Friendship is FOREVER

A MLP:FiM 15th Anniversary Zine

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A Note from the Mods

Hello everypony! Welcome to FRIENDSHIP IS FOREVER: A MLP: FIM 15TH ANNIVERSARY ZINE! Wow, I can't believe it's been that long already! Some days it feels like the show was airing not too long ago, but I suppose that's proof of how big of an impression it left on all of us!

This show is so incredibly special: its premise is relatively simple, but it bloomed into the amazing powerhouse that it is, and touched so many hearts that it can't be understated! So many people have found their home with this show, and it's something I know I will treasure forever.

Friendship is Magic's influence on creatives cannot be ignored — the sheer amount of breathtaking fanart, fanfic, fan merch, and fan music STILL blows me away to this day! This fandom is so immensely talented, and our amazing contributors are just a slice of the whole pie!

I'm so proud of all our contributors; their love and passion for MLP shines as clear as day. We're so grateful they were able to join us for this project to help celebrate this wonderful show and everything it stands for!

Thank you to Lauren Faust and company for creating such a incredible iteration, and thank YOU, dear readers, for being here with us!

We hope you enjoy FRIENDSHIP IS FOREVER!

-Miniyuna, Head Mod

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Manip

Dear Princess Celestia

by Artemis

Twilight Sparkle doesn't need friends. She has books, and books are way better than friends. Her magical studies are much easier to understand than how to interact with other ponies. The ponies in her class are unpredictable and weird and rude. They complain that she talks too much about magic, that she's too antisocial and reserved. Her books don't complain about her like that. Her books are better companions than any other pony ever could be.

Twilight Sparkle doesn't need friends because she has magic.

And if everypony else could just see how incredible magic is, maybe they'd finally take her seriously. Instead of ignoring her to play with the other fillies, they'd fawn over how cool it was that she could teleport a book across the room.

Ever the determined unicorn, Twilight studies day and night in preparation for her entrance exam to Princess Celestia's School for Gifted Unicorns. This is her chance to prove herself to everyone around her. And if she gets the approval of Princess Celestia, then maybe other ponies might start to take her seriously. They'd have to, right?

Twilight Sparkle doesn't need friends because she has Princess Celestia. She's progressing in her studies far faster than anypony has before her, according to the Princess, reaching greater heights than any filly or foal ever has. She basks in the praise from her mentor, finally getting the recognition she's been subconsciously searching for.

And if the other ponies around her still aren't taking her seriously, then that's their problem. Princess Celestia knows how talented she is, and that's all she needs.

She doesn't need friends. She's enrolled in the School for Gifted Unicorns and is the Princess's *favorite* student.

She's not lonely at all.

Definitely not.

Twilight Sparkle doesn't need friends and doesn't have *time* for friends because she's busy making sure Spike doesn't accidentally light her books on fire.

"Twilight Sparkle, my faithful student. How about we have a chat?" Princess Celestia offers.

Twilight beams, always excited when Celestia's attention is focused on her. "Of course! What is it? Is there something you need me to research? Do you have a new assignment for me?"

The Princess smiles at Twilight's enthusiasm. "A new assignment, indeed. Though, this is going to involve some… field work. Do you think you can handle that?"

"Princess Celestia, I can handle *anything* you ask of me!" Twilight brags, puffing her chest out.

"As I would expect of my most accomplished student," Celestia praises. "You remember the dragon you hatched during your entrance exam, yes? He's been growing nicely, and I believe it's time for me to reunite him with you."

"Huh? Reunite us?"

"I've been training him to be your assistant, you see. I believe you would benefit from having an extra hoof – or claw – with your studies and research," Celestia explains. "How does that sound?"

"A dragon. As my research assistant," Twilight repeats. "I've been doing well by myself though, haven't I…?"

"Of course you have! But I know you haven't reached your full potential. I believe having a companion will help bring out even more of your magical strengths."

"Well… If you say so. I'll do my best."

She's not really sure why, but Princess Celestia assigned her an "assistant."

How strange. She was getting on just fine all by herself.

Twilight Sparkle doesn't need friends because she has an assistant, and that's good enough.

"Spike. Could you please bring me the book over there? The one with the blue cover and the gold decorations," Twilight asks, engrossed in her studies.

"I'm on it!" Spike replies, ever the loyal assistant. While he may be a bit clumsy, and sometimes moody, Twilight thinks she's ultimately grateful for his presence.

In record time, Spike brings Twilight the book she requested, placing it on her desk.

"Thank you," she responds, eyes still glued to the report she's writing. She doesn't smile, doesn't look at Spike.

It does make Spike a little irritated when Twilight gets like this. He decides to interrupt her.

"Hey, Twilight?" he asks.

She doesn't look at him. "Mhm?"

"Do you… really like living like this?"

Twilight stops, finally turning towards him. "What exactly do you mean?"

"I mean, like…" He pauses, trying to find the right words. "Don't you ever get lonely?"

"Lonely? Ha!" Twilight scoffs. "How could I possibly be lonely when I have you and Princess Celestia? Besides, I'm so busy that I don't have time to talk to anyone else."

"Yeah… Guess so," Spike mumbles. He knows trying to get Twilight to be more social is a lost cause, but he can't help but worry about her anyways.

Twilight rolls her eyes. Spike loves to make such a big fuss out of nothing. She doesn't need friends, and she can't possibly be wrong about that.

So maybe she was a little bit wrong.

Twilight Sparkle never thought she needed friends, but maybe it isn't so bad. She loves learning, and it turns out that friendship can teach some very valuable lessons. Of course, she reports all of these to Princess Celestia, because she's a good student.

Dear Princess Celestia,

Today I learned the importance of honesty, and how communicating with your friends is actually more beneficial to them than lying to them to try and spare their feelings...

Twilight uses her magic to pick another apple, placing it gently into one of the many barrels that surround her and Applejack.

"Thanks for comin' out here on such short notice," Applejack says, slightly out of breath. "Big Mac was s'posed to help, but he had somethin' come up."

"Of course, it really is no problem at all," Twilight reassures her. "Besides, I'm learning so much about apples! I'll be sure to include it in my next letter to the princess."

Applejack smiles. "Glad you seem to be enjoyin' yourself too."

The sound of hooves galloping on the dirt draws ever closer, a loud voice accompanying it. "Applejaaaaaaaaack!"

"D'ya need somethin', Apple Bloom?"

"Yeah! I need *you*!"

"Me? What for?"

"Sweetie Belle an' Scootaloo are here to watch a movie! D'ya wanna join us?" she asks. "You can join too, Twilight!"

"Oh, well, uh..." Twilight mumbles, trying to think of a good excuse to spare Apple Bloom's feelings. Picking apples all day with Applejack has been fun, yes, but also equally exhausting. She's not really in the mood to watch a movie. She's about ready to head home and spend the rest of the night alone reading books.

"Thanks for the offer, Apple Bloom, but me n' Twilight are both mighty exhausted from pickin' all these apples today. We'll join you next time, m'kay?"

"Awwww," Apple Bloom sighs. "Well, that's okay! Y'all have fun and take care! There's cold apple juice waitin' for you inside when you're finished!"

And with that, she leaves as quickly as she appeared.

"Poor thing," Applejack laments. "I hate tellin' her no, but I just ain't got it in me to watch a movie after this, ya feel?"

"I do. But why didn't you just lie? Wouldn't that have spared her feelings?" Twilight asks, puzzled.

Applejack laughs. "Twilight, you know I couldn't lie to save my life! 'Sides, Apple Bloom knows I don't mean her no harm. If I lied to her, now *that* would'a upset her!"

"I see..." Twilight murmurs.

By being honest with your friends, you build trust with them. True friends respect you when you tell the truth. Apple Bloom understood that Applejack was tired from a long day of picking apples, and she respected that. Likewise, Applejack being honest with her instead of making excuses made Apple Bloom feel respected as well.

P.S. Did you know that there are thousands of different types of apples? The Apple family has engineered five of their own species of apples over the generations! Isn't that impressive?

Your student,

Twilight Sparkle

Dear Princess Celestia,

Today I learned just how important it is to be loyal to your friends, and that sticking with them shows just how much you care...

Twilight and Rainbow Dash head to the bookstore. Truth be told, Twilight never thought she would be going to the bookstore with Rainbow Dash of all ponies, but ever since she introduced her to a certain book series...

"Can you believe it, Twilight!? I'm about to get my hooves on the brand new *Daring Do* novel!" Rainbow practically yells in excitement.

