Fluttershy stood in front of her floor mirror as she pinned back her mane with a clip. She wasn't sure what kind of dress was expected from her that afternoon, but she at least made an effort to look presentable. That in itself was more trouble that one might expect since there was a lot more of her to go around.

Stepping back from the mirror, Fluttershy turned to the side and examined the reflection of her pregnant body. Even with no one else around, she blushed at sight of her rounded middle. There wasn't anything wrong with carrying such a healthy baby, especially as she neared term, but the size of her belly never failed to draw attention her way. She'd reached a point where she could hardly lift herself off the ground and was forced to walk with a wide-legged, lumbering gait more suited to a yak. She could even feel her low-hanging stomach sway beneath her, rocking the baby to sleep as she huffed and puffed everywhere she went. A late-term pregnant mare was already eye-catching enough, but she wasn't exactly a stranger to Ponyville, nor was the baby's infamous father.

Everyone from doctors, friends, and her own mother had told Fluttershy the basics of what she could expect, but always included the caveat that every pregnancy was different. They didn't know the half of it. From gaining prophetic dreams and the ability to smell emotions to experiencing brief moments of reversed gravity and her wings swapping places, there was no end to the strange side-effects that came from carrying Discord's baby. A week ago, she'd spent two days inexplicably magnetized and couldn't enter her kitchen without the entire silverware drawer throwing itself at her. And that wasn't even getting into the regular symptoms of pregnancy that had been enhanced or distorted. At the moment, she had a craving for zinc oxide cream and was still misty-eyed from recalling the ending of a book she hadn't read yet.

She felt a shuffle from deep inside her belly as the baby turned over. Fluttershy wasn't entirely confident in calling it a 'foal' as she couldn't be entirely sure that's what it was. More than once, she felt something prodding her from the inside that was pointier than a hoof and she sometimes felt the shift of what might have been a long tail. Whatever kinds of limbs her baby had, she was at least sure there were only four of them.

The baby wiggled in what little space they had left, then kicked softly against Fluttershy. A tickle formed her in throat just before she burped a single soap bubble that floated to the ground and vanished with a soft *pop*.

"Oh! Great job! That was a big one!" Fluttershy cooed as she stroked her belly with a wing. Being with Discord had given her an unshakable tolerance for the unexpected and carrying his baby had only made her more resilient. Her problems with anxiety had faded away with experience; there was virtually nothing on this earth that could surprise her anymore. After finding out she was pregnant, Fluttershy had to sit down and think long and hard about the difficult questions that might arise from it. She came to the conclusion that whatever kind of creature she eventually gave birth to would still be her child. She trusted the unborn baby in her womb just as much as his father downstairs, and Discord had earned what the baby would be born with.

"Fluttershy!" called the father himself from downstairs. "Dear, I need your opinion on these drapes!"

"On the way!" she yelled back, taking a moment to brush her coat smooth with a wing. "Um… Be patient, please!" With a grunt, she hobbled to the door and descended the stairs one hoof at a time, walking backwards to keep her balance more stable. She was far enough along that the sensitive curve of her stomach would lightly scrape against each step as she crept down them. Fluttershy winced in discomfort, but continued that way, deciding that a little pain was better than risking a fall.

Her hooves touched solid ground at last and she took a moment to catch her breath. Discord poked his head around a corner and gave her a concerned frown.

"Dear, you *know* I could have just poofed you down here in an instant."

"Not…until…the baby's born," Fluttershy gasped.

"Oh, it's just a little *space folding,* as easy as using a door. No harm, no foul!"

"Not until I have the baby, and I mean it. I'll walk to Canterlot and back if I have to." She'd finally caught her breath and cleared her throat before sitting back to take some of the weight off her hooves. "Did you say something about drapes?"

"Oh *yes*! I just wanted to know what you thought of *these*." Discord snapped his fingers. In a flash of light, the old curtains lining the windows of Fluttershy's treehouse vanished and were replaced with matching new sets. "I *like* them, but I'm not sure what kind of *statement* they make."

"Discord…I…what color is this?" Fluttershy stared at the drapes, her eyes wide even as the stung. "I've…I've never *seen* this color!"

"Too garish?" Discord frowned and tapped his chin. With a shrug, he snapped his fingers again and replaced the drapes with a hideously ugly set of plum-purple and lime-green ones. "No need to get *too* fancy, I suppose."

