

"What am I looking at?" Zenith asked as he stared at a miniature model of Canterlot and Ponyville. The display model was stunning in detail and the level of perfection was profound. There was a series of support towers that stretched from Ponyville to Canterlot and little gondolas hung from a silver string.

"I call it the Friendship Skyway," Limón LeChance replied in a nervous voice.

"Tell us about it, Mister LeChance." Pumpkin smiled at the nervous pegasus, trying to reassure him. "And try to relax. We're just two students, like you."

The twitchy pegasus cleared his throat. "I'm a transportation engineering student... the both of you are—"

"Students, just like you, I assure you," Zenith said as he looked Limón in the eye.

"Ah, well then." The pegasus, who was very, very yellow, took a deep breath. "I am trying to get my doctorate in transportation engineering. I've been studying the train and how it operates going between Canterlot and Ponyville. It's inefficient. I've designed a gondola lift system... travel time will take maybe an hour and it will be in continuous motion, meaning no more waiting for a train... depending on how the gondolas are hung from the cable, a new ride would be available every few minutes and ponies could get on and ride to where they need to go in a relaxing and stress free environment."

"So, everything moves on a continuous loop and new cars are always being made available." Pumpkin watched as Limón turned on the model. The gondola system powered up and the gondolas on one side of the system moved up the mountain towards Canterlot while gondolas on the other side of the system moved down towards Ponyville.

"Yes." Limón nodded. "This will be cleaner too... no coal. Just clean electricity. It will be cheaper to operate, everything about this is better than a train for the movement of passengers. We can use the trains to move goods instead."

Lowering his head, Zenith watched as the little plastic gondolas moved along the line, going from miniature tower to miniature tower. The tiny scale model terminal stations' electrical motors hummed. Puffing out his cheeks, he blew on the gondolas and watched them sway from the force of his breath.

"Wind is an issue, but I think we can deal with that," Limón said, now looking nervous again. "The gondolas are bound to have some sway in high winds, but they can be made perfectly safe."

"This is neat, isn't it Zenith?" Pumpkin slugged Zenith to get his attention.

“Now, about the electrical generation... I have some questions,” Zenith said.

Limón gulped, blinked, and bobbed his head. “I have answers... the system will be very efficient, I assure you. I have a piezoelectric system in mind—the wind, the weight of the gondolas, the movement of the system, all of that will actually generate electricity. It’ll still need access to the city grid, but the drain will be minimal. On a windy day, the system will actually provide electricity to the grid. The tugging on the cable will generate friction and the mechanical energy will be collected through piezoelectric generators.”

“That’s clever.” Zenith lifted his head away from the display.

“You know about piezoelectric systems?” Limón stared at Zenith with wide eyed disbelief. “How?”

“As Princess Celestia’s personal student, I have to deal with a lot of presentations, like this one for example, with ponies who want to spend the Crown’s money.” Zenith paused, glanced at Pumpkin, and then back at Limón. “Most of those presentations, I am forced to politely decline. But this one, this one is going to get my mark of approval.”

There was a sharp inhale from Limón. “And what does that mean exactly?”

“It means...” Zenith looked Limón in the eye. “That the project for your engineering doctorate will get some funding... but—” Zenith held up his hoof. “How much funding remains to be seen. I’d say that you have a good chance of getting up to fifty percent of your costs from the Crown.”

Limón sighed with relief.

“Princess Twilight Sparkle will not be outdone in displays of generosity by the Crown.” Pumpkin shook her head. “You have my approval as well. There may be a small percentage left over. Both Princess Celestia and Princess Twilight might leave you with five to ten percent of the costs, but not to worry. There are other means of funding available. There is Princess Luna, various businesses that like to invest, think of the last little bit as a final test. But you shouldn’t sweat it. I see this working and I know for certain that you’ll get help.”

“Oh, why thank you!” Limón smiled and his wings fluttered.

“It was a pleasure to meet with you,” Zenith said, bowing his head. “And now, if you will excuse us, we are very busy ponies.”

Limón nodded. “Of course... of course. Thank you, thank you so very much.”