"You really have become quite the superfan," Twilight muses. "I can't believe the series has grown on you so much to the point where you'd preorder the new books."

"Yeah, yeah," Rainbow huffs. "All that matters is that I get exclusive access to the book before anyone else does! All those other *Daring Do* tourists have to wait a whole week before they can read it!"

"And then you'll get to get it autographed at the end of the month," Twilight reminds her, though she doubts Rainbow Dash forgot.

"I knowwwww!" Rainbow squeals, spreading her wings to flap them in excitement. "I can't wait to meet her again! Do you think I can get my picture with her this time? Or is that too weird… Well, I did break into her house that one time, so it's probably not that weird, right? Oh, hey, we're already at the bookstore! Time sure does fly when you're talking about your favorite author."

The two enter the bookstore, and Rainbow Dash is about to make a beeline to the counter to pick up her preorder, but…

"Wait. Waitwaitwait." Rainbow rushes over to the community board, taking note of one flyer in particular. "THE WONDERBOLTS ARE COMING TO PONYVILLE!?"

"Rainbow Dash! We're in the bookstore!" Twilight rushes to shush her.

"Who cares about the bookstore!? The Wonderbolts are coming *here* at the end of this month!" Then the realization hits. "Wait, that's…"

"Rainbow, it's okay if you want to go to the Wonderbolts meet and greet instead of the *Daring Do* book signing with me. Really, I won't be offended," Twilight reassures her.

Rainbow Dash stares longingly at the Wonderbolts poster before finally turning away. "Nah. I had these plans with you first, so I'm sticking with you."

"Are you *sure*?" Twilight asks, mouth agape. "I know how much you love the Wonderbolts."

"Twi, I'm *sure*," Rainbow reiterates. "I wouldn't just bail on you like that. You're the one who got me into Daring Do in the first place. Of course going to the book signing with you means a lot to me."

"I see… Thank you, Rainbow Dash," Twilight says, still in shock.

It made me feel warm inside when Rainbow Dash decided to stick with her plans with me instead of going to the Wonderbolts event. Of course, I would have been understanding had she decided to go there instead. Yet, she chose me over the Wonderbolts. I think that's what loyalty is. Rainbow made me feel important.

Your student,

Twilight Sparkle

Dear Princess Celestia,

Today I learned the importance of generosity, and just how important it is to share with others that which you hold dear.

"Hold still, dear," Rarity mumbles under her breath, full focus on taking Twilight's measurements. "And… All done! You can move again now."

Twilight lets out a large sigh, having subconsciously held her breath. "Thank you for agreeing to help me out with this outfit, Rarity. I wouldn't want anypony except you to design it for me."

"That's what I love to hear, my dear! You flatter me," Rarity says, batting her eyelashes. "And, I must say, it is great for business, too. Be sure to tell everypony who made your dress, alright?"

Twilight laughs. "Anything to help you out."

"Rarityyyyyyy!" Sweetie Belle sings. "Hey, Rarity, can I borrow some of your fabrics? I need it for a school project."

"I'm a little busy right now," Rarity huffs. "Let's make it quick, alright?"

"Alright! I already know which ones I want. I want that sparkly pink one and, umm… I also want that blue one with the sequins!" she says, pointing to each one. "Oh! And can I have those buttons right there, too? The ones that look like pearls."

"You *may* borrow these," Rarity begins, "but do keep in mind that these are some of my nicer items. Please only use as much as is absolutely necessary, okay?"

"Okay!" Sweetie Belle chirps, using her magic to pick up the fabrics and buttons. "Thanks, Rarity!" And with that, she runs off to her room.

"I can't believe you let her borrow such expensive items..." Twilight murmurs, getting chills just thinking about letting anyone borrow any of her valuable books or magical artifacts.

Rarity shrugs. "I can't say no to my cute little sister. Besides, I'm happy that she's putting it to use! Even if the end product won't be quite as... *refined* as my own designs, we all start somewhere, don't we?"

"Huh. I guess you have a point there."

"What's the point in hoarding my expensive fabrics if no one is going to use them? They deserve to be seen by the world!"

Twilight thinks of the multitudes of rare books on her shelves, collecting dust because she refuses to lend them to anyone. So much knowledge going to waste.

"Rarity, you might be a genius. I'll have to write that down later."

"I know, dear," Rarity says, flipping her mane.

I admire Rarity's willingness to share. She put all of her trust in Sweetie Belle, trusting that she would only use the necessary amount of fabric and not ruin or waste it. I think I could learn a thing or two from her. I've lost track of how many ponies I've refused to lend my books to out of fear that my precious books might be destroyed or lost... But all at the expense of not sharing the valuable knowledge I've accumulated.

Your student,

Twilight Sparkle.

Dear Princess Celestia,

Today I learned the importance of kindness and putting myself in another pony's hooves. Well, in this case, it was a rabbit, but...

"Thanks for coming to the tea party, Twilight," Fluttershy says, handing Twilight a teacup.

"I wouldn't miss it for the world!" Twilight responds, remembering how happy it made her when Rainbow Dash upheld her promise to go with her to the *Daring Do* book signing. She takes a sip of the tea. "This is really good! What flavor is it?"

Fluttershy averts her eyes and smiles. "Oh, it's... It's my own brew, actually. I used some of the herbs and flowers I grew in my garden. You really like it...?"

"You *made* this yourself!?" Twilight says. "This is so much better than anything store-bought! You should try selling it at the market."

Fluttershy laughs, nervous but happy. "Thank you, Twilight. I'm so happy you like it." She hands another teacup to Angel. "You like it too, right, Angel? After all, you helped me come up with the recipe."

Angel looks at the teacup with dismay before kicking it over. Hot tea splatters all over the floor, the scent of freshly picked flowers and herbs overtaking the room.

"Angel, be careful! You could have spilled that on somepony," Fluttershy gently scolds.

Angel huffs and thumps his foot.

Fluttershy picks up the teacup, thankfully still in one piece. "Can you tell me what's wrong, Angel Bunny?"

Angel stares at her expectantly, as if waiting for something.

"Please use your words. I can't help you unless you tell me what's wrong," Fluttershy begs. "I wish I could read your mind..."

Angel seems to be moved by Fluttershy's display of patience. He gestures towards the cupboards.

Something seems to click. "Oh! Your special treat! Goodness, I completely forgot. I'm so sorry, Angel. I'll go make that for you right away."

Angel grins triumphantly.

"But first, we need to apologize to Twilight for disrupting the tea party. Angel, can you tell Twilight you're sorry?" she instructs.

Angel reluctantly turns to Twilight and squeaks.

"Apology accepted. Here, I'll help clean up too," Twilight says, using her magic to bring a dish towel over to the spill.

"Thank you so much, Twilight," Fluttershy says while preparing Angel's treat. "I would have cleaned it up myself, you know…"

"I know. But I wanted to do something kind. As usual, I'm impressed with your patience in these types of situations."

"Well, of course. Angel is my friend! Even though we speak different languages, I want to do my best to understand him. How would you feel if you were upset, but no pony paused to listen to you? If you were communicating differently from everypony else, but no pony tried to understand what you were saying?"

Twilight thinks of all the times she's been upset over something that everypony else thought was small. Somepony took the book she was reading. Somepony sat in the seat she always sat in. Somepony suddenly changed their plans with her. All the times she got upset and tried to express it, only to be told to just "calm down" and "be like everypony else."

"…Yeah. It doesn't feel very good," Twilight murmurs. "I'm glad to have a friend like you, Fluttershy."

"Oh, you flatter me too much… I'm glad that you're my friend too, Twilight!"

Fluttershy is one of the kindest ponies I've ever met. She's patient to a fault, and even when Angel spilled tea all over the floor, she didn't get mad at him. She took the time to understand why he lashed out, instead of simply punishing him. I always feel comfortable around her.

Your student,

Twilight Sparkle

Dear Princess Celestia,

Today I learned how important it is to laugh at your mistakes and move on, instead of letting them bog you down.

"Here's the recipe book you requested," Twilight says, using her magic to levitate the book next to her. "Where should I put it?"

"Uhhh! Just wherever is fine!" Pinkie Pie yells from behind the counter. "Gimme one sec!"

Twilight sets the book on one of the tables, taking a seat while Pinkie finishes up in the kitchen. Twilight absentmindedly flips through the pages of the recipe book, amazed at the condition it's in. In fact, she's amazed that such a book even exists.

Pinkie Pie comes bouncing out of the kitchen and over to Twilight. "Lemme see, lemme see! Oooooh, it's so sparkly!"

