

It had happened unexpectedly, so much so that the lavender unicorn had quite the morning dealing with the adverse effects of mail flaming up while the delivery service slept soundly under the covers.

After dealing with the fire hazard and replacing the small dragon's blanket for the second time in a month, Twilight Sparkle had received a letter from the Princess. However, it was unlike any letter before it - the paper was tinted a pale blue, and the insignia bore the sign of the moon, which was modeled after the cutie mark of the Caretaker of the Night. The unicorn stared at the document, rolled up and placed carefully on her bed, for a solid half an hour, beads of sweat threatening to drench the poor pony as her horn refused to break the seal containing the words underneath.

What would it say? What *could* it say? Twilight had helped save the poor sister of Celestia, sure, and Equestria had welcomed the Princess with open arms. She seemed happy. She seemed fine. Surely everything would be okay.

Right?

Right. Twilight nodded in the affirmative and stood up on her four legs, approaching the document. Giving it her own version of 'The Stare', the egghead lifted the scroll up with her magic and brought it to her eyes and stared at the seal. She would read it and she would respond with haste. A letter from the Princess was important! It could be some royal duty! Celestia might be sick! Bedridden, even! Too weak to write a letter!

The immortal sun goddess. Bedridden. Shaking her head at the sheer absurdity, the unicorn dropped the paper on the edge of the bed. The paper would hold until after breakfast. She was up earlier than usual, it was just a little after dawn, it seemed. The morning dew was slight coming from the chilled air outside and the songbirds outside were slowly coming out of their slumber. Enjoying the birdsong for a moment, the unicorn made way for the kitchen, her mind musing on what she would do today.

*I promised Applejack I would help sort out some of the financial details at the farm - apparently Granny Smith miscalculated something. It doesn't need to be done now but I'm sure she'll be grateful. And Rarity needed me to model some unicorn headwear for her - that'll be important for business! Oh and Dash ...* Twilight continued her mental examination of her day's events, specifically tripping over the idea of the letter that stayed on her bed.

Heading downstairs, the mare found herself with a meal part-way through preparation, her little assistant/brother Spike surprised that she had stayed up. Twilight explained that she had things to take care of, and left it at that, instead opting to help the dragon with breakfast. The addition of the factual unicorn's help in the meal wasn't lost on it, and the amateur chefs soon produced a by-the-book recipe, fit for consumption by both pony and dragon.

The two chatted lightly over the course of their meal, Spike gearing the conversation toward Rarity more as Twilight brought up the stylish unicorn's need for a model to give her an outside view of how a horn would look with a hat. Spike attempted multiple times to steer the conversation to the letter, his interest in the blue parchment mounting, but Twilight skillfully avoided such questions, instead opting to speak more of Rarity.

She spoke of the unicorn's curls, her flawless tail, and those piercing eyes. She played the white unicorn up so much that dragon drooled over his meal. As she continued, her voice got fainter and fainter, the lavender mare walking slowly out of the room as Spike started to daydream about his lovely gem.

Exhaling softly, Twilight was glad to see Owllicious had fallen asleep on his perch. She didn't need another assistant dogging her with questions about some silly piece of paper. She'd get around to it. Eventually. There was just so much that needed doing. Her friends needed her help - the Princess would understand, of course. These were the girls who saved her from her entrapment. The Elements of Harmony. And right now, they needed her help!

Leaving the Library, Twilight Sparkle strode out into the morning light. She really did love the morning, even if she normally slept through it. The soft pale blues and the delicate touch of the dew covered grass made an early morning romp renewing and refreshing. Musing that most anypony would be asleep at this hour, Twilight trotted off toward the one home she knew would be up and working - the Apple Family out at Sweet Apple Acres.

The trot there was uneventful enough - the rolling green hills and cloudy blue sky the only company she kept for the whole trip. However, as she made her way alongside the fence, she could see some of the hardworking stallions in the field, bucking apples and checking the health of some of the trees to make sure any disease would be dealt with before it spread. She counted off some of the workers as she took a moment to watch the ponies. *Caramel... Crisp... and there's Big MacIntosh.* The large red pony could be seen further than the others, and yet still was a head over any normal colt from her distance.

