an asian woman who wore too much mascara.

It was isolated here. No other people around for miles. This may have been a farm at one time, but it has long since been abandoned.

The man knocked on the rickety door and it was answered by a woman with shoulder length brown hair.

He recognized the brown haired woman. An old friend of his mother. He nodded to his travelling companion.
"Serenity has come seeking hope." said the asian woman.

The brunette pulled the visitors into the run down shack and closed the door.

==================================

During the season of Spring, many Earth schools shut down for a week. Many students took the opportunity to travel.

Daisy had gone to visit Junior in college. Jeffrey was touring West Coast Tech. And Dommy had gone to visit his grandfather, River.

Dommy had asked Dawn to come with him, but she couldn't. Her family had asked her to stay away from the Mewni dimension for a while. They said they were having Xix castle fumigated. But Dawn knew that was just a smokescreen.

In the figurative sense. Not literally.

Anyway, her friend, Ivy, was coming to visit for a few days starting tomorrow anyway. So Dawn tried to not think about it too much.

It was Sunday and she was watching after her Aunt Mabel's daughter, Summer. The little girl was growing up so quickly. Dawn wondered what her future would hold.

Someday, Summer's magic will be revealed and everyone will believe that she's the rightful ruler of the Kingdom of Agma. But Agma doesn't even exist in one piece anymore. And it's not like the King of Nagma would just surrender his family's rule willingly, would he?

Aunt Skye thinks that the simplest solution is for Summer to marry into one of the ruling families. But everyone else, especially Aunt Star, is totally against the idea of pressuring Summer into an arranged political marriage.

Besides, Summer isn't a noble. And she's not considered an outsider because Uncle Leo is a commoner from Nagma. They would have to manipulate the reading of the class marriage laws.

And all this is assuming that Summer would even want the crown in the first place.

It's going to be a mess.

Dawn knew that her own situation was simple by comparison. If she wants to rule Xix, all she has to do is just say the word. Her Aunt Skye, the Queen of Xix, wants to officially name her as heir anyway. But time was growing short. The nobles want to know the plan of succession. Dawn needed to make her choice soon.

But then there is the marriage question. Dawn doesn't have a magic wand and only the people closest to her know that she can use royal magic without one. If that secret comes out, would she be forced to take a husband to be her king immediately?

Dawn already has someone in mind. But there's a wee bit of a problem. Their pairing might be forbidden. She might be forced to choose another.

Aunt Star was able to stave off the marriage requirement by keeping her father on as king until she was able to marry Uncle Marco. Dawn can't do that. Her father, Kevin, is a prince, not the King of Xix.
Maybe Dawn's situation wasn't as simple as she thought.

Dawn's thoughts turned to Aunt Star's daughter, Daisy. Dawn wondered if Daisy and Junior have already talked about marriage.

But before Daisy becomes queen, she wants to do the things she wants to first. When she graduates from high school in a few months she wants to go to college with Junior. In California.

Everything is going to change.

A voice from right behind Dawn surprised her. "Hey Sunshine, you in there?"

It was Aunt Pony Head. No footsteps means you can never hear her coming.

Summer ran up to Pony Head and hugged her.

"Ponihed!" she said as she climbed on.

"Hi Auntie Pony Head. Just thinking about the future."

"Why?" Pony Head asked as she flew a few circles around Dawn allowing Summer to ride her.

"I have to make a final decision about whether or not I want to be queen soon."

"Well, aren't you the long awaited rebirth of royal magic?"

Dawn flopped back on the grass.

"I don't like the idea that it's my destiny. It makes me feel like I don't have a choice. But I'm convinced that the Universe is actively trying to make me the next queen."

"Talk about pressure!"

"Did you ever want to be Queen Pony Head?"

"Waaay too much responsibility for my tastes! I wanted to do my own thang! But then again, I never had to think about it because I was seventh in line."

"I wouldn't mind a spare heir."

"I remember when my oldest brother, Prince Pony Head, turned down the Pony Head crown."

"He didn't want to be king?"

"Oh, he did. But he knew that he'd be bad at it. My second brother, Prince Pony Head, didn't want to be king but he accepted the crown from my dad, King Pony Head. 'Someone has to' he said."

"I worry that I won't be a good queen. I'm still not as good as Daisy with my magic."

"Don't think like that, Sunshine! You've got what it takes!"

As Pony Head entertained Summer with a bit of barnstorming, Dawn thought about something that she in fact, lacked.

==================================

Not long ago, King Tom invited Dawn to the Underworld in the hope of presenting her with a gift.
She was accompanied by her cousin Daisy and their families. When they arrived, King Tom showed her a case containing numerous wands.

"Ishtar collected all the other royal wands?" Dawn's father asked.

"Our ancestors must have gathered them over the centuries as their plan progressed. I found them in storage." King Tom said.

"Then they should stay here where they'll be safe. The other bloodlines will be reborn someday. They should come to see you when they're old enough." her Uncle Marco said.

King Tom nodded then asked the young princess, "Dawn, does one of these wands belong to you?"

"Touch them, Dawn. You'll know which one is yours." her Aunt Star said.

Dawn looked closely at each wand in the case. They were all of different shapes and colors. Some were elaborate pieces of art. Others strictly utilitarian. A reflection of their previous owners.

She gently touched each one. Generations of each line's royal magic had left their imprint. But each touch left her disappointed. She felt no affinity with the trace magic the wands carried.

"It's not any of these." she said sadly.

"Are you sure, Dawn?" her mother asked.

Her daughter nodded.

"I thought there were thirteen royal wands in total. I counted eleven in the case, and Daisy's makes only twelve." her father said.

"The wand my mother wielded. Where did you send it, Star?" King Tom asked.

"During our fight? I… um… sent it into… space."

Dawn was disappointed by this news.

"Well, maybe she could use one of the others for now?" Queen Marina suggested.

King Tom nodded to Dawn, wordlessly asking her to select a loaner.

This had been thought of before. Daisy had allowed Dawn to try using her wand to practice. Maybe she would have better luck with another.

Dawn picked up one of the other wands. The Dragonfly wand. It felt like she was misusing a personal item. The wand changed in her hand, and it felt wrong. This should be natural. But she was willing to try.

"Try creating a rainbow. That's a good safe test." Daisy said.

Everyone took a step back.

Dawn made a motion in the air and used her royal magic to make a rainbow. A scrawny, pathetic rainbow. It barely had enough strength to maintain its own arch.

"It's not… so bad?" her Aunt Star said.
"It's terrible! I can do better than that without a wand!"

Dawn waved her empty hand in the air to draw a rainbow. It was missing the color violet, but it was much more robust than her previous attempt. Then it caught on fire.

"Don't worry, dear. That happens a lot down here." Queen Marina said as she helped to extinguish the flames.

"These wands will just hold her back. Unless she uses the one meant for her, she's better off without one." Aunt Star said shaking her head.

"Don't worry. When we go back to Earth we can practice together more." Daisy said.

Dawn did her best to be cheerful and smiled as she placed the wand back in the case.

King Tom said, "I'm sorry, Dawn. I had hoped to present your wand to you as a gift."

"It's alright, King Tom. It's the thought that counts. Thank you for trying."

"The magic is really inside you anyway, Dawn." Her mother said.

==================================

"Dawn."

She didn't immediately react to her mother's voice. She thought she was still daydreaming.

"Dawn, Honey."

"Huh? Mom? Hi. What are you doing on Earth?"

"I'm here to see you."

Jackie also greeted the giggling toddler and her noble steed as they flew down.

"Pony Head? Would you please take little Summer back to her mother? I need to talk to my daughter alone."

"Sure. C'mon kiddo."

Summer squealed in delight as she and Pony Head flew back to Aunt Mabel's house. When they were gone Jackie spoke to her daughter.

"Dawn, something has happened back home."

Dawn then realized something. "Where's Dad?"

"Your dad and your aunt are being forbidden from leaving the Mewni dimension. He asked me to stay on Earth with you until everything is straightened out."

"But what's going on?"

Jackie sat down next to her on the grass.

"Dawn, I know that your father tried to keep you from reading the Crimson Luna books, but you have read them haven't you?"
Dawn nodded silently. She had read them for the first time a few years ago. Before she and her 'cousins' started living on Earth.

"Then you understand now why we asked everyone to never bring copies into the Mewni Dimension?"

Dawn nodded silently again.

Jackie put her hand on her daughter's.

"I'm sorry, Dawn. I knew that we should have told you the truth ourselves. But your father and aunt were convinced that the secret could be kept forever."

The secret her mother was talking about was that her father and Aunt Skye are illegitimate and not legally entitled to their royal titles.

And by extension, neither was she.

==================================

A few years prior…

Dawn was visiting the Kingdom of Mewni. At the moment, she was hanging out with her cousin Daisy in her room.

Her other cousin was off with his girlfriend at the time, Princess Ivy.

"Hey, cuz. I have something to show you." Daisy whispered.

Daisy went to a large trunk in the corner of her room. She closed her eyes and held her hands together. A key made of magic energy appeared and opened the lock.

Daisy leaned into the trunk and after a moment pulled out a paperback book.

Dawn gasped before asking excitedly, "Did you bring that back from Earth?!"

Daisy shook her head. "Stanley brought it for me the last time he snuck across the dimensional barrier."

The cousins smiled and 'oo-ed' mischievously. Asking a teenager to not read something is like daring them to.

==================================

"How sad! Dahlia never saw Hal again." Dawn said aloud as she closed the book.

"I know, right?" Daisy said.

"Dahlia Blackbird is obviously based on my grandmother."

"I thought Hal Forrester was really Junior's Great-Grunkle, but look at this." Daisy said as she took the book and opened it to an early page. She read aloud.

This is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.
"Well, sure. I think Auntie Mabel's publisher has to put that in there. I'm pretty sure Book I has it too. And that book is definitely based on the real Nova and Max."

Dawn was quiet for a moment before asking, "You know what this means, don't you?"

"What?"

"We aren't really related. Not by blood, anyway. That's why our families didn't want us to read this."

For a long moment, Daisy and Dawn contemplated this epiphany.

"I'm going to call Stanley." Daisy said as she locked the book in the trunk.

==================================

Late that night, a portal opened right outside of Daisy's tower window.

A little known feature of dimensional scissors that are capable of reaching Earth was that Tramorfidian crystals are less effective at blocking them. It might take a few tries, but the rare Tramorfidian crystal protecting the royal family of Mewni couldn't stop a determined young man.

Daisy went first and Dawn followed soon after. Too soon. She accidentally interrupted their kiss.

On the lab table, Junior had the original handwritten copy of Journal 5 open to an entry. On the adjacent page, a pair of common dimensional scissors was drawn along with a few notes.

"My dad made this entry when he met Daisy's dad."

"Then these were the scissors that my Great Grandmother Rose gave your Great-Grunkle." Daisy said.

Together Dawn and Daisy read the entry.

==================================

I met a guy last night by the name of Marco Diaz. He showed up at the Mystery Shack today and told us this wild story about his girlfriend from another dimension called Muni(sp?)...

...memories and evidence erased...

...Stan had been to the Muni Dimension...

...romance with princess...

...looming war...

...marriage of duty...

...no other marriageable royal available...

...asked to leave...

...single use scissors...

...Universe Portal was disassembled years ago. I believe I can rig a makeshift charger, but...

...I agree with Mabel and Grunkle Stan. Helping Marco get to Muni is the right thing to do. But I
admit that I have my own reasons as well. I've known since I was just a kid that magic is real. I can use a little bit, but I am just scratching the surface. There's so much I don't understand. The answers are there in Muni…

=================================================================

"We've heard this story before."

"Sometimes there's more to the story. You just have to look harder."

Junior turned on a special gooseneck lamp and aimed it's purple glow at the page.

Under the ultraviolet light, more words appeared on the page with the illustration.

Dawn and Daisy read all of the hidden text.

=================================================================

Some secrets should be kept and others told. Sometimes they make the choice for you. -Queen Rose Butterfly (paraphrased)

...so many secrets. Even the true nature of royal magic is a secret…

...presence could have undermined the marriage and wartime alliance...

...marriage would just be for appearances…

...admitted that she was infertile…

...alliance could be seen as fragile…

...secret birth mother…

...Captain of the Royal Guard, who was of common blood…

...expelled from Muni…

...Was it necessary for them to be separated from…

...Would other allies have abandoned the war effort if the alliance marriage…

...injustice for everyone involved. But it is not my place to judge an entire culture...

...Decades have passed since these events. There is no way for me to verify the success or failure of the scheme...

...I don't know when or even if Marco Diaz will return to Earth. Perhaps he could provide answers if we ever meet again.

I wish him success.

His motorcycle is awesome.

=================================================================

"Why didn't you ever tell us?" Dawn asked.
"Because I shouldn't have been the one to have to show you this. I was hoping your families would tell you themselves eventually."

"So we're the last to know." Daisy said

"Well, except for your brother."

"And Jeffrey?"

"Who do you think showed me this?" Junior said.

==================================

Dawn emerged from the portal into Daisy's room first. She was met by her other cousin, Domingo, waiting up for them.

No. She knew the truth now. He wasn't really her cousin.

"Hi." Dawn greeted him blushing.

"Hi." he said in return.

"How was your date with Ivy?"

"It was fine, I guess."

"Hey, Bro." Daisy said to her brother as she emerged from the portal.

Junior poked his head from the portal and said, "'Sup, Dom. Just dropping them off."

After a quick peck goodbye, Junior left and Daisy pulled the portal closed.

"What's going on?" her brother asked.

"You know I sneak out to see Stanley all the time."

"Alone. This time Dawn went with you. So it wasn't for one of your make out sessions. That would be weird."

"Dommy, it's late. I promise to talk to you about why in the morning."

Domingo had a dubious expression, but dropped the matter for the time being.

"Alright. Good night, you guys." he said as he started towards the door.

"Wait. Before you go..." Daisy said as she unlocked and opened her trunk. "Read this." she said handing him the contraband book.

"Hey! We're not supposed-" he whispered loudly before Dawn interrupted him.

"Just read it, Dommy. Please? It's important."

Domingo looked at the book thinking. Then looked at her and nodded.

==================================

Queen Star greeted them as they sat at the dining table. "Good morning, kids! How about some
"Son? You look terrible! Did you sleep?" King Marco asked.

Domingo shook his head.

"Why not, Dommy?" his mother asked.

"I was up all night reading." he said with a yawn.

"Oh? What were you reading?"

Domingo glanced at his sister and Dawn before answering.

"...Fanfiction."

"Man, I remember when I used to stay up all night reading fanfiction." his father said.

Dawn stopped her reminiscing and returned to the present.

Her mother said to her, "Rumors are spreading about your father and aunt's parentage. There is growing unrest."

"Who let the cabbit out of the bag?" Dawn asked.

"We don't know. There's a Gathering in seven days."

"I guess we'll find out then."

Dawn feared that someone had made the connection between her aunt's fictionalized version of history and real history.

"Your grandfather has been summoned to answer questions."

"Grandpa Brad can always play senile."

Jackie laughed then asked, "Dawn, how do you feel after learning about all this?"

"I'm fine."

"Fine? That's it?" her mother asked.

"Uh-huh." Dawn nonchalantly confirmed.

"No screaming? No denials? No existential identity crisis?"

"Why would I do any of that?"

"I don't know. I was afraid that you might think less of yourself."

"Because of the class thing?"

Jackie nodded.

"The class divisions are a bunch of minotaur flop."
"Dawn!" her mother scolded.

"Mom you weren't born a noble. Neither was Daisy's Grandpa River. He was an outsider like you and Uncle... King Marco. Daisy and Dommy's noble mewman blood is just as thin as mine. But they're considered nobles just because the law says so. Summer has no noble blood at all, yet she holds royal magic. The Universe chose her to become a queen. But I don't think anyone is more noble or less noble than anyone else..."

Jackie smiled at her daughter's egalitarian attitude.

"...except for maybe one person. Nana Gem."

Jackie was surprised.

"She sacrificed everything she had. She gave up her children, the leadership position that she fought so hard to get, even her real name. Crystal. If anyone deserves the respect a noble gets, she does. She's earned it. Not like so many others. She deserves it."

Jackie leaned over and kissed her daughter's forehead.

Dawn leaned on her mother's shoulder.

"I need to go back." Dawn said.

"I know you do."

Hi, Simon.

"Princess Dawn! I wish I could welcome you home under better circumstances."

"I know. Which is why I need to speak to the queen."

Simon opened the throne room doors.

"Dawn, Dear! Welcome home!" said her aunt upon seeing her.

"Hi, Auntie Skye!"

"I thought you weren't coming home this week. Did you mean to come to me during open court?"

"I didn't even realize it was open court time. I didn't see a line outside."

"Petitioners have grown rather scarce since the rumors started."

"Yeah... rumors. Um, Auntie Skye? Is there somewhere we can talk privately?"

"We can speak here. The throne room is frequently swept for spy talismans. Allow me to excuse the guards."

As the guards left the throne room, Dawn realized something else.

"Where is Auntie Mimi?"

"Mimi has left. She has been gone for some time now."
"Oh. I'm sorry. I didn't know." Dawn contemplated asking why, but decided that now was not the time.

After a moment alone, Queen Skye asked Dawn, "Do you know the history of our kingdom's relationship with Quosto?"

"Yes."

"Then you know that we weren't always adversaries."

Dawn nodded. "That changed when the last Queen Ladybird passed away."

"Before her death, Queen Coral Ladybird ceded the Lur territory to us. If she hadn't, the regent would have had enough dimensional ore to move all his forces at once. Xix was the last major obstacle to the regent-king's tyranny."

"Along with Mewni, Kolma, Old Elpon, Gib,..." Dawn said recalling her history lessons.

"Hush, Dawn. I'm telling the story." the Queen of Xix japed.

"Yeah, okay, okay. Those kingdoms were just benchwarmers." Dawn played along.

"Ambitions now stir in the current regent, Ava. They failed with military might those decades ago. But now they are trying another tactic. Undermining our family's legitimacy."

"Do you think Ava is responsible for the rumors about you and my dad?"

"I have reason to believe she is. She is trying to weaken support for our family's rule. She may be trying to back a coup to install a puppet ruler."

"Making Xix easier to conquer. Have you said anything about the rumors?"

"I have not issued a royal statement because any response would only lend to the rumor's credibility. Besides..."