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Sitting at the train station, Zenith sighed and wished that the Friendship Skyway was something that existed [i]right now.[/i] He glanced at his companion, Pumpkin, and smiled as he realised that she was staring at some colt that she didn't know. She had a hungry expression on her face, and was sucking on her lip ring, causing it to click against her teeth.

Many years ago, Zenith had come to Canterlot, arriving at this very train station, and he had been greeted by the ponies of Canterlot and Princess Celestia. It was a fond memory, one of his favourites, and he had newspaper clippings of the event in a scrapbook.

It seemed that far too much of his life was spent waiting on trains, or planning his schedule around the departure and arrival of trains. Pegasi had it easy, they could fly back and forth, to and fro at will, free to go where they pleased, when they pleased. Yet, for some reason, some pegasi took the train. Zenith didn't understand why any creature that could fly would willingly take the train.

"You know, if Donut Joe opened up a franchise right here on the train platform, he'd make a bloody fortune," Pumpkin said as she swiveled her head around to look at Zenith. "I am so [i]bored.[/i] And when I get bored, I get hungry."

"That explains the chub," Zenith replied.

Pumpkin's expression soured and she glared at Zenith, her eyes glittering with outright hostility. She gave a snort and shook her hoof at her friend. "Why, I oughta punch you in the kisser."

"I dunno... they say a filly turns out like her mother—"

"Hey! Hey! HEY! There's a line and you're crossing it, Bub!" Pumpkin leaned forwards, her hoof ready for mayhem.

"And all things considered, your mom is one fine looking mare," Zenith finished.

"Do you really think that my mom is pretty?" Pumpkin bit down on her lip, chewing, and then looked Zenith in the eye. "I worry sometimes... I mean, I love my mom. I really do love my mom... but sometimes... sometimes I worry that I'm going to get... well, you know... [i]plump.[/i]"

"Don't worry Pumpkin, you'll still have your winning personalit—OW!" Zenith rubbed his shoulder. "Hey, that really hurt, what gives?" He saw Pumpkin batting her heavily mascaraed eyelashes at him. His shoulder was [i]throbbing.[/i]

Reaching down, Pumpkin prodded her plush, somewhat plump posterior. "It scares me Zenith, it's like I can't escape it. I exercise, I really do try to be careful about what I eat, but [i]this[/i] keeps happening!" Pumpkin poked herself again, her hoof pressing in just above her nail board cutie mark. "I'm skinny everywhere else, but my butt... it keeps getting bigger. I have a booty."

"A bedonkeydonk—"

"Am I gonna have to slug you again, Bub?" Pumpkin lifted her hoof and waved it in front of Zenith's face, and she watched him go cross eyed looking at it.

"Such a charming filly." Zenith pushed Pumpkin's hoof out of his face. "Pumpkin, one day your big ass is going to make somepony happy. Why worry about it?" Amazed that he hadn't been slugged, Zenith smiled.

"It's not that big," Pumpkin said in a voice that was almost a whimper.

"Not yet—OW! Hey, that's gonna leave a bruise! I'm going to tell Twilight!" Zenith whimpered as he rubbed his sore spot. Pumpkin had slugged him in the same place as she had hit him a few minutes ago. Now, there was a heartbeat in his shoulder and his whole foreleg burned.

"Tattletale," Pumpkin said as she rolled her eyes. Her face brightened when she heard a loud whistle. "Here comes the train!"

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Upon entering Princess Buttermilk's grove, Zenith Zephyr knew that there was something wrong. The gathered colts and fillies looked solemn; scared even. They were worried to see [i]him[/i]. Many scattered. Picking up his pace, Zenith hurried forwards.

The pegasus known as Princess Buttermilk appeared, slipping out from the opening that led into the hollowed out trunk of the tree that Zenith had shaped. Zenith could see that she had been crying. Her eyes were red and the skin around her eyes was puffy. Her nose was snotty. She didn't look very much like a princess at the moment.

"I did not expect you today," Buttermilk said, staring at both Zenith and Pumpkin.

"What's going on?" Zenith asked, drawing himself up to his full height. He was no longer jovial looking or unassuming. His expression was one of command, one of authority. Without realising it, without knowing it, Zenith had slipped from being Princess Celestia's personal student to Princess Celestia's personal emissary. His ears perked forwards, his eyes narrowed,

and all around him, ponies looked at him, as if their eyes were drawn in by some invisible, irresistible force.