"I can't believe I managed to find this. I didn't even know that the Crystal Empire *had* any recipe books, what with it disappearing for a thousand years. I figured most of their artifacts would have been lost to time or ruin, and yet…"

"I expected no less from you, Twilight! I knew you could find it for me!" Pinkie says excitedly. "I can't wait to try and make some of these recipes! Hey, speaking of which, I just finished up a fresh batch of cupcakes! Do you want any?"

"Sure, I'd love that!" Twilight says. "Oh, but about the recipe book… Just be sure not to get it dirty, alright? I do have to return it to the Crystal Empire's library eventually. They were gracious enough to let me borrow it."

"I'll return the book to you in perfect condition! Cross my heart and hope to fly, stick a cupcake in my eye! Anyways, lemme go grab one of those cupcakes for you! Or maybe two or three… I'm hungry too!" Pinkie muses to herself, returning to the kitchen with the recipe book.

In record time, Pinkie Pie returns with a platter of perfectly decorated cupcakes in hoof. Also in record time, Pinkie Pie trips over nothing, platter of cupcakes tumbling to the floor. Pinkie looks up at Twilight, face covered in frosting.

"Oh my gosh, Pinkie, are you okay?" Twilight asks, rushing over to her. "I would have used my magic to stop it, but it happened so fast—"

Pinkie bursts into laughter. "Twilight, it's okay! I'll just feed them to Gummy! He doesn't care about the five second rule. And neither

do I!" Pinkie takes a bite of one of the fallen cupcakes. "Yup, delish! It may look a little messed up, but the taste hasn't changed at all!"

Twilight stares at Pinkie, flabbergasted. Pinkie never fails to find new ways to surprise her.

"You're not… upset? Even though all of your hard work just went to waste?"

"Huh? Why would I be upset? I can just bake another batch, it's okay!" Pinkie says, licking some of the icing off of her face.

"I… I guess. If it were me, I'd probably be so frustrated that I'd quit for the rest of the day."

"Whaaaat!? I could never! You're pretty much guaranteed to make mistakes while baking, so the best thing to do is just laugh and move on! Come on Twilight, laugh with me!" Pinkie says, smiling, surrounded by her mess.

Twilight *has* to admit, it is a little bit funny.

Pinkie Pie is so good at laughing at herself. I tend to take things a little too seriously and get frustrated with myself when I mess up. Yet, Pinkie just laughs without a care in the world. I don't think I can ever be like her, but… If I can loosen up a bit, I think that might be good.

Your student,

Twilight Sparkle

Twilight Sparkle needed friends more than she could have ever known.

She smiles fondly, bittersweet, rereading the old letters she sent to Princess Celestia. Back when Celestia was still ruler of Equestria, before Twilight took up her mantle.

She reads about the first ponies she ever truly considered her friends. She thinks about how stubborn she used to be, insisting that she was the only pony in the world who didn't need friendship.

What a naive little unicorn she had been.

She tucks the letters away for safekeeping. Right on time, too, because her peaceful stroll down memory lane is interrupted.

"Twilight! One of your students sent a letter to you!" Spike says, opening the door to her room without knocking. One of his bad habits. Twilight has learned not to care.

"Thank you, Spike. Could you set it on my desk?"

"Course! Well, that's all. I'll leave you back to your princess duties," he says playfully, shutting the door as he leaves.

Twilight Sparkle would never be where she is today without the friendships she made. While the ponies themselves may have long since passed on, their impact will live on deep in her heart for as long as Equestria stands.




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Foalsitting is Magic

by Hopestoryteller

Cadence has always liked foals. Crucially, foals also generally seem to like *her*, a quality that not all ponies possess. Foals are loud and excitable and brash, for certain, but they are first and foremost ponies like any others—just younger, and considerably less experienced. The vast majority won't earn their cutie marks until they're older. Cadence maintains a personal policy of not pushing any foal to earn their cutie mark before they're ready, but sometimes it really is obvious what they'll get. Take the filly she'll be foalsitting tonight, for example.

Twilight Velvet and Night Light have two children. The elder is a young stallion by the name of Shining Armor. According to his parents, he's close to Cadence's age, works for the Canterlot Royal Guard, and *usually* watches his sister when their parents aren't available. Tonight is an exception brought about by Shining Armor's recent promotion and a shift in schedule, something he's incredibly apologetic over when Cadence arrives.

"Oh, it's no trouble," Cadence says with a laugh after his parents have departed, but he hasn't yet followed. "Your little sister sounds lovely, and I'd like to think I know better than anypony how important the Royal Guard is."

Shining laughs, a little awkwardly. "True. You would. I've got to get going soon, too, but... honestly? I'm not actually sure if I'll be back before or after Mom and Dad."

Cadence offers him a smile. This is only partially because she takes her foalsitting duties very seriously and that includes reassuring family members. Otherwise it's because, his awkwardness aside, he's treating her more like any other pony than a princess and that's strangely charming of him.

"That's more than alright," Cadence tells him. "I'll be here for as long as you need."

"Alright. Seriously, though, thanks so much." He clears his throat before Cadence can tell him *you're welcome*, or *it's nothing*, and looks over his shoulder, raising his voice. "Hey, Twily? Can I steal you away from your books for a second?"

For a couple of seconds, there's no response—did little Twilight not hear her brother? Is she ignoring him?—and then a small voice calls out, "Coming!"

Twilight Sparkle is on the smaller side, even for unicorn fillies. That is the first thing that Cadence notices about her when she comes trotting out of what Cadence is willing to guess is her bedroom. She is very purple, with a neat mane styled a lot like her mother's, and—as Cadence expected—she doesn't have a cutie mark.

(Her brother's, on the other hand, appears to be a decorated shield surrounded by stars. Cadence can't help but wonder what it means; it's not uncommon for family members to have similar cutie marks, so maybe little Twilight will get something close.)

"Oh," Twilight says, staring at Cadence with wide eyes. "Um."

"Hello," Cadence says politely.

"...Who are you?"

"This is..." Shining begins, and then glances over at Cadence. She couldn't begin to guess at what he sees there, but when he turns back to Twilight, he says, "This is Cadence. She offered to help you look after the house while I'm at work and Mom and Dad are at their show. Is that alright with you, Twily?"

Twilight blinks several times, looking between the two of them with the skeptical expression of a pony who is very small and had very different plans for her evening. "I... I guess? I thought you had work tomorrow..."

"Sorry," Shining says apologetically, "I did too until today. Spearhead caught the cold that's been going around, somepony's got to fill in for him, and I was the only pony who actually could on short notice."

"Okay," she says."I don't need help looking after the house, though."

He laughs a little. "I know you don't! But it's nice to have help just in case, isn't it?"

Cadence takes note of the fact that little Twilight is very independent, and likely doesn't think she *needs* a foalsitter that's not her brother (as well as the fact that her brother is carefully avoiding the word *foalsitter*.)

Twilight frowns. "I guess... I won't need it, though."

"That's fine," Cadence says, offering her a smile. "I can stay out here. I'm sure you have plenty to do yourself, don't you?"

The frown deepens. Twilight calls out, "Bye, BBBFF!" and returns to her room much faster than she'd left it.

Cadence turns to Shining. "BBBFF?"

"Big Brother Best Friend Forever," Shining explains.

"That is genuinely adorable," Cadence says.

"She came up with it." There's a proud smile on Shining's face, before he glances at the door and mutters, "I *really* need to go... just, Twily's a bright filly, she's shy around strangers but she's very *curious*, if you let her come to you and answer your questions when she does, you'll get along just fine."

"Got it," Cadence says. "Thank you."

"Thank *you*," Shining says again, and then, without further ado, he shoots out the door with a speed Cadence would have expected from a pegasus over a unicorn. She watches him tear off toward the castle until he's out of sight, then shuts the door behind him and takes a seat in the foyer. She fully believes that Twilight Velvet and Night Light have faith in both of their children, but it seems like Shining Armor has spent more time with his little sister overall. If he says that it's better to let Twilight Sparkle come to her, then she'll wait as long as she needs to.

It isn't as if she has nothing to do while she's waiting. Being a princess, even a relatively minor one in comparison to the mare who is *Princess Celestia* to the rest of Equestria and simply Cadence's aunt to her, does mean that there's always *something* to do if she's unoccupied, and she does always bring something to work on while she's foalsitting specifically for cases like these. Twilight isn't the first shy foal she's sat for and she almost certainly won't be the last.

By the time Cadence hears hoofsteps again, this time much quieter ones than before, she's finished looking over a proposal for increasing the budget of the Canterlot Royal Guard and has started to review the written preparations for this year's Summer Sun Celebration. She doesn't look up until the hoofsteps stop.