Between the workers, Winona made her way through their legs, followed by an energetic and playful AppleBloom, her red bow tickling some of the undersides of the stallions as she ran underneath them, the filly intent on catching her dog. Twilight could hear the youngest in the Apple clan in her head now. *Cutie Mark Crusader Dogcatchers!* Giggling lightly to herself, the unicorn detached herself from the scene, soon moving on to the the farm proper.

Meeting up with Applejack was easy enough. As soon as Twilight made for the front door did the orange mare come out to greet her. Pleasantries were exchanged as Twilight asked about the expenses, Applejack explaining she had actually gotten the paperwork sorted the day before, and awaited the unicorn's skill of organization to find the discrepancy. The farmfilly expressed surprise toward the purple pony, having not expected Twilight to come by for at least a few more days. Twilight merely waived it off, expressing her duty to her friends. As she did,

however, a small feeling at the pit of her stomach pulled at her.

Applejack thanked her kindly for her help. Regardless, there was still a lot of work to do at the farm, and she couldn't stand around and yammer on with her friend as much as she wanted. The lavender mare understood completely, and quickly set inside, meeting with the grandmother mare as the two went to sort out the paperwork.

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It only took Twilight an hour and a half, but she had found two separate invoices from a local fertilizer establishment that claimed payment for the same cartel of supplies, and quickly set to work fixing the mistake. Checking with Applejack, the orange Earth pony suggested the likelihood that both she and Big MacIntosh had paid for it separately, and some issue at the wholesaler must of missed the part where they paid twice. Twilight mentioned she was happy enough to help, and left the Apple clan to deal with the rest, rest assured in knowing that they had quite of bit of money coming their way they hadn't accounted for. As she turned to leave, Applejack called her over real quick.

She asked about why she had come so early. The pony wasn't daft - Twilight was a night owl with a literal night owl - the morning wasn't something she was up and raring to go for. Laughing it off, the unicorn explained she had a letter from the Princess come in, and that had simply given her enough of a rush in the morning to see her up and about. Applejack questioned about the contents of the letter, but Twilight told her nothing was to be worried about. Mumbling something about the time, Celestia's pupil stated she really had to go, as she wanted to help Rarity out before the 'big noon rush', and galloped off for Ponyville, a suspicious emerald eye tracking her as she left the farm.

Coming down to a simple trot as soon as she left the eyesight of her hardworking friend, Twilight cast a nervous glance back toward the farm. She didn't *lie* to Applejack, she just didn't tell her everything. Like how the letter was still on the bed. Or how she didn't open it. She was going to. Eventually. She just had things to do. *Obligations*. She had to study the Magic of Friendship, and that meant helping them when they needed help!

Coming up on the fanciful building, Carousel Boutique looked beautiful even from it's less seen side, the unicorn walking around from the back of the circular enclosure. Rapping gently on the door, Twilight waited patiently for the other unicorn inside to let her in. However, despite some rumblings and a dark, brooding threat toward anypony who dare swing by her Boutique so early, the hip and trending unicorn's tune changed immediately upon sight of her dear friend.

Greeting the fellow unicorn with her usual stressing of words and trademark pet names, Rarity invited her friend inside, positively surprised to see Twilight in so early. She hadn't expected the unicorn's assistance for a couple *days*, at the least. Still, it may have been

because Twilight was becoming more interested in the fashion world, or that she was simply looking for something to brighten up her otherwise drab attire. Twilight would of taken offense to this, but she honestly had no clothes to wear outside of her gala dress, the younger mare simply doing away with the old dress she had initially asked to fix up. Thus, Rarity carried on about her fashions for a good hour before the two set to work with the various headdresses.

