

My Sister Fluttershy

By brokenimage321

Art by 2snacks



“Mommy! Mommy! I’m ho-o-ome!”

I run into the kitchen and stop. Sunflower, the older girl from next door, sits at the kitchen table with a big book.

I stare at her. “Where’s Mommy?” I ask.

She turns a page. “Your Mom’s at the hospital, having the baby.”

My eyes get real big. “She’s having the baby? *Today?*”

She sighs. “That’s what I said.”

“*Mommy’s having the baby!*” I scream. I run over to Sunflower and look up at her. “Did you tell Skittle already?”

“Yes, I told your sister,” she sighs again. She turns another page. “Now, pipe down and go play in the living room where I can see you.”

I skip back to my room. “Mom-my’s having the baby, Mom-my’s having the ba-by,” I sing to myself. I put my saddlebags on my bed, then grab some crayons and paper and skip back to the living room, still humming. Skittle’s already sitting on the floor and playing with her dolly, talking to it like she’s its real mommy. “Hi, Skittle,” I say. “What’d you do in kindergarten today?” She just shrugs and keeps talking.

I lay down on the floor next to her and put down a piece of paper. I want to draw a picture of our family for the new baby, starting with me. I open up my crayon box and pull out a pretty yellow crayon. I draw my body first, with *one two three four* legs, and two pretty little wings. I pull out a pink one and draw my mane, nice and bouncy, then I get an orange one and draw my eyes. When I’m done, I lean back and look at it. It looks like me, kinda. Not as good as I wanted.

After I finish drawing me, I look up at Skittle. She’s still holding the doll in her arms and making baby noises. *Everybody* says we look just like each other, but I don’t think we do. I use the same yellow crayon for her coat, and the same pink one for her mane. I have to dig in the box for another crayon for her eyes. I pick one called “Aquamarine.”

Now that I’ve done *her*, I go back into the box for Mommy and Daddy. Mommy gets “Creamsicle Orange” for her coat, and “Periwinkle Blue” for her mane. I try to draw

it long and curly, but it doesn't turn out very good. Daddy is easy: "Powder Blue" for his coat, and "Lemon Meringue" for his short, wavy mane.

When I'm done, I look at the picture and gasp. *I forgot Mommy' and Daddy's cutie marks!* I grab the black crayon.

Daddy's is easy. It's a big square with a bunch of little squares inside. He says it's a checkered flag, like they use in racing.

Mommy's is harder. First I draw a funny oval, then two long ovals coming off of that, and then two little dots. When I'm done, I lean back and look at it, trying to figure out what it is. Mommy says it's a "bunny," but I've never seen one in real life before, so I don't know for sure.

I'm almost done. I sign my name at the bottom in big letters, just like Mrs. Cirrus said.

"APRIL SHOWERS, AGE 6"

I look at the picture and smile. "Hey, Skittle, look," I say, holding it up. She looks at it for just a second, then goes back to playing with her doll. I make a face. I worked *hard* on that drawing. She should at least say it's *nice*.

I lean over and hit her on the arm. "Ow," she says, and rubs it.

"What are you doing?" I ask.

She picks up her doll. "This is the baby. If she's a girl, she's Angel Bunny, an' if he's a boy, he's Scratch Racer."

I make another face. "You can't use those names—those are Mommy's and Daddy's names!"

She sticks out her tongue. "Meanie face."

I growl. "Oh yeah? Well, you're a *dumb* meanie—"

"*Girls.*" Sunflower's looking up at us over the top of her book. "Knock it off," she says, looking back down.

I stick my tongue out at her. I don't like it when she babysits.

We play for a long time. I get bored of drawing and go get my picture book about the weather. I'm trying to sound out the word *cue-mue-low-nim-bus* when I hear the

front door open. I look up and squeal. *Daddy's home!*

I run into the front hall. Daddy is hanging up his hard hat and factory uniform on the coat rack. I give him a big hug. He leans down and kisses me on the head. "How was school today, April?"

" 'S fine," I say into his shoulder.

Skittle comes running, and Daddy picks her up in a big hug. He kisses her too. He puts her down and sits on the floor with a sigh. Daddy always looks tired, but today he looks *really* tired. He's smiling though.

"So," he says, "Mommy had the baby, and they're both doing fine." He smiles a little bigger. "And, she's a little filly."

I squeal again. "I'm a *big sister?*" I ask.

He nods and ruffles my mane. "Yeah, you're a big sister again. You too, Skittle," he says, looking at her, "you're not the baby of the family anymore!"

She pouts just a little. Daddy laughs, and stands up with a groan. "Alright, you want to go see them?"

"*Yeah!*" Skittle and I both shout.

Daddy smiles. "Alright, let's get some dinner in you first."

Daddy gives Sunflower a few bits, then makes us some macaroni and cheese. After we eat, I help Daddy find his camera and we walk to the hospital.

When we get there, I sound out the sign: *Clouds-dale Gen-er-al*. We get inside, and a nurse takes us up to Mommy's room. She's lying in bed, looking tired but happy. She's holding something in her arms. Daddy pushes me forward, and I see *her*.

She's so tiny, even smaller than Skittle's dolly, but she's *so pretty*. Her coat is all yellow, and her eyes are shut tight. As I watch, she yawns. "What's her name?" I whisper.

"Fluttershy," Mommy says.

I don't know why, but I know it almost before she says it. I sigh. *My sister Fluttershy*. I'm so happy, I feel like someone has wrapped me in a great big blanket and kissed me goodnight.

I take another look, and I see a little poof of pink mane. I squeal.

Mommy and Daddy look at me funny. "She has Gran'ma's mane!" I say.

Mommy smiles and nods. "Mm-hm," she says, "just like you and Skittle!"

Daddy gets a nurse to take a picture of us all gathered around Mommy's bed.

After she takes the picture, I ask Daddy when we can put it in our album with all our *really important* pictures. He smiles. "It takes about a week to get the film developed," he says, "but we'll put it in there as soon as we can."

He looks up at the clock and frowns. "Alright girls, it's getting late. Kiss Mommy goodnight, and let's go."

I give Mommy a kiss, and I sneak a peek into the blanket. Fluttershy yawns again.

I lean in closer. "Hi Fluttershy," I whisper. "My name's April. I'm your big sister."

Right then, Fluttershy opens her eyes. They're big and warm and green. She looks confused for a minute, then she sees me.

And she smiles.

I feel like I'm glowing inside all the way home.

* * *

“Come *on*, April, stop fighting me!”

Mommy is trying to get me into a stupid pink dress. I don't want to wear it, and I don't want to wear the stupid pink hairbow either. I don't even *want* to go to the Merriweather Family Reunion.

“But *Mom...*” I whine.

“No *buts*. You know Daddy has been looking forward to this for a long time.”

She pulls the dress over my head. Another few minutes, and she gets my arms through the sleeves and gets the back zipped up. She sits me down and starts brushing my mane. I look in the mirror and put on the ugliest face I can.

Mommy sees me and frowns. “April, you *know* how important this is to Daddy. He has lots of cousins he never gets to see, and it's not fair of you to put up such a fight about this.” She brushes my mane for another minute, then she smiles. “You know the story about Grandma Merriweather, right?”

“Yes, Mommy,” I say. Daddy tells us that stupid story every time we go to these stupid reunions.

Daddy says his great-grandma was named Merriweather. Merriweather was really nice to everyone, especially to all the kids in the neighborhood. Her husband worked for the city, and she made him do things to help everyone out, like put up streetlights and build parks and stuff. Everybody loved her, and, when she got older, everyone started calling her Grandma, even ponies she wasn't related to.

He also says Grandma also had a ton of kids. She had a yellow coat and a pink mane, and, for some reason, a bunch of her kids got it too. We call it “The Merriweather Mane,” and we can pick out members of our family from all over. Daddy didn't get it, but all three of us girls did.

Grandma loved everyone in her family, but, as the kids got older and moved out, she couldn't see them all the time. She started having a Merriweather Family Reunion each year, just so she could see everybody. Although Grandma isn't around anymore, they still have reunions every single year. We go a lot, but not *every* year. Dad doesn't get much time off from the Weather Factory.

Finally, Mommy stops brushing my mane. She puts the brush down and looks at me close. “We-e-ell,” she says slowly, “I think that’s about all I can do for now.” She looks at me funny. “I don’t suppose I can get you to wear that bow in your mane?” I shake my head and smile. *I win.*

She rolls her eyes. “Alright, April, let’s go.” She lifts me off the chair and sets me on the ground.

I have a thought. “Mommy?” I ask, looking up at her, “Why don’t we ever see *your* family?”

Mommy looks at me funny. She opens her mouth, but it takes her a minute to say anything.

“I...I don’t *have* a family, April. I’m an only child, and my mommy and daddy are...”