"I know you're not actually here to *help* me look after the house," Twilight says.

Cadence looks up. "Oh?"

"You're here to be a foalsitter."

"I am," Cadence confirms. She has a policy of not lying to foals.

"I don't *need* a foalsitter." Twilight pauses. "What are you doing?"

"Paperwork for Princess Celestia," Cadence says, glancing back down at it. "The Summer Sun Celebration—"

"You work for Princess Celestia too?!" Twilight's eyes widen.

"...Sort of?"

Working *for* Princess Celestia is a strong way to put it, and not entirely accurate. Aunt Celestia's current student, who might be a princess herself one day, *works for* her. Cadence lives there and helps out when she can, with whatever she reasonably can.

"That's how you know Shining, I guess," the filly mumbles. "You don't *look* like a Royal Guard."

Another part of the reason why Cadence prefers the younger ponies: they can be very, *very* blunt. It's sweet.

"Oh, I'm not," Cadence tells her. "Your brother and I only met for the first time tonight, at least formally... though I think I've seen him in passing before?"

It is, admittedly, kind of hard to tell the various guards apart when they're wearing their armor, but she knows that Twilight's brother isn't all that new to the Royal Guard, so presumably they have met—at some point—before. Cadence will be keeping an eye out for him in the future, though, because he really does seem nice.

"Huh," Twilight says. "What are you, a princess?"

"Er," Cadence says, "yes?"

Entirely unsurprisingly, the little filly's eyes go even wider. "Wait, really? Then what are you doing *foalsitting*? Don't you have... princess... stuff... to do?"

Cadence smiles at her. "This *is* princess stuff. It's important to know the community you're serving, as well as your own strengths.

I like helping others, and foals generally seem to like me, so it works out all around."

"But I'm just a regular old unicorn," Twilight says. "...I don't like you. And I'm a foal. So."

"That's alright," Cadence says. It's... tempting, very much so, to tell Twilight that she used to be a regular old pegasus, but she holds her tongue. "What do you like?"

Twilight has to think about this. "Books. Magic."

Cadence nods. "What are you reading?"

Twenty minutes later, when Twilight finishes explaining what sounds suspiciously like a high-level magic textbook—where *did* she even get that?—it's become abundantly clear that the way to this little one's heart is through books, particularly books about magic, and especially letting her talk about them.

(Cadence is getting the feeling that, while her parents are as supportive as they can be, and her brother tries even harder, none of them understand how much magic fascinates her—and her peers likely don't even try. Cadence loves foals, but she knows better than anyone who isn't currently one how cruel they can be.)

"I just... think magic is very neat," Twilight says, looking down at her own hooves like she'll find the answers there to the questions she isn't sure how to ask yet.

"Magic *is* very neat," Cadence says. Her own magic, admittedly, isn't exactly the kind that can be found in books.

Much more confidently, Twilight nods. "Um. I'm not sure what time Shining will get home—"

"He admittedly wasn't either," Cadence says. "And... neither am I, actually..."

"What?" Twilight looks shocked. "But you're a *princess*! I thought princesses were supposed to be... perfect!"

Cadence laughs, and shakes her head. "I'm certainly not!"

"Oh." Twilight considers this seriously.

As she does, Cadence says, "However, I know what time your parents will be home, and Shining thought it was possible but unlikely that he'd be home before them. Regardless, we have a few more hours."

"Got it," Twilight says. "Do you want to see my room?"

Admittedly, Cadence has been a *little* curious. "If that's alright with you, Twilight."

She hesitates, then nods.

Cadence had been expecting Twilight's room to have a lot of books in it. She was not expecting it to contain so many books that Cadence legitimately wonders where Twilight sleeps until she hastily relocates some books to another pile and *ah*, there's a bed.

"I like reading," Twilight says, which might be the understatement of her lifetime. "Magic is the *most* interesting, but really, I like learning as much as I can about everything."

Not *all* of the book titles Cadence can see have something to do with magic, though a majority of them certainly do. Cadence wonders, not for the first time, how likely it is that Twilight's eventual cutie mark will have something to do with books. Learning, maybe helping out in a library?

And then little Twilight does something *entirely* unexpected.

Which is to say, it begins when she announces, "This one's my favorite!"

Then, her horn begins to glow with a purple aura. One of the more well-loved (but nevertheless cared-for) books on the stack *also* begins to glow. And a unicorn too young to have her cutie mark *levitates a book across the room*. Granted, she then nearly drops it on Cadence's hooves—Twilight clearly hasn't mastered putting things *down*—but...

That is... *incredibly* impressive. Even among the students of the school meant for unicorns particularly gifted with magic, that's usually not something most are capable of upon initial enrollment. Cadence would know. She attended for a little while herself, and the entrance exam—hatching a dragon egg by any magical means one possesses—is comparatively simple.

Cadence doesn't recall exactly how old Twilight's parents or brother said she was, but at *oldest* she's a year out from the minimum age of enrollment. She needs to tell her aunt about this filly as soon as she possibly can, because *this* level of magical ability already is... incredible!

"Sorry," Twilight says, utterly unaware of how Cadence's thoughts are racing. "I probably shouldn't have tried to levitate it *that* far..."

Her first thought, where cutie marks were concerned, was books. Her *second* thought, seeing this, is that it will almost certainly have something to do with magic. It could, admittedly, be some combination of both.

Twilight *is* noticeably much more tired than she was before trying that. But, dropping the book aside, she'd done exactly what she wanted.

"That is," Cadence says truthfully, "*very* impressive."

Twilight blinks. "It's nothing that special, but... thanks?"

It *is* that special, actually. Cadence doesn't know what she can—or *should*—do, except keep her mouth shut until she can speak with her aunt. Aunt Celestia *needs* to hear about this. Twilight's power might be comparable to that of her aunt's current student, actually—Cadence thinks they might get along rather well, once Twilight's a little older.

"I'm feeling a little tired," Cadence says, and makes a point of yawning. "But that's nothing a little treat won't fix. Say... ice cream."

Twilight blinks. "Huh?"

"What do you say to a little adventure?" Cadence asks. "I know a good place that isn't far from here. We'll be back before you know it."

"I... don't think I'm supposed to leave the house," Twilight says uncertainly. Fair enough.

"Your parents never said we couldn't, I'll be with you, we'll lock up, and we won't go far," Cadence reassures her. "If you'd rather stay here, that's fine. The decision is yours, Twilight."

Twilight thinks for long enough that Cadence finds herself all too certain she'll say no. Then she says, "I guess it'll be alright. If I'm with you."

Ice cream was a *very* good decision, and—in Cadence's opinion—it's a well-deserved reward for a feat of magic that Cadence can't say much to Twilight about. She can, however, get the filly ice cream. As a treat.

They bring it back to the house and eat it on the lawn outside, because time is running slightly short. Cadence locked up and left a note behind. She'd still rather not be too far off when either the parents or Shining Armor gets home.

"...You're actually a pretty good foalsitter," Twilight says after finishing hers, which Cadence will take as the high praise it is. "Most of the foalsitters, that aren't my brother... aren't."

Cadence nods. "How so?"

"They try to get me to talk about things that *aren't* my books or magic," Twilight says matter-of-factly. "Then they're surprised when I barricade the door into my room and ignore them until they're gone."

From the admittedly short time Cadence has spent with Twilight Sparkle so far, she can absolutely see that happening. A motivated foal can do a lot more than most ponies think, and that's *without* her abilities.

"You're nice, though," the filly goes on. "Do you think you can come back?"

The thing is, Cadence rarely ever foalsits for the same foal twice. This is largely to keep things fair—Canterlot isn't a small city—so when she *does*, there's a good reason for it. Such as, for instance, the foal in question seeming suspiciously like a magical prodigy.

"We'll see," Cadence says, thinking of what her aunt might say. "But I'm feeling optimistic."

Twilight beams at her. "Then, next time Shining can't watch me..."

"I'd say there's a good chance." Cadence stands, stretches, then asks, "Before I have to go... would you like to learn something new?"

"Sunshine, sunshine, ladybugs awake! Clap your hooves and do a little shake!"

As suspected, Twilight's a very quick learner. She is also incredibly enthusiastic about the secret hoof-shake that Cadence came up with right then and there. On the off chance she doesn't remember it all by the next time they see each other, Twilight herself definitely will.

The parents ultimately do arrive home before Twilight's brother, and are possibly more surprised than Twilight herself that she's getting along with Cadence. There's a standing offer to come back in the future, something Cadence doesn't know for sure if she'll be taking them up on. But as she said earlier, she's feeling optimistic.