"The rumors are true." Dawn finished her aunt's sentence.

The queen nodded silently. After a moment she asked, "How did you find out?"

"Crimson Luna: Book II had enough clues."

"That book..." Skye said rolling her eyes.

"I'm kinda surprised you didn't ask Auntie Mabel to not publish it. The risk..."

"The only ones with access to copies of that book are those with dimensional scissors capable of travel to Earth. Something that only our kingdom is capable of producing. I do not think that is how Ava discovered the secret. There are other sources. A spy. A disgruntled servant. An errant word. Simple logic. We look nothing like our mother did."

Queen Skye continued. "Maybe on some level, I wanted the truth to come out. Keeping secrets is so tiring. Maybe it is high time the secret was revealed. We are all getting too old for this."

"Oh, Auntie Skye... you're only barely going grey!" Dawn teased.

Skye laughed. "Soon my hair will be as white as Nana Gem's!" she said with a tear.
Dawn and her aunt shared a rare hug.

"Auntie, I've made my decision."

"Does this decision mean that you will need help finding a king? I've never seen you with a boyfriend, Dawn. You are so lovely. I have some very fine princes in mind."

Dawn giggled. "No, Auntie. I don't need help with that part."

"We need to plan. We must ensure you will still have a throne to ascend to. And Ava isn't the only one who can discover secrets."

From her dress, Skye withdrew a tiny roll of paper.

Dawn took the scrap and read it.

JCRGPBTPSWSELVPWSOCHLR

"What's the keyword?" Dawn asked.

"Hope."

Soon, Dawn said, "We'll need help."

"I have already taken the liberty of recruiting some assistance."

Author's Notes: I had tried to put this chapter out by the end of the Labor Day weekend. But there were so many rewrites. So many threads to tie up. And as I said, I even had to break it up into more chapters.

Sorry it was late.
The time leading up to the Gathering of Nobles passed quickly. The day of reckoning had arrived.

The royal family of Xix entered the Great Hall together. The hall was filled to capacity. All eyes followed. Hushed voices and whispers could be heard. They walked together, only moving as fast as the elderly Former King Brad.

When they arrived at their seats, Brad said, "No point in my sitting down. It will be ages before I am able to stand up again!" He then slowly walked to the center of the hall floor.

"This Gathering of Nobles is now in session."

"Former King Brad, Good Morning. Thank you for making the effort to come here today and-"

"Blah-blah-blah! Let us get down to it and not waste time on the pleasantries, shall we?" Brad said.

"Quite right. There are rumors that your children, Queen Skye and Prince Kevin are illegitimate."

"They are my children. You cannot lay your eyes on them and seriously believe otherwise."

There was an unmistakeable resemblance between the old father and his children.

"Paternity is not in question. Your late wife-"

"I will not stand here and allow accusations against my wife. She is long gone. And she committed no crime, unless you consider raising my children as her own a crime."

A woman in a voluminous gown stood. She wore her hair up in a traditional queen's hairstyle. A giant sculpted mass. "So you admit it, then! Your children are not the offspring of your marriage!"

"Ah. Ava. There you are."

"That's Queen Ava to you!"

"Whatever you say, Regent. I will admit that my descendants have the same legal right to a crown as you."

"My great great grandfather was chosen to rule by Queen Coral Ladybird herself!"

Brad scoffed. "Thanks to his guile and deception. And regency rule was not meant to be inherited. Regents are still required to surrender rule upon the return of royal magic!"

Queen Skye stood and said, "I have a proposition, Ava! I will abdicate my crown if you do the same!"
"There is no need for you to abdicate! You and your family will be cast down! Your fake mother deceived your kingdom!"

"She was no fake. My royal mother, Daisy Butterfly, loved and nurtured my brother and I. She was just as much our mother as the woman who gave us life."

"She was childless and barren! You and your sibling are the rotten fruits of adultery! I demand that you and your family be removed from the throne of Xix like the common bastards you are!"

Ava turned to address the whole gathering.

"And unlike them, I am entitled to rule! Not only has my family ruled Quosto since the passing of Queen Coral Ladybird, it will continue to rule because..."

Ava drew something from her purse. "This fell from the sky like a falling star! Signifying that royal magic has returned! Returned to me! QUEEN AVA LADYBIRD!"

Ava held aloft a wand. And there was stunned silence.

Except for Dawn, who started snickering. This soon grew into loud guffaws.

"You dare to laugh at me, child?!"

Dawn wiped a tear of laughter away. "I know royal magic queens. You aren't one of them."

"I now surpass even Queen Star Butterfly, as she has passed her family wand to her daughter. She did not even attend this gathering to advocate for you or your family."

"I know. I asked her not to come today."

==================================

Queen Star Butterfly sat atop her mount. She was surveying their allied troops assembled to counter the invasion force positioned just across the Quosto border.

"The Gathering of Nobles is happening right now. I wish we had enough time to gather a larger army." said her top General, King Marco.

"The greatest victory is one where there's no battle." Star said.

"Very true."

General Ike of Xix said, "The army awaits your command, Your Highness."

"Your monster forces also ready." Lieutenant General Bulgoyaboff informed the queen. "But still we are fewer."

"My favorite art book says that the best plan is a surprise. Don't worry. It will work."

==================================

"You asked for her absence? Queen Star should have disregarded your counsel."

"My aunt, Queen Skye, has chosen me as her heir. I should be able to handle you." Dawn said.

"You imagine yourself as Xix's queen? Your father and your aunt were born outside of royal
wedlock. They are illegitimate. Therefore, *you* are illegitimate! You can never be queen like me. You are nothing but a mutt."

"I am not ashamed of my blood. I am descended from Crystal, Captain of the Xix Royal Guard. A selfless soldier, fighter, and leader. She makes my blood stronger, not weaker."

"Neither your words nor your pride changes the fact that she was a common whore. Your blood excludes you from rule. That is the law of this dimension."

"And you think your rule is unquestioned just because you hold that wand? You don't truly hold royal magic."

"Do you think my wand is not genuine?" Ava said waving the wand making faint trails of red light in the air.

"Oh, I know that wand is real…"

Dawn drew another wand from her purse.

"After all, I have one just like it." she said waving it and drawing bright orange light trails in the air.

Loud gasps were heard throughout the Gathering.

Dawn pushed down the feeling of nausea. Using a royal wand that wasn't hers still felt unnatural. Like she was wearing someone else's underwear.

"But this wand isn't mine. And I don't need it."

Dawn approached Princess Ivy who was with her father in front row seats.

"Hey Ivy, do me a favor and hold onto this for a bit." Dawn said handing her the wand.

The wand changed shape in Ivy's hand.

"All hail me! Pew! Pew!" she mocked.

"Insolent lowborn brat!"

"Ivy is already more of a queen than you'll ever be, Regent."

Ava tightened her grip on the wand. "You test me, mongrel! I should destroy you where you stand!"

"Queen Ava! You must not taint this hall with violence!" shouted a noble from the gallery.

"No. Let her try. Think of it as a demonstration. Let her show everyone her 'awesome royal magic power'." Dawn said making the air quotes gesture.

Dawn turned to Ava.

"I don't think you even know how to use it. Go ahead and try. C'mon, Regent Ava. I'm defenseless. Take your best shot."

In the upper gallery, Domingo and his grandfather made clucking poultry noises.

Ava seethed at being called out.

"Yeah. Just as I thought. You don't have the guts." Dawn taunted.
With a shout of rage, Ava loosed a small blast of magic.

*KABOOM!*

"Aw, man!" Dawn lamented the destroyed target.

"I'll set up another target, Dawn. Let's keep trying." Daisy said as she manifested another target.

"Hey, guys. What'cha doin'?" Domingo asked as he approached the pair in the clearing they liked to use for magic practice.

"I'm trying a magic exercise Daisy showed me."

"What exercise?"

"This!" Daisy said as she fired a blast at the target. The blast stopped cold before it hit.

Daisy hadn't used a wand and shook the stinging sensation from her hand.

"Ah! I've seen mom do that before too." He turned to Dawn. "Can you do it, Dawn?"

Dawn fired a small blast. It slowed down noticeably but still obliterated the target.

"How long have you been practicing that?"

"All afternoon!"

"You know, Bro… it's so nice that you came by."

"Nice that I... No. No, no. No-no-no-no-no. Uh-uh. No."

"C'mon. It's not just about control. It's also about confidence. It'll help if she sees that you trust her."

"Mom and Dad will freak out."

"Mom and Dad are never going to know."

"How will you explain bringing me back to Mewni in a bunch of little zip-top bags?!"

"Oh. So, you *don't* trust Dawn with her magic after all."

Domingo groaned as he walked to the newly repaired target and stood in front of it.

"Alright. Let's do this. Try it again, Dawn." he said.

"HAVE YOU GUYS GONE CRAZY?!"

Daisy giggled. "Just like our dad."

"Dommy! You don't have to do this for me!"

He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. He was trying to appear calm and unafraid.

He opened his eyes and said, "I know you can do it. I believe in you, Dawn."
There was silence as everyone in the Great Hall gawked at them.

Dawn's eyes were glowing and she was floating a foot above the floor. Her arm was outstretched in a halting gesture.

Ava's magic blast was stopped in mid air.

"You are not Queen Ladybird." Dawn said.

The shot dissipated into nothing as her eyes returned to normal and she floated back to the floor.

"Holding that wand does not mean you hold royal magic."

In a flash of magic flame, Dawn's clothes morphed into an elegant queen's dress with her own unique style.

"Unlike you, royal magic runs through my blood. Reborn as part of me."

Ava was frozen in disbelief and fear.

"The royal magic wands were never the source of royal magic. They are only tools. Symbols of the magic bloodlines born to wield them."

Dawn strode confidently towards her adversary.

"And no matter how hard you grip that wand, it will never be yours, It is the Royal Magic Wand of Mula. The Wand of the Firefly Bloodline."

Dawn held her hand up and her eyes glowed.

The wand wrenched itself from Ava's hand and flew into Dawn's.

The instant she closed her fingers around the handle, even before the wand changed form, Dawn knew.

"IT BELONGS TO ME!"

Ava looked pale. She shuddered and fell to her knees.

Shouts were heard from the gallery.

"Royal magic has truly returned!"

"All hail Queen Dawn Firefly!"

"Long may she reign!"

The shouts continued.

Ava stared at the floor silently amid the acclaim for Dawn.

After a moment, Ava looked up at her, scowling and defiant.

"I may not have your precious royal magic, but I am still the Queen of Quosto! And I still intend to reclaim that which is mine!" she said as she rose to her feet.
"We shall see, Regent Ava."

High up, in the back of the gallery, Domingo opened his travel mirror and sent a simple message.

now

Blades pierced the air near Dawn. A portal opened and from it emerged two people. Princess Daisy Butterfly and an unknown girl.

"A portal?! Here?!"

"Someone check the crystal! It must be broken!"

"Princess Daisy, why have you interrupted these proceedings? And how did you bypass the Tramorfidian crystal?"

"It is alright. Princess Daisy is here at my request. And she has brought a special guest." Dawn said.

The unknown girl appeared to be a young teenager. She was dressed in the clothes of a peasant. A lightning bolt symbol marked each cheek.

"Please introduce yourself to everyone."

The girl looked around apprehensively. Trying her best to sound confident, she said, "My name is Lily."

"Where are you from, Lily?"

"The outlands of Quosto."

"What is it like living there?"

"Hard. We usually don't have enough food. When we do, soldiers take more. Sometimes they take people too."

"What is the point of bringing this girl here?! She lives the life of a peasant, as is her lot! And how I handle the internal affairs of my own kingdom is not the concern of this gathering! And if this commoner is from Quosto as she claims, then they have violated my kingdom's sovereignty and taken one of my subjects!" Ava shouted.

"Lily, would you please show everyone why I asked you to come here?" Dawn asked.

Lily nodded.

Ivy held the wand she had above her head.

"Go ahead, Lily. Just like we practiced." Daisy encouraged her.

Lily closed her eyes. When she opened them again, they glowed with power.

The wand flew from Ivy's hand...

==================================

The previous week, in the outlands of Quosto…

"Serenity has come seeking hope." said the asian woman.
The brunette pulled the visitors into the run down shack and closed the door.

"You made it!" she said as she gave the asian woman a hug.

"Hi, Auntie Mimi! This is a new look for you!" said the asian woman.

"I was going to say the same thing about you!"

"She's handy for not being recognized. I found her in my dad's yearbook. He said she peaked in high school." the asian woman said.

"And you brought Junior along!"

"Man! I didn't think that this was going to be how I spent Spring Break!" Junior said as he pulled back the hood of his cloak.

"Radiant Shadow Transform!" called out the asian woman. She magically changed back into her true appearance.

Mimi turned to another person in the room. A young girl with marks on her cheeks. Lightning bolts.

"Lily? These are my friends. This is-"

"I know who you are. You're Daisy Butterfly." Lily said.

"Why, yes, I am. Hello, Lily."

"Hi, Lily. Everyone but Daisy calls me Junior."

"We would like to be your friends." Daisy said with a smile.

"I don't want you as friends."

"Have we done something wrong?"

"People like you have."

"Like us? Oh. You mean nobles. People like Queen Ava. The Regent."

"Regent. She hates it when you call her that."

"Well, Lily, if it helps, I'm not a noble." Junior said.

"Are you her servant?"

Junior laughed. "No. I'm her friend."

"Nobles and commoners can't be friends."

"Sure they can, Lily! Some of my best friends are nobles."

"Why are you friends with them? All they do is take. They take our food, our money, our homes. They even take our family."

"What happened to your family?" Junior asked.

"My dad was taken away before I was born."
"Why?"

"He wouldn't tell some soldiers where a monster was hiding."

"Did the monster do something wrong?"

Lily looked towards Mimi.

"It's okay, Lily. They'll understand. They're good people. Trust me. Trust them."

"I'll tell you, only because Mimi says I can trust you."

"We understand." Daisy said.

"The monster was my mom. She was cursed. They were living in a plainlands village when the curse changed her."

"So they hid."

"They hid in the mountains. My mom said that my dad could stop the curse for a while. But my dad was caught when they were looking for food. My mom said that she watched from a hiding spot as the soldiers arrested him. But she didn't help him."

"It's because she was still carrying you. They knew that they had to protect you."

"When the curse changed her into a monster again, my dad wasn't there to change her back. The monster could fly and was a good hunter and she stayed in the mountains hiding."

"She stayed hidden until you were born, didn't she?"

Lily nodded. "She changed back into a mewman after I was born. She wanted to take me and leave the kingdom, but commoners aren't allowed to have dimensional scissors. She tried to cross into Kipen, but they turned us away. Eventually we settled in a village here in the outlands because no one knew her here."

"Do you know what happened to your father?"

"I remember when I was young, I found my mom crying 'he's gone' over and over. My dad was dead."

A few tears streaked Lily's face.

"How did she know?"

"She said she just knew."

"Where is your mother?"

"She got sick and died last year." Lily said as she wiped her eyes.

"I'm so sorry, Lily. Have you been alone since then?"

"No. After my mom died, a family took me in. I helped on their farm."

"Oh! What kind of people were they?"

"They were very kind to me."
"Then why are you living all alone out here?"

Lily's tears resumed. "Because I'm cursed too! I changed into a monster like my mom! I chased down the boys in the village and tied them up. I don't even know why I did it!"

Daisy hugged Lily. She could feel Lily's tiny wings buzzing on her back.

"After I changed back, I realized what I had done. I was so ashamed."

"Shhh. It's all right. You weren't in control of yourself."

"The worst part was Cole."

"Cole?"

"One of the farmer's sons. I took so many boys. He had this look on his face. I couldn't bear it and I ran away."

"Was Cole special to you?"

"It doesn't matter now."

Lily sniffled.

"You're right. It doesn't matter. Because if he really cares about you, he'll understand." Junior said.

Mimi said, "Tales of the creature's sighting travelled across the border. We recognized the description."

"Is that why you're here? Is someone you know cursed like me?"

"You aren't cursed. What you have is a gift as well as a responsibility, but it's not a curse." Daisy said.

Daisy broke the hug and held Lily's shoulders to look at her.

Lily wiped her eyes.

"Lily, let me show you why Mimi was sent to find you."

She nodded.

"Let's start small. Please, do what I do." Daisy said.

Daisy showed Lily her empty hands, then cupped her palms together.

Lily did as she was asked.

"I want you to think of something. A cute bug."

"Okay."

"Imagine it between your hands. You must believe it is there. Will it to exist."

"That's impossible."

"No, it isn't. Dip deep down inside yourself. You'll find something there to help you."
After a long moment Lily said, "Something is tickling my palms."

"Let it go."

Lily opened her hands to reveal a glowing ladybird beetle. It opened it's spotted orange shell to stretch its shimmering wings. It seemed to smile at her as it flew out of her hands and around the shack.

Lily stared up at it in wonder. "How…?"

"Because you are magic."

Daisy opened her hands to let a butterfly join the ladybird in flight.

Lily was crying, overcome with emotions.

"You are important and special." Daisy said to her.

"Come with us, Lily. You've been on the run for long enough." Junior said.

The Ladybird Wand flew across the Great Hall and into Lily's waiting hand. She gripped the wand. With a flourish of magic, it changed its form.

"No! Give that wand to me!" Ava demanded.

"I don't have to listen to you." Lily said.

"Yes, you do! You are my subject! You must obey me! I order you to surrender that wand to me!"

Lily had spent her whole life downtrodden but in this moment steeled herself. "I am *not* your subject!"

The wand glowed in her hand and her clothes magically changed. Lily now looked like the ruler she was born to be.

"I AM YOUR QUEEN!" Lily shouted at her.

"NO! YOU ARE BENEATH ME! YOU ARE NOT THE QUEEN! YOU ARE JUST A LOWLY PEASANT!" Ava screamed.

She turned to the gathering and implored them to agree.

"TELL HER! TELL HER THE LAW! SHE IS COMMON TRASH! SHE CAN NOT BE THE QUEEN!" she screeched.

Some of Ava's allies stood.

"ZED! JERRY! TELL THEM ALL! I AM THE QUEEN! I AM THE QUEEN!" she shrieked. Her voice had become hoarse.

Lord Zed spoke solemnly. "Regent Ava, the Universe has spoken. It is time for you to step down."

"All hail Queen Lily Ladybird of Quosto. Long may she reign." said Baron Jerry.