Twilight likened the experience to that of a fashion show where she was the only model. Running back and forth between hats before invariably being stopped by Rarity to add some appropriate dress to the ensemble to better 'complete' a piece. Still, it was nice to not have her horn poking at a hat from the inside, or being pushed on by some heavy brim. She mused about why horn fashion was less than it was, and Rarity let her know that such fashions wax and wane with time, and now they were making a comeback. When asked why, Rarity mentioned that the biggest news these days was the return of the sister of Celestia, who sported quite a horn, like her sister.

Twilight felt the well in her stomach widen at the mention of the Mare who once dwelled on the Moon. Rarity, privy to the smallest changes in demeanor, quickly grilled her friend for information on what was troubling her. Instead, the unicorn waived it off, relenting about keeping another one of her friends waiting should she be much longer. Somewhat satisfied with the answer, Rarity disrobed her friend and thanked Twilight for her help, citing that she had so much more to work with now.

As the unicorn left the Boutique, she couldn't help but think of the letter now. The Princess was big news, and it wasn't right to keep her waiting, that's for sure. Still, the noontide sun shone brightly overhead, and Twilight couldn't help but draw the conclusion that the Princess might be asleep now. Yes, that was simply it - no need to rush and get things done, The Princess of the Night would surely be snoozing after a long summer night.

Trotting along the summer's day, Twilight Sparkle headed off toward an open field, one where she would often see her friend Rainbow Dash practising tricks for her entrance exam into the Wonderbolts. Approaching the center of the grassy expanse, Twilight couldn't help but notice a lack of clouds, and a lack of pegasus. Frowning slightly, the unicorn hesitantly made her way out of the field, only to be staring into the rose colored eyes of the cyan mare as she turned her head.

Jumping back in surprise, the purple pony shrieked slightly as the cyan pegasus laughed her head off at her friend, claiming another successful prank on the studious unicorn. As the embarrassed filly steadied her hooves, the rainbow-maned pegasus prodded her side playfully. Twilight smiled weakly at her friend, guessing that Dash felt that she was a big enough pony to prank hard on, which she guessed was a way of showing her endearment to her friends.

The two chatted for a little while, Dash taking breaks in the conversation to take off into the sky as she showboated to Twilight her new tricks. As the unicorn continued on about any old

subject, a system of words or a phrase taken out of context would galvanize the cyan mare into action, a new trick idea buzzing in her head, that would often end in disaster or a close shave. It wasn't long at all before Twilight nervously started to hesitate speaking, for fear of coming up with some sort of string of words that might send her friend into an early grave.

Soon, however, Dash started to ask about Twilight's day, which she was more than capable in informing. She skipped the letter in her rundown, her mind taking second nature in ignoring the pastel blue document. However, Dash seemed impressed by the unicorn's work ethic, wondering aloud just what prompted the early start. Twilight laughed nervously, offering this and that and some other things as explanations. The pit in her stomach grew as she spoke to the Element of Loyalty, and the more she spoke, the more that pit tugged at her. She didn't like it.

Rainbow Dash attempted to get Twilight's attention back toward tricks, but the purple pony felt she had little more to offer her friend, citing a need to go see their friend Pinkie Pie at the bakery across town. Dash expressed her own interest in accompanying Twilight, but she refused, goading Dash's ego as she mentioned that the last trick looked really awesome, and that she should try and practise it a bit more. The pegasus took the bait, brushing her hoof on her chest with pride as she *guessed* she could give the move a couple more tries. Twilight fed the ego a little more, and soon Dash was airborne again, taking off to the skies as she went in search of a cloud to use for the trick.

Twilight sighed with relief, leaving the field in a slow walk. She really didn't have much on the agenda to meet with Pinkie Pie, but a low grumble from her stomach told her that she might as well stop by to see what there was. Plodding along through town, Twilight took in the sights around her. AppleBloom and her friends were laughing and playing, their red caps strewn about their necks as they chased a lone bunny that had happened to wander into Ponyville. AppleBloom was beating out the other girls, her days spent chasing Winona showing as she helped the girls corner the rabbit. However, it escaped, as they always do, the girls collapsing in a heap on each other. Looking about, the girls couldn't help but laugh at their folly, soon picking themselves up and taking off for something new to occupy their time. Twilight smiled at this, knowing as long as those fillies stayed together, they'd be fine.