Fluttershy rubbed her eyes as her vision returned in splotches, then took the opportunity to see what kind of decorating Discord had done. While he'd at least kept the general impression of their home the same, he'd expanded the inside of the treehouse to roughly four times the space of the outside. Tables and chairs were spaced apart from one another, with each table having names for every seat and a centerpiece of a bouquet of ice flowers that were all slowly melting. A table of food lined the far wall, covered in dishes Fluttershy couldn't identify but suddenly had an intense craving for. Next to them was an open bar manned by a flying eyeball wearing a bow tie.

"It all looks…so…" Fluttershy looked above the doorway, where a banner reading '*It's A ???*' was pinned to the wall. She took a deep breath, then finished with, "Wonderful! You did a…really… good job!"

"Did I *really*?" Discord said, suddenly appearing at her side. He wrapped his long body around hers, one hand pressed to her belly, and pecked her on the cheek. "I haven't seen my friends in so long, I only have *one* chance to make a good impression."

"If there's anything you make, it's an impression," Fluttershy said with a smile, touching her nose to his. The baby shifted inside of her, pushing out against their father's hand.

"Well, that's not *all* I made," he said with a sly wink before vanishing again.

Fluttershy didn't have much room to complain, as this was more his party than hers. She'd already had a baby shower with all her friends the weekend before, but Discord wanted to throw a second celebration to invite his more 'pan-dimensional' acquaintances. Fluttershy was uncomfortable enough being the center of attention at a party with her friends, let alone at one with strangers. Discord had insisted, but explained it was more of an obligation for a being in his position.

"Relationships and marriages come and go, but you can't *un*-have your first baby," he'd said. "A celebration is practically *required* when a child is on the way so all the Gods and Goddesses and Thems In Between have an opportunity to pay their respects. I've been to a dozen of these things myself and I can tell you mine will be *far* from the most boring. Even if it *does* have to be hosted in *Euclidean* space…"

Fluttershy adjusted her hair clip before clamoring back to her hooves and waddling slowly to the doorway. Discord was in the kitchen, cooking up desserts with a dozen extra arms.

"When are the guests going to arrive?" she asked.

"Let's see…" Discord checked a watch while the rest of his arms continued working. "Well, Ghukex arrived about two thousand years ago and is buried under the bedrock, but there's no telling when he'll decide to get out of bed. Thyrenn is already here, but you won't know that until she allows herself to be perceived. The Blackened Eye of Night told me would be late because his car got a flat, but I'm sure he's only buying himself time because he forgot a gift. Other than that, guests should start to arrive around 5:30."

"Oh, that's…soon." Fluttershy shuffled her wings and absentmindedly stroked her middle. "Um, Discord? What should I…do? When they get here, I mean?"

"Do? Nothing, really. Just be sociable, mingle a bit, say hello to everyone. Let them get a look at you, maybe tolerate a few too many belly touches. Try not to step on anyone's shadow, but you're expecting so I'm sure they'll give you a pass."

"They won't mind that I'm not like you?"

"What, mortal? Some of them have so many half-mortal brats running around this plane of existence they don't know where to keep them all. I've only resisted so long because you're the first one to meet my standards."

"Don't call our baby a brat…" Fluttershy said, softly.

"No, no, you don't understand. *Their* half-mortals are brats. *My* half-mortal is a perfect little demigod." Discord lowered himself to her eye level. "Really, Fluttershy, there's *nothing* to worry about. You're more likely to be bored than nervous. The whole thing is really a formality."

"I just get a little anxious with…being social…"

"I happen to be *keenly* aware that isn't true," said Discord with a flat expression. "All you need to do is look like a cute little expecting mother and you're already doing a fan-*tastic* job without even trying."

"Well…if you say so. I might go upstairs if it gets overwhelming, okay?"

"Just say the word and I'll poof you away."

"I already told you no poofing-" Fluttershy was interrupted by a knock at the door on the other end of the room.

"*Ohhhhh*! The guests are arriving! Fluttershy, go let them in. I've got my hands full with the…" Discord paused and scratched his chin. "Wait, what *was* I making?"

Fluttershy waddled across the floor, carefully adjusting her gait to make it seem like she wasn't bursting at the seams pregnant. She stopped to clear her throat, tossed her mane back, and touched her belly for good luck before throwing open the door.

"Hello! Welc-" Fluttershy stopped, blinking. "Discord? Discord, there's no one here!"

