

Dim Bulbs

Bon Bon's yard sale was nearly sold out. Loose hangers were peeking over the edges of borrowed picnic tables, threatening to topple over. Various refuse left behind by shoppers —the chipped lid of an old sugar bowl, a browning apple core— lay abandoned and forgotten. Three stools had been left behind after Bon Bon's friends had finished chatting. One of these had been appropriated by a playful colt and left, fallen over, in the center of the stone road.

Bon Bon picked up the nearest hanger in her mouth, as well as several of its siblings. She rummaged her way around the last item in stock, a table lamp. It was still in excellent condition, but she really wanted to get a matching pair for her living room. This lamp was alone and of an unusual model; she couldn't find a match for it anywhere.

From one angle it was thin, from another it was stout with an artistically meta lamp-shaped hole in the center. It had a glassy glaze to it and whoever viewed it had to look past their own reflection to see the mottled blue underneath. The lampshade was Fluttershy yellow with holes cut into the top like swiss cheese. Bon Bon had liked the way it cast firefly-dots onto the walls and ceiling.

Lyra said it looked rather like a moldy sat-upon donut where a moth had chosen to perch. Lyra had no taste in art.

She debated over when to bring the lamp inside. If she did so now, then the sale was effectively over. This was a tempting proposition. The folk of Ponyville just went nuts over yard sales, and this one had been a doozy. Part of it had been her proximity to the main square. While she didn't live in its center, her street was well-traveled enough that she got plenty of visitors. She'd even had some repeat customers: those spending the warm Saturday outside and looking for a way to use up a few minutes between activities.

There was also something about the close-knit community of the town, something terrifying. Most of the shopping was done from a competitive side: a high stakes game of haggling, penny pinching and auctioneering. When it was against her, it always involved them whacking off a hefty percentage of the asking price. When it was between customers, she had a good chance of raking in a tidy profit, placing her in the awkward position of wishing for dissonance at every purchase. That side of her scared her, like there was a separate pony in her mind gleefully awaiting the discordance. This form of haggling was alien to her. Most visitors to her candy shop just paid the listed price.

Whatever the level of lunacy involved in bartering, it worked. She had sold almost everything, from her Rarity originals to that hideous sugar bowl and its absurd matching hat. She wasn't even sure where she had acquired the paisley 'pair'. She wondered if somewhere out there, a pony was adjusting a matching lampshade.

Somepony had offered her three bits for the borrowed display tables. In the middle of Bon Bon's breakfast, Derpy had appeared and started bidding on the twice-bitten muffin. The mailmare had been starting to shove bits into Bon Bon's face when Bon Bon shoved the pastry into her own mouth. She wished that had ended that, but the pegasus had spent twenty extra minutes sniffing for crumbs. Meanwhile, a pony had suggested a very good price for Lyra's grade school lyre, the one with the tonality like a rusted fiddle. Bon Bon's conscience had gotten the better of her. It had only been placed inside the window, and wasn't even remotely for sale. She had, however, at Lyra's request, sold a small collection of assorted kazooos. The gleam in Sweetie Belle's delighted eyes made her sure she would regret that particular decision. She already had a rusted fiddle rhapsody haunting her dreams; it didn't need kazoo accompaniment.

It had been Bon Bon's most exhausting morning in months, she was ready to quit, but she just didn't know what else to do with that lamp. Trinket had already stopped by, so she couldn't sell it to the knick-knack shop. The antique store wouldn't give it a second glance. She had no idea who to give it away to either.

Bon Bon felt the quiet simmer of the little competition left in her. She'd already gotten some rather outrageous offers on the lamp. Bon Bon decided that by this point she'd give a generous discount to anypony who asked nicely, as long as there was no more haggling.

So, convicted in her decision, and her mouth full of coat hangers, she turned away from the table...

...and promptly cried out in anguish as a stinging sensation pierced into her scalp. The coat hangers, half-dangling outside her mouth and all caught in her mane, had hooked onto the branch of a hat stand. It tore at her hair and tangled everything further.