And Pumpkin noticed the change. She always noticed the change. Her filly bits noticed the change too, and she felt a powerful spike of arousal spiking through her loins. She swished her tail around, trying to get some cool air to move over places that had just grown far too hot and humid.

"It's under control," Buttermilk replied, her eyes darting around, unable to meet Zenith's steely gaze, and her ears pinned back against her skull. "Look, I'm very busy, if you could excuse me and come back—"

"No." Zenith took a step forwards. He saw tears welling up in Buttermilk Biscuit's eyes.

"I tried to get her to go to the hospital with me," Buttermilk said, collapsing into sobs. "But she wouldn't listen... she just won't listen and I don't know what to do!"

"Show me," Zenith demanded.

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It took a moment for Zenith's eyes to adjust to the dim light after squeezing through the opening. The inside of the tree was cosy indeed, a tight fit for all of the ponies now standing inside of it. Looking down, he saw a familiar face curled up in a bed of straw.

"Pink Lemonade, right?" Zenith kneeled down and then lay upon the floor beside the filly. He heard her whimpering. He lowered his head so he could look her in the eye, and not down upon her. Celestia had told him how important it was to sometimes get down at eye level, and it was a lesson he now took to heart. He saw her nod.

"Want to tell me what is wrong?" Zenith asked. He saw her shake her head. He took a deep breath. "I can't help you if you don't tell me what is going on."

"I don't want to get Buttermilk in trouble," Pink Lemonade replied.

"Well... how about not getting [i]me[/i] in trouble?" Zenith ears perked forwards. He saw the filly inhale and a panicked expression settled over her features. Tears streamed down her cheeks.

"I don't want you in trouble, you brought us food!" Pink Lemonade squeezed her eyes shut and then sobbed. "It hurts so much!"

"What hurts?" Zenith asked.

There was a rustle of straw as the filly's body shifted. Zenith watched as she extended her left foreleg. There was a crude bandage tied around it, a dirty piece of cloth. With a touch of his magic, the dirty rag slipped away, revealing a gash.

The laceration was somewhat scabbed over, but blood still oozed. Zenith winced from looking at it, feeling his dock clench from sympathetic pain. Turning his head, he looked at Buttermilk, and then looked at Pink Lemonade. "You really need to go to the hospital—"

"NO!" Pink Lemonade shook her head. "I don't want Buttermilk to get in trouble!"

"I've tried to talk her into going, but I don't want to force her. It feels wrong to force a pony to do something," Buttermilk said in a low voice.

"Sometimes it's necessary, you gotta make a pony do what's good for them." Pumpkin sat down beside Zenith and looked at Pink Lemonade's leg. "That looks pretty bad."

"You shouldn't have to force a pony to do anything." Zenith shook his head. "But you should inspire them to do the right thing. They need to [i]want[i] to do the right thing."

"How do I do that?" Buttermilk asked.

Shrugging, Zenith peered down at the pegasus filly's injured leg. He cringed as more blood oozed. "Pumpkin, I need you to go and get me some first aid supplies... and some superglue."

"What? Superglue?" Pumpkin blinked and her ears splayed out. "Why superglue?"

"Because, I'm going to fix this," Zenith replied as he glanced at Buttermilk. "I am hoping that by helping Buttermilk and Pink Lemonade out now, I can make them want to do the right thing in the future."

"Oh." Pumpkin shook her head. "I guess that makes sense. I'll go get some stuff." The unicorn filly rose, turned around, then shimmied out of the narrow opening, her plump, plush posterior getting stuck for a moment and then passed through with a pop.

"Buttermilk works so hard to help us... I don't want to go back... I don't want to go back... and I don't want her in trouble," Pink Lemonade said in a stammering, pleading voice.

"Hush," Zenith commanded.

"But I—"

“Hush.” Zenith raised his eyebrow and the little pink filly hushed. He booped her on the nose and then turned to look at Buttermilk. “Princess Buttermilk, you [i]owe[/i] me. One day, I’m going to call in this favour and you’re going to help me.”

The pegasus bowed her head and her ears drooped. “Okay.” Buttermilk sniffled a bit and then looked up. “Thank you.”