"*Oh*, darn it all, I forgot to switch the doors." Discord appeared and shooed her out of the way before closing the door and peeling it off the wall like a sticker, folding it up, and putting it in a pocket. He then painted a new door in its place with a paint roller. Fluttershy picked at something in her teeth while this all happened, but quickly stopped once Discord flung the door open. Behind it stood an older mare with a chubby, friendly face, a curly mane, and a cloak marked with magical symbols.

"Esroh! I was *praying* you'd get here first! How are you, love?"

Discord gave the mare a friendly hug as he invited her inside. Fluttershy took a moment to gather herself before stepping forward and speaking her own. "Hello! I'm Fluttershy. It's nice to meet you."

"Hi Fluttershy!" Esroh said in a bright, friendly voice. "You look absolutely *hideous* and I'm disgusted by the sight of you!"

"Wh-I-Whu-" Fluttershy stammered and backed away, but Discord quickly stopped her.

"Wait, wait! Esroh is an old friend! She's an expert of reverse-entropic magic, but it makes her say the reverse of everything she means!"

"Oh Discord," she beamed, "I hate you more with every passing day you still exist. Breathing the same air as you fills me with more loathing than I can even stand!"

"You're always such a *charmer*! You two mingle, I'm almost ready with the anti-brownies."

Fluttershy swallowed and forced herself to smile at their first guest.

"Oh Fluttershy, I've been really dreading meeting you," said Esroh. "You look like a bloated boil on the backside of a hog and I'm sure your baby will be just as ugly."

"Th-thank you."

"When I heard Discord had settled down with a mortal, I was furious. I knew that, whoever she was, she must've been a weak-willed simpleton to submit to him. I'm angry that I'm wrong."

"C-can I get you some punch? Are you thirsty?"

"I hate punch, I would hate a glass."

"Wait, so do you…" Fluttershy raised a hoof, unsure whether she should go get punch or not, but was graciously interrupted by another knock on Discord's door. "Oh! I'm sorry, you may need to help yourself. It's been so nice to meet you!"

Esroh trotted away as Fluttershy turned back to the door and opened it. Before she could say anything, a young stallion with a chrome-silver coat walked backwards through the doorway. He closed the door himself and looked at her with a dour, hopeless expression. With a long, weary sigh, he said, "Hey Fluttershy."

"Oh, um, hello. I'm Fluttershy, but I guess you already knew that…somehow."

"Okay so here's what's going on," the stallion said. "My name's Chrono Mirror, I'm immortal, and I'm currently experiencing the flow of time backwards. I've known you for a really, really long time but this is the first time you're actually meeting me."

"Well, that's…very interesting," said Fluttershy. Chrono Mirror glanced down at her belly and his lip began to quiver. "Is everything alright?" she asked.

"Suh-So…" His voice cracked and he sniffed briefly. "Basically this is the first time you meet me but that makes this the last time I'll ever see *you*. I'm just…I-I'm getting kind of emotional about it, okay? It's no big deal. It's fine for you, don't worry about it."

"I'm sorry. Were we…um…*will* we be good friends?"

"Kinda. I mostly know you through him." Chrono Mirror wiped his eye before pointing a hoof at Fluttershy's belly. "He's like the best friend I ever had."

"Wait, *he*? It's a boy?"

"Yeah. Sorry, you probably wanted that a surprise but you'll find that out the day after tomorrow, anyway."

"But my due date isn't until…oh my…"

"Yeah. I got to babysit him next year. That was fun." Chrono Mirror sighed again and gave a resigned shrug. "But…this is the last time I'll ever see him."

"Would you…like a moment alone with him?" Fluttershy asked. It seemed like the right thing to say.

Chrono Mirror wiped his nose on the back of his leg and nodded. Fluttershy awkwardly turned to the side and folded her wings back as the stallion sank to the floor and put his head against her belly. He touched a hoof to the spot where the baby was kicking and cleared his throat.

"Hey man, you doing good in there?" he said, his voice soft. "Probably, you don't even gotta feed yourself. A lot better than that apartment we're gonna get. I'm jealous, I really am."

Fluttershy glanced around, shuffling in place as the stallion muttered a one-sided conversation to her unborn son. She tried to silently call for Discord's attention, but he was busy chatting to Esroh next to the open bar. With a startled gasp, she nearly fell over as Chrono Mirror wrapped her belly in an uncomfortable hug.

"I'll never forget what you're gonna do for me. You'll be there when no one else will. You'll seriously be the kindest, most genuine guy I've ever met," Chrono Mirror said to Fluttershy's middle and sniffed as he touched his head to it. "You're gonna be the best friend I ever had. Be cool to your mom, okay?"