"NOOOOOOO!"
Ava drew a dagger from her sleeve and charged.

"DIIIIIIIEEEE!!"

Lily cast her magic.

==================================

General Marco felt the buzz of the travel mirror and looked at the message. He turned the mirror to Queen Star so she could read it for herself.

Star held her hand up. Her eyes glowed with magic.

==================================

Just over the border in Quosto…

Above the army, a giant movie screen appeared in the sky. The image of a young queen was projected onto it.

"I am Queen Lily Ladybird. Holder of Royal Magic and rightful ruler of the Kingdom of Quosto."

"The former regent, Ava, has been arrested for her refusal to step down as she was required…"

The image panned over to show Ava in the Great Hall bound by magical shackles.

"...Release me! I'm the *bleep*ing queen! This is treason! You m*bleeeeeep*s! You'll all pay for this! F*bleeeep*!..."

"I hereby promise to protect the people of Quosto. If you follow me, I will lead you back to prosperity not through war and conquest, but through friendship and peace..."

The broadcast concluded with Lily ordering the invasion force to stand down, and releasing all conscripts from service allowing them to return to their homes.

Conscripts were the majority of Ava's forces.

The camp was filled with calls varying from elation, to disappointment, to relief, to denial.

"It must be some kind of trick!"

"Screw you guys! I'm going home!"

"Long live Queen Lily!"

"There's not going to be a battle."

"Thank goodness."

"I'm heading home to the plainlands."

"We'll come with you!"

There were of course some holdouts who tried to rally enough forces to attempt an assault.

That was when Queen Star cast her royal magic.
The last of the now outnumbered holdouts despaired at the sight of the magically strengthened and flexing soldiers waiting for them across the border.

"I am now *Very* Buff Frog!"

==================================

Daisy changed her video camera back into her wand and Dawn dismissed her magically produced cue cards.

"Yoink!" said Dawn as she pulled Ava's crown off of her huge hairdo.

"Why, you uppity little sh*bleep*!"

"I think I'll just leave that censor spell on for now." Daisy said.

Ava was taken away. Her official punishment would be determined later though it would likely be dimensional exile.

The clamor and excitement took quite a while to settle down in the Great Hall.

"This is a momentous day!"

"To see the return of royal magic in not one, but two queens!"

"The Great Decline has come to an end!"

Dawn took a moment to appreciate the applause. But she was waiting for the other shoe to drop.

"A magic queen must have a king!"

There it is.

"My son, Sir Lars, would be a good king and husband."

"My nephew, Sir Theo, would make a fine ruler."

"I would make the best king!"

"You are more than twice their ages! My son is a far better choice!"

"No! My brother!"

The gathering descended into petty squabbling.

"Your nephew only concerns himself with women and drink!"

"Well, your son is an idiotic fool!"

"Excuse me…"

The verbal clashes continued.

"Count Ross!"

"Prince Greg!"
"Me!"

"May I have everyone's attention?…"

"My son!"

"Mine!"

"No, mine!"

"EVERYONE! SHUT UUUUUUUUUP!"

The gathering turned to the source of the command. Jackie.

"Doesn't anyone even care what they want?!" she asked.

Everyone turned to Lily and Dawn.

"The laws of this dimension say that a magic queen must have a king."

"Many noblemen have been suggested as husbands. Whom do you fancy?"

"But, I'm too young to get married." Lily protested.

"Queen Lily, the law-"

"I don't care!"

"But you can not rule-"

"No! I was just found in an abandoned shack! And now you all expect me to just marry some stranger?! They were right! You're all carrion birds!"

"You would leave Quosto without a leader? The power vacuum will draw warlords and conquerors."

"So what?! Quosto's been ruled by warlords for a long time!"

"You promised to protect your kingdom!"

"I promised to protect the people! If I have to do that as a peasant, then I will!"

There was silence until an graying noblewoman stood.

"Madam Oriole?"

"The marriage laws must be abolished." she said.

The resulting shouting blended into an incoherent roar.

"Does no one else now realize why the magic queens are required to have a king?" the old noblewoman said.

"To ensure the continuation of their house!"

"To ensure the survival of our magic." Daisy corrected them.
"For almost seven hundred years, royal magic has been vanishing. The law was created in an attempt to stem that loss!"

Tom stood. "The magic was not truly vanishing. It was being hoarded by my ancestors. The law is based on fear and falsehoods."

"King Tom! Are you admitting having a hand in this atrocity?"

"I was an unwitting part of the plot. I admit my role, along with my ignorance at the time. Had my mother used the law to successfully force my unwanted union with Queen Star, she could have given birth to an unimaginable magical being."

"The royal magic isn't meant to be concentrated. No single being should have all of that power. It could have destroyed the universe." Daisy said.

"My mother's death put an end to that centuries old scheme. And now royal magic is free to be return on its own terms. But how long until there is another attempt?"

"Perhaps another has already begun? So many here have proposed a blind union."

"If Queen Lily refuses to marry, the law demands that she be removed from power, and her magic wand confiscated."

"But what good would that do? Her power is part of her."

"Even if we take her title, the people of Quosto will follow her. They have been hoping for her arrival. She was born to lead."

"The time will be right for Queen Lily to take a husband one day. But that day is not today."

"The laws must be abolished so they can never again be used to compel the magic queens to marry against their will and judgement."

"Even if I don't get married today, I'm still not free to choose my own husband." Lily said.

"Of course you will be."

"Suitors from all lands will seek your hand. And you will have your pick."

"Only as long as I don't choose a commoner."

"But why would you want to-"

"What? Marry a commoner like me?"

"Queen Lily, you have risen above your class."

"No, I haven't. And I won't deny who I am or where I'm from." Lily said.

"Neither will I." Dawn said standing beside her.

"Queen Dawn?"

"No. I'm not queen yet. Or has everyone forgotten why we are all gathered here today?"

Brad returned to the center of the hall floor from the sidelines.
"I have been accused of secretly siring children with a commoner outside of my royal marriage and falsely presenting them as my legitimate heirs. I stand before you, guilty. The penalty is exile."

"C'mon everyone. We should go pack. Auntie Mabel and Uncle Leo said that they would take us in until we get back on our feet." Dawn said as she started towards the exit.

"But by virtue of your royal magic, your origin matters not!"

"Well, maybe not for me. But it still matters very much for my family." said Dawn.

"By law, my children, and their birth mother are to be exiled to another dimension, never to return. I will not remain here without them. I will join them in exile." said Brad

"And I refuse to rule a kingdom where my own family is forbidden to enter." Dawn said.

"What do you propose?"

"My family cannot be punished if the marriage laws restricting choice do not exist."

"And give everyone the unconditional freedom to just go ahead and marry whomever, whenever they wish?"

"Yes."

"The social order will break down!"

"Imagine how much it will break down when two kingdoms find themselves without rulers. I will protect the people. As a peasant if I must." Dawn said.

Dawn could tell that the gathered nobles were on the cusp. They just needed a little push.

"Another royal magic bloodline has already returned." she said.

"Another queen has been born?!"

"To a commoner and an outsider. I definitely detect a trend."

"Which line is it? What is her name?"

"Will it even matter?"

There was silence.

"This gathering is about to make a choice that will greatly impact the future of this dimension. Please make the correct one."

There was intense debate.

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Author's Notes: My original plan for this plotline was a battle scene. Dawn would fight with a spear like her dad and would show her magic publicly for the first time during the battle.
But the battle would have been too one sided. Ava was deluded by her own sense of superiority and simply isn't on the same villain level that Ishtar was.
Epilogue 13: Sunrise

Author's Notes:

Aaaand there it is... the episode "Game of Flags" provides irrefutable evidence that this fanfiction irreconcilably conflicts with canon.

TV SPOILER PLACED IN CLOSING AUTHOR'S NOTES.

But, oh well. It had to happen sooner or later.

Additional note: And sorry to those of you who read an earlier version of this chapter before I pulled it. I made a minor revision. But I absolutely felt the need to make the change.

That's what happens when you have a long commute to work. Too much time to overthink.

Comments and constructive criticism are welcome and appreciated.

Really appreciated…

Really.

==================================

Starfall by GolfAlphaMike

Epilogue 13: Sunrise

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Kevin walked the bride to the middle of the Great Hall. She moved slowly.

Arriving at the waiting groom, Kevin kissed the bride's cheek. The bride took the groom's hand and stood beside him.

And with a simple, heartfelt promise to each other, it was done.

The groom looked ready to cry.

"Is everything alright, my love?" Crystal asked.

They were surrounded by family and friends. Among the witnesses he saw Daisy holding her Stanley's hand. They were happy and smiling.

"Yes, my wife. All is as it should be." Brad said.

==================================

"My niece will complete her education before assuming the throne." Skye said.

"How much time does she require? A few months?"

"Five to six years."

There were groans of disappointment.
"Now, now. Princess Firefly has stated that she will ascend when the time is right."

"But without a king."

"Without the requirement of a king. Dawn, Lily, Daisy and any other royal magic holder that comes in the future will be free to choose when and to whom a union takes place."

"As well as if a union takes place at all."

"Yes, but is that so bad? Take me for example. I have ruled without a king for many years."

"Queen Skye, that's because-"

"The point being… that even if someday a magic queen does freely decide to never wed or bear an heir to her line, all will be well. The Great Decline is over. The bloodlines will be reborn just as they have always been. Royal magic will not abandon us."

There were murmurs of agreement.

"Now that that is settled, I wish to make an announcement. For personal reasons, I have decided to step down as queen effective immediately."

"But I thought Princess Dawn would not ascend for a few more years?"

"That is correct. But my kingdom will be fine without a lame duck queen. The kingdom will be placed under the care of a trusted and capable regent until his daughter is ready."

Kevin piped in, "Wait, what?"

"Do not worry, brother. It is a temporary position. You will be done before you even realize it."

"But-"

"Congratulations, Babe." Jackie said placing a kiss on his cheek.

"Congrats, Dad!" Dawn said wrapping him in a hug.

Skye removed her crown and handed it to Jackie.

"For when it is time."

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"This situation is different. Regency rule is not possible."

"So soon after such an upheaval, it would be unwise to fully entrust her kingdom to another. She is inexperienced, but the burden of rule falls to her."

"She will need a trusted advisor."

"The former king has years of wisdom and experience. He can instruct her in the ways of governance and rule."

"His kingdom has long since passed to his heir. He has no selfish appetite for power, preferring instead to lead a simple life in retirement."

"He is the ideal candidate."
"And he is willing to emerge from retirement in order to mentor the young queen."

"Will you accept our recommendation, Your Highness?"

"Yes." said Lily, nodding.

"Queen Lily is also a young girl. She can also use guidance and companionship from one like herself."

"Her first choices for royal companion have other commitments."

"Is there another volunteer?"

==================================

The gathering drew to a close. It was one of the longest on record.

All of the other nobles had departed.

"I can't believe that actually worked!" Junior said.

"Dawn?" Crystal asked.

"Grandmother."

"Granddaughter."

In that moment, they appreciated the freedom to refer to each other with such familiar terms.

"This was a very audacious plan. Bold, but also very risky. Surely you took into account the possibility of your marriage today."

"Yes. I- we did."

"Who would you have chosen as your husband?"

"...Dommy"

Dawn felt the heat of embarrassment after she said his name.

"Really, Dawn?" Kevin asked.

She did her best to sell it.

"Xix's alliance with Mewni was thought to be secured by family ties. Now the truth is known. I believe that alliances are best secured by friendship, common goals, and honor. But if it proved to be necessary, I would have renewed our long standing alliance and asked Prince Domingo of Mewni to be my king. It would have been strange for both of us because we were raised to falsely believe we were cousins by blood. But we get along well and it would have been our duty to make the best of it. For the peace of mind of both of our kingdoms."

Dawn smiled serenely as she finished. "Heh. Nailed it." she thought to herself.

"Dear, sweet Dawn… That is the biggest load of crocattle dung I have ever heard." her grandmother said.

Dawn's confident expression shattered.
"The time for secrets has passed. How long have you been dating your non-cousin?"

The long silence was deafening. Dawn anxiously bit her lower lip.

"...Almost three years."

"Dawn! How could you keep this a secret from us?!" Kevin exclaimed.

"Y- You're one to talk, Dad!"

"Nana Crystal, how did you know?" Jackie asked.

"I am quite the expert when it comes to hidden relationships, Dear."

Grabbing Domingo, Dawn declared to her family, "Everyone, this is my boyfriend, Dommy."

"Hi." Domingo said nervously.

"My little girl has grown up!" Kevin lamented as Jackie smiled and comforted him.

==================================

After most goodbyes had been said, Dawn and Daisy talked with Lily.

"It's time for us to go, Lily. We have school in the morning." Dawn said.

"I was hoping to spend more time together."

"Us too. I wish you could go to school with us."

"Me too. But I don't think I can leave for that long. Besides, I've never been to school before. The only teacher I ever had was my mom."

"Please come visit us after things settle down in Quosto." Daisy said.

"I'll get you a special pair of dimensional scissors."

"If you need anything, just ask us. Feel free to come to us for anything at all, Lily. We really do want to be your friends."

"Thank you." Lily said.

"Oh, and there's one more thing." Dawn said.

"There is?"

Dawn placed the crown of Quosto on Lily's head.

Lily reached up to touch it.

Daisy cupped her palms together and Dawn did the same.

Seeing this, Lily joined them.

Dawn and Daisy released a glowing firefly and a butterfly.

A ladybird fluttered from Lily's hands to join them in flight.
With a smile they parted. Lily watched as Daisy held Juniors arm as they walked. Dawn trailed behind the group with Dommy.

Lily was approached by her new mentor.

"We should be on our way, Queen Lily. Some friends have offered lodging for the journey."

"Countess Tobi's castle has a hot spring." added her new royal companion.

==================================

A portal opened at the front door of their Aunt Mabel's home.

Junior had to leave right away to make sure he gets back to college in time for his classes. He occasionally has problems with airport security about whether or not he's allowed to fly. Dawn and Domingo slipped away to let Daisy say goodbye.

After they had gone around the side of the huge house, Dawn reached for his hand. She felt comfort and relief after such a trying week.

She had been so nervous last night. Afraid that she wouldn't be taken seriously. Afraid that she would screw up her magic. Afraid that the plan would blow up in their faces. Afraid of the possibility of a forced marriage. Afraid of what he felt about it. They were only in high school.

But he just told her that he was there for her. No matter what. The plan was never explicitly laid out. But both of them understood.

"Thank you for believing in me." she said.

"Never a doubt in my mind."

She pulled him close and claimed his lips.

It was so easy to get carried away. Without thinking they began to go a little farther than they had ever before.

But before they touched second base, they were called out.

"Hey, uh… dudes?"

Dommy and Dawn yelped in surprise.

"Sal?! What are you doing here?" she asked while blushing furiously.

"Oh, I was just waiting here to give Junior a ride to the airport." said Salvador Ramirez.

At that moment, Junior poked his head around the corner. "Hey, Sal? Uncle Leo said you were out here."

Seeing Dawn and Dommy he joked. "Negotiating the alliance between your kingdoms?"

"Oh! Is that what they were doing? That's a relief. I thought they were making out!" Sal said.

Junior laughed. "Thanks for the ride, Sal. Mind if we swing by my house to see my parents before we go?" he asked.
Sal agreed, then asked, "Hey Dom, you want a ride back?"

"I'm good."

They saw Junior and Daisy share one more quick kiss before he got in Sal's truck and rode away. Daisy saw them and smiled, but then simply entered the house.

Though slightly embarrassed, the prince and princess would bid each other 'good night' only after more negotiation.

==================================

Monday morning before class, students were catching up with each other…

"How was Portland?"

"I went to a basketball game. How was Seattle?"

"It rained almost the entire time."

"Did anyone else see the meteor shower last night?"

"Dawn! We didn't hear from you over the break. We heard you had to leave town after all."

"Something came up back home."

"Yeah? What did you do?"

"We overthrew a despot, installed a rightful ruler, prevented a war, found my magic wand, overhauled an unjust social class system, I became the official heir to the throne of my kingdom, got a new last name, and my grandparents finally got married."

Dawns classmates just stared, silent and slack jawed.

"I feel like I'm forgetting something… Oh, yeah! A big family secret came out. Dommy and I aren't actually related. So I guess it's okay now for us to tell everyone that we've been secretly dating for a while."

"NO! MY PRECIOUS PRINCESS DAWN! WE'RE MEANT TO BE TOGETHER!" Caleb Gleeful cried as he was held back.

Dommy was uncharacteristically napping at his desk. It had been a very eventful Spring Break.

==================================

Skye returned to the royal quarters of Xix castle. It had been a thoroughly exhausting week.

Her reign was finally complete.

"I hope you are not too tired, my queen. I have missed you."

She found her long time partner waiting in her true form. Skye laid down next to her in an embrace.

"I am no longer the queen."

"You are still mine."
They shared a kiss of reunion.

"The marriage laws have been abolished. I hope you do not mind waiting until the next gathering, Mimi."

"Of course not. It was their moment to shine."

Soon, they would depart these quarters together to share a modest home beside the Silent Sea.

Unable to sleep, the restless Lily stared out her tower window into the night. She had grown up in poverty. The opulence of the royal quarters made her uneasy.

She changed her wand into an umbrella and jumped down from the high window.

She was spotted by one of the castle's wall sentries as she silently floated by. A feeling of fear gripped Lily for a moment before she reminded herself that the guards served her now.

The sentry stood at attention as Queen Ladybird passed overhead.

After landing at the edge of the forest beyond the castle walls, she entered and disappeared between the trees.

Lily walked and thought.

She was now the ruler of a kingdom. She was gifted with incredible magic power. People looked up to her.

So different from what her life was just recently.

She will try her best. She had people to help her. An old former king. Grandfather of another magic holder like her. She also now had a royal companion. Another princess like her. She was asleep in the next room. They'll all be living together for a while.

She had to learn to trust them. They didn't seem like the nobles she had known all her life.

Lily sat down at the foot of a tree and leaned against it.

She was born a commoner. She expected to live and die as a peasant.

Like her family.

Her father probably died in the dungeons of the castle where she now lived. Her mother died after months of growing weak. She wished that they were here with her now.

She closed her eyes and a few tears fell.

She was there alone for only a short time when she heard a voice.

"Are you alright?"