Cadence is still feeling fairly optimistic when she returns to the castle. As it turns out, she recognizes Shining Armor in uniform now that she's met him outside of it, and quietly informs him that yes, his parents are home, yes, things went great with his sister, and yes, she did ask Cadence to tell him hello if she saw him. Then she goes to find Aunt Celestia.

Her current student, Sunset Shimmer, is leaving the room when Cadence arrives. Cadence offers her a smile, but considering what a hurry Sunset was in, she's honestly not sure if she actually *saw* it or not.

"Is everything... alright?" Cadence asks, glancing behind her in the direction Sunset left in.

Her aunt frowns, but nods. "She's frustrated, but I have faith in her. How was foalsitting?"

"Oh, it went well!" Cadence couldn't keep the smile off her face if she tried. "That's actually why I wanted to speak with you..."

Neither Cadence nor her aunt realize then that Sunset doesn't actually leave. That, while she wants to be alone, she's curious—a trait all Celestia's best students share—about what Cadence has to say. So Sunset doubles back to eavesdrop. What she hears—a young filly with power comparable to her own, one that Cadence *likes* more than her, a magical prodigy—isn't something she needs to hear.

She knows, then. They're going to replace her. She's just not good enough.

Sunset Shimmer has worked too hard, and come too far, to stand by and let that happen. Not on her watch. Not *ever*.

She'll do whatever it takes. Whatever she has to. Princess Celestia will have to see what she's worth then, to her and to Equestria. And if she doesn't... maybe she wasn't worth learning from in the first place.



NO GODS... NO MAGIC...

AND YOUR PATHETIC FRIENDSHIP

ONLY YOU LITTLE PONIES..

You'll never win. Discord

because

friendship is...

MAGIC

HIKIKEN





by Joey

"Twilight, time to get up! You've got school today!"

Twilight groaned and sleepily slammed her alarm's snooze button with her hoof. "Coming, mom!" she called.

She groggily slid out of bed and trotted downstairs.

"Good morning, sweetie," Twilight Velvet said warmly.

"Morning, mom."

"Did you sleep well?"

"Eh, about as well as I can knowing Trixie will be in my class *again*."

"Four years in a row? Is that even possible?"

It is when you basically run everything with an iron hoof, Twilight thought to herself as she sat at the table across from her brother, Shining Armour. "It is when you're the daughter of the school's biggest donator," she said aloud.

Twilight sighed, using her magic to stir her spoon in her breakfast, dreading the day ahead of her.

Velvet frowned. "Well, I'm sure it'll be fine. You're a strong unicorn. Just like your father."

Twilight's father, Night Light, looked up from his newspaper and gave his daughter an encouraging smile. She forced a small smile back.

"You gonna be ok, Twily? I know this is your first year where we aren't going to the same school," Shining Armour asked with concern. He had enrolled to be a Royal Guard the previous summer, meaning he'd be going to the training school on the other side of Canterlot, far away from where Twilight went – Flankçoise Dupone High.

"Yeah, Shining, I'll be fine. I don't *always* need you to protect me." Twilight said that, but deep down she had no idea how to manage herself; she wasn't the most social unicorn.

Twilight finished her breakfast and grabbed her school bag, briskly heading for the front door.

"You want me to walk with you?" Shining asked.

"No, I'll be fine! Besides, I don't want you to be late on my account."

Twilight shut the door behind her and booked it to school, taking a shortcut through the park.

At school, Professor Starswirl was taking attendance.

"Pinkie?"

"I'm here!"

"Rarity?"

"Here, Professor!"

"Cheese?"

"Here!"

"Sunset?"

"Here!"

"Twilight?"

At that moment, the mare in question burst through the door, panting. "Sorry I'm late, Professor..."

Starswirl glared at her.

"Twilight, I expect better from you. Please ensure you arrive at my classes *on time*."

Twilight nodded and took her seat, opting to sit as far away from Trixie and Bon Bon as possible, placing her next to a student she didn't recognise, snout deep in a comic book.

At that moment, Trixie came over.

"Well, well, Twilight Sparkle. Late on the first day, are we? That's not a good look for you. Maybe if you weren't so lazy and slow, you'd have been on time to class, like The Great and Powerful Trixie! Honestly, Rainbow Dash's pet turtle is faster than you." The snobby blue unicorn proceeded to laugh loudly at her own insult, making Twilight roll her eyes.

The unicorn sitting beside her looked up from her comic book, looking disapprovingly at Trixie.

Trixie towered over Twilight and growled at her. "Don't forget your place, Sparkle. I'm above you, try to remember that."

Twilight gulped and shrunk back in her seat.

Her seat neighbour stood up firmly and faced Trixie.

"Be quiet. You're not the boss of this classroom, the Professor is. Go back to your seat and keep to yourself."

The student locked eyes with Trixie, seemingly locked in a staring contest. *A stalemate*, Twilight thought.

Trixie scowled.

"Ugh, whatever new girl, you're *clearly* not worth my time enough to bother arguing with."

She reluctantly went back to her seat.

Twilight sat in awe as her protector returned to her seat next to her. No one had ever been so bold with Trixie before.

"Woah, that was amazing!"

The new student chuckled. "Ha, thanks. I just follow my favourite superheroine's motto: 'All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good people do nothing', and that girl is evil with a capital E."

Twilight laughed lightly. "True, she is." She extended her hoof. "I'm Twilight."

"Sunset."

Moon Dancer was a quiet mare. She kept to herself a lot and was homeschooled by the kind assistant of her controlling father. Her mother died when she was just a filly.

Moon Dancer desperately wanted to go to school, to be around other ponies her age; she hated being isolated and living a sheltered life. She'd ask her father, time and time again, but the answer was always the same: "*No.*"

At the start of the new school year, she tried to sneak out. Unfortunately, her father's assistant caught her just as she reached

the steps of the high school. But before she threw in the towel and reluctantly headed back home, she noticed an elder stallion who had collapsed to the ground and offered to help him back to his hooves. He thanked her and she headed home, scared of what her father would say.

Little did she know…

Later, when the bell rang to signal the end of class, Twilight was getting ready to head to the school library when her ears perked up at a commotion behind her. Bulk Biceps was towering over Cheese Sandwich, glaring threateningly. Starswirl noticed this.

"Bulk, what's going on?"

"It's Cheese, Professor! He–"

"Bulk, go to the principal's office! Now! I won't tolerate attempts of violence in my classroom!"

Bulk growled angrily and did as he was told. Cheese just sat there, taken aback.

In an unknown part of Canterlot, a villain was on the prowl for negative emotions to control.

"A poor, sensitive stallion angered by a classmate. Negativity born out of a misunderstanding is the perfect prey for my akumas."

He opened his cane, and a black butterfly came out of it.

"Fly away my evil akuma, and evilise him!"

Bulk Biceps stood outside the principal's office, boiling with rage. The akuma flew into his earring.

"Revenger, I am Buck Moth. I can give you the power to seek revenge on those who have wronged you."

"Yes, Buck Moth."

The black glow from the earring engulfed Bulk, transforming him.

Twilight and Sunset were hanging out in the library, reading quietly, when they heard a loud *CRASH* from outside. They ran to the window and saw a… *giant bipedal bull*? break the doors to the school down.

"*CHEESE!*" the monster roared, making his way down the street, on the hunt.

Twilight's eyes widened.

"Is it just me? Or did that sound just like Bulk!?"

Sunset's eyes lit up. "Do you think he's been transformed somehow!? Into this monster, this… *villain*!?" She ran suddenly to the door, grinning excitedly.

"Woah, what are you doing!? It'll be dangerous out there!" Twilight called after her new friend.

"Where there's a supervillain, there's always a superhero close behind! No way I'm missing this!"

When Moon Dancer arrived home, her father proceeded to scold her and then ground her. She hung her head and retreated to her bedroom.

She sat at her desk, piled high with books covering topics from magic spells, beginner to advanced, to Equestrian history, and put her head in her hooves, dejected.

Then, out of the corner of her eye, she spotted something: a little black box with a strange engraving on the lid, one she didn't recognise from her studies. Her eyes narrowed out of curiosity, and she made the impulsive choice to open the box.

As soon as she did, a small green glow emanated from within. Moon Dancer dropped the box in surprise. The little glowing ball morphed into a small floating creature with cat-like features. The creature yawned and stretched. Moon Dancer adjusted her glasses. Was she seeing things?