She makes a funny noise, shakes her head, and walks out of the room. I trot after her. “Your mommy and daddy are *what*, Mommy?” I ask.

Daddy pokes his head out of the kitchen. “April, stop pestering your mother.”

I pout. “But, *Daddy*...”

Daddy gives me *that look*, and I stop.

Mommy sees Skittle in the living room and nods her head towards our bedroom. “Come on, Skittle, your turn,” she says. Her voice sounds a little funny. Skittle doesn’t notice, though, and skips back to our room.

I walk into the kitchen. Daddy is wrapping up a plate of cookies for us to share. He sees me walk in with the frown on my face, and he sighs. “Cheer up, April,” he says. “It’s just for a few hours.” I frown even harder, and he laughs.

Daddy finishes wrapping the cookies and puts them in his saddlebags. He looks over at me. “Hey April, can you do me a favor?” he asks. I shrug.

He reaches out and touches me on my shoulder, and I look up. “April,” he says, “you’re a big girl now, and that means you’re ready for a very special job. There’s going to be a lot of ponies at this reunion, and it’s going to be easy for Skittle or Fluttershy to get lost. Could you do me a favor and keep an eye on your sisters? Make sure they’re

safe, and they're having fun?"

"But Fluttershy can't even walk very good, and Skittle likes to stay with Mommy all the time," I say. "Can't *she* keep an eye on them today?"

"I'm not just talking about today," he sighs. "Fluttershy and Skittle are going to grow up real soon, and they're going to need a big sister even more than they do now." I look at my hooves. "April, can you do that job for me? Keep an eye on them?" he asks. After a minute, I nod, and he pats me on the shoulder.

Right then, Skittle walks into the kitchen, wearing a dress and a hairbow. I make a face. Mommy doesn't *have* to fight Skittle to put on a dress. Skittle actually *likes* wearing dresses. *Weirdo*.

Mommy comes in right behind Skittle, carrying Fluttershy in a little blanket she's holding in her mouth. "Are we ready to go?" she asks through the blanket.

Daddy smiles and helps put Fluttershy in Mommy's baby carrier, then he puts on his saddlebags and opens the front door. Mommy goes out first, then Skittle and me, and Daddy last. He locks the door, then follows us down the walk.

The park we're going to is all the way on the other side of Cloudsdale, so we have a long way to go. I don't mind, though. I like looking out over the edge. You can see the whole world from up here!

I sigh. The ground below is so pretty and green.

"Mommy? Can we visit the ground sometime?" I ask.

Daddy answers. "I don't think so, April. Mommy doesn't like the ground."

I look over the edge again. *But it's so pretty, though*.

We come up over a little rise, and we see the park. It's full of all kinds of pegasi, most of them yellow and pink. It looks like there's games and food and everyone's laughing and having fun.

I suddenly remember that I'm *not* going to have a good time. I put on my ugly face again.

As soon as we get in the park, a bunch of other mommies come up and surround Mommy. They all start talking about how cute Fluttershy is and making baby noises. I try

to hide behind Mommy, but Daddy notices me. “April, why don’t you go play with the other fillies?” he asks.

I look around and see a group of fillies playing with a beach ball. They’re trying to not let it fall. And *none* of them are wearing dresses. I crinkle my nose at them.

Right then, an old mare comes up to me and grabs my face in both hooves. “Oh, Angel, is this your oldest?” she says in a baby voice as she squeezes me. She smells like cats. I wiggle out of her grasp and go looking for something not-fun to do.

After wandering through the crowd for a while, I see a bunch of ponies gathered around some tables. The tables are covered in food, and have long white cloths on them. Daddy’s standing next to our plate of cookies, talking to another pegasus and laughing. I worm my way through the crowd and manage to grab a cookie. I start eating it slowly while looking around the park. There are ponies *everywhere*—where am I supposed to go if I don’t want to have fun?

Suddenly, I have an idea. I lift up the tablecloth and sneak underneath. It’s dark under here, but I can be alone and not-have-fun all by myself and not be bothered by any cat-ladies. I start munching on my cookie again.

Right before I finish, someone else lifts up the tablecloth. I look up, and see two big colts sneak under the table. They’re holding a big pile of treats, and are laughing under their breaths. They don’t see me. I’m okay with that.

They start eating their treats, chewing with their mouths open and making fun of the other ponies. I try not to listen. After a while though, I hear one of them say, “Hey, did you see that pony with the dopey baby?”

“What did they call her? Flappershy?”

I stand up. ***What did they say?***

“What kinda name is that? Flappershy? Who names a foal *that?*”

“Yeah, and she’s ugly, too—even for a baby!”

They start laughing. I can’t take it anymore.

“***Hey!***” I yell at them. They both turn and look. One has a dumb look on his face and has crumbs falling out of his mouth. The other looks mad.

I suddenly remember something *else* Daddy says about Grandma Merriweather. He says Grandma was nice most of the time, but if you tried to hurt someone she cared about, she'd get mad—*real* mad—and she'd make you *sorry*. Daddy said that sometimes the Merriweather mares get real angry, too, just like Grandma. He said that wasn't nice, and, whenever I feel like that, I should put on a big smile and try to solve my problems with *nice* words.

I smile real big. "Fluttershy is my sister. Could you please not say those things about her?"

The bigger one gulps down his cupcake. "Flappershy is *your* sister? You should ask for a new one!" The little one laughs.

I smile even bigger. "That's not nice to say. Can you please stop?"

The bigger one is laughing now, too. The little one pipes up. "Flappershy? What kinda name is that? Oh, I know! Maybe it's *Fartershy*!" The big one laughs even harder.

I smile as *big* as I can. "That's mean. Please don't say that."

Now they're laughing so hard they're crying. The big one says, "Hey, how about this—when she tries to fly, she'll fall straight to the ground! Then she'll be *Splattershy*!"

Daddy has to come pull me off them. I'm still swinging my hooves and yelling bad words as he drags me away. The little one has cupcake smashed all over this face and the big one is crying for his mommy.

Daddy goes and finds Mommy and Skittle, and we go straight home. Daddy takes me into the bathroom and starts cleaning me up. He's making an angry face. When we're done, he takes off the dress and looks at it. He makes a noise.

"April, *look* at this dress! You ruined it!" He sighs and looks at me. "Go to your room and think about what you've done. Mommy or I will be there in a minute."

I go to my room and lay on my bed. Normally, I'd be scared right now, but for some reason, I feel happy. It takes me a minute to figure out why.

Daddy told me today that it was my job to take care of Skittle and Fluttershy. I'm their big sister, and I need to make sure they're happy and safe.

I'm happy because I did my job, and I did it *right*. I stood up for my little sister

when she couldn't do it herself.

Suddenly, I smile. I stood up for my sister, I beat up two colts twice my size, I got to leave the reunion early, and I won't have to wear that stupid dress ever again?

I win.

* * *

“April! *April!* Over here!”

I look into the crowd of mommies and daddies standing on the sidewalk, waiting for their foals to get out of school. I see Mommy waving at me. I skip up next to her, beaming. “Hi, Mommy! Hi, Fluttershy!”

“Ape,” Fluttershy chirps. I give her a look.

“Fluttershy, it’s not ‘Ape,’ it’s ‘April.’”

“Ape,” she repeats, smiling.

I groan and look at Mommy. Mommy smiles back.

“Just give her time,” she says. “She’ll get it eventually.” She leans over and gives Fluttershy a kiss. Fluttershy giggles.

I giggle too. I can’t help it. She’s just so *cute*.

Mommy looks up and waves again. “Skittle! Skittle! We’re over here!”

In a moment, Skittle pushes her way through the crowd, and we all start walking home together. After a minute, Mommy looks over her shoulder at me and asks, “So, April, how was third grade today?”

I gasp. “*Oh!* I almost forgot!”

Mommy stops and looks at me funny. I just smile real big.

“Today, we had a pony from the Weather Patrol come and talk to us,” I say. “It was so *cool!* His name was Thunder Crash, and he works with storms and thunderclouds! He told us about how they’d push the clouds around, and get them just right, and then they make it start raining—and it sounded so *fun!*”

I run around Mommy and make *swooshing* noises, pretending I’m Mr. Crash. Mommy laughs, but Fluttershy presses up against her, looking at me with big eyes. As soon as I see her do that, I stop. “Sorry, Fluttershy,” I whisper awkwardly. She just smiles.

Mommy starts walking again and I trot up alongside her. “Daddy talks about weather all the time,” she says. “What made you so excited about Thunder Crash?”

I groan. “Mommy, Daddy works at the *Weather Factory*. All he does is work a machine all day, and it sounds so *boring.*” I look at the ground. “Sleet isn’t even *cool*

weather.” Mommy smiles a weird little smile, then looks straight ahead again.