Striding up to Sugar Cube Corner, Twilight neatly sidestepped a pink blur that came barreling out the door at the mere sight of the pink strip of mane Twilight owned. Bouncing about, Pinkie Pie showered her friend in some on-the-spot song that somehow managed to rhyme the word orange flawlessly. Pushing Twilight into the bakery proper, Pinkie hopped around the counter as she chatted amiably *at* the purple unicorn. Twilight was used to not taking part in her own conversations with Pinkie Pie, as the pink mare rarely missed a beat in which Twilight could speak. Perusing the items, it was about fifteen minutes of non-stop Pinkie speak until the filly decided she'd actually ask why her friend was in.

Her stomach growling in response, Twilight sheepishly grinned as her Earth pony friend

quickly thought about how to best solve this problem. Ending her pondering, Pinkie pushed the purple pony purposefully toward the pie parlor proper, showcasing a number of the freshly baked goods for her friend. Twilight's eyes bulged as she sniffed each pastry, her mouth closed shut as to not absentmindedly drool over the choices. She felt the pit in her stomach retract slightly at the intent to feed it, and quickly chose a pie at random, only giving it a quick sniff to make sure it wasn't anything she'd find disgusting. Rather, Twilight found it delectable, and taking a quick break from Mr. and Mrs. Cake, Pinkie joined her in consuming the pie, taking great care not to eat it all in one gigantic bite for her friend's sake.

Finishing off the round dish, Twilight rested a bit as she and Pinkie Pie spoke about any little thing. It didn't take long for her to notice that Pinkie was actually letting her get words in edgewise, and that bothered her. Bringing it up in passing, Pinkie tilted her head slightly. Putting a hoof up to her chin, the pink mare explained that something seemed to be bothering Twilight, as she wasn't smiling as much as Pinkie was used to. In an instant Twilight felt the pit in her stomach rip open, and the mare looked troubled. Not needing her trademark Pinkie Sense to catch it, the normally hyperactive pony leaned in close to her friend, asking her what was wrong.

Twilight shook her head. It wasn't anything too big. Just an early day and a lack of sleep, that was all. Her mind rolled over to the parchment on her bed. Why did she feel so guilty about it? She'd get around to it! She intended to! She *had things to do*, and the world couldn't be stopped because somepony, even if it was a Princess, had something to tell her. Pinkie didn't buy it as she eyed her lavender friend, stroking her chin thoughtfully as she did. Pressing the issue, Twilight shook her mane as she finally gave up the idea that she simply didn't want to talk about it. Under normal circumstances, most ponies would likely have pushed the envelope to help their friend, but as Pinkie raised a hoof, Mrs. Cake came outside to beckon the party pony back in, citing her help was needed in the kitchen. Despite her free-going spirit, Pinkie had a job that she was tied to, much to Twilight's reprieve. However, as she thanked Pinkie for her time, the mare caught her attention, waving her hoof at her own eyes, then Twilight's, in a very serious looking *I'm watching you* manner.

Finding herself in full gallop in an effort to put as much distance between herself and Pinkie Pie, Twilight soon found herself on the path to Fluttershy's. Finding the idea of seeing all her friends in one day to be appealing, she knew at least Fluttershy wouldn't be prying into her private life at home. Easing herself to a trot, the purple unicorn let herself think back to the letter just a little bit. Perhaps it was some sort additional lesson as deemed by the Princesses? Or perhaps it was just a thank you letter. That made sense, didn't it? To say '*Hey thanks for rescuing me from being some horrible evil tyrant made of dark magic*'. That seemed pretty likely.