She jumped slightly as he gave her stomach a light kiss, then crawled underneath her to the other side before popping back on his hooves. His eyes were puffy and bloodshot and he looked more upset than before.

"…Feeling better?" she asked.

"Not really," mumbled Chrono Mirror. "Congratulations, I guess."

"Oh, thank you. I'm glad he was…*will be* such a good friend to you." Fluttershy touched her stomach and smiled to herself. It was a strange thing to find out, but it was also comforting, in a way.

"One of the best guys I've ever known, for real."

After pondering a moment, an idea occurred to her. "Could I ask you a question? We haven't thought of a name for the baby yet. Would you mind telling me what we decide on?"

"Discord is gonna ask me after the party not to tell you," said Chrono Mirror. "He wants you to come up with it yourself."

"He does?" Fluttershy cocked her head with a puzzled frown. "Why does it matter…" Another knock on the door interrupted her. "Oh! Well, it was so nice to meet…wait, we've already met before, haven't we? Well, *you've* met *me* but *I* haven't met…" She was started to get dizzy before a second knock snapped her out of it. "Um…I need to get the door."

Chrono Mirror wandered off, walking backwards through the room toward Discord. Fluttershy smoothed down her ruffled coat with her wings, then cleared her throat before answering the door. There was no one behind it.

"…Hello?" she asked the empty air, not yet convinced it was empty.

"Hi!" said nobody. "Are you Fluttershy? The mother?"

Fluttershy leaned through the doorway and looked around, but saw no one. When she pulled back and scratched her head, she blinked. In the fraction of a second before her eyes fully closed, a pink shape popped into her vision, but vanished again when her eyes opened.

"Oh, y-yes. I'm Fluttershy," she said to the empty doorway, trying not to be rude. With a frown, she backed away slightly and blinked again. The figure reappeared, just barely before her eyelids fully closed. If she continuously blinked over and over again, as fast as she could, she was just barely able to perceive the creature on the doorway. It was a tall, upright being made of pink, iridescent crystal. It had a pair of arms, but no legs; instead, it floated a few inches above the ground.

"I thought so!" the creature said as it floated inside. "I don't mean to assume, but I thought I remembered most biological beings having only *one* heartbeat and you have *two*."

"That's right," said Fluttershy. She had to bob her head in order to blink fast enough to see the creature and it was starting to give her a headache.

"That's so *fascinating*! I'm Zyntyl, by the way – old friend of Discord's. It probably takes a lot of oxygen to incubate a baby, doesn't it? Have you been making sure to breathe every day?"

"I…think so?"

"*Zyntyl*! I knew you'd never miss a party!" Discord poofed at Fluttershy's side and leaned over to shake his hand. He glanced back at her before turning to Zyntyl and adding, "Zyntyl, buddy, I hate to tell you this but you're still oscillating at too high a frequency for this plane. Take it down a notch."

"You're kidding! My other fifth-dimensional friends say this is perfect for them."

"They've only got the four down here, remember? Just a smidge, you're about to give Fluttershy a migraine."

Zyntyl sighed and began to turn the object that looked like his head counter-clockwise. Fluttershy stopped blinking and watched him flicker into sight by degrees, blinking rapidly in and out of existence like a dying light bulb. Once he was fully visible – if still a little insubstantial – his head stopped turning.

"Is that better?" he asked Fluttershy. "I'm *so* sorry about that, it's been a long time since I've been to this plane and even longer since meeting any locals."

"Nothing to worry about," she said, smiling. "Happy you could make it."

"Glad to be here. Listen, it's been a hell of a trip and I'm about starved. You got any paradoxes or unsolvable equations for me to nibble on?"

"We should have a tray over on the table," said Discord, pointing to the back of the room. Fluttershy held her smile until Zyntyl was gone, then let out a sigh and leaned against Discord, putting a hoof to her forehead. Maybe she wasn't as immune to the bizarre as she thought.

"Sweetie, would you mind taking over the front door?" she said. "I think I need something to eat."

"I'm sure I could spare a few minutes." Discord snapped his fingers, producing a second Discord in a cloud of mist. The doppelganger grumbled as he slumped back to the kitchen. "I *always* get the dirty jobs…"

With Discord at the door, Fluttershy was free to head to the food table that had been enticing her all afternoon. There were more guests than she expected already inside, but they were probably the ones that didn't need a door to enter. Only a small number of them were ponies like herself with most seats at the tables being taken up by otherwordly beings, weird creatures, and trans-dimensional deities from beyond time and space. To their credit, they seemed like pleasant folks and many of them gave her a friendly word as she passed by. She would've stayed and chatted if the social fatigue wasn't already starting to get to her. Besides, she was a mare on a mission.