"Who or what are you?" Moon Dancer asked aloud, nudging the strange being with her hoof.

"I'm a kwami. My name is Plagg. You got anything to eat?"

Plagg's eyes darted around the room looking for something to eat. His eyes fell on a quill on Moon Dancer's desk and floated over to snatch a bite out of it. He sputtered and spat when he tried.

"Ugh! That's not food!" Plagg made a face laced with disgust.

"Hey! My favourite quill!" Moon Dancer exclaimed. She leapt towards Plagg and caught him in her hooves. "Where did you come from? Why are you in my *house*?"

"Well, I came from the box right there," Plagg replied cheekily. "I'm here to help you help Canterlot."

"Riiiiight…" Moon Dancer replied, not convinced. "Well, I guess my first question is… what *is* a kwami, anyway?"

Plagg let out a bored sigh; he wasn't a fan of explaining things, especially to newbies. "Kwamis are magical beings tied to jewellery. They grant powers to their holders, who are meant to fight for the greater good. Yours is the power of destruction. Does that make sense?"

Moon Dancer shook her head.

"Good."

She stared, confused.

"This is a prank, right? From my dad? Wait, no… He has no sense of humour…"

Plagg flew out of Moon Dancer's hooves. "No! Your dad can't know I exist! Nobody can!"

Moon Dancer sat on her haunches, thinking. "Well… okay. I guess anything beats endless studying. As much as I enjoy it, it can be a *bit* much…"

"Great!" Plagg exclaimed, perking up. "Okay, so to transform you gotta say 'claws out'. Got it?"

Moon Dancer slipped the ring onto her horn. "Plagg, claws out!"

"Wait, I've not finished–!"

Plagg proceeded to get sucked into the ring as Moon Dancer transformed, donning a black suit with ears, a black eye mask, a belt stylised like a tail, and a bell around her neck.

She looked down at herself. "Woah."

Elsewhere, Twilight had returned home and made her way up to her room. When she got there, she noticed a black box on her bed. A puzzled expression settled on her face, and she went to open it. A red light came from the box, spawning a small red creature with black spots. Twilight's eyes widened and she retreated backwards in fear.

"Eek! A bug! A giant bug! Help–!"

The small creature flew ever so slightly closer. "Shh! No, it's okay!"

"Eeeek! It talks!"

Twilight armed herself with her magic aura and blasted a few beams from her horn at the "bug", which it dodged.

"Twilight, please listen. I know this all must seem bizzare to you."

Twilight levitated a glass and trapped the bug inside.

"Well… okay, if this makes you feel safer…" Her voice was muffled.

"Please, just answer some questions. First, what are you? Second, how do you know my name? Third–"

"Let's start with just the first question. I'm a kwami, my name is Tikki. Now, if you'd let me explain…"

Twilight, panicked, ran to her door. "Mom! Dad!" she called.

"No, please! Shh! No!"

Tikki flew through the glass.

"Twilight, please trust me! I'm your *friend*. Only you can stop Revenger!"

"Me!? This has to be a mistake! I don't know anything about stopping monsters or villains, and besides, I have four left hooves! But maybe…Sunset. My friend. She loves superheroes! She'd totally be up for stopping Revenger! You should go see her instead!"

"But Twilight, you're the chosen one!"

Twilight sat still, hesitant. "Uhhhhh… well, okay…" She levitated the earrings out of the box and put them on. "Okay, so what do I do?"

"You need to confront the villain and break the object on their person to release the akuma, which you then must capture."

"Capture it? Sure, that's not too scary… And, something about a charm?"

"Yes, your Lucky Charm! That'll be your superpower!"

Twilight groaned from stress. "This is all so sudden, Tikki. There's no way I can pull this off!"

"You've just gotta believe in yourself, Twilight. When you're ready, just say 'Spots on'."

Twilight looked confused. "Spots on?"

In a flash, she transformed, donning a red suit and eye mask with black spots and red hair ties. She looked down at herself, surprised, and a little freaked out.

"Wah! How do I get this thing off!? Tikki, if you can hear me, please change me back!"

Twilight heard a knock on her door and flinched. Her mom's voice passed through. "Twilight! Did you get home okay?"

"Uhh… yeah, mom! Just super!"

As she heard her mom's hoofsteps recede, she went to her window and looked out into the street. Revenger was patrolling the streets, shouting Cheese Sandwich's name. Twilight spotted Sunset, following carefully.

"Sunset?! Okay, so I guess I'd better follow…"

Twilight opened her window.

"Okay, so, super powers. Stopping a villain. Fine! And… I guess I have this super yo-yo thing?"

She grasped her yo-yo to the statue of a nearby building and pulled gently. Instantly she flew through the air, letting out a surprised scream.

Canter Noir was busy messing around, tightrope walking on her staff, when she heard a yell from above her. She looked skywards, only for a mare to collide with her in a tangled mess, hanging by her staff.

"Gee! Nice of you to drop in."

"S-sorry! I don't know how to control this thing yet!" Twilight hopped away, brushing the dust off herself.

"Are you the partner my kwami told me about? I'm Canter Noir. Cool name, huh? What about you?"

"I'm… uhh…" She pulled her yo-yo, hitting Canter Noir's head in the process. "Sorry again…I'm so clumsy."

"You're So Clumsy? Pretty weird name. But don't worry, I'm still learning everything too."

Suddenly, they heard a loud roar. Canter Noir readied herself to follow.

"Hang on, where are you going?" Marebug asked.

"To save Canterlot, right?"

Canter Noir launched herself with her staff, towards the source of the sound. "Alley-oop!"

"Ugh…" Marebug groaned.

"Remember, Twilight… Believe in yourself…" she muttered as she moved to follow.

Cheese Sandwich was sitting in his room, testing jokes with Pinkie Pie and giggling with her. Suddenly, his room was enveloped by a large shadow. He turned around and saw a big beefy bull at his window, just as it broke the glass and climbed into his bedroom. He tried to escape but tripped and fell on his haunches.

"Found you…!" the monster growled. He picked Cheese up and fled at speed towards the mountains, heading for the waterfall at the top.

Marebug and Canter Noir heard distant fearful screams as they travelled through Canterlot.

"Help! Help me!"

They stopped on top of a nearby building to try and find where the screams were coming from. Then Marebug spotted Revenger, climbing up the mountain with Cheese Sandwich trapped in his iron grip.

"Canter Noir, up there!"

"I see them! So, what's our next move, So Clumsy?"

"Well…" Marebug had to think quickly.

"We should use our powers. I can summon a super-powered item to help, according to my kwami. What about you?"

"My kwami said I can destroy anything I touch, apparently."

"Hm… we need to get up there, fast. Lucky Charm!" she cried.

An axe appeared.

"An axe, huh…? Hm…"

Her eyes darted around, her Lucky Vision highlighting Canter Noir, the mountain, and her Lucky Charm.

"Alright, I have a plan."

Revenger was about halfway up the mountain, when Cheese bucked up the courage to ask.

"W-what are you gonna do to me?"

"Little earth pony is going to learn to fly." Revenger growled menacingly. Cheese's eyes grew wider, terrified.

Suddenly, Canter Noir passed by them, airborne.

"Meowdy," she punned as she hooked herself to the side of the mountain with her staff.

"Out of the way, little kitty," Revenger growled. "I need to teach this little pony a lesson he'll never forget."

"I don't think so! Time for you to be grounded. Cataclysm!"

Canter Noir used her Cataclysm on the mountainside, destroying it and causing an avalanche, leaving Revenger with nothing to hold onto as he proceeded to fall, loosening his grip on Cheese.

Cheese fell, and time seemed to slow down, wind whipping his face.

But just as he thought it was over, he felt himself be pulled back into a small cave on the side of the mountain.

"Gotcha!"

Marebug and Cheese waited in the cave until the avalanche stopped, before she took him to ground level.

Marebug walked over to the mess, and broke Revenger's earring in two, releasing the akuma. "No more evil-doing for you, little akuma."

She opened her yo-yo, the inside glowing white, and aimed it at the akuma.

"Time to de-evilize!"

She captured the akuma successfully.

"Gotcha!"

She released the purified butterfly, watching it fly away.

"Bye bye, little butterfly."

She tossed her Lucky Charm axe into the air.

"Miraculous Marebug!"

The axe dissolved into magical ladybugs and fixed all the damage caused, and Revenger transformed back into Bulk Biceps.

"You were amazing, Miss... uh... Bugmare lady. You did it!" Canter Noir exclaimed.

"*We* did it. Couldn't have done it without you, partner."