Bon Bon panicked and flailed wildly. Dislodged hangers were hurled in all directions. Cranky Doodle Donkey had been meandering by with his signature pout when one hanger nearly smashed the lamp and hit him square in the shoulder. His startled eyes darted to the ruckus unfolding before him and he let loose great heehaws of amusement.

"Sorry, sorry!" exclaimed Bon Bon. She gave the hat stand a few good tugs and it teetered violently and collapsed onto her back. She made a "meep" sound in surprise and fell to her haunches.

Cranky's snorts turned to howls.

"Sorry. Sorry for hitting you," Bon Bon apologized again. She turned away and finally tugged her curls loose. She wiped her welling eyes dry and looked to see Cranky wiping tears of mirth from his. She took a few deep breaths to compose herself. "Uh. Can I help you?" she finally asked, not sure what else to say.

"I think you already did. I haven't laughed that well since I tried on socks!" The donkey gave one last heehaw and pranced back down the street.

Cranky's head was high and his eyes were closed. He reached the fallen stool. His thin legs slipped into the network of spindles, tripped him onto his generously-sized muzzle and sent his toupee gently floating down over his nostrils. "AAARGH! Of all the—" He sneezed.

Bon Bon, to her credit, merely smirked.

"WHAT KIND OF FOAL LEAVES A—"

"Brave Heart," answered Bon Bon simply.

"What?"

"Brave Heart was pretending to be a lion tamer. I tell you this because it was literally a foal who left that stool there."

"Oh. Whatever. Didn't mean to be ageist or anything. You ponies and your stupid terms."

Bon Bon ignored the irony of Cranky's politically correct apology. "It's alright, I should have put that stool away first."

"Guess so."

"Sorry about that too."

Cranky shrugged calmly, still in that ridiculous pose. A mother and child walked past, silently staring.

"Would you do me a favour, please?" Bon Bon asked.

"What?"

Bon Bon pointed to the hangers sticking out of her mane.

"I need a mirror and a brush. Would you mind watching this stuff for a few minutes, please?"

"K." Cranky shook the stool free, replaced the toupee with a grunt, picked his hooves delicately over to the table and slumped in front of the lamp.

* * *

Bon Bon spent a good fifteen minutes indoors thoroughly destroying her brush. When she returned, Cranky was still the only one there, having not moved an inch.

"Thanks so much."

"No trouble at all," Cranky stated, but lingered.

Bon Bon's heart leaped. He was looking at the lamp!

She tiptoed around him, tossing hangers and other items into her saddle bag and pretending that she wasn't staring.

"Soooo..." she finally ventured. "That's a neat lamp you've found there."

"Yup."

"Great condition, also earth pony —and therefore donkey— friendly!"

"That's nice."

Bon Bon leaned over and gently lifted the lamp shade. "If you look at the bulb you'll see—"

"I KNOW HOW A LAMP WORKS!"

Bon Bon flinched and the shade fell clattering to the table.

"All right," she muttered as she walked away. "You don't have to be so—"

"*CRANKY?*"

"Expressive." She smiled.

* * *

Bon Bon had cleared most of the mess away. The junk had been thrown out, the stools returned to the house, and the hangers buried deep in her closet so as to learn their lesson. Everything was tidy.

The only things left were the bit jar on the window ledge, the tables and the lamp. Cranky was still staring at it. He hadn't even replaced the shade.

"You almost done there, Cranky?"

"Soon, soon." He waved without diverting his gaze.

Bon Bon began to settle in for a long wait. Mercifully, she was relieved to see Pinkie Pie hopping over to her. Pinkie was always a good distraction. The pink pony was constantly wandering into Bon Bon's shop to trade secrets about the dessert business. Of course, they always seemed to go off on a tangent and Bon Bon would lose an hour, half a dozen peppermints and a quarter of her mind to the baker. Still, she was always glad for the visits. Every so often she needed to get away from little worries and explore Pinkie's world.

This was one of those times.

Pinkie landed from one last hop, lifted her head, opened her grinning lips and...

"How much for the lamp?"

"What?"

"WHAT!?" Cranky stomped over. "Now wait just a cotton pickin'..."

"Hey there, friend." Pinkie raised her nose. "You haven't asked her for it yet, correct?"