After a moment, I sigh. I *hate* the Factory. Daddy talks all the time about how dangerous it is, with all the big machines and everything. And he always comes home so late he never has time to play with us. Even on his days off, he’s so tired we don’t do a whole lot. Even though he lives with us and I see him all the time, it’s like he’s not even here.

I sigh. I miss him.

When we get home, Mommy tells us to put our things inside, then we can come outside to play. I run inside and put my saddlebags on my bed. I turn them a little bit so I can see my Flight Camp patch better. I sewed it on myself right after I got home from graduation this past summer. As I look at it, I puff out my chest—I know how to fly, and I have the badge to prove it! I dust it off (even though it doesn’t *need* dusting), then I turn and skip outside.

Once I get outside, I stand on the porch and look around the yard. Mommy is over talking to Sunflower’s mommy about something, and Skittle is sitting on the clouds, watching the other pegasi flying overhead. Fluttershy is off to one side of the yard, playing around with the clouds. I watch her for a minute, and make sure she’s not going to go wandering near the edge—it *is* my job to keep her safe, after all. Our house is right on the edge of Cloudsdale, and if she falls off, she might get really hurt.

After a while, I decide Fluttershy’s not going anywhere, and I look away. I see Skittle still staring up at the sky, and I get a mean smile on my face. I spread my wings and run towards her. “I’m Thunder Crash, and I’m gonna *get* you, raincloud!” I yell. She looks over her shoulder, sees me running towards her, and yelps. She gets up and starts running away. I make big scary noises, and she starts screaming “*Mom-eee!*”

Mommy turns and looks at us. She frowns. “April, knock it off.”

I skid to a stop, then go stand on the porch and pout. Fluttershy is still playing quietly—it looks like she’s using little tufts of cloud to make a cloud-castle...

Suddenly, I have an idea. I check to see if Mommy’s looking (she’s not), then I sneak over to the edge of our yard, right next to the drop-off. I grab onto the edge and

pull—and a little piece of cloud comes off. It's not very big, but it's just big enough that I can push it around with both hooves.

I grab it, spread my wings, and take off. I fly around the yard, making *wooshing* noises again. "Hey, wait up!" Skittle shouts. She flaps her wings for a bit, and, with a little effort, she takes off too. Once she gets in the air, she tries to chase me, but I'm faster.

I laugh as I fly higher and higher, pushing the cloud the whole time. I fly so high I can see our entire neighborhood, all the houses small and packed together like building blocks. This is where the Factory workers live, out on the edge of Cloudsdale. The houses are nicer in other parts of the city, where the ponies have more money, but I like this neighborhood. It's *my* neighborhood.

Suddenly, I hear Mommy scream. I look down, and I see Fluttershy standing at the edge of the yard, looking at the ground far below. Mommy runs over and yanks Fluttershy back by her tail. Fluttershy squeaks in surprise. Mommy spins Fluttershy around and starts yelling at her. I blink. Mommy hasn't yelled at us in a long time—maybe not *ever*.

I turn and look at Skittle. She's hovering in the air, looking at me with big eyes. We can both hear Mommy. She doesn't sound mad. She sounds *scared*.

I push the cloud lower and we both listen.

"Fluttershy, don't you *ever* do that again! You can't fly, and if you fall down, we might never find you! Do you know how *dangerous* it is down there? Don't you remember what happened to your Grandpa Snowdrift?"

Skittle and I look at each other again. We've never even *heard* of Grandpa Snowdrift before. I kinda want Mommy to keep talking, but Fluttershy starts to cry. Mommy sits down, then reaches out and grabs Fluttershy in a tight hug. After a minute, she starts rocking back and forth. Skittle and I watch for a while, but Mommy just keeps rocking. Eventually, I fly away to put my little cloud back where I found it, then I tiptoe up on the porch where Skittle's standing. We both watch Mommy for a while. I can still hear someone crying. I can't tell if it's Fluttershy or Mommy.

After a while, we go inside and play quietly. Mommy comes in a little later, her eyes red and puffy, with Fluttershy right behind her. She doesn't say anything.

We play until dinnertime, and after dinner Skittle and I do our homework. When Daddy comes home, he kisses us goodnight, ruffles our manes, and goes into the kitchen to get his dinner out of the fridge. Mommy puts the three of us to bed. She kisses us goodnight, then turns out the light.

I lie awake until I hear Fluttershy start breathing heavy. I sit up and double-check her eyes are closed, then I lean over and poke Skittle. "Hey, Skits."

She opens up one eye and looks blearily up at me. "Wha-a-a-at?" she moans.

"Wanna play Weather Patrol?" I ask.

She opens her other eye and sits up. I tell her my plan.

Ten minutes later, we're pressed up against a shed just outside the Weather Factory fence. "What are we doing here again?" Skittle asks.

"*Shh!*" I turn and look around the corner. "Don't talk so loud. We don't want any guards to hear us."

"Sorry," she whispers. I glance around again. "So, *what* are we doing?" she whispers.

I roll my eyes and whisper back, "Do you remember what Daddy told us that one time about the Cloud Division?"

"No."

"He said that sometimes little clouds get stuck as they come out of the Condenser on the roof," I whisper, "and they'll pick up little bits of all the other clouds that come out. The longer they stay there, the more clouds they pick up, until they become thick black rainclouds. Someone has to go and clean them out every so often, otherwise it starts raining inside the Factory." I turn and look at her. "Don't you remember that?"

She shakes her head, and I roll my eyes. I peek out from behind the shed again. The coast is clear. I spread my wings, and—

"If those clouds are just gonna get thrown away, why are we sneaking in?" I

groan and turn around. Skittle looks at me with her big, innocent eyes.

“*Because,*” I hiss, “we don’t want to get in trouble.” I peek around the corner again.

“I don’t get it,” she says uncertainly.

I grit my teeth. “Just... stay here, okay?” I say to her.

I can’t see any guards. I decide to go for it. I fly over the fence, then dash from shadow to shadow. At every stop I listen as hard as I can for hoofsteps, but I never hear any. Finally, I make it to the Cloud Division. It’s a big, round building, with a curved roof, and a giant machine on top. I’m guessing that’s the Condenser that Daddy was talking about.

I fly up and land on the roof. As soon as I touch down, I slip and land on my side. I look down and make a face. It looks like it’s been a while since someone washed the roof—it’s kinda dirty up here.

I stand up and trot over to the mouth of the Condenser. Just like Daddy said, there’s a little cloud stuck on the rim. It’s tiny—not much bigger than the one I was playing with earlier—but it’s so dark it’s almost black.

I manage to pull it off, and fly back to the shed where Skittle is hiding. As soon as I fly into view, Skittle’s eyes get real big.

“April...” she says, surprised. I smile real big and puff out my chest. “...um... you got *dirty.*”

I groan. *There goes my moment.* Irritated, I turn around and look at my flank—there’s a big patch of mud all down my side. I sigh. “Come on, Skittle, let’s get out of here.”

She flies up next to me. “What are you gonna do with that cloud?” she asks.

I open my mouth to answer, but nothing comes out. I have *no idea* what we’re going to do with it. I turn around and start flying away, but I don’t get far before I stop. I turn around and smile. “We’re gonna water Sunflower’s plants,” I say.

Sunflower grows wildflowers. Everypony said she wouldn’t be able to, but she somehow figured it out. She keeps them in little clay pots in her front yard. I figure they

could use the extra rain. It's not the best idea, but it's better than nothing.

The cloud is too little for both of us to push it, so I end up pushing it all the way home by myself. It's harder than I thought it would be—before we're even halfway there, I'm gasping for breath.

Finally, we make it back. There's Sunflower's pots, all lined up alongside her front step, filled with bright flowers. I push the cloud over, above the pots, and stare at it. I suddenly realize something: *I have no idea how to make it rain.*

I turn to look at Skittle. She's just hovering there and watching me. I turn back and make a big show of adjusting the cloud *just right*. I stare at it, trying to figure out what to do next. I try shaking it, but that doesn't do anything; I try to jump on it, but the cloud's so tiny I almost fall off just trying to stand on it.

Then, I do something I shouldn't. It's past my bedtime, so I'm starting to feel sleepy, and I'm tired from pushing the cloud all that way. And, I'm a little upset because I don't want to look like an idiot in front of Skittle. I'm frustrated, too, because after all we've done, *nothing's working*. So, I let out a little yell, spin around, and kick the cloud.

That does it. It's just a tiny cloud, but it starts raining hard all over those little flowers. They suddenly look brighter, *happier*, somehow, like they're standing up just a little straighter.

I smile—I made this happen. *I made those flowers happy.*

I sigh. *Mr. Crash was right—this is the greatest job ever.*

After the cloud runs out, I push it away, then Skittle and I sneak back through our window. Skittle flops right back into bed, but I slowly open our door and peek out. Mommy and Daddy are sitting at the kitchen table talking. I stifle a yawn, then sneak into the bathroom.