Catching sight of the cottage ahead, Twilight smirked to herself as she could hear a demure voice singing to herself from within it's walls. Picking up her pace, Twilight *knew* that seeing Fluttershy was a good idea today, and quickly rapped on the pegasus' door. There was a terrified meep coming from inside, which Twilight instinctively called out to calm the pegasus. It wasn't long before the cream colored mare opened the door for her friend, slightly abashed but

all too welcoming toward her friend. The purple pony was allowed inside as Fluttershy apologized for this and that, little things Twilight couldn't help but feel would of gone completely unnoticed. Still, she smiled warmly as Fluttershy spoke openly with Twilight - she always did so with her.

Twilight sat and listened for awhile, about how Rarity was looking into fashionable pegasi wear for the wings, about how Angel Bunny had woken her up this morning with his own brand of breakfast; he had thrown a carrot at her from outside, up into her second story bedroom, and it had landed square between her eyes. Twilight giggled despite herself when Fluttershy praised the Bunny's aim. Eventually Fluttershy asked Twilight about her day, and the unicorn explained in full, how she had gotten up early, seen Applejack, helped Rarity, watched Dash, and dined with Pinkie. She went on to say that she had already seen everypony else who had asked to see her - now she wanted just to relax with one of her friends.

And so they did for a number of hours. Twilight didn't let herself be a burden to Fluttershy, and soon was helping the pegasus in her daily routine - checking on the chickens, feeding the animals, gathering the eggs and eventually was in Fluttershy's kitchen preparing tea when an odd thought struck her. Rarity lived at her business, Pinkie above Sugar Cube Corner, and Applejack lived with her family at the farm. Even Rainbow Dash lived in a cloud home that she often had to move about in part of her work as a weather pony. Twilight herself lived in a Library - and yet Fluttershy owned a cottage. Sure one could argue that her work was with the animals that lived around her, but in all realities the animals came to her. As she thought about it, the butteryellow mare stepped lightly into the room, having finished feeding the animals for the day.

Twilight brought up her findings with the pegasus, but to an unexpected result. The pink-maned filly sighed deeply as she sat down. Unsure of what she did, the unicorn asked her friend what was wrong. Fluttershy smiled, which Twilight felt a slight relief from. In her demure voice, the pegasus said that she was well aware of the other ponies marriage to their work - even Dash, and she was often envious of it.

When asked why, Fluttershy shook her mane. It was because of their positions in the Ponyville community that they saw many others during the day, and while she was a shy filly, she still loved company. She still loved her friends. Before Twilight was around, she didn't see many ponies, even Rarity was a rare visit. She was downright lonely sometimes, just outside of reach from town. Twilight made to apologize for bringing it up, but the pegasus again shook her head. She said she was happy now, that on days like this her friend would go out of her way just to see her.

The pit in her stomach became a chasm.

Twilight fidgeted hugely, shocking Fluttershy. When asked what was wrong, Twilight froze. Excusing herself, the mare said she remembered something hugely important. When

prodded gently, Twilight relented for a moment. Explaining that she had been putting something important off, she deeply thanked Fluttershy. Confused, the pegasus didn't have time to pry further - not that she likely would have - as the unicorn bolted from the cottage, her eyes focusing on the vague shapes in the distance - specifically, a tree in which she called her home.

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Blasting into her home, Twilight ran face first into the purple dragon within, who had been standing next to the door, blue scroll in hand. Spike had some great speech built up for the purple unicorn. He'd let her know about all the work he did for her as not only her assistant but as her friend. And how disappointed he was in that his friend had forgone her duty to the Princesses and had quite plainly avoided the blue parchment all day.

What a speech he had created in his hand. It's too bad after the collision with Twilight Sparkle he forgot the entire thing, feeling the blue note ripped from his grasp as the unicorn hastily broke the seal and unfurled the scroll. She had been scared - scared of what? Nightmare Moon? No, she wasn't that thing anymore. She was a Princess. She was Celestia's little sister, and she had sent her a note. And right now, she deserved more than Twilight's attention, because the unicorn was so much less right now. She was dishonest, self-absorbed, selfish, lethargic and horridly cruel to just sleight the Princess of the Moon.