"Pound it!" they said in unison, hoofbumping. Canter Noir's ring started beeping.

"Looks like it's time for us to go." Marebug motioned. "Secret identities and all."

"Okay. But we should do this again soon, 'kay?" Canter Noir smirked.

"Well... Not too soon, I hope."

Canter Noir waved and left.

Cheese approached Bulk, cautiously.

"I'm sorry..." Bulk said. "I thought you were laughing at me, because you were looking at me."

"No, *I'm* sorry. I should have said something, instead of feeling intimidated." Cheese apologised.

Sunset peered out from behind a nearby bush, her phone levitating beside her, and seeing the coast was clear, galloped up to Marebug.

"Amazing! So are you, like, Canterlot's superhero now? How did you get your powers? Did you get bitten by a radioactive ladybug? Oh, sorry, uh... What should I call you?"

"Uh. Marebug! Call me Marebug."

"Marebug... So cool!"

Her earrings started to beep. Marebug waved at Bulk, Cheese and Sunset and left, heading back home.

She landed back in her room just in time before she detransformed. Tikki appeared in front of her.

"You were right, Tikki! I did it!"

"I knew you could, if you believed in yourself!"

"You're right!" Twilight beamed proudly.

"Nooroo, dark wings fall. I'll get you one day, Marebug and Canter Noir. Soon, your Miraculous will both be mine!"

Buck Moth laughed evilly, his voice echoing throughout the room.


NETTLE
MOTH




LovinglyPromise

HAPPY NIGHTMARE NIGHT

Ribbons for Rarity

by Spruce

Flowers danced in the gentle winds of Fluttershy's flapping wings. The pegasus' pink tail caressed the tallest stems in the patch as she floated through the meadow. Her wide, seafoam eyes scanned the array of wildflowers before her. Fluttershy gingerly placed the worn wicker basket she held in her mouth, careful not to crush any of the flowers. "This looks like a good spot," she softly breathed. A bit louder, Fluttershy called, "You can come out now!" From the basket popped two long ears and a white face with an impatient look. Angel jerked his head to look around the meadow before hopping onto the grass. The rabbit sniffed the spring air and thumped his hind leg. Fluttershy looked down to meet Angel's petulant glare. "Oh, I know you wanted to go to the lake today, Angel, but Rarity needed more flowers for her hats." Angel rolled his eyes and crossed his arms.

Fluttershy ignored her pet's defiance and continued to survey the flowers. She inhaled deeply, her wings wafting floral scents to her nostrils. "So sweet! Rarity is going to love these." Fluttershy bent over, her mane brushing the grass, as she plucked the flowers one by one and placed them in her basket. She soon filled the basket: soft pinks and reds contrasted with sharp violet. Petals layered atop one another until not even the vibrant green stems were visible in the afternoon sun.

The thin strip of a salmon-pink flag flapped like a butterfly wing atop Carousel Boutique in the mid-morning breeze. Standing before the deep purple door, Fluttershy gave three soft knocks with her hoof. On cue, a silver-blue glow shimmered around the handle, and the door swung open. Fluttershy was surprised to see not the shop owner, but a well-groomed white Persian cat, standing behind the open doorway. Opalescence responded to Fluttershy's warm greeting and soft smile with an apathetic yawn. After a quick lick of her paw, Opal lazily retreated deeper into the shop. Following the pampered pet, Fluttershy picked up her basket of flowers and carefully trotted inside. Beyond the mulberry drapes of the showroom, a faint humming came from Rarity's workshop. Fluttershy followed her friend's delicate voice to find Rarity surrounded by various levitating tools.

Ribbon spools hovered above the seamstress' violet curls. Silver scissors dashed from one end of the worktable to the other, held firmly by Rarity's magical aura. Mannequins pushed to the edge of the workshop were robed in the newest iterations of Rarity's spring

collection. Tightly woven straw hats adorned with colorful lace and flower petals crowned the lifeless models, and draped from their flanks were linen dresses with accentuated darts at the hips. Fluttershy was peacefully admiring the collection when Rarity noticed her guest.

"Ah! Fluttershy, darling! Come in, come in!" Rarity looked over her pale red eyeglasses to greet the meek pegasus. "You brought the flowers! How marvelous!" Fluttershy seemed to shrink at Rarity's excited welcome, but relaxed as Rarity eagerly took the basket from her. The unicorn began to sift through the contents of the basket, seemingly examining each petal down to the vein. "These are simply wonderful! Where *ever* did you find them?" Rarity called over her shoulder as she sorted the flowers on a nearby table.

"Um, there's a quiet meadow not too far from my cottage. Sometimes when the weather is nice, I like to have tea there." The fabrics scattered about the room nearly suffocated Fluttershy's hushed voice. "Actually, Rarity, I was wondering if maybe you wanted to have a picnic—"

"What do you think of this piece?" Rarity pushed a mannequin toward her, cutting off Fluttershy. The tailor's measuring tape that dangled from Rarity's neck swayed as she whirled around the model. "The underpinning was quite tricky with this fabric blend. What do you think of the pleating at the loin? How about the hemline? It's not too lacey, you think?"

"Oh, well," Fluttershy let out a hesitant breath.

"Darling, you can be honest with me!"

"I think it's nice."

"Oh, you're just saying that! I must say, I am worried about fraying." Rarity rubbed her hoof against her chin in thought. Her horn twinkled as she lifted the skirt's hemline to her bespectacled stare.

"If you want the skirts to be durable, you could use ramie. You could even use an overlock stitch to—" Fluttershy was interrupted again by Rarity's fervor.

"My spools!" Rarity rigidly gasped. "I nearly forgot!" Rarity whipped her head around to stare at the clock above her workstation. Fluttershy cowered at Rarity's sudden panic, ducking her head and tucking her wings tightly behind her. "I was supposed to pick them up at the market almost an hour ago!" Rarity let out an exasperated sigh and brought her pastern to her forehead. "I ordered more '*Glory Green*,' '*Sea Mist Cyan*,' and '*Sundance Yellow*' ribbon to finish the line!

The rest of the dresses will look *dreadful* without matching accents! And nopony would dare wear these shoes if—" Rarity nearly choked.

Fluttershy's eyes darted between her frantic friend and the costumed mannequin. Her pink mane veiled her bashful expression. "Um, I should maybe let you get back to work," she started.

"Oh, Fluttershy, darling," Rarity batted her lashes as she composed herself. "Could I trouble you to go to the market for me? I just have so much to get done here before the line is ready for delivery. Hoity Toity is ever so impatient these days!"

"Well, I suppose I could, but I was hoping we could…" Fluttershy trailed off sheepishly.

"Marvelous!" Rarity clapped her hooves together and trotted across the room. "You'll be picking the ribbons up from Lily Lace. Look for the lilac tent with spools of ribbon in front of it. You simply *can't* miss it." Rarity was already back at her worktable, sorting the flowers from the basket. Fluttershy stood still in the doorway, unsure of her task. Opal emerged from behind Fluttershy and gave the pony a halfhearted nuzzle. Fluttershy looked down at the fluffy pet, searching for an answer in her lime green eyes. Opalescence answered with a squeaky meow before sauntering out of the workshop. Fluttershy recognized the cat's silent invitation and shuffled after her.

"Fluttershy, dear?" Rarity called absentmindedly.

"Yes, Rarity?"

"The ribbons are silk, not satin, so do be careful!"

Ponies milled about the unpaved plaza. The shadows of soaring pegasi scattered light across the clearing. The sounds of hoofsteps bounced off the clusters of stalls and mixed with the murmur of voices. Colts and fillies scampered around carts, weaving between the legs of their parents. Saddlebags filled with bits and wares alike bulged as customers meandered between vendors. Amidst all the bustle, Fluttershy timidly trotted through the crowd. She raised her head above the masses to scan the lanes of the market, doing her best not to stick out. She traced the lines of colored banners stretched across tentpoles for hanging shop signs. A placard for *Royal Regalia* drifted in the suffocating air adjacent to *Brightside Buttons*. Fluttershy inched closer to the garment section of the market, inspecting the wares at each table. "Excuse me—pardon me—coming through—excuse me," Fluttershy trembled. She pushed past the sea of flanks

until she happened upon a stall piled high with spools of ribbons, lace, and thread.

Behind the table of wares stood Lily Lace, draped in a sheer orchid gown. Bolts of pale gossamer fabric stacked behind Lily seemed to dwarf the already petite unicorn. She wore a content expression as she held a magazine idly with her magic aura. Lily was flipping lazily through the pages as Fluttershy stepped forward to examine the neatly stacked spools of ribbon before her. Crimsons shone in the afternoon sun while deep indigos seemed to swallow the light. Indeed, she saw Rarity's desired *Glory Green* — at least, what she *assumed* was *Glory Green*.