If anything about her pregnancy had been normal, it was the change to her appetite. Fluttershy really ate as if she were two people where before she'd barely been a nibbler. There were times when she'd get cravings for strange things like beets, pickles, and ultraviolet light, but her diet remained mostly the same despite the amount nearly tripling. Very little of what lined the long table looked like edible food, but she gathered a couple green geometric shapes on a plate after the baby told her brain they smelled good. At the end of the table, Fluttershy let out a relieved sigh at the sight of a normal hayburger on a platter. The last one. She hurried as fast as she could carry her pregnant body, but was narrowly beaten there by a unicorn stallion.

"Oh!" he said, startled as she nearly barreled into him. "Sorry, were you taking that?"

"Oh no, that's okay. You take it, I already have…" She glanced at the shapes on her plate as they leisurely spun in place. "…a couple of these."

"I'm not taking food from an expecting mare, it's all yours," said the stallion as he backed away. His coat was a light chestnut brown and had a cutie mark shaped like a book. Whoever he was, he looked suspiciously normal.

"No, no, you got here first, it's only fair that you have it," Fluttershy said.

"You need it more than I do. I think we'll stand here arguing all day unless somebody does this." He lifted the burger with a cloud of yellow magic before dropping it on her plate. Fluttershy was about to thank him, but her appetite had taken over and she took a huge bite without even realizing it.

"Thorry," she mumbled with a full mouth. "I'm not uthually like thith about food."

"C'mon, you've got every right to be," said the stallion. He tapped his chin and pointed a hoof at her. "You've got to be Fluttershy, then. I'm Starcatcher. I don't live far from here, I've seen you around town a couple times."

"Nice to meet you, Starcatcher," said Fluttershy after she swallowed her next bite of her burger. "I didn't see you come in, I would've said hello earlier."

"No worries! You've got a lot on your plate today. You're the center of attention here, after all."

"I know…" Fluttershy sighed wearily and took a bite of one of the crystals. It dissolved on her tongue and tasted like salted caramel. "It's been a little overwhelming. More than I expected."

"Take a break if you need to, getting stressed won't do anyone any good," said Starcatcher as he pointed to her belly. "Especially the little guy. Or girl."

"It's a boy," said Fluttershy with a smile. She always perked up when getting a chance to talk about the baby. "I just found out today, actually. I feel like I could always tell, but it's nice to know for sure."

"That's great! Congratulations!" said Starcatcher with a bright smile. "Could I feel? I hear it's sort of a tradition at these things."

"Oh, of course! Just be gentle, please." Fluttershy allowed Starcatcher at her side and folded her wing back as he touched his hoof lightly to her belly. After pointing him to where the baby was moving, the two of them both jumped at a swift kick from inside her.

"He's friendly!" Starcatcher chuckled.

"Definitely. He's better at meeting people than I am," Fluttershy giggled. "Are you a friend of Discord's?"

"Sort of," Starcatcher answered, playfully prodding the baby back in response to the kicks. "I'm here on behalf of a group I'm in. We know each other."

"A group?"

"Yep. The Church of the Draconequus. You've probably heard of us."

"A…church?"

"I know what you're thinking," Starcatcher chuckled, glancing up from Fluttershy's belly. "But we are *not* a cult, don't listen to anything you hear."

"Oh…I…won't." Fluttershy bit her lip and began searching around the room for Discord.

"Yeah, I just wanted to get a chance to meet the little guy before he begins the Ascension. I'll probably see you there, right? The mother gets to rise first." Reaching into his small saddlebag, Starcatcher produced a pair of scissors. "Say, would you do me a favor? When he's born, you snip off a lock of hair for us?"

"*Hey*!" Discord shouted from across the room as he threw himself through the air toward them.

"I'll just leave these with you, okay?" Starcatcher said with one last smile before he galloped away at full speed toward the window Fluttershy just realized was open.

Discord wrapped his snake-like body protectively around Fluttershy and jabbed a clawed finger toward the stallions back. ""I already *told* you freaks not to bother me again!"

"*My life is yours, Chaos Lord!*" Starcatcher screamed before hurling himself out the window and into a bush before scrambling away through the backyard.

Discord sighed. "Can you believe these guys? When you try to destroy the world, the last thing they tell you is that some people might *want that*." He looked her in the eye and thumbed a lock of mane from her face. "Are you alright, dear?"