Lily turned in surprise to find Ivy.

"Princess Ivy! What are you doing here?"
"I could ask you the same thing. It's only dark-o'clock."

"Were you following me?"

"No. The little tree that I keep on my nightstand woke me up. The trees told me that you're sad. What's wrong? Feeling overwhelmed?"

Lily nodded.

"And you came out here to feel better."

"I used to spend a lot of time in the outland forests. This feels familiar."

Ivy sat nearby and said, "I like spending time in the forest too. But I have to come up to the surface for them. Like the one near Mewni Castle. I especially like the ones on Earth."

"Aren't there any at home?"

"There aren't many trees back home. Just lots of fire and water right now. The steam and humidity makes my hair so frizzy."

Lily laughed.

"But when I become the ruler of Underworld, there'll be forests and forests worth."

Ivy breathed deeply, taking in the scent of the trees.

"I can't get used to the idea that I'm the ruler now. I grew up a commoner. I never thought I would be anything else."

"You sound like my mom."

Lily looked at Ivy in surprise.

"Oh! Did you not know that my mom was of common blood? My parents and a few other interclass couples got around the law before engagement duels were finally outlawed."

"Princess Ivy, is that why you offered to be my royal companion? Because you have common blood too?"

"Maybe partly. Being both noble and common can be tough. But, mostly I offered because I'd like to be your friend. And I don't want you to think of me as 'Princess' Ivy. Just call me 'Ivy'."

Lily nodded. "I feel like I've made a lot of friends lately."

"Hope there's room for one more."

"Won't you miss everyone back home?"

"I can always visit. You should come with me next time. We can even go to other dimensions."

"Do you think we could visit the outlands?"

"I think you should visit your whole kingdom. Is there someone there you want to see?"

Lily nodded.
"What's his name?"

"...Cole." Lily said blushing.

"So that's why you fought so hard against the marriage laws!"

"No!... Yes... Maybe?..."

"Oooh. I bet he's cute."

"I need to talk to him. I should apologize."

"Because of the royal transformation mewberty thing?"

"That's what Princess Daisy said it was. But it wasn't like any mewberty I'd ever seen. I couldn't think about anything but boys."

"Yeah. When that happened to Dawn, she took all the boys in a monster tribe and even Daisy's boyfriend too."

"Did she also take Prince Domingo?"

"She already took him the old fashioned way. But during mewberty, she kinda skipped him."

"Did he get jealous?"

"He knew what to expect because of his sister. The only one who was jealous was me."

"Oh! Did you like him?"

"We actually used to date."

"Really? Is it hard seeing them together?"

"It got easier. They're happy together. Happier than Dommy and I would have been if we stayed together. Some things are meant to be. Let me tell you about the love polyhedron all our parents were tangled up in sometime. It makes a not-really-cousins relationship seem kinda tame."

Lily smiled.

"If you're feeling a little better now, maybe we should get you back into bed."

"I don't like my room. Everything is made of gold and jewels."

"Ava had such gaudy taste. I had to redecorate the royal companion's room with lots of plants. You should redecorate your room too. You can use your magic."

For a moment Lily was silent. Then the tears started again.

"Hey! What's wrong?" Ivy said as she sat right next to the younger girl.

"I have magic powers. I didn't even know it. I could've... I could've-"

"You could have, what?"

"I could've saved my mom!"
Ivy just let Lily cry on her shoulder.

After a moment, a gentle voice was heard. "There was nothing you could have done. Even the greatest magic cannot stop death forever."

"Queen Star!" Ivy said.

Lily was frozen in shock.

Star knelt to speak to her.

"I know you miss her. Even today, I still miss my own mother. It's unfair. Losing those you love, then having so much responsibility placed on you."

"You were so brave, Lily. You stood up to a conqueror. You smashed a hole in the class wall. Your mother and father would be very proud of you. They will always be with you. In here." Star said as a tiny magic glow floated from her fingertip to Lily's heart.

Lily leapt into Star's hug.

They remained that way for a long time.

"I hope you don't mind my coming by unannounced."

Lily shook her head. "No. I don't mind." she said as she wiped her tears away.

"Hi to you too, Ivy!" Star said.

"Hi, Queen Star. Funny running into you out here."

"Well, I was told you were both outside."

Star's father, covered in dirt and leaves and carrying a spear, appeared from behind some bushes.

"Ah! My daughter has found you. I trust everything is well."

"We're okay, Mr River." Lily said.

"Good! Please do not stay up too late, Queen Lily. Your first lessons begin tomorrow. I will now return to the hunt. There is a jackalope that said I was old! He. Shall. Pay."

With a strange war cry, the former king dove into the bushes.

Lily laughed. "Your father's not what I expected."

"You aren't what anyone expected. I wanted to come and meet the new queen. Sorry I missed your coronation."

"Is King Marco here too?" Ivy asked.

"No, we all left our husbands at home."

"We?" Lily asked.

"I brought some people with me who would like to get to know you."

"Hey." said a dark haired woman who approached. "I was going to meet you tomorrow. I'm Janna.
My husband and I are going to come and tutor you a few days per week."

"Are you a teacher?"

"Kinda. I'm a scholar. I was trained at the Secret Library."

"There's a secret library?"

"Shh. It's a secret."

Lily laughed. "You remind me of Daisy's boyfriend."

"Junior's my son. He gets his good looks from his father's side of the family."

"Ah!" Lily said understanding.

"And you already know Dawn's mom, Jackie." Star said.

"Yes. From the Great Hall."

"Sorry we didn't get to talk more. When you're ready, I thought we could talk about what happened when you changed. You thought you were a monster. I thought the same thing when the change happened to me."

Lily nodded.

"Hello, Queen Lily." said a water demoness.

"Mom?!" Ivy said surprised.

"Hello, my daughter. I brought some things you might need from home." she said handing a backpack to Ivy.

She thanked her mother then introduced her. "Lily, this is my Mom, Queen Marina. She wasn't at the Gathering."

"Hello, Queen Marina."

"Please, Dear. Just Marina. Did my daughter tell you that I was born of common blood? I can share with you my experiences as the commoner queen of Underworld."

"I would like that." Lily said.

"Hi there, Lily!" said another visitor. "I'm Mabel."

"Mabel is my husband's twin sister." Janna said.

"And this is my daughter. Her name is Summer."

"Hi." Lily said.

Mabel said to her young daughter. "Sweetheart, show Lily what you can do."

With a giggle and a spark of magic, a shining silver caterpillar appeared in her tiny hand.

Lily covered her mouth in delighted surprise.
"She keeps doing that. I could start a silk shirt factory." Mabel said.

Lily smiled.

After the introductions, Ivy asked, "Hey, wait just a minute! Where did you all come from anyway? Did you come from Earth? Did you go back to your kingdoms and then come back again? Your timing is a little too perfect."

"Never mind all that!" The women all said.

They all stayed together and talked as the darkness gave way to the light.

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Author's Notes: You may be wondering why I included an superfluous makeout scene with Dawn and Dommy. In the last few chapters I tried to depict their relationship subtly due to its covert nature. But with the reveal of the truth, I knew I needed to add in at least some concrete affection between them.

When my original draft of Epilogue 11 grew past 10,000 words, I knew I had to break it into smaller chunks.

But the next epilogue chapter will definitely, truly, for really reals this time, be the finale.

*cough*maybe*cough*

SPOILER FOLLOWS REGARDING CANON CONFLICT:

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Queen Moon Butterfly can willingly morph into her mewberty butterfly form. Something this fanfiction assumed was not possible under normal conditions.
Refer to Chapter 28: Truth. Ishtar is only able to trigger the royal transformation due to possessing multiple magic bloodlines.
Epilogue 14: Prodigy

Author's Notes: You know how last time I said that this would be the last chapter? Turns out I lied. Not just to all of my readers, but I also lied to myself.

Comments and constructive criticism are still always appreciated.

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Starfall by GolfAlphaMike
Epilogue 14: Prodigy
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Magic has been in his sister's life since the day she was born. Dawn and Daisy lived with their family and used magic freely. Summer inevitably began trying to copy them.

When his sister was only a year old, Jeffrey found her sleeping above her crib on a summoned cloud. But other magic holders didn't develop control over their magic until they were in their early teens.

He took a sample of the condensed of water vapor for testing then alerted his family.

The evidence was clear. Summer was a prodigy, like him.

Because Summer was beginning to utilize magic early, Daisy tried to teach her to summon a silkmoth. But whenever Summer attempted to copy Daisy, she only summoned larvae.

Summer was now sitting on his bed. Jeffrey was trying to get her to manifest a silkworm. He wanted to determine if the caterpillar's development stage coincided Summer's own growth.

"Okay, Summer. Can you summon a caterpillar for your big brother?"

His little sister shook her head.

"Will you do it for a cookie?" Jeffrey said holding up a chocolate chip cookie.

Summer reached for the treat and summoned something for her brother.

"What are you doing, son?"

"Father! Look what Summer made!"

Leo looked at what was in his daughter's hands. A cookie and a silk cocoon.

His father began to tear up.

"You're both growing up so fast!" he blubbered

At that moment, the bell for the main gate sounded.

"*sob* Someone's at the *sob* gate." Leo said crying.

"Why don't you stay here with Summer, Father?"
Jeffrey headed towards the main room. He overheard his mother's voice as he passed her study.

"I don't know, Candy... I was thinking of writing a fourth book… An epilogue instead?... Maybe… I plan on correcting all the names… Why not? The secret's out… Definitive Edition?... I'll get started..."

He made a mental note to speak to his mother about her plan. Not all secrets have made themselves known just yet.

At the front door Jeffrey pressed the comm button.

"Hello?"

A voice sounded on the electronic speaker. "Jeffrey? It's Aunt Cat."

While Jeffrey occasionally visited his father's side of the family in Eagma, they had to come to Earth to visit Summer. Once Summer began to show signs of her magic, their parents decided that they would stop bringing her to visit the Mewni Dimension until she was old enough to control her abilities. One of her displays would expose her as the reborn holder of the Silkmoth bloodline's royal magic.

"Hello, Aunt Cat! Come in!"

Jeffrey pulled the lever opening the main gate. He then opened the front door to welcome his father's sister.

He was met not only by his aunt, but also by a royal escort.

"Hello, Jeffrey Pines it is good to meet you."

"Your Highness." Jeffrey said as he bowed.

"Son? Who's at the door?" Leo asked as he came down the stairs carrying Summer.

"It's Aunt Cat…"

"Hello sister! Summer, say 'hi' to Auntie Cat!" he said as he approached the door.

"...and King Ted of Nagma." Jeffrey finished.

Leo froze.

"Greetings, Leo. I have come to meet the new heir to the throne of my kingdom, your daughter, Princess Summer Silkmoth." King Ted said.

"Silkmoth?" Leo laughed nervously. "But our family name is 'Pines'. Has my sister been telling you tall tales, Highness?"

"Yes, I understand that you took your wife's surname. But we both know your daughter will claim the royal family name of old Agma."

A silver moth appeared and fluttered around him and his daughter. Leo's free hand shot out.

*Hurk!* gasped the moth as it was grabbed. Leo quickly threw it out an open window.

"Please ignore the pests. I need to line our closets with cedar." Leo said.
"Brother. It is pointless to play ignorant. He knows." Cat said.

Leo was silent, unsure how to proceed.

"Hon? Jeffie? Is someone at the door?" Mabel asked as she approached. "Oh! Hi, Cat! Who's your friend?"

"Mother, let me introduce you to King Ted, the ruler of Nagma." Jeffrey said

"Oh! Please come in! Would you like some tea?"

==================================

In the dining room, Leo, Mabel, Cat, and King Ted sat around the table. Jeffrey had taken Summer upstairs to allow the adults to talk.

King Ted spoke. "When Princess Firefly made her debut, she said that another bloodline had already appeared. The rulers of every land began questioning if it was their own reign that was coming to an end."

"What led you to believe it is our daughter?" Leo asked.

"Princess Dawn stated that the reborn magic princess was born to a commoner and an outsider. Dimensional scissors are rarely owned by non-nobles. It would be a prominent, yet common blooded family. Those few couples that fit the criteria were sought out, even exiles. But none had given birth to a holder of royal magic."

"For a while, your family had been showing your daughter off to friends in your homeland. But suddenly that ceased. It has been almost a year since you have brought your daughter across the barrier, has it not?"

Leo and Mabel nodded.

"Mother couldn't explain to her friends why she stopped bringing Summer to visit." Cat said.

"You were the only common-interdimensional couple that had not yet been questioned. Protected in this almost unreachable dimension. A dimension with deep ties to the Butterfly and Firefly lines."

"Still, that doesn't mean that Summer is the reborn-" Leo started.

Everyone at the table was staring at something behind him.

"She's doing magic behind me, isn't she?"

Everyone nodded.

Leo turned around in his seat to see his young daughter riding a tiny winged warnicorn.

"Sorry! She got away from me!" Jeffrey apologized as he ran after her.

"King Ted, now that you know the truth, what will you do?" Mabel asked as Summer dismissed the magical mount and climbed into her lap.

"You need not fear a contentious transfer of power. I desire to turn the kingdom over to the true heir. Nagma will revert to regency rule until she is of age. Just as Xix has done."
"But, Summer is still just a baby. It could be twenty years, or more."

"My eldest daughter does not wish to rule. So I will name my dutiful son, Prince Nate, as the last regent. He will lead Nagma until Queen Silkmoth rises."

"This truly is the ideal place for her to grow up. I would recommend any future royal magic users be raised here until it is time to reveal themselves to their kingdoms." King Ted said.

"King Ted, I don't mean to question your family's honor. But how can you know that Prince Nate won't want to pass the throne of Nagma to his own heir?" Leo asked.

"I do not think Nate will have a child of his own."

"Does he not like kids?" Mabel asked. King Ted chuckled. "He likes children just fine. His boyfriend however…"

"Ah." said the others at the table.

"The Silkmoth Magic has timed it's rebirth well. An easy transfer of power from my family to yours."

"King Ted, the Silkmoths ruled over a larger kingdom. Agma broke up into three separate kingdoms during the Great Decline. Have you considered how Queen Willow and King Art will react to news of my sister?" Jeffrey asked.

"When your sister's ascendancy becomes known, they will want some form of treaty or alliance. If they had sons, I imagine both would propose an alliance marriage with Princess Silkmoth."

"Then it's a good thing they both have only daughters." Leo said.

"Not that we would agree to it anyway. Summer will get to decide her own future."

"Quite right." King Ted said. He then turned to Jeffrey. "What are your plans for the future? I am told that your intelligence eclipses even the great scholars."

"I'm graduating from high school. I've been accepted into a very prestigious Earth college. West Coast Tech. I've already committed to my lifelong dream."

"Lifelong, Jeffie? You're only twelve." Mabel said.

"It feels much longer, Mother."

"You are Princess Silkmoth's elder brother, Jeffrey. A union with either Princess Gale of Wagma or Princess Raine of Sagma would strengthen weathered ties."

"King Ted, I'm not husband material for either princess. They're already marriage age and as my mother pointed out, I'm only twelve. But, you know who they should maybe consider? Uncle Ken's son Leo and Aunt Cat's son Kit."

"Jeffrey!" Aunt Cat exclaimed.

"Plus there's two of them! Think about it, King Ted. Each kingdom would have a blood tie to Queen Silkmoth."

King Ted's expression subtly showed that he was warming up to the idea.
"What about after your formal education, Jeffrey?" he asked.

"There is no *after* for me, King Ted. I'm going to spend my life in pursuit of knowledge."

"You could do that in your father's homeland. You could help make your sister's kingdom a shining citadel of learning. Imagine the founding of a university renown across the dimensions! You know what? My daughter's daughter is about your age…"

The mirror in the living room rang.

"I'll get it! Could be an emergency! Excuse me!" Jeffrey said.

"He's so shy." Mabel said.

The adults laughed as he quickly left the dining room.

"Answer." he said to the mirror.

"Hello, Jeffrey." said the Regent of Xix as he appeared in the glass.

"Uncle Kevin! Hello."

"Why are you blushing?"

"Um… I just ran from the other room. This house really is too spacious."

"Is my daughter there? I need to speak with her."

"Dawn's not here right now. I think she's with Domingo."

"I already tried her travel mirror too. Would you please pass along a message to her?"

"Sure."

"Thanks to the return of the Firefly magic bloodline, parts of old Mula have expressed a desire to re-establish closer relations."

"Really? I guess I shouldn’t be surprised. Which other kingdom is it? Vi'i? Liv?"

"All seven of them. The kingdoms of Vi'i, Liv, Cli, Dix, Mic, Superawesomeland, and Mim."

"…"

"Dawn is committed to Domingo and has no close cousins. I could really use some advice."

"…Okay. This is a tough one to figure out." Jeffrey said.

Junior suddenly appeared behind Jeffrey.

"I have an idea! Trade!" he said.

"Trade?"

"It doesn't have to be a marriage alliance. Set up an economic treaty. Establish a free trade zone within the old Mula borders. And then you can negotiate foreign trade together as one stronger
entity." Junior explained.

"Hmm… I need to consult Dawn. But this could work. Yes! This could work!"

After Kevin ended the call Jeffrey asked, "What are you doing here, Junior?"

"You think I would miss you and Daisy's graduation?"

"I meant, how did you get in the house?" Jeffrey asked patting his pockets in search of his keys.

Junior held up his grappling hook pistol and laughed. "As if a gate and a lock are going to keep me out."

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Author's Notes: Yes. This was a bit of filler. Tying down those loose threads. I swear I'm trying to wrap it up!
Epilogue 15: Circle

Author's Notes: Sorry for the three month absence. I had some time and motivation issues.

This chapter is the conclusion of Starfall. The story is now marked as complete.

The events and revelations of recent episodes largely conflict with this fanfiction's imagining of Mewni history. I hope that you can still enjoy this story despite this.

Comments and constructive criticism are, as always, welcomed and appreciated.

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Starfall by GolfAlphaMike
Epilogue 15: Circle

==================================

"Daisy Diaz Butterfly."

Her family, friends, and classmates all applauded as her name was called.

Eventually another name was called.

"Jeffrey Douglas Pines. Valedictorian."

There was more applause and cheering.

Eventually the last name was called.

"Congratulations to this year's entire Gravity Falls High School graduating class!"

==================================

After the ceremony, the families gathered to congratulate the graduates.