"Um, excuse me?" Fluttershy's soft voice could barely be heard above the chatter of vendors and customers. "I'm here to pick up an order?"

"Oh. Em. Gee!" Lily Lace nearly dropped her reading. "You, like, need to speak up. I can barely hear you, girl!" Lily straightened herself out before the shy pony. "So, like, what can I do for you?"

"I'm here to pick up an order? Ribbons for Rarity." Fluttershy shuffled her hooves as she repeated herself.

"Babe, I've heard hummingbirds louder than you. Order for who?" Lily's wide, curious expression softened any impatience in her voice.

"Rarity? From Carousel Boutique? She's working on a new collection—"

"Rarity!? I've literally waited, like, all morning for her!" Lily's horn glowed as she produced a wrapped box from behind her table. "Here are her ribbons. Tell Rarity that it's, like, super, super, duper hard to find anypony who makes the dye for *Sea Mist Cyan*. It's, like, so last season. Super vintage."

Fluttershy nodded at the unicorn's message as she swept the box into her saddlebag. She closed the butterfly latch and spoke a soft thank you to Lily.

"Don't mention it, girlfriend," Lily called back as she picked up her magazine.

It was long past noon when Fluttershy returned to Rarity's workshop. This time, the pegasus was not greeted by Rarity's uninterested pet, but by the proprietor herself. "Oh, darling, you are

an angel! I can't possibly thank you enough." Rarity's eyes shone with relief behind her glasses. Her measuring tape still draped over her neck, and she now had a pin cushion around her hoof.

"It's really no problem, but I wanted to ask you," Fluttershy stopped herself as she felt Rarity lift the wrapped box from her bag. The shimmering box floated out and above Fluttershy until it rested on the ground; silver-blue light enveloped the box as Rarity carefully opened it. The two ponies peered inside to see six thick spools of ribbon packed tightly together.

"Oh, simply beautiful!" Rarity lifted out a spool of *Sundance Yellow*. "Look at the way the grosgrain catches the light! Magnificent, is it not?" Rarity didn't wait for Fluttershy to answer. "Lily didn't give you any trouble, did she?"

"No, but she did want me to tell you—"

"Let me guess, *Sea Mist Cyan*?" Rarity raised a sharp eyebrow. "For all the trouble she goes through to get that lavender tulle, surely she understands how important it is to get the right shade." Rarity briefly examined the rest of her order. "Shimmery, but not showy," she spoke to herself as she wrapped the box again. "I must be going. I need to add the final touches tonight before delivery!"

"Tonight? Does that mean you won't have time for a tea party?" Anxiety laced Fluttershy's voice. "Do you think we could have tea some other—"

"Ta-ta, darling!" Rarity was already retreating to her workshop, her box of ribbons floating effortlessly behind her. With a firm click, the door to Carousel Boutique closed and left Rarity's friend on the porch alone.

Fluttershy tucked her wings even tighter against her flank, her pink mane nearly obscuring them as she hung her head. "That's okay. There's always next time," she whispered to herself, as she slowly ambled home.

Birds zipped around the trees surrounding Fluttershy's cottage. The setting sun cast a brilliant orange hue over the birdhouses that dotted the home. Fluttershy herself was trotting slowly along the beaten path that led to her home's perch. As she passed Angel's house, a white face peered out from under the beige siding. Angel bounded out to hop beside his owner, and indignantly, he gestured to his nonexistent watch. "Not now, Angel Bunny," Fluttershy sighed.

Angel rolled his eyes, but followed the pegasus inside her cottage. Fluttershy pushed through the rusted red door that led to her sitting room. For a moment, Fluttershy felt smaller than ever beneath her vaulted ceilings. Soon, life began to stir in the silent room as squirrels and mice eagerly greeted their friend. A soft smile broke across her muzzle. "Hello, sweeties!" Fluttershy's voice rose in excitement. "Are you hungry? I suppose it is nearly dinnertime." The critters began to clamor over one another, as if Fluttershy would ever forget to feed them. With a few gentle flaps of her wings, Fluttershy reached for the box of feed on the shelf. Her tail curled beneath her as she lifted herself off the ground.

After she fed her animal friends, Fluttershy trotted into the kitchen to feed herself: between running her errands, she had forgotten to stop for lunch. She prepared herself a leafy salad, topped with small sprinkles of petals. Fluttershy's pleasant smile dimmed as she remembered her first favor for Rarity. Fluttershy finished her meal and drank in the last of the dusk light that was draining from the kitchen windows. With a languid sigh, she decided to retire to bed early. Beneath her quilted orange-and-pink blanket, Fluttershy thought about the splendor she had observed in Rarity's workshop. She looked up at the vines that crawled along her ceiling and reflected on how intricately the lace on Rarity's dresses did the same. Fluttershy tossed onto her side. *Rarity has been so busy lately,* she thought. *I'm happy to help, but I miss spending time with her...* She began to think of all the flowers she had picked, of their soft petals and pointed leaf-tips. Soon, Fluttershy fell fast asleep.

Late morning caught Fluttershy by surprise. The chirping of birdsong flowed sweetly through the open window of Fluttershy's bedroom. Crawling from under her patterned blanket, the pegasus stretched her wings wide, the tips of her feathers shuddering with the effort. Fluttershy drifted out of her bedroom to begin her chores. As she was tending to her garden, Fluttershy saw a pony wearing a wide-brimmed hat stroll down the pathway. Instinctively, Fluttershy shrank behind an azalea.

"Fluttershy? Are you home, darling?" The refined voice pierced the air, and Fluttershy instantly recognized it as Rarity's. She eagerly trotted across the bridge spanning the small creek that protected the cottage. Forgetting herself for a moment, Fluttershy skidded to a halt and crossed her front legs.

"Good morning, Rarity," Fluttershy called courteously. "I thought you had to make your delivery today?"

"Don't be absurd, dear. I just sent it off earlier this morning!" Rarity was closer to Fluttershy now. She could see the fashionista sporting a wide floppy hat with lace accents and a bright, sunflower-yellow bow fixed precisely to the side. Complimenting Rarity's headpiece were soft-pink sunglasses with angular frames and a pink silk scarf to match. "Care to join me on a walk?" Rarity cocked her head as she asked.

Fluttershy nodded as she floated over to follow Rarity. As they walked, Rarity recounted to Fluttershy how fabulous the spring line had turned out; how the ribbons added a unique chic that elevated the pieces from traditional vintage; and how Hoity Toity had praised Rarity's genius.

"Goodness, Rarity," Fluttershy gasped, "I'm so glad you finished everything on time."

"I couldn't have done it without you, darling!" Rarity's sincerity filled Fluttershy with pride. "Oh! We're almost here!"

"Almost *where*?" Fluttershy looked around for anything familiar. She had wandered in so many meadows before, but this one was new. Just then, Fluttershy spotted a red-and-white checkered blanket neatly set in the grassy clearing. A large wicker basket sat in the middle of the blanket, encircled by small plates and teacups. As the two ponies approached, Rarity nodded toward a generously large tin. Fluttershy approached with instinctive caution. "*Madame Majesty's Golden Plum Rose Tea?*" Fluttershy's face radiated as much shock as it did excitement. "Rarity, how did you afford this?"

"The sale of my spring collection left me with more than enough bits to splurge." Rarity casually responded. "And I knew you'd appreciate it. Did you honestly think I was ignoring you when you said you wanted to have tea?"

"Oh, well..." Fluttershy looked down at the tin sheepishly. "Um, Rarity? Do you want to have a picnic?"

"I thought you'd never ask!"






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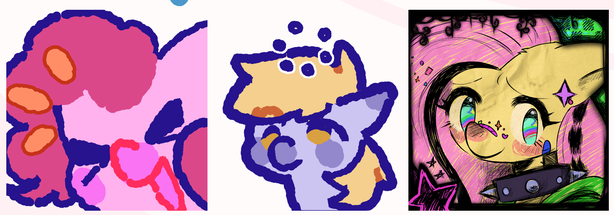

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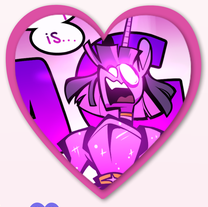

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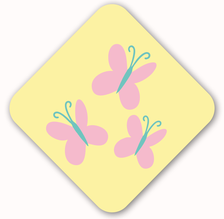

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