"Oh, I-I'm alright," Fluttershy said, shakily. She leaned against Discord's scaled side for support. "I think I…might need a bit of a break."

"Don't worry about those lunatics, they're harmless."

"It's not just them. This is a *new* kind of weird, one I'm not so used to." She shuffled her wings and waddled forward out of Discord's reach. "I'm going to lay down for a while."

"Wait! Fluttershy, just a minute," Discord said as he slipped in front of her. "A *really* important guest just arrived, I've been waiting all day to introduce you. Just do this for me, please? This one last thing."

"…Okay, just one more. But after that, I need some alone time. I'm getting frazzled."

Discord tittered with delight and poofed away, forcing Fluttershy to catch herself. She rubbed her belly, trying to come up with a convincing excuse to leave the party early, when Discord returned with a stallion in tow.

Fluttershy forgot her exhaustion for the moment at the sight of the stranger. He was tall, rail-thin, and an intimidating kind of handsome. His coat was bone white and his mane a deeper shade of black than she'd ever seen outside the night sky. He wore a large ruby on a chain around his neck and a long cloak that seemed to melt into shadow as it touched the floor. The outside was black velvet, the inside a glittering field of stars. Two of those stars sat in dark, sunken holes where his eyes should have been.

"Dreamlord, I'd like to introduce you to my mate, young Fluttershy."

"I…know you," said Fluttershy, forgetting her manners. She furrowed her brow. "I'm sure we've never met, but how do I know you?"

"We have met, Fluttershy," said the Dreamlord in a deep and resonant voice, "but not in the waking world. Regardless, I am pleased to make your acquaintance formally and I wish you well with the birth of your child." The stallion turned to address Discord. "Delirium sends her apologies that she cannot be here herself. You know well that my younger sister is not one to keep appointments."

"Oh, I know I'll see her soon enough, and surely when I least expect it," said Discord. "I can hardly wait for the surprise."

"You have much of her in you, nephew," said the Dreamlord. "It is…nostalgic."

"We've met…in my dreams?" Fluttershy asked, quietly. "Like…Princess Luna?"

"In a sense. I've empowered her to perform some responsibilities in my stead."

"Empowered? Does she work for you, then? Do you…*make* dreams?"

"I *am* dreams," said the stallion, the stars in his eyes growing momentarily brighter.

"You two have fun, mingle, have a chat," Discord said, giving Fluttershy a peck on the cheek as he floated away. "I need to run and entertain. *Ciao!*"

"This whole day is starting to feel like a dream…" Fluttershy sighed, rubbing tension from her eyes. "I thought I'd be used to stuff like this. I'm the one having Discord's baby, strange things shouldn't bother me anymore. But I…I can't help feeling that I…I might have gotten in over my head." Fluttershy touched her middle to settle the baby's stirring and realized a moment later the Dreamlord was still staring at her. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to ramble. I don't know why I'm telling you all this."

The stallion didn't respond, taking a moment to paw at the ground with one hoof and survey the room like a bird of prey. Fluttershy had the impression he did not speak much and only when he had thought very hard about what he was going to say.

"You struggle because you do not believe you fit into your mate's world," he said. "That his way of life has been thrust upon you. But chaos is as natural to your world as order. Understand: it is not the chaos that causes suffering, but your resistance to it."

The Dreamlord turned her way again and a flicker of something like sorrow crossed his severe face.

"To have a child is to invite chaos," he told her. "We cannot predict what changes that child may bring, what choices they will make, so we must embrace uncertainty, as joyful or agonizing as it may be. Do not pull away."

Fluttershy gazed at the Dreamlord, her eyes wide as she drank in what he told her. Even after just hearing it, she could tell it was one of the most important things she'd ever be told in her life. But, after a moment of pondering, a surprising question grew in her mind.

"Do you have any children, Dreamlord?" she asked.

A twinge of pain crossed the stallion's face, but it lasted only for a second.

"…I do," he said. Fluttershy sensed this is all he would say on the subject.

"There's a lot I have to think about," she sighed. "Maybe I have been looking at this all wrong. Thank you, Dreamlord. I think…maybe you told me what I needed to hear."

"It was a pleasure, Fluttershy," said the Dreamlord as he dipped his head. "Regrettably, I have other business to attend to. I look forward to watching the stories you and your child write yourselves. Good day."