"Congratulations, Sweetheart!" her Abuela Angie said.

"Even though I'm not top of the class?"

"Daisy, we are all so proud of you." her father said.

"Besides, Genius here blew the curve." Junior pointed out while giving him a congratulatory noogie.

"And you received better marks than your mother." her Grandfather River said.

"Dad!" her mother exclaimed.

"Come on now. Graduating from high school isn't a contest." Dipper said.

"It sure wasn't this year! Am I right?" Mabel joked

"Aunt Mabel!" Junior chastised.
Summer laughed happily despite not understanding the joke on account of her being a toddler.

"My brilliant son!" Leo sobbed. "So proud!"

"This seems like a good time to tell everyone that there's been a slight change in my college plans." Jeffrey announced.

"I thought you decided on West Coast Tech a long time ago?" his Uncle Dipper asked.

"Yes, and I still am. But not immediately. I've decided to live in Nagma for a while. But instead of living with my father's side of the family, King Ted has offered to foster me in the castle."

"You're going to be an exchange student!" Star exclaimed.

"Son, going to West Coast Technical is all you've ever wanted."

"I know father, but I think it would be best to attend when I'm a similar age as the other students. I've already spoken to the administration. They're excited to have me attend, but they've agreed to hold my spot in reserve until I'm eighteen. This will be a good thing for me. Besides, someone has to start getting the kingdom ready for Summer."

"Bet'cha he comes back to Earth with a girlfriend." Glossaryck whispered to Pony Head.

"What about you, Daisy? You don't have to move into the dorms like other freshmen since you'll definitely qualify for a waiver." Jackie said.

"Yes, Mija! You should tell us your plans." her Abuelo Rafael asked.

Daisy was about to answer when her mother interrupted.

"Sorry everyone! I need to steal some one on one time alone with my daughter. We'll meet up with everyone at the picnic."

Together they left the others and walked towards the woods beside the school.

==================================

They were alone when Daisy saw her mother wipe away a tear.

"What's wrong, Mom?"

"I was just remembering the day your father and I graduated high school. That was the day my mother told me that she was very sick and I would need to ascend to the throne much sooner than I thought."

"..."

"I'm so proud of you Daisy. You'll be a very good queen."

"Mom?! Are you dying?!" she said almost panicking.

"What? No!" her mother reassured her. "No, I'm not sick."

"Don't scare me like that!"

"I'm just glad that you won't need to ascend to the throne too soon. You'll be a good queen..."
*someday*. That is… if you still want to be queen.

"What are you saying? If I don't take the throne…"

"You don't have to accept the crown if you don't want to, Daisy. Your father and I can keep on being the rulers of Mewni."

"Mom, that's crazy talk. If I don't become queen someday, what would happen to Mewni when you and dad are… gone?"

"Did you know that no one, not even my own mother, ever asked me if I wanted to be queen? It was assumed. And here I am doing the same thing. I never asked you."

"Oh, Mom. You don't need to ask. I always accepted that I would be queen. The kingdom needs me to be queen. Just like it needed you."

"But it was a different time. The reason I had to take the throne was because I was the last holder of royal magic. But you aren't. Your future isn't set in stone like mine was. I want you to have the same choice that Dawn and Lily had. The same choice that Summer will have someday."

"Mom…"

"Do you remember from your lessons why Kolma didn't fall into chaos when everyone thought the Dragonfly line had ended?"

"Because Kolma and Mewni are neighbors. And However-many-great-grandma Nebula helped keep order there until a new ruler was crowned." Daisy answered

"We can ask the next Queen Dragonfly to help keep order until a new government is formed in Mewni. Maybe Queen Firefly instead. Or even Queen Ladybird."

"And the rule of the Butterfly magic bloodline would just end?"

"Mewni shouldn't rely on royal magic to take care of it forever. And I'm talking about the whole dimension, not just the kingdom. The queens are like mothers to the kingdoms. And like any good mother we want to see our children grow and mature and eventually take care of themselves. Maybe this is what needs to happen."

"But look what happened last time. They don't call it the Great Decline for nothing."

"The people clung to the idea of royal magic even though the old queens didn't leave anything to take its place. Sometimes I wonder what would have happened if Nova and Max had married. If Lur had stayed independent, but allied with Mula, their ideas might have slowly spread, and the class wall might have been broken down a lot sooner. Maybe the ideas of rule by nobility and magical right would have eventually ended. And then the magic holders would be free to find a new purpose. But one of us has to be the first."

Daisy considered her mother's words before she spoke.

"Maybe someday. But it won't be me. The dimension is still centuries behind, and there's so much I can do to help. Do you remember when I was eight and they were about to launch that man from the catapult before Dad stopped them? Medicine in Mewni is still so primitive."

"So why aren't you planning to go to med school?"
"Because I'll do more good as queen. I've decided to take health administration as my major. Just one more doctor won't make as big a difference as more hospitals. That's the thing I want to fix most when I'm queen. Like you did with the schools. Mewni needs more people who can straddle both science and magic."

"Like the Pines family," her mother pointed out.

Daisy smiled.

"The other queens are still coming and I think they could still use a big sister. Maybe someday, royal magic holders like us won't be needed anymore. But we're not ready. Not yet. I think that's why royal magic holders are still being reborn in their kingdoms. There's still so much more to do." she said.

After a moment Daisy added, "And there's no way I'm cutting off a mermaid's tail."

Her mother smiled.

"Princess Daisy Diaz Butterfly, will you accept the royal burden of the crown and become a guiding light on the path to harmony and prosperity as the next Queen of Mewni?" she asked.

"I will, Mother."

Her mother gave her a kiss on the gold star of her right cheek.

"You know, Mom, you could have given me the choice when I was younger."

"I didn't want to ask you too soon. Before you really understood the responsibility. Before you saw the amount of good you can do as queen."

"But what made you ask today?"

"It was just the right time. Mothers know these things."

Her mother put her arm around her shoulders as they walked.

"You will be a good leader someday. You will be queen your own way."

"Thanks, Mom."

Together, they returned to their friends and family.

=================================================================================

There was a joint picnic held to celebrate the achievements of Daisy and Jeffrey though it grew into a high school graduation party for all students.

Their families and friends had come. Daisy's grandfather River had brought Lily.

Having also returned from college for the summer, Adam Gleeful came to congratulate them and to make one final desperate declaration of affection to Daisy before she left Gravity Falls. She turned down his advances as usual.

Though details were still being figured out, Stanley planned to live off campus starting next semester. Ivy kept inquiring about his dorm roommate.
Dommy and Dawn also talked about their plans for college next year. Everyone seemed to be moving on to the next stages of their lives. The thought depressed Janna somewhat.

Tom and Marina arrived late to the party accompanied by a young married couple from the kingdom of Talo. They were expecting and the wife had developed some rather unique symptoms. They wanted to live in Gravity Falls to raise their daughter.

This made Janna and Mabel happy.

Cryptids and other paranormal denizens of the region were welcomed. Not one bit of magic was used in aggression or needed in defense. A good time was had by all.

Days are long this time of year. It was still light out when the party drew to a close. Thanks to magic, cleanup was simple.

People said their goodbyes. There were some tears. At the end of the summer, everyone would go their own way.

They would all have to make the most of the time they had together now.

==================================

Stanley had asked Daisy to meet him at sunset. He had something he wanted to talk to her about.

The cliff overlooking the town was their spot because of a carving they had found there. On a boulder there was a carving of the initials 'DB+SP' inside of a heart. It had been there for a long time.

She arrived to find him waiting for her. When she came close he got down on one knee. In his hand was a diamond ring.

Her memories suddenly appeared to her as clear as the day.

==================================

"Daddy?" said the young princess.

"Yes, Daisy?" said her father, the king.

"Am I Dawn's grandma?"

Her father chuckled. "You're only six years old. You won't get to be a grandma until you're much, much older."

"Dawn's dad said that his mom was named Daisy."

"That's right. She was. And we named you after her."

"Really? What was she like?"

"I only know about her from stories. The best person to ask is about her is Dawn's grandpa."

"Did mommy know her?"

"Your mom was too young to really remember her when she… had to leave."

"She had to leave like Grandma Moon?"
"That's right."

"If you and mommy didn't know her, why did you name me after her?"

"Because she was a very good person. She thought of everyone else before herself and did something very important. We named you 'Daisy' so that maybe some part of her will be part of you. Kind of like how your Uncle Dipper named his son after both of his great uncles."

"Were they named Junior too?"

Marco smiled. "No. Their names were Stanford and Stanley. They were twins. Junior's real name is Stanford Stanley Pines."

"Why does everyone call him that if it's not really his name?"

"Junior is just a nickname for someone that's named after someone else."

"Am I a Junior too?"

"No. Junior is usually only used for boys."

"Well, I'm not going to call him Junior anymore. That's not his real name."

"You call your little brother 'Dommy'."

"That's different."

"Are you going to call Junior 'Stanford' instead?"

Daisy shook her head. "I don't think Abuelo likes Stanford."

"Really? What makes you say that?"

"He was mad at Stanford."

"He was? When was this?"

"When he was watching the grass battle."

"Grass battle? Do you mean football?"

Daisy nodded.

"Your Abuelo is just a fan of the other team. It doesn't mean he doesn't like Junior."

"Oh. Okay."

"You could call Junior 'Ford' instead."

"No. That's not right."

==================================

"...The prince wants to marry me. Well, not him actually. His mother, Queen Jade, wants him to marry me. She was trying to arrange our marriage with my mom and dad."

"And they said 'no', right?"
"They said that I was only thirteen. I'm still too young. Besides, they always said that who I'm going to marry is going to be my decision."

"What do you want, Daisy?"

"I don't want to marry the prince. I don't even know him, Stanley."

"But why would Jade want to marry her son off so early?"

=================================================================================================

"Everyone says there's going to be a war. Oh, Stanley… this is all my fault."

"Your fault? But, Daisy, you didn't do anything."

"That's why. If I had agreed to marry, this might not have happened."

"Because their enemies might've thought twice if they had a marriage alliance with Mewni. I get it now."

=================================================================================================

"Answer."

"Hi, Auntie Janna."

"Hi, Daisy. I need to talk to Junior. He's got school in the morning and he's not back yet. He's not answering my calls to his travel mirror."

"I can try calling him."

"Calling him? He said that he was going to visit you. Isn't he there with you?"

Daisy shook her head.

"Then where is he?!"

=================================================================================================

Stanley entered the throne room of Mewni Castle. Smoke wafted from his torn black clothes and he had a cut on his forehead.

"Stanley!" Daisy said.

"Junior! Where have you been? It's been over a week!" King Butterfly said.

"Your parents are worried sick!" Queen Butterfly said as she bandaged his cut.

"Here, Queen B." Stanley said as he gave the Queen a thick envelope. "These'll help Queen Jade."

"Really? What is it?" the queen asked.

"You don't really want to know. Uh, really think twice about looking. But it's some stuff that Duke Earl really wouldn't want to appear in Mewni Monarchy Monthly. His allies would turn on him for sure."

Curiosity got the better of the queen and king and they pulled a picture from the envelope.
With a grimace, they immediately stuffed the picture back into the envelope.

"Can I see?" the princess asked.

"NO!" her parents said in unison.

"Junior? How did you get these?" the king asked indicating the envelope.

"Before I answer that King B, let me ask you something first. Are any of the following still frowned upon in this dimension? Impersonating a high noble, mana sharking, relic counterfeiting, manticore rustling, necromancy without a license."

"You know what? Never mind." the king said dropping the envelope on his throne.

"Anyway, you don't even actually have to use the pictures. Just let Duke Earl know that you've got the goods on him and Lady Marmalade, and Sir Duke, and Lady Madonna."

"And the slime monster." the queen added.

"Are you suggesting we use blackmail to prevent the war?" the king asked.

"Pssh… naw!"

"Is there something wrong with your eye, Stanley?" the princess asked.

"I'm trying to wink."

"Junior, it's not that we aren't grateful. We are. I'm sure Queen Jade will be too when she's done being weirded out. But you're only fourteen. Don't you think you're a just little bit too young to be taking on problems like… well, like this?" the queen asked.

"Mom, when you were our age, didn't you once storm a castle full of monsters to rescue dad?" Daisy said teasingly.

"More than once." her mother said.

"Hey!" her father protested.

"We're practically family. We're supposed to take care of each other." Stanley said.

"Thank you, Stanley." the princess said reaching for his hand. But before their hands touched, the queen and king gathered them into a group hug.

"Yes! Thank you, Junior!" the queen said.

Behind them the princess' younger brother was heard asking, "Why would anyone want to do that with an octohorse?"

Everyone that was hugging looked to see that he had opened the envelope with the extortion material.

"NOOOOOOooooo….!" the king shouted while diving towards the prince in slow motion.

==================================

"I better get back. I'm probably in trouble for ditching school."
"We'll call your parents to explain."

"No. Don't tell anyone else that I was here. The less anyone else knows, the better. I'll just take my punishment. I'll probably be grounded until I catch up with homework. And my dad'll probably make me clean the whole lab."

"You shouldn't be punished for helping us." the king said.

Stanley just shrugged.

"It's okay. Oh! And if anyone comes around looking for Andrew '8-Ball' Alcatraz, you know what to do…" he said with a sinister look.

"Junior, we are *not* going to whack anyone!"

"What? I meant just tell them that you don't know who they're talking about."

"If you didn't just tell us, we wouldn't know anything!"

After saying goodbye, Junior left the throne room to find the royal assistant who would open a portal back to Earth for him.

She chased after him and caught up to him in the hall.

"Stanley."

"Daisy?"

"I wasn't going to marry him."

"I know. But at least now you don't have to feel guilty about it."

"You went through all that just to make me feel better?"

"I... I would do anything to make you feel better."

"..."

"Daisy, I-"

She didn't wait for him to finish speaking before she kissed him.

==================================

"Hello, everyone. Some of you already know me, but I'm Daisy Diaz Butterfly. I'll be attending Gravity Falls High School as an exchange student along with my brother and my cousin."

"Who's your host family?" asked a girl near the back of the class.

"Well, my cousin Dawn and I will be living with family friends and my brother will be living with my boyfriend's family."

"Well, I suppose your brother can share a room with my brother." Adam Gleeful said.

Daisy sighed.

"She meant *my* family, you knucklehead." Stanley said.
Elegantly dressed, Daisy descended the main staircase of the mansion.

Her prom date was in awe.

"You're beautiful!" he said.

"Thank you, Stanley." she said blushing from the compliment.

"Your parent's will never forgive us if we don't get a picture of you two!" Aunt Mabel said.

Daisy placed her hand over Stanley's heart and he held her close with a hand around her waist.

Uncle Leo snapped a few pictures.

"Why there, Stanley? It's so far away."

"Make just one national landmark disappear and suddenly colleges don't want you to attend. So I'm pretty sure your dad helped get me accepted there. And I even got the scholarship."

"But dimensional scissors can't reach there yet."

"They will soon. Jeffrey says the barrier will be weak enough next summer."

"But that's a whole year away."

After looking through the triangular attic window to see that her brother was asleep, Daisy floated on her cloud towards her boyfriend's bedroom window.

Her tapping on the window pane woke him up. He got up from his bed to investigate.

"Daisy? It's almost midnight."

"I couldn't sleep. You're leaving tomorrow."

"I wouldn't leave without saying goodbye." Stanley said as he helped her in through his bedroom window.

"I know. But that would've been so… brief. I want to spend as much time with you as I can before you go."

"But I'm leaving in the morning. The only time left…"

"Stanley… can I stay with you tonight?"

For a split second he stopped breathing.

She began to undo the buttons of her top.

He reached up and held her hands to stop her.

"You don't… you don't want me to stay." she said as she turned her head to look away.
"Of course I want you to stay!" he blurted out before realizing he was being too loud. He tried to hold his voice to a whisper.

"Of course I want you to stay. But I thought we were waiting? You said you wanted to wait at prom because you're only seventeen."

"A year seems like such a long time…"

"Is that what's really bothering you?"

Daisy nodded. "... and you'll be so far away."

"We done long distance before. Heck, we've done cross dimension."

"It was easy to see each other before. Even across dimensions thanks to our scissors. But this is different. We won't be able to just appear for each other. We have to actually travel…"

"Then that's what we'll do. I'll come back to see you as often as I can."

"...You're going to meet new friends. Maybe you'll meet someone else-"

"Hey, hey! None of that talk! You don't have to worry about me not coming back to you. Do you know how long I've been in love with you? I'm not going to stop loving you in a year. Not in ten, or twenty, or thirty. Not even in a million."

Daisy embraced him and buried her face in his broad chest.

"I promise, we won't be apart for long." he said to her.

"I want it to be you." Daisy quietly said.

"Daisy?"

She spoke a little more loudly. "A royal magic queen must have a king. When the time comes, I want you to be mine. Not because of the law. But because I love you. I want you to be mine."

"Are you asking me to…?"

He felt her nod.

==================================

The soldiers guarding the Great Hall of Mewni stood at attention. They were surprised to see the princess and her companion appear at this very late hour.

"Hello, Sergeant. We would like to go inside." Princess Daisy said.

"Yes, Princess." the sergeant said as he opened the door.

==================================

"There." Daisy said pointing to the dome of the glass ceiling. "When my mother needed my father the most, she wished upon that star for him to find a way back to her. She prayed to that star with all her heart."

"Why did she choose that one? It's not the biggest or brightest."
"She says that she just knew that it was the one. I think it was because it's a red star like the one my dad has."

"You mean their heartbond."

"It was my mom's magic working through their bond that created the path for him to follow."

"The bear leads north."

"And during his big fight in the Underworld, my dad borrowed a little of my mom's magic."

"He was magically juiced when he fought all those gladiators?"

"Maybe not all twenty three. But definitely for the last one."

He laughed for a moment before his expression changed.

"Daisy, do you think we'll be heartbonded?" he asked.

"It doesn't matter if we are or not. I know we're meant to be together."

Stanley just smiled at her.

"So, will you take this step with me?"

"Yeah, but, aren't there supposed to be witnesses?"

"We don't need witnesses for this. This is just for us."

"Okay, then."

Standing alone in the Great Hall of Mewni, they held hands and looked into each other's eyes to make a promise to each other.

"If you accept, I promise that I will take you as my king. I will share with you my crown, my fortune..."

