

Sunset Looms Chapter 4

The Grey Potter

<http://www.fimfiction.net/story/6198/Sunset-Looms>

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The halls of Canterlot Castle were made to impress. To dazzle even the most jaded of pony kind. Ceilings were high and obscured by arches, with paint and cloth making the actual ceiling vanish into obscurity. Windows attempted to reach that high, and they couldn't. But it was their frequency that made the hallways long and infinite, stained glass casting a thousand colors on the white marble work. To the filly I used to be, the castle would seem massive, overwhelmingly big and detailed. Infinitely so. There was no physical way to walk from one end of the corridor to the other. It was just as feasible as trying to get to the ceiling without wings. I mean, my living room was big. Canterlot was huge. Equestria was unimaginably massive. But just walking down a typical hallway in Canterlot Castle, you'd think it was bigger than all of those combined.

I may have been a clever filly, but I wasn't above the use of silly superlatives.

I guess I'm trying to leave this impression with you, because when I walked side by side with Celestia, that huge, gigantic, and enormous place? I became right at home. I would imagine that she warped space to make everything a reasonable size. We'd reach the end of those infinite corridors in just two seconds. Of course that was just another silly filly superlative. Now I can understand that talking with Celestia is what kept me distracted from the size of the place. Back then, I had to run to keep up with her regal stride, with the magical effect of shortening the corridors. I didn't mind it much. Anything to be near my teacher, my idol, a literal god.

Now that I think about it, did she even notice how I kept falling behind her?

Maybe she wanted me to learn to keep stride, because... I don't know, some kind of weird, self-building lesson? Celestia works in mysterious ways, that's what I always told myself.

I guess they really were mysterious. No, actually, I wish they had remained that way. I got an answer, an answer that just confuses, just... What kind of answer is this?

"I love you"

Oh.

Oh dear...

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The pillow in my old room was a weird consistency, fluffier than I was used to, but it made it easier to block out the rest of the world. I was trying to vigorously scrub thought from my brain. It mostly involved trying to scrub my snout from the rest of my face. No, it doesn't really work, but I felt like I was accomplishing something.

"Spiiiiiike!" I yelled into my pillow, "What am I going to do?!"

"Um, I don't know?" he replied, words muffled beyond the fluff barrier.

"I don't know either!" I lift my head up, then slam it down again. "What is that supposed to mean?! 'I love you'? Ack! ACK, SPIKE! ACK!"

Ever the helpful assistant, Spike sat at the foot of my bed, playing with his fingers nervously. "Your friends all say they love you all the time. Maybe it was a friendly thing."

"No it wasn't..." I raised my head. "She said... she said..."

"She said...? C'mon, say it!"

"She said LOVE YOU love you!"

"Love you, love you?"

"Yes!" I moaned into my pillow and keep scrubbing. Don't want to think, please, Luna, anybody, memory charm. Memory charm this away, please.

"And um, that's.... Bad?"

I looked at Spike. Just looked at him. I thought he could read my face easily enough. He tilted his little confused head, just like a puppy. Close enough.

"Yes Spike. It's bad," I said. "Do you think I'd be, I dunno, pillow diving? Screaming and hollering? If it wasn't *that* bad?"

"Well I don't know, maybe you didn't know what to wear to your first date." I glared at him, or I hope I was glaring at him. He shrugged. "Hey, I don't understand you girls all the time. Just last week you had this same reaction to spilling ink all over some book."

"First of all, that book was a limited first edition copy signed by Sapphire Wednesdays. And second? This is worse. Much, much worse."

"Why?"

"*Why?!?*" I squeaked, "What do you mean why?!"

"It's Princess Celestia, Twilight!" Spike exclaimed. "That's like, the most powerful, intelligent, and beautiful pony in all of Equestria. And you've known her for a really, really long time! She's perfect for you!"

I sighed. A deep, long exhale, trying to calm myself down, trying not to get mad at Spike. He was only trying to help me. That's all. I fluffed my strange pillow and tried to get comfortable atop the old bed. "Have I, Spike? Have I really known Princess Celestia? If I really, really knew her that well, then why is this... this love thing coming as such a surprise to me? How long has she felt like this, and hidden it from me? I thought we were just teacher and student, learning from one another. But now..." I shook my head. "Every little thing we've ever done together, I have to think differently about it. Even when she first took me as a student, Spike. Even then, did she look at me, a filly who didn't even have a cutie mark yet, and think 'when she grows up, I want to marry her'?"

Spike was silent for a moment.

"That *is* creepy," he admitted.

"You see?"