Even a few minutes later, Fluttershy couldn't quite remember exactly what the stallion had said to her, but she was feeling a new kind of resolve as she weaved around the tables on her way to the downstairs bathroom. She pulled the door closed behind her and locked it, letting out a deep sigh. Discord had expanded their house to accommodate the guests, but he'd either neglected or forgotten to do the same for the downstairs bathroom, which had become dangerously small for her changing body.

Knocking over a towel rack and a plunger with her widened girth, Fluttershy turned to face the mirror and sat down in front of it, taking stock of her weary expression. She had stress lines under her eyes and had put on extra weight in her cheeks, but the sight of her own face was calming enough to center her. Using some of the prenatal yoga techniques her friend Tree Hugger had taught her, Fluttershy took deep, measured, deliberate breaths as she found her own inner calm.

"*Let go,*" she told herself, her voice barely a whisper in the near silence. "*Let go. Embrace uncertainty.*" The baby stirred inside her and she smiled, touching a hoof to her middle. "*Embrace uncertainty.*"

When Fluttershy opened her eyes, she was still smiling. For the first time all day, she was excited at the idea that she had no idea what was going to happen. Being with Discord made every day an adventure into the unknown and she knew his baby would only bring more of that with him. And she was happy about it. She couldn't wait to see the kind of life he would live because – more than any normal child – the possibilities were limitless. Chaos and the unknown were frightening, but weren't they also kind of fun, too?

The baby kicked, hard, making Fluttershy wince. With a hiccup, she dislodged another soap bubble from the back of her throat. As it floated into the sink, she giggled and stroked her belly.

I love you, she thought to her baby. *And all the weird things you're doing to me.*

"*I love you*," said the soap bubble as it touched the bottom of the sink and popped. Fluttershy jumped, her ears pinning back on her head. The voice had been hers. Had she simply burped up one of her own thoughts or was it her son trying to tell her something?

"At least you'll never let me get bored," she said happily to the baby. In the cramped bathroom, she grunted as she pushed herself to her hooves. The weight and discomfort of pregnancy was a little too *normal* for her to enjoy. "You're hungry, aren't you? I could have a snack or two myself."

The first thing Fluttershy did after exiting the bathroom was head straight to the back of the room to try everything on the snack table, whether it looked edible or not. Discord had whipped up a universe of snacks for every kind of appetite, even those that didn't exist. She ate tiny rotating planets made of cake, complete with orbiting moons. She drank cups of swirling mist that coated the inside of her throat and made the air she breathed taste savory and rich. She licked what looked like a small hill of powder on a plate that blossomed into a bouquet of sweet, blue crystals on her tongue that make sparks as she crunched them between her teeth. She even began eating a small square of fabric before realizing it was a napkin and spitting it out.

Fluttershy was frowning at a mathematical equation on a piece of paper, trying to decide how she was supposed to eat it, when something thin and cold tapped her on the shoulder. Behind her stood a bundle of eyeballs, each a different color, standing on a collection of tentacles. The eyes looking her way swiveled in their sockets, their pupils dilating.

Fluttershy took a moment to set her plate down and take a deep breath before turning to the greet the creature with a smile. "Hello! Thank you so much for coming! I'm Fluttershy, Discord's mate. Although that's probably obvious." She shuffled in place, self-consciously glancing at her wide middle. The bundle of eyes blinked at her soundlessly as Fluttershy felt something prodding at the back of her consciousness.

"*Hello Good afternoon it is nice to meet you I am The Blackened Eye of Night it is a pleasure to meet you*," the creature said directly into her mind. A bundle of tentacles unfurled themselves, producing a box covered in gift wrap. "*I apologize for being late here is a gift for you and the baby it is a teddy bear.*" The Eye paused and blinked at her. "*You were not supposed to hear that last part.*"

"I'll pretend I didn't," said Fluttershy as she took the gift and set it aside. "That's so nice of you, Mr. Eye. How long have you known Discord?"

"*I have known him since the stars were young.*" The one of the eyes shifted in front of the others and extended itself from the bundle, its iris rapidly flashing colors. "*The baby looks just like him.*"

"Does he? We really weren't sure," Fluttershy said, beaming warmly down at herself. "I've been so excited to find out what he looks like. We weren't even sure we *could* have a baby together, at first."

"*I am glad that your biology was sufficient in conceiving a child with him and has been satisfactory in carrying it to term.*" The Eye paused and wound a pair of shorter tentacles into a tight knot. "*I am sorry I am not very good at conversation and I would like to stop.*"

"That's okay, Mr. Eye. Thank you so much for the gift."