His bedroom door opened just wide enough for his father to poke his head in. "Hey, Junior! Time to wake up!" he said before leaving and closing the door.

Stanley and Daisy's eyes shot open.

She immediately rolled over him off the bed and onto the floor. She then quickly slid underneath his bed to hide.

The door reopened and his father's head reappeared.

"I'm up, Dad. I'm up." Stanley said as he sat up and rubbed his face.

His father was silent as he scanned his son's bedroom with his eyes.

"You look like you didn't sleep." his father said.

"Big day today, you know?"
"Yup. Big day. Biiig day. Anyway, breakfast is ready."

"Okay, Dad. Be down soon."

Just as they lowered their guard, his father quickly asked, "Hey Princess, you want to have breakfast with us?! There's pancakes!"

"Pancakes?!" came the excited reply from under the bed.

Stanley facepalmed.

==================================

"So, I heard we had a surprise overnight guest last night." his mother teased as they sat down for breakfast.

"Ooooooo." Dommy joined in teasing.

"Nothing happened!" Daisy and Stanley said defensively as they blushed.

"Oh, we know."

"Then why is there a bond candle in the middle of the table?" Stanley asked.

"I was just trying to make breakfast classy?" his mother feigned ignorance.

The candle was unlit.

==================================

The car was loaded. Stanley and his parents were ready to begin the drive south.

"I guess it's time for us to get going." Stanley said.

"Stan, you were nothing but a nuisance, and I'm glad to be rid of you." Mabel said.

"I'll miss you too, Aunt Mabel." he said as he hugged her and gave her a kiss on the cheek

He said his goodbyes to everyone else who was there to see him off.

Daisy was the last.

"I'll call tonight from my grandparent's house in Piedmont. And I'll call tomorrow after I'm done moving in."

Daisy just nodded.

They shared a short, sweet, but sad kiss goodbye and Stanley went to the car where his parents were waiting.

The screech of an eagle was heard overhead as he opened the rear passenger door. The eagle swooped down to land on the roof of the car and it sat eye to eye with Stanley.

It gave him a kiss on the forehead before it flew away.

Somewhat confused, Stanley sat down in the car and closed the door.
The car had just left the parking lot of the Mystery Shack when it was levitated by magic energy and returned to the parking spot.

Daisy put her wand away and ran up to the car.

Stanley opened the door.

"Dais-?"

"Ain't no dang eagle gonna be the last one to kiss *my* man before he goes!" she said before she pulled him out of the car and kissed him passionately.

After she broke the kiss, she pushed him back into the car and closed the door.

"Okay." Daisy said.

She waved as the car left for the second time.

==================================

Daisy sat on her bed with the canopy curtains drawn for privacy.

"How's the dorms?" she said looking into her pocket mirror.

"It's alright. First year students have to live here if they don't have a waiver."

"Maybe it's a good thing. You'll get the full college life experience."

"You'd be allowed to live off campus if you come here for college next year."

"What do you mean 'if'? Of course I'm going there."

"Okay." Stanley said smiling.

"Did you meet your roommate?"


"Really?"

"Yeah. We met when he was moving in. But he only calls one of them 'Mom'. He calls the other one 'Dad'."

"Well, maybe his Dad just looks like a woman?"

"I think I know how to tell the difference between a man and a woman. She was a short redhead with boobs. His 'Dad' is definitely a woman."

"It's only been a day. Checking out other women already?"

"Aww. You know you're the only girl for me."

Daisy smiled.

"And let me tell you about his other mom. I think she's a lightning demon."

"An Oni?! No way!"
"Maybe when you visit sometime, you can bring Ivy. I think I found her next boyfriend."

Daisy laughed.

"I miss you, Stanley."

"I miss you too, Daisy."

"Is your roommate there now?"

"No. His parents wanted to take him out to eat before they left."

"Dawn's not here either."

Daisy held her mirror out in one hand and aimed it at herself.

"Taking a selfie?" Stanley asked.

Daisy shook her head and smiled shyly. She blushed as she reached up and began to undo the buttons of her top.

"..."

==================================

Daisy emerged from her memories. Her attention flicked back and forth between his face and the ring.

"Stanley, It's beautiful!"

"Daisy, I wanted to give you this. Not because of what it's worth, but because of what it is supposed to represent."

"And what is that?"

"It's supposed to represent my love for you... but it doesn't. It can't."

Daisy's heart fell. "...Why not?" she said on the verge of tears.

"Because that's impossible. Even if this diamond was as big as a mountain it still wouldn't be enough to show my love for you."

Daisy was crying.

"Daisy. I was thinking that maybe we should tell everyone... if you're ready."

==================================

Standing alone in the Great Hall of Mewni, they held hands and looked into each other's eyes to make a promise to each other.

"If you accept me, I promise that I will take you as my king. I will share with you my crown, my fortune..."

"None of that matters to me."

Daisy smiled. "Stanley, I promise to love you, whether you accept me or not."
"And I promise to keep loving you forever, Daisy."

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"Yes!" She leapt into his arms and rained kisses on his face.

"Here. Let's try this on." he said as he slipped the ring onto her finger.

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That night they returned to Mabel's house to find Daisy and Stanley's families there. They all had knowing smiles on their faces.

A large banner saying 'CONGRATULATIONS TO THE HAPPY COUPLE!' hung from the balcony.

"So, Stanley and I have an announcement. But I guess you all already knew that…"

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"She's so happy, Grandpa."

"That is good. Do they suspect anything?"

"No. I implied that it was buried with her. It's probably for the best. His dad and aunt still have their suspicions about how their great uncle had gotten hold of a diamond ring in the first place."

"His conscience is clear. After all, he purchased the ring from a broker… He did *pay* for it, did he not?"

"Yes. The price was equal to twenty Xix silvers plus tax and commission just like you suggested. He knew it was the one when I pointed it out to him. And he couldn't pass up such an amazing deal."

"Your aunt had planned to pass her ring on to you. Do you regret giving it up?"

"No. This feels like we're putting something right. But do you really think that he wouldn't have chosen the ring if he knew it belonged to my grandmother?"

"Maybe. But in a kind of way, now it is hers once again."

==================================

Though they could have had servants help, Marco and Star helped to move their daughter to college themselves. They felt that it was the sort of thing parents should do for their children. They would do the same for their son when it was time.

"...And that's the last one." Marco said placing the heavy trunk in the tower.

"We're so happy that you're going to your father's alma mater." said Daisy's Abuela.

"And we're glad she's going to live here with you." Marco said.

"You sure you don't mind giving up this room?" Daisy asked.

"Since Junior's friend will be renting the spare bedroom, I'll just turn the shed into a guest house when we visit. Besides, this tower is the biggest room in the house. You and your fiance need the
room.” Star said.

Marco put his fingers in his ears and began to sing loudly. "La-La-La-La-I-don't-wanna-think-about-it-La-La-La…"

"Oh, Marco! You don't have to plug your ears. The tower room is soundproof!” said Daisy's Abuelo.

"AAAUUUGH!"

Daisy laughed then looked at the trunk her father had just put down.

"Uh, oh. I think this stuff is Dommy's."

"Huh. Okay, I'll move it down to the garage for now. We'll just bring it back later." Marco said as he tried to pick the trunk back up. But after moving several heavy items, his strength had begun to wane and he had trouble lifting.

"Maybe I should help you with that, King B." Junior said as he grabbed the handle on one side. Together they made their way downstairs. After arriving in the garage they set the trunk down against the wall.

Junior spied a cloth covering a motorcycle.

"Hey, King B. Is that the bike my dad bought from you?"

"It sure is!"

"Can I have a peek?"

Marco smiled as he pulled off the covering.

"Wow! Look at that. You know, I'm trying to imagine my dad riding it."

"Your dad was a better rider than me. He's even won a Globnar race."

"Well, this is no lightcycle! This is a classic! It still looks great!"

"Yeah. I try to take care of it. Too bad I can only ride when we visit Earth. Not many gas stations in Mewni."

"Say, uh, King B… would it be okay if… if I took Daisy for a ride… on it… sometime… sir?"

Marco took a moment like he was thinking about it.

"Sure, Junior. I trust you."

"Oh! Looks like you found my dad's bike! We were wondering what was taking you two so long." Daisy said as she and her mother entered the garage.

"It's been too long, Marco! Take me for a ride?” Star said as she leapt onto the motorcycle and straddled the leather seat.

Marco smiled as he put on his leather jacket and helmet.

"Yay!"
"Hang on to me." he said to Star as he climbed onto the motorcycle in front of her. Star materialized her own jacket and helmet then wrapped her arms around him.

"I'll never let go." she said.

"We'll see you kids later!" Marco said before he started the bike. Star and Marco rode out of the garage and down the street.

"My parents are so weird." said Daisy

"Sweetheart? Did your mom and dad leave?" her Abuela asked as she entered the garage.

"They went for a ride."

Her Abuelo said, "Mija, now that we are retired, we will be travelling a lot and are not going to be able to keep as close an eye on you as your parents think."

Abuela Angie opened a portal with a set of dimensional scissors and said, "But I'm sure it will be fine. You and Junior are very responsible young adults."

"We are going on a tour of Galafamor. We will be back by Halloween."

"And then we'll be going to Andromeda until Thanksgiving!"

"¡Adios, kids!" said her grandparents as they stepped through the portal.

"Did your family just leave us alone in the house?"

Daisy wrapped her arms around him and gave him a huge smile.

==================================

Star and Marco rode out of the city for a while. They followed the back roads until they found themselves in the forest.

They parked the motorcycle on the side of the road and hiked into the woods to find a particular spot.

They sat together on the grass as night came. Star leaned back into her husband allowing his arms to wrap around her. Together they watched as the stars filled the sky.

"Can you find the North Star for me?" she asked.

He nuzzled her neck. The feel of his breath on her skin made goosebumps rise.

"I'm holding her."

Star turned her head to find his lips with hers. She savored every last part of the intimacy they shared. Their physical closeness and the emotions flowing between them through their bond. She snuggled into his arms.

"Daisy's almost the same age I was when I became queen."

"And she'll be a great one. Like her mother. And Dawn chose Dommy just like you said she would."

"How could she not? He's a catch like his father."
Star looked thoughtful for a moment.

"I wish the kids could have lived a life free from expectations." she said

"Just the ones they put on themselves."

"What do you think the kids would have been if we weren't the royal family of Mewni? What if they were just our kids?"

"I always imagined that Dommy would've become a cop if he wasn't going to be a king." Marco said.

"Maybe. Daisy would've been a doctor."

"Hmm. Dr Daisy, PhD."

For a moment they let their imaginations run with the idea.

"But instead they'll have to settle for being rulers like us." Star said.

"I never thought of it as settling. I got to be your husband."

Star turned to him and smiled.

"Marco? Why did we only have two kids?"

"Because we wanted to balance being parents with being king and queen. And we didn't want to have to rely on servants to help raise our children. I think we did a good job."

"Me too. But the kids are almost grown. Our son has a future queen waiting for him. Our daughter has chosen her king. Someday, they'll take our place. What will we do then?"

"Live the life we want? Without expectations?"

"Maybe we could live on Earth. Maybe we could have…"

Marco felt Star's emotions. A sense of longing.

"Star? Do you want us to have another baby?"

Star nodded and asked, "Do you?"

Marco caressed her cheek and said, "I do."

Star smiled.

"You don't think we're too old?" Marco asked.

"Too old?! You take that back!" Star said with playful indignance as she rolled her husband onto his back and sat astride him. "If you think we're getting too old to have another kid…" Star's hands had found their way inside his shirt and were massaging his chest. "…we'd better start trying right away!"

"Here? Now?" Marco said as he glanced around making sure they were alone.

"Yes, now. No waiting. That is, unless you're scared." Star said as she sat upright and pulled her top off.
"I'm not afraid." he said as his hands felt her bare skin.

Star pressed her hand below her navel. She closed her eyes and the hearts on her cheeks glowed briefly.

"How about now? It's… unsafe." she said with a grin.

"Safety is overrated." he said as he sat up to wrap his arms around her.

Star laughed as she pulled his shirt over his head. She stopped to touch the star on his chest.

They looked into each other's eyes. Their lips touched lightly at first, but each kiss that followed grew in strength.

Abandoning thought, they undressed each other and lay down embracing in the grass.

"I love you."

"I love you, too."

With those simple words, they rejoined and became one.

It was magic.

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Author's Notes: So is Starfall done? Like, done-done?

I've told the main story I wanted to tell and the epilogue grew into a sequel. There are no major hanging plot points remaining. So, yeah, after more than a year and a half, I'm pretty much done. But maybe in the distant future, like when the show finale approaches, I'll bump this story up to the front again with a bonus chapter or my writer's notes. But it wouldn't really change or add more to the plot. So I feel comfortable saying the story is "complete".

I'm not much for taking part in events like "Wholesome Week", but since this chapter sort of matched up with the Sunday prompt "AU of Choice" I figured it was as good a time as any to put this finale out. Besides, I wanted to finish this story off before the end of the hiatus and the start of Starbuary.

To all the readers and reviewers on FFnet, AO3, tumblr, reddit and other forums whether you liked, loved, or straight up hated "Starfall":

Thank You.

-GolfAlphaMike

January 22, 2017
Meanwhile, in the Kingdom of Mewni... Somewhere around the middle of Chapter 22...

One of Star's large bed pillows was wearing Marco's red hoodie. She was still deciding whether to name it 'Marc-pill-o' or 'Marco Pillow'. She had quickly ruled out the name 'Soft Kid' because Marco isn't a boy anymore. Marco is a man.

She hugged the cushiony substitute and smiled. She didn't have to search her heart for Marco's feelings tonight. He loved her and she knew it. She felt it.

Sitting in her bed, Star pressed her nose into the red cotton garment and breathed deeply. The
fragrance triggered memories of happiness and adventure. Memories of passion.

Memories of her lover, Marco.

By definition, that’s what he was. Her paramour. She was engaged to Tom, but her heart and body belonged to Marco. Star giggled to herself. It seemed so naughty when she thought of it that way.

And she didn’t feel at all guilty about it.

How scandalous.

But she knew in her heart, that this wasn’t really cheating. And Tom didn’t even want her. He has a lover of his own. It’s been more than four years. Good for them.

But there were some who think that doesn’t matter. Feelings don’t matter. Love doesn’t matter. Only duty, tradition, and the law matter. They think she should just marry Tom, lie back, close her eyes, and think about Mewni on the wedding night. Then she can just be miserable for the rest of her life.

As if.

But after today, that’s gone out the window. Thank goodness for legal loopholes. The traditionalists can kiss her royal ass.

Star would probably find all of this kind of funny if it wasn’t happening to her. After Marco is finally her king, they should try to find a way to get rid of all this forced marriage and dueling business.

Who came up with that stuff anyway?

Star tried to push aside those unpleasant thoughts, so she squeezed Marco’s stuffed placeholder tighter and inhaled the scent of his hoodie again.

She laid herself down on her side next to the special pillow. She draped her arm and leg over it, holding it close in contact with her entire body.

She imagined she was laying with Marco. But this time, she was the big spoon.

That one night in his bedroom. In their bed.

Star blushed at the memory. The heat radiated from her face down into her body.

They were each other’s firsts. Why did she wait so long to take that step with him? By that time, they had already been together for two years. They had been in love with each other for even longer. It seems so silly now. What held her back?

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During high school, after Star and Marco had been together for about a year, there was a ladies only sleepover at Janna’s. A session of girl talk and gossip had turned to the subject of sex, as it sometimes does.

Jackie revealed the fact that she had recently lost her virginity to Blake, her boyfriend at the time. That was how she described it too. Not making love, or sharing herself with him.

She lost something.
And she seemed sad. Janna picked up on this too and asked Jackie to talk about it.

She wasn’t ready, but he pushed and pushed until she gave in. He turned out to be very selfish in bed. He was too rough and impatient. Jackie didn’t orgasm. She even told them that it hurt. He broke up with her not long after. Jackie felt so used.

They tried to be supportive. They assured Jackie that someday, her prince would come.

And they were surprised to learn that her and Marco had barely rounded second base.

Star remembered being worried. Would their first time be as bad as that? Would it hurt? Was that why she wanted to wait so long?

But she never, ever worried that sex was all he wanted from her. He never pressured her.

Back in the present, Star rolled in her bed onto her back. She held the body pillow on top of her. She remembered being like this with him. It felt so intimate. Marco above her, looking into her eyes as he thrust. His kisses on her lips. On her face. On her neck.

But the pillow was too light. Star briefly thought about magically increasing its mass to simulate Marco’s weight pressing her into the mattress. Instead, she wrapped her slender legs around the pillow and crushed it into her center.

Star wanted to feel that deep connection with Marco again. It was so much more than just physical. Star moaned at the thought.

She then realized something. She was excited. There was a wet feeling between her legs.

Star giggled. It had been a while before today.

When the Obscuring Spell was broken, Marco remembered.

That kiss. It was so full of emotion. So full of love. So full of…need.

It was like a dam bursting. She had been forced to hold back this part of herself for too long. Her cheeks glowed with pink light that bathed both of their faces.

He was here for her. They were together again. Star drank his kisses like they were cool water and she was dying of thirst.

It was like a bucket of syrup had been overturned under her dress. She was so wet and ready.

She showered his lips and face with kisses and crushed their bodies so tightly together that not even light could pass between them. She felt him. It was pressed against her belly. Star knew he was happy to be with her. She leapt up and wrapped her arms and legs around him as he carried and held her.

After years of wandering the desert, Star found herself swimming in the ocean.

She wanted to just rip his clothes off and take him right then and there. Her royal clothing was too bulky and cumbersome. No time to deal with all that. Slow and tender lovemaking could come later. Would she have just pushed him onto his back, yanked her underwear to the side, and impaled
herself on him? Or would she have gotten down on her knees in her royal gown and taken him into her mouth?

But, time was too short. They couldn’t keep going. She couldn’t lose control. Not yet. Star fought her libido and pried herself off of Marco. She collected herself and began to explain, but he already knew why.

They had to go and rush off to the Great Hall so he could challenge her engagement.

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Star indulged herself in a wicked little fantasy. What if there had been time? What if they had shown up to today’s gathering after she had her way with Marco? She imagined herself standing in the middle of the Great Hall to allow the challenge, with Marco’s seed running down the inside of her leg under her dress.