I close the door and turn on the light. I stare, wide-eyed, into the mirror. That roof must have been dirtier than I thought. I'm *filthy*. I gotta clean myself up before I get into bed, or Mom and Dad'll know we snuck out *for sure*.

I quietly get a washcloth out from under the sink and get it wet. I don't want Mommy and Daddy to hear me, after all. I start trying to clean up my flank, but it's hard;

I have to scrub *really* hard before I can even see the littlest bit of purple—

Wait. *Purple?* I scrub harder. After a minute, I see three little purple umbrellas on my flank. I stare at them with my mouth open. Is that...

"My cutie mark!" I scream.

A second later, Mommy bursts into the tiny bathroom, with Daddy right behind her in the hall. "April? What happened?" Mommy asks, worried. She looks at me closer. "...why are you so dirty?"

I try to tell her, but I'm so excited I talk too fast and Mommy can't understand me. Mommy asks me to say it slower, but I can't. Skittle finally stumbles in, rubbing her eyes, and Mommy asks her if *she* knows what happened. Skittle tells her about how we snuck out to the Weather Factory, and how we got the cloud and watered the flowers and everything. When she's done, Daddy looks at me over the top of Mommy's head. "Young lady, you're in *big* trouble. Haven't I told you how dangerous the Factory is?"

I feel my eyes start to fill with tears. "B-but..." I say, turning to the side and gesturing feebly at my cutie mark.

For a moment, everyone is silent. Then, Mommy screams.

"April! You got your cutie mark!"

I smile real big. "That's what I've been trying to *tell* you!"

Daddy smiles. "April, come out here where I can give you a hug!" he says. I wrap my arms around him, and he hugs me close. "You're still in trouble, missy," he whispers in my ear, then kisses me on the cheek.

Daddy has us all line up in the living room so he can get a picture. I turn sideways so he can get a good view of my cutie mark. After that, Mommy has me take a shower to get all cleaned up, then I go straight to bed.

I lie awake for a long time. I pat my flank, trying to feel my cutie mark, but I can't find it. My fur all feels the same.

I snuggle down deeper under my covers.

I got my cutie mark for making it rain.

I sigh.

I'm gonna be in the Weather Patrol when I grow up!

* * *

“So, April: *how* old are you again?”

Mom looks at me over the top of her glasses. She’s smiling.

I roll my eyes and smile back. “Thirteen, Mom.”

“Thir-teen,” she says slowly, filling in the blank.

We’re sitting at our old kitchen table, working on my Weather Patrol application. The sky outside is dark, and the house is all quiet except for the two of us at the table. I smile as I watch Mom fill in the blank for our address. I’m really glad she’s helping me this time around.

You can apply to get into the Weather Patrol when you turn twelve. They don’t have you do a whole lot at that age—mostly just studying weather maps and such—but it’s a start. Right after my birthday party last year, I sat down and filled out the application all by myself. I still remember feeling just like Thunder Crash as I handed it to the mailpony.

A few weeks later, I came home from school to find an envelope on the kitchen table. It had the Cloudsdale Weather Patrol logo on the front. When I saw my name on it, I screamed. With Mom, Skittle, and Fluttershy gathered around, I opened it up and started reading. As soon as I read the words “Dear Weather Patrol Applicant,” my heart sank. Mommy gave me a hug and said it was alright—I just needed to try again.

You can only apply three times, so, this year, I’m having Mom help me out. I think her handwriting might make a difference.

As Mom writes, I gaze around the room. I smile as I see Fluttershy’s saddlebags on the coat hook. She’s in first grade this year, and, although she hates doing the homework (I think it freaks her out that the teacher has to judge her work) I think she enjoys it. As goofy as it sounds, seeing that sly little smile when she doesn’t think anyone’s looking makes me glow inside.

I take another look at Mom. She has all my personal information down, and is reading the instructions for the next section. I swallow. *Maybe now’s the time.*

For the past few months, I’ve been trying to work up the courage to talk to Mom about Grandpa Snowdrift. The only time she’s ever mentioned him was that one time

with Fluttershy, and I've been curious about him ever since.

I'm scared to bring it up, though. She always seems so nervous, and I'm afraid to make her even more upset. But tonight, we're all alone, and Mom seems to be in a good mood. I don't think I'll get an opportunity like this again.

I shift uneasily in my chair. "Mom?"

"Yes, dear?" she says, looking at me over the top of her glasses.

I swallow again. "Mom... who was Grandpa Snowdrift?"

Mom's eyes bulge, and she drops the pen with a clatter. "Who was... *who*?" she asks, breathless.

"G-g-grandpa Snowdrift," I say, looking away.

Slowly, she sinks down in her chair. She turns to stare straight ahead, face slack and eyes wide. After a moment, she starts to speak in a small, frightened voice.

"Grandpa Snowdrift was... my daddy. He was... the best pony I ever knew. He was a surveyor, and Princess Celestia asked him to... to find a new spot for a pegasus city... Whenever he left, he'd bring me back something from where he'd gone... a rock, or a leaf, or a bunny..." I see the hint of a smile twitch the corner of her mouth—just once, and it's gone.

I lean over and look at her flank. "Isn't that what your cutie mark is? A bunny?"

She continues like she hasn't heard me. "They'd looked everywhere, but nowhere was right for the pegasi." She pauses, quivering. "Then they tried the Everfree Forest..."

She sags a little in her chair. "They knew it was dangerous, and Mommy asked him not to go, but Daddy said he *had* to..." She takes a deep breath. "I was so selfish... I asked Daddy to bring me back another bunny... Muffin was lonely... He ruffled my mane and said he would if he saw one. Then he left..."

She's silent for a long moment. Finally, I see a tear run down her cheek.

"They said afterwards he was so brave... he fought the manticore all by himself so Bluebird could get away..."

She chokes back a sob. "But Daddy didn't come home. The monster on the

ground took Daddy away, and he never came home again..."

Her eyes grow a little wider, and she finally falls silent. After a moment, I turn to follow her gaze. She's staring out the window at the moon, hanging over the forest like a ghost. I open my mouth to say something, but I don't know what to say. I sit there for several minutes, watching Mom stare silently at the moon. Finally, I creep quietly off to bed, leaving my application forgotten on the table.

I lie on my bed and stare at the ceiling until the sun peeks over the horizon.

* * *

“Dear Weather Patrol Applicant...”

I slowly lower the letter. My hooves are shaking. Mom, Fluttershy, and Skittle are sitting around the table, staring at me with frozen smiles. I drop my arms to my side, the letter fluttering to the floor.

I can feel the tears welling up. I try to brush them away, but it’s no good.

Fluttershy climbs out of her seat. She comes over and gives me a hug, leaning her head on me. Mom stands too, then Skittle.

I pull myself out of Fluttershy’s grasp and run back to my room. I slam the door and flop on my bed, crying.

After a minute, I hear a little tap at the door. “April? Are you okay?” It’s Mom.

“No, Mom, I’m *not* okay!” I scream. I roll over and pull my pillow over my head. I can still hear Mom talking, but I can’t tell what she’s saying. I yell at her to go away, and, after a while, she does, leaving me all alone in my dark cloud.

It’s hours later before I come out from under the pillow. The house is quiet and dark, except for a single light in the kitchen. On the counter is a sandwich, cut in half and wrapped in plastic. Next to it is a newspaper with a folded note on top. I unwrap the sandwich and take a bite. Dandelion. My favorite.

I unfold the note and start reading.

April,

I’m so sorry. I know it hurts.

I’ve been thinking about it, and I think it would be good if you got a job this summer. You don’t have any work experience—nothing to show you’re a good worker. You can get a job over the summer and get some experience, then apply again next year. You do have one more application left, after all.

You could always ask Dad if there are any openings at the Factory. Sometimes they do hire foals your age, and, since they already know Dad, it might be easier to get a job there. I know you don’t like the factory, but I thought I’d mention it anyways.

I took Skittle and Fluttershy to the store. We’ll be home before 8.

*Lots of love,
Mom*

I finish half the sandwich, then go get the other half—and the newspaper, too. I unfold the paper, and, after a moment, I smile. I can feel the tears coming, but I don't care. It's the "Help Wanted" page, with a bunch of entries circled—all things that Mom thinks I might like.

One, in particular, catches my eye.

Wanted: Summer Flight Camp Junior Counselors

No experience needed

Ages 13-18

Relive your Flight Camp experience!

Visit Camp Offices to apply

I take another bite of the sandwich and chew thoughtfully.

* * *

“Alright Orion, I’m gonna take off.”

“See you tomorrow, April!” Orion calls back.