"Well no, but—"

"Then I asked first! I get first dibs on offering a price."

"But I was LOOKING at it!"

"Pinkie..." Bon Bon said cautiously, "you were here three times already and never showed interest before."

"Well that's 'cause I needed time to think it over."

Bon Bon thought back to Pinkie's previous visits. She had spent every one talking to various ponies. For all Bon Bon had seen, Pinkie hadn't even *looked* at the lamp.

"Pinkie, we're friends now right? Wouldn't it make you happy to see your *friend* receive something they like?" Cranky asked.

"Hey, it's just some *friendly* competition. You gotta keep your wits about ya if ya want to be a part of this town. Besides, this makes things more interesting! Interesting things are fun!"

"But what if I really wanted that lamp? I could have been getting it for Matilda!"

"But you *weren't* going to get it for Matilda, were you?"

"Well no, but—"

"So!" said Pinkie, turning back to Bon Bon. "How much for the lamp?"

"Well, I haven't decided who to sell it to yet. I should have put 'eight bits' on the sticker, though."

"Eight bits!?" shouted Pinkie. "That's robbery!" She trotted over to the lamp and peered at it critically. "I could buy this new for no more than five!"

Bon Bon and Cranky walked over to join her.

"Probably not," Bon Bon answered. "I got that hoof-made in Manehattan by a specialty designer. There isn't another like it."

Cranky whistled. It sounded something like a drowning sparrow.

"I bought it for twenty-seven bits, so eight really is a super price." Bon Bon continued.

Bon Bon revoked her earlier decision to offer a discount. This could be interesting, and interesting things were fun.

"Hmmm," mused Pinkie. "I still say I'll give you five." She looked at Cranky with challenge written in her face.

"Well...I haven't got any change on me right now..."

"Ha!" said Pinkie triumphantly. "I knew it!"

"...but if you let me trot over to my house real fast I'll give you six twenty-five."

"Six... twenty-five?" repeated Bon Bon.

"I have bits with me right now!" said Pinkie, pulling out a hoof-full of coins from nowhere. "I can pay you five bits and have that lamp out of your way without pause!"

"Pinkie!" said Bon Bon. "You have nearly twenty bits there!"

"I was, uh, going to pay rent later?" said Pinkie sheepishly.

"With fifteen bits?"

"I got a really good price?"

"With your excellent bartering skills, I'm sure," said Cranky sarcastically. He turned to Bon Bon. "Look, don't give in to this con artist. I'll pay a full six seventy-five if you let me have the lamp."

"I'll pay seven!" interjected Pinkie.

"Well, so will I!"

"I asked first! You tell him Bon Bon!"

"Uhhhhh..." Bon Bon stammered. "One moment please!"

The two customers continued bickering while Bon Bon slinked back and leaned her side against the house.

"What's going on?" asked a voice from the nether.

"Aaaaah!" Bon Bon reared up.

Twilight Sparkle trotted out from Bon Bon's blind side. "And I thought / was jumpy."

"Oh goodness! Twilight! I'm just all nerves right now. These customers are driving me bonkers!"

Twilight looked at the bonk-drivers.

"Rabbit season!" said Pinkie.

"Duck season!" came the retort.

"Rabbit season!" she argued.

"Duck season!" he insisted.

"Rabbit season!"

"Duck season!"

"Rabbit season!"

"Duck season!"

"Duck season!"

"What are we talking about?"

"I don't know but it sounds familiar." Pinkie replaced the lamp shade and furrowed her brow at it.

"Well," Twilight turned back to Bon Bon, "I can understand. Is that your last item?"

"Don't tell me you want it too!"

"Oh, no no!" Twilight blushed. "It's just that...I was trying to get some reading done..." Twilight pointed to the café next door.

"...and the noise is keeping you from concentrating," Bon Bon finished. "I apologize."

"Oh, it's not your fault."

"Well it is, currently, still *my* lamp. I'll try to get them to hush up."

"Hope it's not a bother," said Twilight, returning to the café.

"Oh, none at all. You enjoy your book, dear." Bon Bon waved until the door chimes were drowned out by Pinkie and Cranky's bickering. Then she dropped her smile, narrowed her eyes and spun around.