Spike groaned as he looked around, wondering what happened. As he began to regain focus, his eyes were drawn to a glowing horn nearby, the form of a purple pony reading a note taking shape. Blinking away the last of his confusion, he started to say his mentor's name just before she blinked out of existence, her teleport spell leaving an inky black imprint in the space where she once stood. Shooting to his feet, he called out Twilight's name, looking about for the mare, before realizing that the blue scroll lay discarded on the floor. Stepping forward, the dragon picked up the paper, unraveling it as he gave it a look himself.

*Dear Twilig-*

This was scribbled out.

*Hello, Ms. Spar-*

More scribbles.

*Twilight Sparkle, my Sister's dear student,*

*I hope this letter finds you well. Um. Scribble. There are many things different about Equestria after a thousand years, such as astronomy and night clubs. The last bit was only mildly scribbled, as if to signify a naughty secret. One thing that always seems to hold true is how the subjects of Equestria treat a Princess, with utmost honor and borderline stinginess!*



Spike laughed despite himself, his mind trailing to the night of the Gala in particular. *But big Sister always speaks well of you bearers, the Elements of Harmony. You're so much more than a common pony - and I don't need Celly to tell me that.* Spike chuckled at such an improper way to refer to the Princess of the Sun. *But she speaks so highly of you alone, Twilight. And she says you treat her more as a teacher, or a guardian, than a Princess. Even a friend.*

So, *um*, Scribbles were a mess for the next couple lines, Spike trying to pick out words in the mess of ink, but either they were too well scratched over or were simply turned into ink blots. However, near the end, there was a single line.

*Please be my friend?*

*Warmest Regards,*

The end of the parchment only held a small scratch, written in an ancient Equestrian language that Spike could only guess was the Princess' name in the old ways. Wearing a goofy smile, the baby dragon's face soon fell as he looked at the floor below him, awash in ash marks and black powder. This was going to take a long time to clean.

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She was hurried through the halls, the important unicorn pony Twilight Sparkle, but the guard that accompanied the purple pony were hesitant when the mare asked she be taken to the *other* Princess' room. Exchanging quick glances, the guards nodded, trusting in Twilight's unusual request, and quickly diverged off the familiar path. Twilight's face was stretched in an insincere smile, a pleasantry she forced herself to use when in Canterlot. As they walked, Twilight took note of the tapestries in this part of the palace, as they depicted the phases of the moon, all of them in a brilliant midnight blue. She found them beautiful, each one adorned with a purple border befitting of the night. Not to say the unicorn wasn't partial to the color herself.

Soon she was brought before large, ornate doors, the guard standing to either side of the door. Pausing briefly, Twilight indulged herself slightly as she dismissed the stoic stallions with a please. The guard took only a moment to exchange glances, but again they adhered to the unicorn's whims. Twilight giggled to herself, the guard had often bent to her will when she was younger, but now that she was a full-grown mare and an embodiment of an Element of Harmony, she guessed correctly that Celestia had silently bid the Royal Guard to follow her orders.

The pit in her stomach was small now, Twilight realized as she placed a hoof on the door, giving it a light push. It diminished rapidly, filling the mare with a sense of purpose, and surprisingly, serenity. Stepping into the room, a pastel blue mane was tossed aside with grace, a lone pony sitting at a small, round table. Upon it sat a kettle and two cups on brilliant white plates. How long she had been there, Twilight didn't know, but she knew what was right. It was

like Fluttershy said - she had always been there, but it wasn't until she had friends did she feel happy and complete. Stepping forward, the midnight blue alicorn beamed hugely at the approaching mare, Twilight returning the smile with equal intensity. Placing herself at the table, she sat across from the Princess. The alicorn opened her mouth, but quickly closed it, unsure of what to say. Twilight, on the other hand, poured out some tea for the two, heating it lightly with her magic. She knew exactly what to say as she greeted her new friend.

**“Hello again, Luna.”**