I trot out the front gates of Flight Camp and I feel my counselor’s badge bounce against my chest. It makes me smile. I pass all the foals waiting for their parents, and I hear one of them call out, “Hey, it’s Miss April! Hi, Miss April!” I turn and flash a grin to the crowd, then spread my wings and take off. Once I’m in the air, I pull a few loop-de-loops for the foals. When I hear their cheers, I smile wide.

I love being a counselor.

I pull out of my last loop and fly off for home. As soon as I’m out of sight of the camp, I bite my lip. *I hope it came today.*

Mom, Skittle and I worked together to get Fluttershy’s Flight Camp application in on time. We had to spend a couple weeks on it to make sure everything was perfect. *I* was the one who took Fluttershy in to get her physical. While the doctor was measuring her wingspan, I noticed she was shaking. I smiled at her reassuringly. She looked at me like I was an oncoming train.

The day after we submitted the application, I was sitting at the kitchen table doing homework while Mom was washing dishes. I was working on a particularly difficult math problem when I heard Fluttershy in the kitchen.

“M-mommy?” she asked quietly. As soon as Mom turned from the sink, Fluttershy looked at her hooves.

“What do you need, honey?” asked Mom, putting a plate in the dish rack. Fluttershy stood there, silent, for a moment, then let out a high-pitched squeak and ran back to our bedroom. I looked up from my work as Mom dashed after her.

Mom found her huddled up in a corner behind her bed, shaking. Mom sat on the floor and put her arms around her. “Fluttershy, what’s wrong?” Fluttershy just shook her head. “Come on, you can tell me—I’m your Mom. I’ll love you no matter what.”

“Mommy, I—” she gulped, then whispered something.

“What was that, honey?” Fluttershy said it again, so quiet that Mom couldn’t hear. She hugged her closer. “Fluttershy, I—”

"I don't want to go to Flight Camp!" Fluttershy shrieked. In the kitchen, I dropped my pencil and looked up, eyes wide.

Fluttershy started crying, and Mom, slightly stunned, started rubbing her back. After a minute, she said, "You know Flight Camp teaches you to fly and how to be safe, right? Flying can be dangerous, and Daddy and I don't want you flying unless you've gone..."

"T-then I d-don't wanna fly," she said, burying her face in Mom's side.

She told Mom that she was scared of the counselors judging her, to see if she was good enough to fly and everything. She'd been afraid of hurting our feelings, though, and had been hiding it since we first started talking about sending her to Camp.

School got out a week later, and I started work at camp a few days after that. I *loved* it. Some of the foals already knew how to fly, and all we had to do was teach them some basics about the weather and traffic rules—and, some days, even *that* was a struggle. Most of the foals, though, couldn't fly yet, and *they* were the ones that made being a counselor worth it. Watching them realize they could actually *fly*—

Awesome.

After work, I'd come home and flop down at the kitchen table. Mom would ask me about my day, and I'd tell stories about how it went—especially about the weak fliers, the ones that just *lit up* the first time they felt the wind under their wings. The first few days, I noticed Fluttershy sitting in the living room playing with dolls—but always with one ear pointed in my direction. After a few days, she sat in the hallway outside the kitchen door, the doll lying idly in her lap. Finally, after a week or two, she came and sat at the table as I told my stories. One day, I saw her smile.

So I told *more* stories. I told her about Creamsicle, the little filly who was scared of heights, but got over it once she realized how much fun flying was. I told her about Nimbus, who flew like a brick on the first day, but, by the end of the two-week session, was pulling loop-de-loops. And I told her about Whirligig, the tiny filly that no one thought would be able to perform, but ended up outdoing them all.

As each session wrapped up, I told stories about graduation. To be honest, it was

a little silly—someone gave a short speech about how important safe flying was, then the counselors called each foal by name and presented them with a certificate of completion and—most importantly—a Flight Camp patch. It was one of my favorite times—to see all the foals that couldn't fly to save their lives get that patch... sometimes they whooped and cheered, sometimes they gave me a hug, and sometimes they even cried. I cried myself, once or twice.

After weeks of stories, I looked out the window to see Fluttershy in the backyard, all by herself. She stood at one end of the yard, wings spread wide, eyes closed. As I watched, she opened her eyes and gulped. She started flapping her wings, and then she started running. She sprinted the length of the yard, pumping her wings as hard as she could. She had to skid to a stop before she ran off the cloud, but she was *trying*. I don't think I've ever been more proud of her in my life.

That evening, after dinner, I was lying on the couch reading a book.

"Um... April?"

I lowered my book and saw Fluttershy standing beside me. I had to smile; she's really tall and lanky for her age—all legs and nothing else. She's going to get all the colts when she grows up.

I closed my book and sat up. "What's up?"

She climbed up on the couch next to me and put her head in my lap. She didn't say anything, so I started stroking her mane. She snuggled closer to me. "April, do you think... do you think I'm gonna do alright at camp?"

I smiled. "Of *course*, Fluttershy. We wouldn't have signed you up if we didn't. The counselors are nice, and they want to help *everypony* do their best."

"...and I'll like it?"

"You'll *love* it. I promise." She smiled.

As Fluttershy's session got closer, the other foals in the neighborhood started getting their acceptance letters. I made a point of checking the mailbox on my way home from work, hoping each day that there'd be a letter for Fluttershy. She always greeted me at the door, bright-eyed and smiling eagerly. It broke my heart each time I

came in empty-hooved. As the days turned to weeks, her smile got smaller and smaller.

As I land in front of our house, I clench my jaw. Her session starts in two days. If her letter doesn't come today...

I trot over to the mailbox. I take a deep breath, then yank it open.

Nothing. Not even a bill.

I look up to see Fluttershy standing in the window. She must see the shock on my face, because she starts to cry.

I grit my teeth.

Now it's personal.

* * *

"Ah, Miss... Flowers, is it? Come on in. You're here early."

"It's, um, 'Showers,' sir," I say, stepping timidly into the office. "There's something I want to talk to you about."

Mr. Gale sits at his desk, ruffling some paperwork and sipping his coffee. The shiny brass plaque on his desk reads "CAMP DIRECTOR."

"Um, I was just curious," I say quietly. "My sister Fluttershy applied for camp, and we still haven't heard if she's been accepted or not."

Mr. Gale continues to shuffle his papers without responding.

I swallow. "Um...the last session starts tomorrow, and I was wondering...could you please look her up and see if she was accepted?"

He holds up a hoof, and I flinch. After a moment, he turns around and begins going through a filing cabinet, muttering to himself. Finally, he surfaces with a thin manila folder and slaps it on his desk. As he opens it up, I can see Fluttershy's picture clipped inside. She's shying away from the camera, trying to hide behind her mane.

Mr. Gale paws through the application for a few moments, making little noises to himself. At last, he nods and closes the folder with a sense of finality.

"I'm sorry, Ms. Flowers, but your sister's application has been denied. She's simply not coming to Flight Camp."

I stand there, stunned. Fluttershy? Not going to Camp? Not after everything we'd done, all the forms and the checkups and the stories? Not after she ran across the backyard trying her hardest to fly? Not at *all*?

Mr. Gale sees the look on my face and smiles condescendingly. "Don't worry, Ms. Flowers. All is not lost. I'm sure she could still get a job at the Weather Factory..."

Instantly I bristle. I can feel Grandma Merriweather coming down the warpath, and, for once, I don't try to stop her.

"How. Dare. You."

He looks at me over the top of his glasses. "Excuse me, Ms. Flowers?"

"How dare you!" Quivering with rage, I rear up and slam my hooves on the desk. "What right do *you* have to say that? To condemn her to the Factory? Do you even *know*

her? *Know* what she's like? She's *my* sister, Mr. Gale, and you have *no idea* who you're dealing with."

I suddenly realize I'm screaming at the top of my lungs. I start in again even louder. "Do you know what she's been through? She's scared of her own shadow, for Celestia's sake! Who are *you* to deny her that patch?" I take a deep breath. "I *swear* to you, let her in, and she will work the *hardest*, and the *longest*, and the *proudest* of any pony in this camp, and if she doesn't..." I lean in close. "...I'll send her to the Factory *myself*."

I notice for the first time that Mr. Gale is shaking like a leaf. The poor pony is drenched in sweat, his eyes bulging out of his head. I grit my teeth and reach inside for another boost from Grandma, but it's gone. I swallow, and do my best to sound intimidating.

"Um...so what do you have to say for yourself, Mr. Gale?"

He slowly sits up straight and, hooves shaking, picks up the file. He speaks quietly, his voice trembling. "I'm sorry, Ms. Flowers, but I *really* can't do anything. Flight Control has reviewed all these files personally, and I could get fired—*or worse*—for letting your sister in."

I try to give him a Merriweather Glare, but it doesn't feel right. Nevertheless, he quails under my gaze.

"I...I can let her attend classes with the others, maybe even get the patch. But nothing official. *Nothing official*, or Commander Storm Squall will have my hide."