A lascivious grin appeared on Star’s face as she allowed her fantasy to progress further. Maybe she would have left a drop of his seed on the corner of her mouth. She would have made sure that Ishtar saw her lick it clean from her lips. It might have caused a riot, but it would have been worth it just to spite her.

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She found herself breathing heavily. Star licked her lips to moisten them.

Great. She was never going to fall asleep in this state. And there was a session of open court scheduled for tomorrow. She needed a clear head.

She needed relief.

She knew where Marco was spending the night. It pays to have shared allies.

The dimensional scissors she borrowed from Marco years ago sat in her nightstand drawer. Untouched ever since dimensional travel to Earth was made impossible. Where else would she want to go, anyway?

It didn’t matter, though. Xix’s royal family always traveled with a Tramorfidian crystal. No ambushes.

And no late night booty calls.

Star gave an exasperated sigh.

She looked over to her wand laying on top of the nightstand. Cloudy made fast travel easy. It wouldn’t take too long to get to Marco.

But Star is supposed to keep her distance. If she were seen, the high nobles could say Star violated the rules, and Ishtar would win. The last thing she wanted was to blow it now. She just needed to be patient. It’s been almost five years. What’s a few more weeks?

Easy. That’s what.

…

She could do the time standing on her head.
No problem.

She was going to die of horniness.

A queen’s gotta do what a queen’s gotta do, right?.

Star sighed again before sitting up. She placed the pillow behind her, then grabbed the hem of her nightgown and pulled it up and over her head. After tossing it aside, she flopped back onto the bed leaning against the large pillow, naked save for her panties.

How would Marco react if he could see her now? All hot and bothered like this?

With her left hand she cupped her petite breasts.

Star thought of her breasts for a moment. She was certainly no longer totally flat like she had been in her youth. But now, while certainly very perky, hers were still just barely a handful. While this had advantages, particularly in combat, she remembered being anxious about what Marco would think of them the first time he saw them. Would he have preferred someone with a more voluptuous body? Someone more womanly?

Marco watched her as she pulled her nightie off exposing the modest swells of her breasts. She was straddling his hips, wearing nothing but a pair of cotton panties. Her nipples stood out like pink berries against her pale skin. A feeling of shyness arose. Did he like what he saw?

His eyes were focused below her neck. She saw him lick his lips and gulp. She could feel his manhood through his underwear, hard as stone.

It seems like he does.

Star leaned down to him. As she placed her lips on his, she pressed their chests together, squeezing her breasts against his broad pectorals. The feeling of his bare skin against hers was electrifying. His hands wandered the skin of her back. His fingertips grazing the stems and membranes of her mewberty wings, sending tiny shivers through her. Soon his strong hands found their way down to her bottom, where they squeezed and massaged her through the soft fabric. Her nipples dragged against his skin as they ground against each other.

The two thin layers of cloth between them were unbearable. They had to go.

Star gently circled her areola with her fingertips. Her nipples stiffened with excitement. She trembled from her own stimulation. How was she this turned on? She was burning up.
She ran her right hand down her flat, toned belly until it reached the apex of her thighs. She pressed her fingers over her panties to find them soaked through.

Star hissed as she drew her hand up, dragging her fingertips along the groove of her mound through the dampened cloth. Reaching the waistline of her panties, she pressed down lightly and slipped her fingers beneath the thin fabric.

She felt the patch of fine golden down as she slid her searching fingertips past it. She lifted her fingers slightly, avoiding her now aching and sensitive nub. There. She was wet, and hot, and slick. Star bit her lower lip as she traced her finger along the cleft of her lips.

Her left hand massaged her breasts harder, stimulating and pinching the hard pebbles that were her nipples.

A finger on her right hand very softly grazed her button.

The orgasm that hit her was sudden and fierce. She gasped in surprise as her quaking body arched and her toes curled. Her head thrashed back and forth whipping her blonde mane into a frenzied mess.

All too soon, Star’s climax subsided. She turned her head to find the hoodie still wrapped around the pillow. A little bit of him was here with her. His scent surrounded her in post orgasmic bliss. She imagined it was his fingers that were touching her, still buried inside her pussy.

With a little laugh and a smile, Star relaxed. The suddenness of her orgasm had stoked her memories.

==================================

They had helped each other shed the last pieces of their clothing. Now, they were sitting close, facing each other on the bed. Star was practically in his lap. They were just enjoying each other, taking in the sights and tracing the details of each other’s naked bodies.

Star boldly took his hand and pressed it against her breast. She felt a rush of exhilaration. They shared a nervous smile, knowing they just crossed another line. Soon, she slowly guided his hand downward. And for the first time, his fingers gently explored her secret garden.

After only a moment, he was shaking and apologizing. Star understood what was happening. He was so excited and nervous. They both were. But it was overwhelming him. He wouldn’t last.

She told him to relax. There was nothing he could do to disappoint her. She wanted to ease his anxiety and please him at the same time. Star lovingly kissed his lips and reached down.

Star marveled at how his manhood felt when she first gently touched it with her fingers. Hard and strong like iron, but with the texture of silk. It felt so large and hot in her hand. As she caressed his length, a droplet of clear fluid formed on the tip. She smeared it around the head, making him slide easily between her fingers.

She told him to let go and enjoy it.

He lasted only a few strokes. He squeezed his eyes shut and growled her name as he let go. Jets of hot, gooey cum shot from him. A bit splashed on her cheek. Right on the pink heart.

His face was so red from embarrassment. He began to apologize again before Star shushed him. She enjoyed watching him come. She enjoyed the feeling of holding his pulsing cock as his seed surged
through it and burst from it. It made her feel so... powerful. Tonight, he was her wand and this was his magic.

She brought her hand up to her cheek, wiped his seed off the pink heart with her finger and brought it to her slightly open lips.

Star had been told that it would taste metallic and bitter. But it wasn’t. To her, it tasted like... salted butter.

Marco watched, transfixed, as she licked. His mouth moved, only to speak silent words.

She asked him if he enjoyed that as much as she did.

He could only nod.

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Star drew her hand out from her panties. Her hand was drenched in fluid. Long viscous strings formed as it dripped down. She dragged her slippery fingers up from below her navel, through the valley between her breasts, to her lips.

Her tongue emerged for a taste, curling around a finger and drawing it into her mouth. It had been a while since she last tasted herself.

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Marco needed a moment. Star knew he would be ready again soon. He was strong and virile.

From their sitting position, he pushed her backward with a kiss on her lips.

Star understood. He wanted her to lie down. Star would let him show her how much he wanted to please her.

She wrapped her arms around his neck as she reclined, ensuring she landed softly.

Once Star lay down fully, he went back and forth, kisses wandering between her lips and her cheeks before he moved on to kiss and suckle her neck. Star felt his breathing. He was trying to experience her fully, taking in the scent of her hair, which she knew he loved.

Marco slowly kissed his way down her body. He moved slowly, making sure to tend to every part of her. While his hands explored her breasts, he kissed his way down her shallow cleavage.

Star told him that she wished she had more in that area to offer him.

He came face to face with her and looked directly in her eyes. He assured her that she was beautiful and perfect. He loved her and there was nothing about her he would change.

His hand cupped a breast more firmly. Marco moved his face back down to her chest.

And then he told her that he could tell they were very sensitive.

His tongue darted out and gave her nipple a quick lick sending a jolt through her entire body.

With a yelp and a giggle, her confidence was restored.

She pulled Marco’s face to hers for a passionate kiss. She then pushed him back down to continue
his work.

He bathed her breasts with attention. He kissed and licked every inch of skin. When it came to her nipples, light suckling was combined with swirling licks and gentle bites.

The sensations were incredibly intense, yet she held Marco’s face to her bosom. She didn’t want him to stop.

Soon, it was time for Marco’s focus to move south again. He kissed all over her midriff and even elicited a laugh from her when he tickled her navel with a playful dip of his tongue.

Once Marco travelled below her navel, Star’s heart began to race. Her breath became rapid. He was so close. She could feel herself blooming like a flower. She spread her legs for him, inviting him to taste the nectar that was now dripping from her.

His nose nuzzled the fine hairs just above her most private treasure.

She eagerly waited for him to begin.

Star whimpered when instead, Marco shifted further down. Starting just above her knee, he ran his tongue up the inside of her thigh toward her waiting pussy.

She was shivering with anticipation.

But he was teasing again. Star felt his hot breath on her as he moved to her other thigh.

Desperate now, she grabbed his head, almost pulling his hair out, and dragged him back to her center. She was almost shouting.

She was Princess Star Johannsen Butterfly. The Queen-to-be. Heir to the Throne of the Kingdom of Mewni. Yet, she had just done something completely beneath her station.

She had begged… with language that would make a monster blush.

She covered her mouth, shocked by the obscene words that came out of it.

Marco was looking up at her from below.

He had been ready to take this step with her for a while but she was the one who came to his room. She needed him tonight.

She needed him for the rest of her life.

In a hushed voice, she told him she loved him and pleaded with him again.

She gasped when his lips kissed her sex. His hot and steamy tongue was probing and stimulating her, undulating against her. The bedroom was filled with her moans of pleasure and the wet sounds of his kissing and licking.

This was even more intense than his earlier attentions on her breasts. Star could only hang on.

His tongue swept over her, sliding all around, lapping up her honey. When his tongue found her sensitive pearl, she squealed. Marco swirled his tongue around it and suckled on it lightly.

Star was in paradise.
She felt the buildup deep inside.

Marco backed off the nub momentarily and attended to other areas of her sex. But he soon returned, careful not to overstimulate her. He went back and forth several times before changing his technique.

Star felt his lips find her button again. Then his tongue was accompanied by something slipping into her. A finger. Then there were two. Not too deep. Just enough.

Star knew it would be only moments before she came. She tried to tell him she was close, but she couldn’t speak.

Marco was unceasing in his efforts. His fingers, tongue, and lips all working together. Licking. Eating.

She was there. Overcome with pleasure. She felt herself spasming around his fingertips. Her wetness flowed freely from her as she squirmed. Marco continued as Star’s legs clamped his head in place.

Star opened her mouth to scream, but no sound came out. She closed her eyes and saw stars. Fumbling in the dark, Star searched for him. She felt his hand find hers. She held onto it tightly as euphoria consumed her.

Soon she came back to herself and he was there with her. His face hovered just inches above hers. She could see her juices glistening on his proud smile.

She asked if he had ever done that before.

He shook his head.

Then how was he so good at it? Natural talent?

She reached up and cradled his head while she kissed the nectar from his lips. The taste and scent reminded Star of the ocean. There was a hint of something mildly musky. A flavor deep and erotic.

He would claim that there was also a sweet note to her, though she was not sure of that. Maybe it was something about the slight differences between humans and mewmans.

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Alone in her huge bed, Star flipped over, and pressed her face into Marco’s red hoodie. She loved the feel of the soft cotton.

Star remembered how she would bury her face in Marco’s broad chest. His strong arms would wrap around and surround her.

Without looking up, Star flipped the empty sleeves over her head. Left arm first, then right in an attempt to replicate Marco’s embrace.

After a moment, Star sat up and kneeled, still a bit frustrated.

Even though it was awesome and powerful, Star came too quickly for her satisfaction.

Star folded the pillow, giving it additional firmness. She then stuffed the pillow under herself between her thighs. She began rolling her hips and grinding herself into the cushion.

She groaned at the sensation. The friction of the cotton delightfully tortuous. A sheen of sweat
formed on her skin as she gyrated. Clockwise, then counterclockwise, slowly driving herself
towards another climax.

Marco lay down beside Star. She touched his face as they kissed each other tenderly. She put her
leg over him and pulled his body closer. Star felt his hardness pressing against her. He was ready
again.

Star decided to take control. She put her hand on his shoulder and pushed him onto his back. She
climbed on top and straddled him again. But now there was nothing between them. His manhood
seemed even hotter when pressed directly against her slit. She took a moment to look down at his
face. She wanted to see his expression.

For a moment they stared lovingly at each other. Their hands travelled over each other. He reached
up and gently fondled her breasts. She put her hands over his and pressed them harder into her flesh.
She ran her fingertips through the well defined details of his abdominals as his hands ran up her
thighs. His hands found her bare bottom and squeezed firmly. She leaned forward and put her hands
on his chest as he held her hips.

She rocked herself and slid along his length, coating him in her wetness.

He drew a sharp breath, and his eyes narrowed.

She ground herself against him again.

She felt his grip tighten.

She slid further forward, her nether lips kissed the head of his manhood.

Marco made a sound through clenched teeth.

As Star moved her hips back, the head rubbed her button and she gasped at the stimulation. She
performed the move again. The slickness made him feel luxuriously smooth.

As Star glided along him, he bucked upward against her. Star bit her lip to stifle a cry of pleasure.

What was she to do? There were so many ways to proceed. So many things to try. Oh, the things
she wanted to do to him.

But there was one thing she wanted more than anything else at this moment.

She wanted him inside her.

She sat upright and rose from him. Her arousal dripped down, connecting them as she did.

She reached for him again, pointing him into herself. The tip of him brushed her entrance. Star could
feel her heart beating hard and fast.

He was trembling. Star knew he was fighting the urge to thrust upwards.

This was the moment of truth.

Star told him that she loved him then began the slow descent. The head of his cock parted her lips.

He hissed her name.
There was a slight resistance. When Star pushed through, there was a moment of discomfort.

Marco asked if she wanted to stop. He must have seen a change in her expression.

She told him she was alright and just needed to go slowly. She waited a moment before continuing.

Her body opened up to accept him inside her. His size stretched her as she slowly slid, inch by sublime inch, down his shaft. Star gave him a clear view of her body taking all of him in.

Soon, he was buried to the hilt. They were joined together as one. She didn’t know it would feel like this. Her tight sheath contoured to match his shape. A perfect fit. Star paused to appreciate the feeling of Marco inside her. So warm and full. She saw the look of adoration on his face.

And he told her that he loved her.

She smiled at his words.

She lifted herself almost to the end of his member, keeping the head inside.

She came back down, a little faster than before. She grunted at the sensation of him filling her again.

She rose and fell again. Faster still. Then again. And again.

The bed began to creak.

Soon she was bouncing on him. Her mound flattening as it smashed against him.

Her breasts were bobbing with her motions. Beads of sweat were forming on her athletic body.

With his hands still holding her, Marco began to move his hips upwards. It took a moment for him to match her rhythm, but soon they were in perfect sync. Star felt him driving deep, the head of his cock stroking a special place inside her.

She moaned words encouraging him to keep thrusting up into her. With her hands on her head, fingers tangled in her hair, Star rode Marco like a warnicorn as he bucked.

Star changed her motion. She rolled her hips in circles with him inside her. She felt his manhood against every wall. Spiraling and swirling. She relished every incredible feeling.

Marco’s hands slid up her sides and pulled her body closer. The angle of their connection changed. Now, his member rubbed against her sweet spot as they moved. She dropped her face down to his and crushed their lips together. Their tongues danced and intertwined.

She put her hands on his shoulders and straightened her arms pushing herself up. She continued writhing on him.

She felt amazing. Marco was hitting all the right places. Mouth open and panting, Star felt herself racing towards the edge.

Soon it was upon her. Powerful waves of ecstasy from her core coursed through her body. She cried out his name as she felt the rhythmic spasms. His hard cock was buried inside her, magnifying the intensity. She sat upright and firmly massaged her breasts as she slammed herself down on him, trying to sink him deeper into herself.

Breathless as her climax subsided, she looked down at the face of her lover.
His eyes were locked with hers. There was a look of concentration on his face.

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Atop her pillow, Star had reached a plateau. The buildup warm and tight in her core. Her climax was within reach. So close. She could easily take herself over the brink right now. But, the release will be so much better the longer she can last.

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He was trying to hold himself back.

She knew why.

He was trying to pull out, but couldn’t with Star on top. Only if she allowed him. She wanted something more from him, but the night was far from over. She would grant this respite.

She lifted herself off of him. The slickened head of his cock brushed her sensitive nub as it withdrew. The contact sent a ripple of pleasure through her. But she felt a kind of incompleteness as he slid out.

She dismounted and kneeled next to him on the bed.

Star looked at his hard manhood, shining in the dim light coated by her juices. And she felt an urge.

He let out a breath that he had been holding. It was only a brief moment of rest before he sharply drew that breath back in.

Star had engulfed him with her mouth. Her tongue swirling and massaging. Her taste, like sea spray, clung to him. She bobbed her head, squeezing him with her lips while they slid along his length. She tried her best to take in all of him. She wrapped a hand around his girth at the base to make up for the length she couldn’t manage. She continued suckling his manhood until she needed a breather. She kissed the head as she momentarily released him.

While pumping with one hand and lavishing his cock with kisses and licks, her other hand slipped down to cup his sack. She gently kneaded the firm orbs inside, swollen with more potent seed. When her tongue ran along the ridge of the glans, he gripped a fistful of the bedsheets.

Star switched between taking him in her mouth, and licking and kissing his length. While near the base, she carefully took one of his jewels into her mouth, then the other, before licking her way back up the underside of his rod.

Wet heat was oozing from her. Pleasing him this way was exciting her.

Star looked up to his face to see him staring back. Star kept eye contact with him as she took him into her mouth again. Wordlessly telling him how much she enjoyed sucking his cock.

She felt his hand creeping up the inside of her thigh. Marco was reaching to touch her. Soon his fingers again found her sex. Her eyes closed at the contact. He gently rubbed her as she continued to tend to him.

She was so excited, that it did not take much to set her off again. This orgasm was wonderful, but not overpowering. She needed just a moment’s pause to enjoy the rush. With her mouth enveloping him, she moaned her appreciation and resumed her treatments on his cock.
She knew he was close when she felt him tighten. She let go of him and focused more on using her mouth, letting her hands wander his abdominals and muscular thighs.

Star heard his warnings, but chose to ignore them. She continued to enthusiastically service him.

He came with a roar, squirting gobs of hot, sticky semen into her mouth. Briny and thick. Star did her best to swallow as much as she could. White droplets escaped the seal of her lips and dribbled down his shaft. She kept her mouth around him until the torrent slowed and subsided. She savored his taste as she licked his shaft clean and kissed away the last delicious beads of cream as they seeped from the tip.

It took a moment for Marco to emerge from what looked like a trance. He then gazed upon her with an expression Star could only describe as worship.