"But, but," Spike pulled himself up on the bed. His face was compacted in confusion. "Even Celestia's feelings have to take time to develop, don't they? You've known each other for years and years. There's gotta be some time when you've noticed she changed."

"Yes, but... I'm trying to put a date on when things felt different, and it's hard. Celestia's always been Celestia. It makes me think that this is something that's been going on for a very, *very* long time."

"Oh come on, Twilight. You can't think of one significant change?"

"No," I sighed, "Not even one."

"One thing that was so *radically different?*"

"Not even... Hey, why are you grinning like that?"

"Not one thing *that completely and totally changed your life forever?*" He wagged his eyebrows like I was in on this joke.

"Spike!" I laughed, despite myself. "What in Equestria are you trying to get at?"

"C'mon, Twilight! The Summer Sun Celebration! Celestia sent you to Ponyville to make friends! You gotta admit, that was a little weird of her. *Different* weird!"

"She had a purpose, Spike. It was so I could attune to the Elements of Harmony."

"And then later, once that was all done?"

"Spike, just because my life changed didn't mean Celestia did."

"Well, no, maybe not, but didn't your relationship change? Even by the teensiest tiniest amount? You went from learning right under her to sending letters all the time. Maybe Celestia changed then, when you were so far away?" I was silent, so Spike spoke up again, "Maybe she got lonely without you around, and it made her realize just how special you are."

"Spike!" I laughed, "When did you get to be the master situation reader?"

"You wrote a letter about it once, remember?"

"Oh. Right."

"So." His smile grew wide. "Now does it seem like such a bad thing?"

"Are you playing matchmaker, Spike?" I nudged him with my hind hoof and laughed again. I was relieved, or maybe just less tense. I definitely didn't feel like scrubbing out my brain anymore. But...

I thought about this, if Celestia could have changed in such a short amount of time, looking aside and resting my head on my hoof. Maybe I was focusing too much on her outward behavior. Or maybe... Well, to me, Celestia never changed, it wasn't like her to change. Old as she was, it seemed ridiculous that anything could affect her. But if she could, and did, change, that means she was hiding this from me. For how long? And how many other things were kept a secret... besides the obvious stately matters I had no business hearing. All ponies had things they kept to themselves. But the Princess always seemed so forward and candid with me, with everyone.

And love? She hadn't had a... thing Since Blueblood, the original Blueblood over a thousand years ago. This, for me, all of a sudden, still felt, well, strange. And more importantly...

"Spike." I turned to look at him. "I don't think I love Celestia. Love her, love her, I mean. Don't give me those eyes. All this time, she's been a teacher, a mentor. I love her to bits, but, just not that way. And she just feels... I don't know, unapproachable? I still get nervous every time I see her, like I'm going to disappoint her, or not live up to her expectations."

"I'm sure you won't, Twilight! She's arranged a date with you, hasn't she?"

"Please, it's a *meeting*. A get-together. Date is a... pretty strong word."

"You're going to tour the gardens! Isn't that just sooo romantic?"

"Oh, stop it! You're making me nervous again!" I shook my head, turning away. There was a book I had, left long ago in this old bedroom. With a small levitation spell, I brought it to me, and set it gently on my pillow. "I mean... what am I supposed to say? My Big Book of Romance Etiquette isn't going to help me here."

"Why, because it doesn't cover ancient all powerful alicorn gods?"

"No. Well, yes, it doesn't cover that either." I magically flipped through the pages, reaffirming my worry, "More importantly, the book only talks about dating *colts*."

☺

Some time later, I began my walk to the Royal Gardens. Spike had insisted that I wear a fancy dress and go by carriage and bring flowers and so on and so forth. I think towards the end he was making fun of me and my nerves, trying to calm me down. In the end, I left as I usually did, without any fancy dress or

gift. Just as myself. I hoped Celestia did the same... If she turned up with flowers, well, I don't know what I'd do.

I still couldn't help but feel a bit lost. Not in Canterlot, I knew the place like the fall of my fetlock. But what do I say to the Princess? She's always been special, always there for me. A mentor. A guardian. This felt like my mom had come up to me and professed her love. It didn't sit well at all. Not at all.

But could I sum up the will to turn down the ruler of all Equestria? To deny her? What if she simply forced me to become her lover? She had the power to do that. I was certain she did.

Thinking about this, I felt like I didn't know my mentor at all. I was going to the gardens to see a very powerful stranger. I never was good at handling situations I didn't understand. At least I wasn't getting all twitchy and panicky. Just feeling a bit small. Tight. Short of breath and maybe a little queasy.