I smile at him. "Thank you very much, Mr. Gale. Fluttershy will be here fifteen minutes early tomorrow morning." I turn and walk out the door, but stop in the doorway. "Oh, and Mr. Gale? The name's Showers. *April Showers*."

I don't think I've ever enjoyed seeing a pony cringe so much. I kick the door shut behind me and laugh to myself all the way to the airfield.

* * *

"Where's Gullywash?"

Orion blinks at me in surprise. "Um, I think I saw him out there..." He points feebly out the window.

I look outside and see Gullywash trotting across the airfield. It looks like the idiot hasn't shaved in a week. His tan coat and spiky mane clash horribly with his Counselor hat and jacket. To top it all off, he's wearing a smug grin, like he *knows* what he's done and doesn't care.

I growl and charge out the door. As close in on him, Gullywash turns around and smiles. "Hey, April, how's it—"

"What did you do to Fluttershy?" I demand.

Gullywash blinks. "I...I don't know what you mean," he says, looking away.

"*You're lying,*" I growl. "What did you *do* to Fluttershy?"

"Woah, April, calm down." Orion has finally caught up. "What's going on?"

"*This a-hole* won't tell me what he did to my sister," I hiss. Orion takes a step back, eyes wide.

He looks back and forth between us for a moment. Finally, he looks at me and asks, "Well, what *did* he do?"

I shoot Orion a glare. "Monday and Tuesday, Fluttershy wouldn't stop talking about camp. Yesterday, she didn't say a word," I growl. "Not. A word. And she was in *your class* yesterday," I say, jabbing Gullywash in the chest. "Something happened, and *you're* going to tell me what. It. *Was.*"

Gullywash looks away again and mutters something. "What was that?" I demand.

He turns and looks me in the eye. "Your sister can't fly," he says.

I suck in a breath. "*What?*"

"Your sister can't fly," he repeats. "Yesterday, we were up on the high glide. The foals are just supposed to get a little running start, jump off, and glide to the ground. Helps build their confidence, no big deal." He takes a breath. "Your sister couldn't do it. She jumped, dropped like a rock, and the other foals started making fun of her. That's it."

I sat down, hard.

“...You’re not answering her question,” Orion says, after a pause. “Did you do something to Fluttershy?”

Gullywash looks away. “I...I might have pushed her.”

“You *pushed* her?” I shriek. I lunge at him, but Orion grabs me.

He looks over his shoulder. “Gullywash, get out of here,” he orders. Wide-eyed, Gullywash takes off running.

I flail my hooves at him as he dashes away. “You lay a *hoof* on her again, and I will *end* you. Do you hear me? *End yo—*”

Orion clamps a hoof over my mouth. “April, calm down! You’re gonna scare the foals.” He wrestles with me for another minute before hissing in my ear. “*Listen*,” he says, “Maybe Gullywash didn’t mean anything. Sometimes the foals *need* that little push—otherwise, they might never realize they can fly. That’s half the point of the High Glide.” He turns and sees the pain and anger in my eyes. He lowers his head and sighs. “Tell you what. If you want to beat the crap out of Gullywash, I don’t care. Just do it after hours. For now, take a walk and try to blow off some steam. When you’re done, meet me at the runway. We need you over there.”

He lets go of me and walks away. I stand there, fuming, for a minute before I turn and stomp towards the racetrack.

It’s just not *fair*. It’s taken us *so long* to get Fluttershy here—the forms, the doctor’s visit, the stories...if that was all for nothing...

And Gullywash made me a *liar*, too. I promised Fluttershy that she’d love camp, and that all the counselors were nice...

What was he thinking, pushing her off like that? He knew she was having trouble; she could’ve gotten really hurt! It’s *my job* to take care of Fluttershy, and if I’d known that Gullywash was going to do *that* to her...

And all the other foals making fun of Fluttershy... she’s so sensitive, I... I don’t know if she’ll ever want to fly again...

After a dozen or so laps around the track, I take a deep breath. I’m still mad, but I

don't feel like *killing* anyone anymore. I sigh and peel off towards the runway. After a moment, I smile.

It doesn't matter. Gullywash and I still need to have a *discussion*, but all I can do now is help make the rest of Flight Camp the best time Fluttershy's had in her life. That's the important thing.

At that instant, I hear the laughter.

I look down look down and see I'm right over the hoops course. Fluttershy's sitting down on some clouds, trying to hide behind her mane. Two colts, one brown and one orange, stand in front of her. Pointing. *Laughing*.

I snarl. I tuck my wings back and go into a dive—

Right then, a filly with a rainbow mane lands next to Fluttershy, facing the bullies. I flare my wings and stop, staring. The rainbow one is talking to them. I strain my ears, but I can't make out what she's saying.

After a moment of arguing, the four of them trot away: Fluttershy, the rainbow one, and the brown one in one direction, the orange one in another. I land on the clouds and glance back and forth between Fluttershy's group and the orange colt, both rapidly disappearing in opposite directions. *What on earth is going on?*

I turn and follow Fluttershy. The rainbow filly and the brown colt keep on shooting little comments at each other, but I still can't hear them. Fluttershy lags behind them a little, the smallest hint of a spring in her step.

I suddenly realize where we're going. Straight ahead is the starting point for the hoops course. As I watch, the orange colt flies by and lands on the start line, holding a checkered flag.

I stop, stunned. *The rainbow one challenged them to a race.*

She's protecting Fluttershy.

The rainbow filly flies up to the orange colt, and, after another moment of arguing, takes the checkered flag. She flies back down and gives it to Fluttershy. They talk for a bit, then the rainbow one flies away. She returns a second later with a little cloud. Fluttershy gingerly steps on it, and the rainbow one pushes her into the middle of

the course—right where the flagpony would be in an *actual* race. I see Fluttershy flash a little grin.

I smile as I feel my worries melt away. Yes, some of the foals might make fun of Fluttershy, but now she has an *ally*. I can stand up for her, but she needs someone her *own* age—a friend who can defend her in the locker room or in the hallways at school. This rainbow filly is *exactly* who she needs. I sigh. *Everything's gonna be alright.*

I walk up and join the swelling crowd of foals. Orion needs me for something else, but this is my *sister*. I don't care.

Fluttershy waves the flag, and they're *off*. I whoop as they round the first corner, the rainbow one in the lead. I watch them for a moment more, then I turn to see the look on Fluttershy's face.

I freeze, my breath stuck in my throat.

The little cloud is empty.

Fluttershy's gone.

I turn to the foal next to me. "Did you see Fluttershy?"

"Who?"

"*Fluttershy*. My sister. The pony with the flag?"

"Oh, *her*. No, I haven't."

I turn to the next foal. "Did *you* see her?"

"No."

no no no

I turn and scan the stands. No Fluttershy. *Where could she have gone?*

I stop. I look down.

At the ground.

Oh, no.

I dive off the stands. The wind shrieks past me as I build speed.

Don't you remember what happened to your Grandpa Snowdrift?

I hear Mom's voice in my ears. I try to shut her out, scanning the forest below for yellow and pink.

Fluttershy, don't you ever do that again! You can't fly, and if you fall down, we might never find you!

I close my eyes and flap harder. *Gotta find her. Bring her back. Keep her safe.*

Hey, how about this—when she tries to fly, she'll fall straight to the ground! Then she'll be Splattershy!

I open my eyes and scream.

my fault my fault my fault

I see something. I turn my head. A rainbow streak, shooting down towards the forest.

What on earth—

BOOM

Color! Light! Noise!

can't see can't see

falling

Trees!

PAIN

Blackness.

* * *

"April!"

At the sound of Mom's voice, I groan. I don't want to get up for school today. I want to lie here in my bed, safe and warm, maybe forever.

"April! Wake up!"

I realize I don't feel very well. I decide I'm not going to school today. I'm going to stay right here and try to get better. "Leave me alone, Mom," I mutter.

"April! Wake up right now!"

She sounds frightened. Is something wrong? I open my eyes a crack to see what she wants.

What has she done with the lights? Everything's orange...and fuzzy...

I gasp, and my vision clears. I lie in the thick cold mud at the base of a tree. The sun sets over the forest, bathing everything in acid orange. Mom hovers over me, eyes wide, body covered in fear-sweat. I try to stand, but searing pain brings me down again.

"April, don't move." Orion is here, and a few of the other counselors, too.

Mom looks up. *"Skit-tle! Over here!"* she shrieks

I look up at her. Mom shakes like a leaf, bulging eyes darting like mayflies. Skittle and Gullywash come over a rise, Skittle's eyes full of tears.

Tears.

Fluttershy!

I struggle to stand again. "Mom... "

"April, *don't move*. Help is on the way."

Mom glances nervously over her shoulder. She hasn't heard me.