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Star pulled the pillow from between her legs and threw it onto the bed in front of her. She hastily pushed her sopping wet panties down while kneeling. She struggled to pull just one leg out, leaving her underwear around her other leg.

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Star wasn’t joking when she compared him to her magic wand. The wand can create simulations of life. But his essence, when mingled with hers inside her womb, can create actual life.

That however would not happen tonight thanks to the contraceptive spell. Available in potion, rune, and other forms. Girls in Mewni are usually taught how to cast the spell when young. Star taught it to a few of her friends. It even protected against disease.

Star’s royal magic made casting the spell extremely easy. Thanks to her royal magic, she could even instantly remove its protection, unlike others who have to wait a month or two for the effects to wane.

But despite the very low risk, Marco was cautious. She wanted him to let go of his inhibitions.

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Star dove into the hoodie covered pillow. He wrapped her left arm around it and held it to her face, turning only slightly so she could breathe.

With Star on her knees and her ass up in the air, her right hand snaked its way under her body towards the steamy and damp place between her legs.

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They gave each other soft kisses as they lounged in each other’s embrace, still recovering from their previous round.

She asked him why he held back, even though she already knew the answer.

He told her that he was being safe.

She giggled sweetly. They were already way past safe.

She reassured him that there would be no unintended consequences. Her magic spell would ensure that tonight would be about their love and needs, but nothing else.
And she told him she knew that he wanted to. To fill her up with his love. She would accept everything he had to give her.

That was what she desired as well. She wanted to share herself with him fully. To give herself to him completely, in body and soul.

Tonight, she wanted him to take what was already his.

She wanted him to take her.

She kissed him passionately, holding his head as she assaulted his mouth. Tangling and wrestling their tongues.

Playtime was over.

Star broke away and turned her body. After pulling her long blonde hair forward over her shoulder, she crawled on her hands and knees toward the foot of the bed, wiggling her backside as she did. She dropped to her elbows with her ass up in the air, presenting herself. She swayed her rump in an attempt at hypnotizing him. She hoped she looked enticing.

She reached back between her legs and stroked her moist pussy, spreading her folds and smearing her wetness all over her lips.

She looked back over her shoulder with half lidded eyes and found him staring back.

He was ready.

In an instant, he was on his knees behind her. His hands gripped her by the waist and pulled her closer. She felt his length resting along the cleft of her buttocks.

His hands pushed her hips forward as he pulled back. Star felt his cock dragging down the crack of her ass. Then he was in position, the tip of his manhood poking between her quivering lips, ready to pierce her center.

She tried to push back, attempting to impale herself on him, but his strong hands held her firm. He was taking control now. She mewled plaintively as his manhood teased her slit.

She felt the tension of his body, like a longbow at full draw. There were long seconds of anticipation before his powerful thrust penetrated into her core and their bodies slammed together. She squealed in ecstasy as she was instantly filled.

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Gasping breathlessly on her royal bed, Star plunged two fingers into her cunt. With her other hand, she grabbed some of Marco’s hoodie and squeezed it in a tight fist.

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Star only had a moment to catch her breath before she felt Marco pulling back. He forcefully thrust his hard cock back into her. Again and again, he drove into her, quickening every stroke until he reached a rhythm.

Soon, he was pounding into her, his hips hammering a beat against her ass like it was a drum. Star’s eyes began to roll back in her head. She was afraid she might pass out from the intensity.

Without stopping, he pulled her up. He was thrusting upwards into her now. Marco grabbed her tits
from behind. His face was buried in the nape of her neck.

Star felt his bites and kisses. Her arms reached back over her shoulders to touch him, at the same
time giving him better access to her breasts. She felt the wonderful pressure of her wings flattened
between his chest and her back. They were strong and not as delicate and fragile as they might have
appeared. A tide of pleasure flooded her body.

His right hand moved down her belly until his fingers touched her clit. She moaned his name and put
her own hand over his to help him.

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Her juices were running like a river. Star’s plunging fingers were joined by her other hand. With it,
she rubbed and tweaked her clit.

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Suddenly, her pussy was clenching and spasming around his cock as he continued to ram into her.
She was shaking. Every inch of her skin was tingling. She questioned if this was reality. Where had
this mighty warrior come from?

She was still reeling as she felt her body being bent over again. Further down this time. Her
shoulders rested on the mattress. Her hands gripped the bedsheets.

Now, his cock stroked her sensitive button as he fucked her. The pleasure welling up again.

She heard him grunting now as he drove himself into her. The cheeks of her ass rippling as he
slammed against her over and over. The bed was banging against the wall.

Marco made one last forceful thrust. Star vaguely heard him calling out her name.

She felt him erupt. Like a volcano spewing forth magma from deep within. Boiling hot, almost
scalding her inside.

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The lengthy buildup made her feel like she was about to explode. Star surrendered control and let go,
finally allowing herself to be overwhelmed.

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Reacting to the molten surge, her pussy violently constricted and convulsed, wringing the cum from
his throbbing cock. Liquid heat flowed through her like lava as they both came. Her rapturous
screams were muffled in the mattress.

Glorious moments passed. She felt him shudder before they collapsed into a heap on the bed
together.

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Star was motionless, except for her heavy breathing into the pillow. Face down on her bed, it was as
if she had prostrated herself, bowing before a higher power. Her legs folded underneath her,
unwilling to support her. Her underwear was still tangled around her ankle. Her arms lay limp below
her torso, her sex dripping onto her hands.
Ravished. In a good way. She was positively, delightfully, utterly, ravished.

He asked her if she was alright. Still ever the gentleman.

An unseen smirk curled her lips, her face still buried in the bedsheets. She turned her head to the side and gave him a satisfied nod.

She felt a kiss on side of her neck before Star felt his weight lift from her.

Star whined as he pulled himself out, their combined essences spilling from her.

She felt his warm hands on her sacrum, rubbing the smooth skin above her ass.

She pushed her legs out to lie flat on her belly with her lover kneeling between her spread legs.

He began to apply light pressure. She moaned happily as his hands massaged her back, gliding along her flanks and between her tiny wings. His strong hands felt so good on her neck and shoulders.

She eventually asked him to go lower. He returned his touch to her hips and the small of her back. Soon, she asked him to go lower still.

His hands firmly kneaded the round cheeks of her butt.

She thought lustfully about him catching glimpses of her pink folds as he squeezed. She felt the brush of his fingers gently teasing her wet lips as he massaged her thighs.

He returned to her cheeks and lingered there a while before he ran his hands up and down her entire back in one last soothing pass. He finished with light kisses on her wings, raising goosebumps on her skin.

Thoroughly relaxed, she gave an appreciative sigh. Then, with slow, languid movement, Star rolled onto her back. She opened her arms for him. And when he was in her embrace, she praised him.

Back in the present, Star’s body felt so heavy, but she found the strength to turn over.

She used her toes to grab and finally free herself of the frilly garment still tangled around her ankle.

Her thoughts were still filled with Marco.

He was magnificent that night. He proved to be a stallion. That wild man was still lurking inside him, waiting for the right moment to emerge. He would take charge when needed. Just as her king should.

As queen, she had to project an image of strength and authority. But with him, she could let her guard down and allow her heart to be vulnerable.

After years of separation, he found a way back to her. And now, knowing that he was so close again only emphasised to Star what she already knew. She needed him. In every way, she needed him.

Soon, she will share with him, her crown, her heart,... and her bed.

She had begun to touch herself again. She didn’t even realize that she was doing it at first. Was she really so insatiable?
Reaching out with magic, she called to her wand. She wrapped her sticky fingers around the handle as it floated into her hand.

Just one more.

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There was a quiet calm now. In the dim light of the room, Star and Marco relaxed in each other’s arms. Stroking each other’s skin. Brushing aside strands of hair from each other’s faces. Sharing warm and tender kisses.

He asked what had led to tonight. They had been arguing. She had shut herself away and he didn’t know why.

Star didn’t want to spoil this night with sadness. She waved off the question, only telling him that she needed him tonight and she will need him again soon.

She could tell that he didn’t quite understand, but he acquiesced and let it drop for the time being.

Her universe was changing. Dark storms loomed on the horizon. But he was her shelter. Her faithful and patient companion. Steadfast and solid as the Earth.

And she wanted to wrap herself up in him like a blanket.

She nudged him and they rolled together so he was laying on top of her.

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A journey into the wand when she was younger revealed a little bit more than Star was expecting.

What would the people say if they knew that throughout history, the holders of royal magic have used their wands in such a manner?

Festiva the Fun wasn’t called that for nothing. Celena wasn’t quite as shy as she let everyone believe. Solaria was a complete freak. And the trip answered many lingering questions regarding how Eclipsa managed certain acts.

Star didn’t dare look further for fear of learning about her own mother’s activities.

The wands are strange things, shifting and changing, becoming as unique as its current wielder. While the wand of Mewni has passed through her ancestors hands for generations, each time it is bestowed upon a new heir, it is remade. Star’s wand was once her mother’s wand, but at the same time it has also never been her mother’s wand.

So Star really didn’t need to feel weird about using it like this.

She willed her wand to form an attachment. Something modest. Not like the one she saw in the back section of that boutique back on Earth. Janna called it something that didn’t quite fit.

It wasn’t fuzzy like a bunny at all.

She began by touching it to herself gently.

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Marco was above her. Their faces only inches away. Staring into each other’s eyes. They were
silent, breathing each other’s breath.

Even after everything that has happened tonight, there was a nervousness inside her. She was trembling.

He was keeping his weight off of her, supporting himself on his elbows. He lay comfortably between her legs, her hips beneath his. She could feel him rising.

His hands up next to her face caressed her cheeks. Gently tracing the outline of her pink hearts. She closed her eyes as he leaned down. She felt his lips softly brush hers.

Still holding his weight with one arm, he moved his hand in between them. His fingers were feather light as they moved across her skin. He settled his hand between her breasts.

She reached up and placed her hand on his chest. She searched.

There was his heartbeat. Strong and steady. Beating in time with hers. Their hearts, their breathing, their emotions, perfectly in sync. Like sharing a single body and soul.

This feeling inside. Star couldn’t even describe it. Love? That word wasn’t enough.

Tears formed in her eyes.

He seemed to understand. Star could see his eyes glistening as he smiled warmly for her.

She pulled him close. She tried to put everything she felt, everything she was, into this kiss. She wrapped her arms and legs around him, trying to pull him into herself.

And with a whisper in his ear, she asked him to make love to her.

They were both ready. Marco shifted his hips. Taking his time, he entered her slowly. Her wet lips parted, welcoming him. His member filling her. Her tight sheath caressing him as he sank deeper.

She held his gaze, never breaking eye contact. Her legs around him, urging him onward. Wordless gasps of bliss as she stretched to fit him. Strained grunts of pleasure as he slid into her tight body.

Soon he was home.

They held each other, remaining still except for their breathing in time with each other. Star could feel his heat inside her, pulsing with their heartbeat.

He planted his hands on the bed under her arms, and pushed himself up. Still joined with her, he began.

His movements delightfully slow at the start. Every motion seemingly aimed to please her.

He began to move faster, putting more into each stroke. Rolling his hips as he thrust, he rubbed against her swollen pearl.

When she looked down, Star could see his abdominal muscles flex as he thrust. She could see his manhood driving into her and emerging coated and glistening with her wetness.

He dropped to his elbows, never breaking the rhythm.

Her arms could reach around him again. She stroked his back as they continued to make love.
They held each other closer, moaning into each other as they kissed. Their chests were touching now. Their breathing quickened. Their bodies melding together. She could feel their hearts beating with each other.

Star’s kisses travelled across his cheek to his jawline. She buried her face below his ear and kissed his neck. She felt his lips on her own neck sending shivers down her spine. Her fingernails dug into his back, scratching his skin.

His arms burrowed under her and surrounded her. She felt all his strength in every thrust. Her legs pulled in time with his thrusting. Her feet were locked behind his muscular thighs. Her hands reached down to his taut rear, trying to help drive him deeper within her.

He gasped out her name.

She felt it. Like the raging surf crashing against the shore. A tsunami, drowning her core in warmth.

Her body responded to the deluge. Her velvet walls massaging and holding his member. Its rhythmic embrace, milking him of his seed. Drawing it out from him and into her.

She held onto him tightly, savoring every wave of liquid heat. The warmth radiated from her center, spreading throughout her body.

For a moment, nothing else existed. There was no one else, nothing else, but them. Only their joined soul.

There was pink light.

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She was screaming his name. She didn’t care if anyone could hear her.

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They were both breathing heavily. Her skin was dewed with sweat. She looked at his face. Beads of moisture had formed on his brow.

How long did it last? Forever, yet only a moment.

He made a move to lift himself off of her, but Star shook her head and kept her legs wrapped around him. She wanted him to stay inside her for as long as possible.

Marco nodded and stayed, supporting his weight on his elbows.

She looked up at him. Softly smiling. Stroking his cheeks. Running her fingers through his dark hair. Looking into his brown eyes.

He returned her smile and kissed her hands as they passed his lips.

Joined at the hips, he stayed as long as he could. But the night took its toll on his stamina and eventually he slipped out of her. There was a small trickle of wetness between them.

Their foreheads touched and they closed their eyes.

Their first night of lovemaking was complete. Star was fulfilled and satisfied.

She could think of only one way to describe this.
It was magic.

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Star lay still on her bed, panting and spent. Her sheets were saturated in her essences and perspiration. The pillow was on top of her, covering her face and chest.

After a long while, she slowly withdrew her tool. She carelessly let it drop from her tired fingers onto the bed beside her. A moment later, the erotic attachment dissipated, leaving only the wand.

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Marco laid on top of her for just a moment longer. After a long, slow breath, he shifted his weight and laid on his side facing her.

Words of love were offered.

Did he say it, or did she? Or was it both of them, perfectly in sync?

Star felt Marco reach for her and pull her close for a soft kiss. She moaned sweetly at the sensation. She wanted to be held as she fell asleep. She rolled to face away, but moved her body against his. Her wings flattened between them, and Star snuggled into the warmth of his body. His arm wrapped around her.

In his embrace, she thought of the future. Soon, she will ask him to marry her. They will rule together as Queen and King. They will love each other as husband and wife.

Someday, when they decide the time is right, they will cast the spell of life together.

As her consciousness slipped away, she felt him nuzzle her hair and breathe. She sighed peacefully.

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Before he woke the next morning, she left for Mewni. And soon afterward, her entire universe came crashing down.

Nearly five years of sadness. Losing her mother. Enemies scheming in the shadows. A looming sense of dread hovering around her like smog. Fearing she would never see Marco again.

The blessing they received that night. The magical bond they shared, connecting their souls even across dimensions. Broken, thanks to Ishtar’s trickery.

But after everything, he was here for her now.

The dream she thought was lost was once again possible.

Star thought back to that night once more. It was like a beautiful fairytale. She briefly wondered if she was looking back with rose tinted glasses. But, if the memory has been sweetened by the passing of time, so be it. Soon, they would make new memories together. They would share love every day.

She wanted to wake up together, wrapped up in each other’s naked bodies, limbs tangled. Happy, and smiling, and laughing with each other. Then, with the daylight shining on them through the windows, they would enjoy a nice morning romp.

There were still a few weeks to go. She would start taking part in the wedding preparations more actively now that she was looking forward to it. She had more things to plan. Things to change.
She could try to convince the fashion designers to start a trend of less complicated clothing. They could start by simplifying her wedding dress. It was too bulky and cumbersome.

Maybe tomorrow before open court, she would go to the farmer’s market and enjoy some fresh corn on the cob. Slathered with melted butter and salt.

Star felt the weight of the day’s events combined with her evening’s activities. Sleep was creeping over her. She stretched briefly, then squeezed the pillow into her bosom. She breathed in his scent.

She remembered a phrase from her French studies. La petite mort.

She slept soundly and dreamed of the moment when her pillow was replaced with the genuine article.

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Author's Notes:

I think I’ve exhausted my vocabulary. There’s only so many ways to say ‘thrust’. And I failed to find a truly acceptable alternate way of saying ‘deeper’. I hope I wasn’t too repetitive.

I also tried to select appropriate words to differentiate the tenor of each section. I tried to avoid vulgarity, for the most part.

You may have noticed that I wrote this from Star’s perspective.

But, I, the author, am a dude. How did I do?

Yes, I wrote Marco as a god (lowercase ‘g’) in bed here.

No, this is not a self insert.

You may ask, is this a fantasy?

This is based on a series featuring magic. So, yes, obviously.

But, is this a fantasy in the context of ‘Starfall’?

I dropped a hint in this chapter that implies Star might be an unreliable narrator. So, maybe, maybe not.

Now, before you complain that what you just read still breaks your suspension of disbelief, even for a cartoon about a magical princess, I would like to introduce you all to GolfAlphaMike’s Theory of Magical Fighter Enhancement.™

I have this theory that Star is magically and unintentionally making Marco a stronger fighter. Just like the past queens turned the Mewni peasants into a formidable fighting force against the monsters, as we learn in ‘Mewnipendence Day’.

Now, expanding on that a bit, who’s to say that the strengthening doesn’t extend to other physical feats?

Okay, fine. If you don’t buy into all that, here are other arguments.

Marco as depicted in this flashback scene is 18 years old. (He is 23 years old in the main plotline of Starfall) I believe that a healthy, 18 year old, male could have sex 50 times a day. (Though probably for about 30 seconds each time)

As we see in ‘Running with Scissors’, 30 year old Marco is a beefcake. He probably began beefing up early thanks to genetics. Marco’s dad is a pretty big dude, after all. Therefore 18 year old Marco is probably getting pretty swole. You know what increases testosterone? The main hormone responsible for sex drive in males? Muscle mass.

In other words: Marco is a man. A handsome, muscular man. GolfAlphaMike is a guy. And probably one sandwich away from fat.

And don’t forget: Star. Is. Magic. And she’s probably a wildcat in the sack. (As an adult! Call off the cops, Chris Hansen!)

Finally, you may ask, where did all the dialogue go?

As a self imposed writing restriction for this chapter, I decided to try writing without spoken dialogue. The entire chapter is Star alone, or Star’s memories. I allowed myself to describe the gist of a conversation, and Star’s internal thoughts, but not the actual quote verbatim words. Sort of the exact opposite style as Chapters 1 and 30.

How successful was it?

In my opinion? Meh.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!