How long was this walk again? I picked up my pace, occasionally breaking into a gallop as I rushed to the Royal Gardens.

Night had fallen. Lamps all around the city, and in the garden itself, were lit up. Fairy Fire, I think. The flames were warm and yellow, contained in bulbs, and made all of Canterlot feel like it had settled down next to a comforting hearth. The entrance to the gardens was framed by a pair of these lamps, offering what light it could into the rows and lines of well maintained hedges and bushes.

Celestia was there, between the lamps of fairy light, waiting for me. She was thankfully the same as she always looked. Legs straight, head held high and tall, face gently placid. She gave me a small bow, her head bobbing gracefully, like a flower caught in the breeze.

"Good evening, Twilight Sparkle," she said as I approached.

"Uh, good evening, Princess Celestia."

"We have something very important to discuss, Twilight. Will you walk with me?"

I bowed my head. "Certainly, Princess."

We entered the garden, side by side. She didn't speak, but she didn't do anything else either. We simply walked, enjoying the scenery. Well, I enjoyed the scenery. I have no idea what was going on in the Princess' head, but sometimes, it was just best to let her think. Being trapped in my own thoughts wasn't getting me anywhere pleasant. So I observed and named plants. Dragon Lily, Warren's Running Posy, Snow-on-the-Mountain. There were many species of plants I hadn't encountered in years, all spun and shaped by the Canterlot Unicorns, maximizing each plant's natural beauty.

We had spent a few minutes in the arbortorial section of the garden, mentally checking off each species, when she spoke. If there was anything special about the spot, I could not determine what.

"Twilight Sparkle?"

I looked up to my mentor, feeling my heart clamp shut.

"Will you indulge me for a few minutes?"

I found myself smacking sideways into a tree in an automatic flight response. *Indulge?!*

"I just want to explain myself, Twilight. Do not worry."

"Oh, oh okay! I'll listen!" I laughed nervously, then laughed again when I realized I was laughing nervously. Oh dear, I am becoming a wreck.

She stopped and glanced over me. "I'm sorry, I have hurt you, haven't I?"

"Hurt me? No... no, of course not, Princess."

"That's not what you told Luna."

"Okay... okay, I admit, I was a little... a little..."

"Upset?"

“Freaked out, I think is better.” I paused, then tried to cover myself, “not that there’s anything wrong with you or—“

“Twilight, it’s alright. I want to apologize.”

“A-apologize?”

“Yes.” She settled down, began lying in the finely cut grass, “Twilight, telling you that I loved you was the most selfish and thoughtless thing I have ever done.”

I sat in front of her, a comfortable distance away. How we used to sit when we had lessons together. “Can you really say that? For how old you are, I’m sure there something else…”

“Maybe. But this was certainly my most self-absorbed time in a long time. Twilight Sparkle, did you know that I had my eye on you for a while?”

“No, Princess. Not at all.”

“Exactly.”

“For so long, day after day, nothing would happen. No, a lot would happen, all around me, but I didn’t notice it anymore. It was all white noise.”

“But then you appeared.”

“Don’t. Don’t withdraw from me. No, it wasn’t love. I don’t think it ever was love. But you were interesting, something new, and you forced me to realize something painful. I had lost connection with my pony subjects. I thought that you had the answers, because you were such a stand-out in magic. Because you could attune with the Elements. Because you were giving me friendship reports. I became obsessed with the idea of you, thinking you as the cause of all my woes, yet the savior of all my problems. I became convinced that this focus was love, and forced the idea on you in my haste.”

“But I was wrong. And it was wrong of me to throw the emotions at you, as if you would accept them, or help me with them.”

“Twilight Sparkle.” She looked directly at me, and I couldn’t help but return her gaze. “I am sorry to have hurt you. But I am having trouble understanding feelings and friendship. I was too prideful to admit it sooner, and now I’ve made a mess of things. Of myself, and of you. Will you please continue to teach me about the magic of friendship? Not as a mentor or tutor, but as my friend?”

I was glad I had always let Celestia have time to think, because I needed a moment after a story, an apology like that.

Though not too long.

I carefully nuzzled against her nose. Still not comfortable, but much more at ease. “Of course, Princess. Apology accepted. We can be friends.” I stood up, smiling reassurance, “I’ll help you the best that I can!”

“Thank you, Twilight.” She returned my smile, brighter than I had ever seen from her. “Thank you.”

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Twilight.

Maybe someday.

Maybe sometime.

I can admit to you, in security.

My feelings.

And we can reforge a relationship.

A true relationship

Before the final chapter.

Before your private sunset.

With Love,

Princess Celestia