"Mom... Fluttershy...!"

She whips around to face me, eyes wide. She glances around again, then looks at me. She licks her lips and opens her mouth.

"April, she—she's gone."

My eyes go wide. I turn to look at Orion. He bites his lip. "There's... there's no way she could have..."

Something deep inside me snaps, and I collapse back into the mud.

My sister Fluttershy. Gone.

And it's all my fault.

If I hadn't pushed so hard for her to come to camp... if I had stopped the bullies... if I had held the flag *myself*...

It's my job to protect my little sisters.

And I failed.

I slowly realize I'm lying in a hospital bed. One nurse is trying to get the mud out of my coat, and another is wrapping bandages around my head. They ask me not to move, and to try not to talk.

I have nothing to say.

Mom and Dad come by to visit almost every day. Mom doesn't say much; she mostly sits in the corner and cries. Dad talks, though—he tells me how he's been searching for Fluttershy every second he can. He's even got the police involved. As far as anyone can tell, Fluttershy fell in the heart of the Everfree Forest, and they've been going in as deep as they dare. They haven't found a thing—not even a feather. Dad is always tired, but he's *exhausted* when he comes to visit. One day, he even falls asleep in his chair. I'm worried about him.

Sometimes they bring Skittle. She never says anything—she just sits there and looks out the window. When Dad asks her questions, her responses are short and harsh. I think she's mad at me.

Two weeks later, they let me go home. Camp is over, but school hasn't started yet, so I fly down to the forest. I dart among the trees, hiding from the monsters I *know* are there, looking for something, *anything*, to give me hope. Every day, I come home from the forest empty-hooved and weeping.

Sometimes I see Dad, a long ways away, searching through the trees too, and, for some reason, that makes me feel worse.

One day I come home to a cold dark house and a note on the table.

There's been an accident. Come to the hospital.

I dash into the emergency room, panting, to see a crowd of ponies in Weather Factory uniforms. They're all talking over each other, and I have no idea what they're actually saying. I ask a nurse where my Dad is, and she points me down a hallway. I sprint past room after room of families around the bed of a pony in a factory uniform. I bite my lip. *They're all okay. Daddy's okay too.*

As I approach the room at the end of the hall, I hear shouting. I see Mom and Skittle sitting against the wall. Skittle is crying, and Mom is staring at the wall, eyes glassy. I skid to a halt just outside the door.

A crowd of doctors are gathered around the bed. All I can see are machines and tubes and bandages. The doctors are all shouting orders at each other. I try to lean around them to get a better view, but there's too many.

For just an instant, there's a gap in the crowd. My breath catches in my throat.

I see Daddy's soft blue legs.

Covered in bandages.

Stained dark red.

I sink down onto the cold linoleum.

No. Not Daddy, too.

I wear a black dress to the funeral. I stand in the front row. Mom sits next to me in a wheelchair. Skittle stands on the other side of her.

The preacher says a few words over Daddy's grave. I don't listen. I'm playing with my nametag from the Factory. I've worked there ever since Dad died. The Factory paid the hospital bills, but nothing else.

We needed money.

I had time.

I went to the Factory and punched Dad's card.

I look at Mom. She stares straight ahead. She hasn't said a word since Dad died.

She just stares at the wall all day and all night. Right after he died I got on my knees and begged her for help.

She didn't hear me.

Skittle looks away. She won't talk to me. She blames me.

I blame myself.

The preacher finishes talking and closes his book. Two ponies with shovels come forward and start pouring shovelfuls of dirt on Daddy's coffin. As Daddy disappears forever, I suck in a deep, shuddering breath.

Fluttershy is gone. Mom is broken. Skittle hates me. Dad is dead. And I—I work in the factory that killed him.

I no longer have the strength to cry.

* * *

“Morning, April.”

“Good morning, sir.” I nod at my manager and pull my timecard out of the rack.

He checks his clipboard. “It looks like you’re hauling today.”

“Yes, sir.” I sigh. I punch my timecard. Time to get to work.

These days, it seems like *all* I do is punch my timecard. Work eat sleep, work eat sleep, lather rinse repeat. It’s been the same thing, every single day, for the past seven years.

Well, there has been *one* change. I got “promoted,” if you call it that, to the Cloud Division. I didn’t think anything could be worse than Sleet, but apparently I was wrong. The work is hot, humid, and miserable. Today, apparently, I’m hauling buckets of water from the giant tank to the boiling vats. Other ponies pump the bellows, keeping the fires hot and the water boiling, and others are working the Condenser, using the steam to make proper clouds. They’re a lot more strict about safety, too—after that accident when Daddy fell asleep at one of the big machines, Management keeps a sharp eye on everyone, and they yell at you if you make even a tiny mistake. Which means I spend all day breaking my back while walking on eggshells. *Exactly* what I wanted from life.

Mom is still broken. She sits in her kitchen chair all day, staring out the window, looking twenty years older than she should. Sometimes I see a flicker of... *something*—an eye blink, a twitch of the ear—but mostly she just stares, dead-eyed, at the forest. I keep a pot of thin carrot soup on the stove, and give her a bowl every morning and night. Sometimes it’s gone when I go to refill it, sometimes it’s not. Sometimes she’s in her chair in the kitchen, sometimes she’s in bed. I never actually see her move; it feels more like I’m watering a plant than caring for my own mother.

Skittle and I haven’t really spoken in years. After the funeral, she buried herself in music and magazines. For the first few months, I tried to crack her shell—tried to talk to her about her day, tried to get her to help out around the house—but she shut me out. Things stayed like that until she graduated high school, when she skipped town. The first I heard of it was when she left me a note with a Canterlot forwarding address. I have no idea what she’s doing there—the address sounds like it’s a bakery or

something, but Skittle's not the baking *type*.

Frankly, I'm worried about her—as much as we don't get along, she *is* still my sister, and it's my responsibility to make sure she's okay. I send her a couple hundred bits out of my paycheck each month. When work gets hard, I pretend Skittle needs the money I send her.

I think of Skittle a lot.

I suddenly realize I'm punching my timecard again. Startled, I look at the horizon; the sun is setting.

Time to go home.

Lather, rinse, repeat.

* * *

“Skittle? What the heck are *you* doing here?”

She steps in to the circle of light on the porch and giggles. “What am I doing? I’m here to see my big sister, of course! Why else would I be here?”

I groan.

Skittle suddenly started sending me letters a few months ago. I opened the first few eagerly, but they were impersonal little things, like nothing had ever happened between us. I sent a few notes in reply, but she never answered them. All she ever wrote about were the parties and concerts she went to and other useless crap like that.

After that, I stopped reading her letters. Well, I *skimmed* them, but that was about it.

About a month ago, she started writing about doing something together as sisters. She got more and more insistent over the next few weeks. I still didn’t answer her, though—she doesn’t care to answer *my* letters, why should I answer hers?

Work today was hard. I had been fantasizing about a nice hot cup of chamomile and going to bed when Skittle ambushed me as I slid my key in the door.

I groan, unlock the door, and walk inside, leaving the door open. I stomp into the kitchen. Mom’s still sitting silently at the table. I grab her bowl, slop the last of the carrot soup into it, and slam it back on the table. I grab a teakettle, fill it with water, throw it on the stove, and turn on the heat. I turn around, and Skittle is standing there smiling brightly. I groan again.

She seems to take that as a sign and sits down. I yank open the fridge, pull out the carrots for the next batch of soup, and start peeling them at the sink. After a moment, I look over at her. “So, what do *you* want?”

She smiles. “I *told* you, I just want to spend some time with you. It’s been *forever*, and Canterlot’s *so boring*.”

I snort. “What about all those parties you write about? And those high-society brunches you sneak into? And those day trips to Ponyville, and Celestia-knows where else?”

She ignores the question. “I was thinking we could do something,” she continues,

“y’know, as *sisters*.”

“Can’t. I have work.” I pick up the next carrot.

“What about *after* work?”

I look over at her. “Skittle, I work double shifts. When I come home, I give Mom some soup, get something to eat, and go straight to bed.”

“Well, what about your days off?”

I sigh and look back at the carrot. “I don’t *have* days off. When I’m not at the Factory, I go pick up some odd jobs.” Next carrot. “I know a guy who owns a moving company. I can usually count on him to have something for me.”

“But, you *have* to have some kind of vacation time!”

I laugh, a hard, bitter laugh. “Skittle, the closest I get to a vacation is when we get special assignments from the Weather Patrol—and that’s only when they have a big storm or something coming up.” I look up from the carrot and stare out the window. “They pull us all off the floor and assign us two or three to a cloud. Then we push them all to wherever they need to go. We don’t get to do any *actual* Weather Patrol stuff, but it’s... *enough*.” I notice I’ve stopped peeling, and start again with a vengeance. “It’s hard work, maybe even harder than the regular stuff, but the pay is good.” Next carrot. “Long story short, I can’t do anything with you. I work too much.”