"You are welcome it was on sale and only cost wait stop don't listen to that." The Eye quickly shuffled away on his tentacles, leaving a light trail of fluid behind that gradually dried into vapor. Fluttershy smiled. He was sweet, in his own way.

After eating, Fluttershy began to properly mingle, letting go of all judgment and simply letting the strangeness come as it may. Discord's friends were certainly varied, but she found all of them uniquely friendly and some even charming. The experience of talking to them was invigorating and even opened her up to new experiences on her own. A telepathic cloud of vapor named Jhuzt allowed Fluttershy to briefly project into the mind of her baby and experience the inside of her own womb. A blindfolded mare by the name of All-Sight gave her a glimpse of the infinite alternate universes where Fluttershy had a child – it was only in one that she had a baby with Discord. A goddess of war named Draega offered to teach her a lost style of unarmed combat specifically designed for expecting mothers. This Fluttershy declined.

Evening came faster than she expected. Soon the light from the windows faded into evening and fatigue began catching up with Fluttershy. The guests began to leave shortly after, some of them using the door, some using the windows, and some simply un-making themselves where they stood. While Discord half-carried and half-dragged a weeping Chrono Mirror to the door, Fluttershy was having a sleepy conversation with a tall mare next to the snack table.

"It feels like waiting, but a different *kind* of waiting," Fluttershy said while stroking her belly. "Waiting means expecting something to be over, but it's also a kind of constant change within the waiting. Am I making sense?"

"It's sort of both, in a way," the mare said, nodding. "It's a transitional state from one life to another. You're pregnant now, and that's temporary, but once you're not pregnant anymore, you will never *not* be a mother. Even if one day you live exactly as you did before the baby, you will never be completely the same because a life has come from you. You see, this is the slow point between two life states of permanent change. Pregnancy itself is a kind of liminal space, if you think about it."

Fluttershy nodded drowsily, then frowned. "I'm sorry, what was your name again?"

"Termina, goddess of liminal spaces," the mare said. "I only just got here, I wanted to say hi before the party ended."

"You picked a good time, I think the party is just about over."

"Then that's my cue! Bye!" Termina blinked away with a soft *pop*, leaving Fluttershy staring at empty air.

"…Oh, alright. Goodbye."

As Fluttershy sighed and shuffled back to the food table for one last snack, Discord approached with the last remaining guest at his side, Esroh.

"Absolutely horrible party, Fluttershy," she said, cheerily. "I'm going to stay all night long."

"Already? It feels like you just got here."

"Dear, you look almost ready to collapse," said Discord, running a finger under her chin to lift her drooping head. "The party's over."

"I hope you and the baby suffer for the rest of your lives," said Esroh as she gave Fluttershy an affectionate nuzzle and patted her belly. "You'll be a horrible mother."

"You really think so?"

Esroh gave her a hug. "No."

"You're too sweet," Fluttershy giggled, returning the hug with her wings. She batted them, lifting herself off the ground slightly to take the weight off her hooves. "Come back any time. The baby should-" A yawn interrupted her. "The baby should be here soon. *Very* soon."

"I hate you and never want to see you again," said Esroh, giving Fluttershy one last peck on the cheek before letting Discord walk her out. Once she was gone, he let out a groan and dropped to the floor with a *whump*.

"Well, *that* was a miserable bore, wasn't it?" Discord grumbled.

"I think it went well. I liked meeting all your friends."

"Exactly, it went *too* well. No fights, no madness. Where was the *drama* of it all?"

"If I have to get used to your crazy friends, you need to get used to things being normal once in a while."

"*Normal*," Discord scoffed. He glanced at Fluttershy, then reached out and smoothed his softer hand across her belly. "Look at me, I'm having a *kid*. I'm *settling down*. When did I get so *boring*?"

Fluttershy glided over to Discord and nestled herself against his side in the middle of the floor. She guided his hand back toward her belly and held it to where the baby was kicking.

"Having a baby is going to be a lot of things," she said, resting her head against his scaled chest and listening to his heartbeat. "But it won't be boring."

She was moments away from falling asleep against Discord, but was alerted by another hard kick from the baby. Fluttershy hiccuped another soap bubble from her mouth, which the two of them watched float leisurely down to the wooden floor where it popped.

"*Hungry,*" said a new voice from the bubble, one that belonged to neither Fluttershy nor Discord. The two of them glanced at one another in wide-eyed shock.

"See what I mean?" said Fluttershy as she laughed.