"Alright," she said, returning to them. "I have come to a decision."

Pinkie and Cranky fell silent.

"Whoever is willing to stop beating around the bush and pay the full eight bits can get the lamp." She was afraid they'd both jump in, but they surprised her.

"Pshaw, no way!" grunted Cranky.

"You're kidding!" Pinkie laughed. "Where's the joy in paying full price for something? There's no thrill, no accomplishment—"

"—no deal," finished Cranky.

"B-but it's an excellent deal!" said Bon Bon

"Maybe for the item *before* you priced it," mused Pinkie, "but not afterwards."

"I don't get it."

"I'll give you seven twenty-five for the lamp," said Cranky.

"SEVEN FIFTY!" cried Pinky.

"Why doesn't one of you just get a lamp from Trinket?" sighed Bon Bon.

"No!" said Pinkie. "Now it's a matter of principle!"

"You have some pretty twisted principles, girly!" Cranky retorted.

Bon Bon groaned and dropped her muzzle onto the table. Maybe it looked like a pig-nose now. She didn't know. Maybe if she got a glass table and a camera she could find out.

There were rhapsody fiddles in her head.

"Well Bon Bon's just going to have to choose who gets it," Cranky summated. "So who is it, Bon Bon? Pinkie or me?"

"Bon Bon doesn't choose favorites! And if she did, she'd choose me!"

"Oh, because you make her life so much easier!"

"At least I don't laugh at her misery!"

"How much of that did you see!?"

"The whoooooole thing, *Crashy Doodle Dangly!*"

"Now see here, *Pinkie Sly*, I'm just an honest—"

"Honest! You're trying to cheat her out of her half a bit!"

"Sooo are youuuu!"

"But at least I'm honest about it! I—"

There was a gigantic BANG! Purple and blue blurred into a whirlwind of fury.

"I. AM. TRYING. TO. STUDY!" With the great rushing tornado of an advanced student's most powerful esoteric energy, there was an adorable 'pop' noise, and suddenly there were two lamps. Then the café door slammed, the chimes dropped to the floor and the wind died.

The three yardsalers stared at the table. The two lamps finished wobbling against the wood and settled. There was bird song, there was the rustling of the leaves and there were no words. There was silence.

"I'll give you three seventy-five for these here lamps," said Cranky.

"What!" exploded Pinkie. "That's half your original offer!"

"Well, The lamp has been halved!"

"What are you talking about? The lamp has been doubled! *Doubled!* And I want them both!"

"Bon Bon, tell her that... Uh, what're you doin'?"

Bon Bon was prancing to the other side of the table, the one facing her house. She dropped the bit jar she had brought with her and smiled pleasantly to the empty space opposite her.

"Why, good afternoon! What lovely lamps you have here! Are they for sale?" She dashed under the table and popped up at the other side.

"Why yes!" she replied to the empty space she had just been occupying herself. "They're at an excellent price, but I'm afraid I haven't settled on a buyer yet." She hopped back under the table and reappeared near the bit jar. Pinkie and Cranky bent away from her.

"Oh, that's a shame!" Bon Bon continued. "You know, I've been looking for a pair of lamps for my living room! I had one before, but just couldn't find a match."

Duck. Hop.

"My, what a coincidence! Until very recently I've been looking for just the same thing! I just found some."

"I suppose what you don't want any more just became my treasure! What do you want for them?"

"I'm selling them for eight bits each."

"What a bargain! Sixteen bits it is!"

"Oh, but wait! You seem like such a delightful individual that I'll give you the second one half off."

"My, aren't you a sweetheart!"

"I know!"

"Ah ha ha!"

"Oh ho ho!"

She sighed and counted out coins from her jar. "Well, here are twelve bits."

"Wonderful! Let me go grab you a box!"

Pinkie and Cranky stood still while Bon Bon disappeared into the house and reappeared with a box perched on her back. She set the box down, placed the coins and the lamps inside it, and trotted it back to the doorway. She lifted a hoof to the doorknob and... SLAM!

"So," came Pinkie's muffled voice from outside the door. "Can I interest you in a cake for Matilda instead?"

"Aw, can it."