I hesitate, hoping she doesn’t ask the next question.

I work so much because I’m scared of the alternative. If I didn’t work, I’d have to be home with Mom, watching her stare out the window. If I wasn’t doing that, I’d be walking the dirty, depressing streets of our neighborhood, avoiding all the places Fluttershy and I used to play.

If I didn’t work, I’d go insane.

Thankfully, Skittle just sighs. “Well, we still need to do *something*. We *are* sisters, after all.”

Sisters. Right.

“Listen,” she says, “I got us tickets to the Best Young Flyer Competition next weekend.”

I shoot her a look. “Don’t you *hate* sports?”

She flips her, mane, irritated. “One of the Merriweathers is competing. We *have* to be there.” I finish peeling the last carrot, rinse them off, and start chopping them.

“April, you should get your late shift off and come with me.”

“Skittle, I—” I look over at her. She’s staring back at me with big eyes, the faintest hint of a quiver on her lip. *She’s never gonna give up.*

I sigh. “Alright, I’ll go to the stupid competition with you.”

Skittle smiles wide and starts chattering about something. I feel a pang of guilt—I wasn’t actually planning on *going*. I was just going to blow her off at the last minute. But, seeing how happy she is, thinking I’ll go with her...

I brush the feeling away.

* * *

“*Good morning, April!* Are you ready to go to the competition today?”

I’m standing in the doorway to the kitchen, yawning. Skittle stands at the counter, humming to herself and chopping carrots. “Skittle, what on *earth* are you doing?” I ask.

“I’m gonna take care of Mom for you today,” she responds. “It’s our special day, after all—our first day together as sisters in a long time.”

“Yeah, about that,” I say, rubbing my eyes. “I can’t go, Skittle. I have work.”

“No, you don’t,” she responds brightly. “I got someone to cover your late shift for you.”

I freeze mid-rub. “You did *what?*” I ask, furiously.

Her smile fades the slightest bit. “Don’t be mad, April—I-I knew you wouldn’t go if I didn’t, and I…” She gulps, and, flustered, scoops up the chopped carrots and throws them in the pot.

I sigh angrily and stomp to the bathroom. I shower quickly, throw on my uniform, and grab a few raw carrots from the fridge for breakfast.

As I open the front door, Skittle calls from the kitchen, “Meet me at the Cloudiseum at four, April—gate 7!”

I slam the door on my way out.

As soon as I get to work, I check in with my manager. I’m pumping the bellows again today.

I’m lost in my thoughts—about Mom, and Skittle, and the Competition, when I hear the other ponies chattering excitedly about something. I look around for the disturbance and stop cold.

I live a life of darkness and routine. My neighborhood is cramped and dirty; the last bit of color left when Sunflower took her plants to college. My days are inside the white walls of the Factory, my nights inside the black walls of my bedroom. I don’t stop and smell the roses because there simply *aren’t* any in my world.

Nevertheless, in the middle of our factory floor, sprouts a rose. A white pony wearing a Factory uniform and visitor’s badge stands in the sunlight. Two wings sprout from her back—not the regular feathered kind, but two things of gossamer and light.

The sight literally takes my breath away. After a moment, I move closer, enchanted.

She flutters her wings experimentally, then lifts off, sending a cascade of silver sparks shooting across the walls. After a moment, she flies even higher, letting her wings catch the sun. The sunlight, filtered through her wings, fills the air with shafts of bright color.

I gasp. She's turned the factory into a cathedral.

She stays only a few minutes before her friends usher her out, but her wings stick with me. What is this feeling that I've forgotten? Not *love*, but ...*wonder*. Since...since Fluttershy fell, my life has been so cold. I've forgotten what it's like to *feel*. I realize, for the first time, I have a deep hole in my heart, and I can feel its weight pressing on my soul.

It's only later I realize she looked like a little filly who had gotten hold of the glitter. I snort and try to put her out of my mind.

A couple hours later, I punch my card and step outside. The sudden brightness catches me off-guard—I rarely make it home before sunset. I don't know if it's the sun, or the pony's wings, or what, but I suddenly feel *happy*. That hasn't happened in a long time.

I fly over to the Cloudiseum, and land in front of Gate 7, just like Skittle said. Skittle's already there. As soon as I land, she runs over and gives me a big hug. "April! You made it!" she cries happily. I can't help myself—I wrap my arms around her, and I feel a smile tugging at my lips, too.

She hands me my ticket and we go and find our seats. As soon as we sit down, Skittle turns to me. "Did I tell you about my last trip to Ponyville? I *almost* scored a ticket to the Grand Galloping Gala! It was *so awesome*—there I was..."

I tune her out. I check out the Cloudiseum—the big, empty arena in the middle, the ponies hawking popcorn and candy, the judges' stand, tall and proud at the far end. It reminds me of that one time we came here to see Dad race.

I sigh. Those were good times.

I glance around again, and notice for the first time that the stands are filled with

dozens of ponies with the Merriweather Mane. I smile. There *has* to be one of us competing for there to be such a turnout.

Skittle continues to chatter for nearly the entire event. She only quiets down when #5—Apricot, the Merriweather—comes out. Her routine is relatively simple, but she performs it beautifully. As she finishes, Skittle and I jump to our hooves and stomp and cheer with the rest of the Merriweathers. As the crowd quiets down, Skittle picks up her saddlebags. "I'm bored. Let's get out of here."

I smile; she *doesn't* like sports. She turns to leave, and I scan the crowd one last time. I'm halfway through my sweep when I pause, frowning.

Almost directly across from us, four ponies I don't recognize sit together. In the middle is a Merriweather with a long, luxurious mane and shy demeanor. I squint. Something about her *bothers* me, but I can't tell what it is.

Wasn't she at the Factory earlier today?

I realize Skittle's almost at the gate already—and she's still talking, of course. I trot after her, still looking over my shoulder at that mysterious Merriweather.

Skittle chatters for our entire walk home. At first, I tune her out, but, after a while, I start listening with half an ear, and, finally, laughing along with her.

Right as we turn onto our street, there's a lull in the conversation. I lick my lips nervously. "Hey, Skittle..." She turns to look at me, and I falter. "Um... thanks for getting my shift off." I pause again. "I... I really had fun today."

Skittle smiles. "I knew you would," she says.

We get to our house. I start up the front walk, but Skittle stays behind. I turn and look at her questioningly. "Do you want to come in?" I ask.

She shakes her head. "I'd better take off. It's a bit of a flight to Canterlot, you know."

I nod, and continue up the walk. "Um...April?" I stop and turn around. She's looking at her hooves.

"April, I...I'm sorry." She says quietly. "I... I know it wasn't your fault, what... what happened. I was angry, and I..." After a pause, she sniffles and shakes her head.

I can feel tears welling up in my eyes. "I'm sorry, too."

Skittle nods, then turns away. "Be safe, okay?" I say. She smiles and nods. She spreads her wings and takes off, and I watch her until she glides out of sight.

I smile as I turn and walk inside.

* * *

“Hey, sis! Long time, no see!”

I smile and roll my eyes. “Skittle? What are you doing here?”

She’s standing by the gate to the Weather Factory, wearing saddlebags and a warm smile. She shrugs. “I just wanted to see my sister is all. I knew you were getting off work about now, so…”

She turns and walks with me for a little ways before she suddenly stops. I turn back to see her staring at something with a sly smile. She looks at me and jerks her head. “Do you remember that?” She asks.

I turn and look, and see an old shed by the factory fence. I have to stare at it for a moment before I smile. “That’s the shed…”

“Where I hid the night you got your cutie mark!” she laughs. After a moment, she grins wickedly and spreads her wings. “Race you home!”

We both land in our front yard at the same time. She lands a little too hard and collapses, laughing, on the clouds. She wipes away a tear. “Whew… I haven’t had that much fun in a *long* time.”

I let her in, and she trots to the kitchen. I get Mom a bowl of soup while Skittle puts some water on for tea. We sit down at the table, and Skittle starts digging in her bag. “Y’know, there *is* a reason I came over tonight,” she says. She looks up at me apologetically. “Other than to spend time with you, of course.” She resumes digging, and, with a triumphant “Ah-hah!” surfaces with a frilly blue skirt.

I raise an eyebrow. “Wait—you actually brought it back?”

“Ye-e-ah,” she says slowly. “Weren’t you just lending it to me for the Gala?”

I shake my head. “*Keep it*. I haven’t worn that thing in years.” As she stuffs it back in her bag, I see a smile creep across her face.

The kettle starts to sing, and we both get up. I get the mugs and pour the water, while Skittle adds some tea bags she’s brought with her. As I’m adding milk to mine, I look over at her. “So, how *was* the Gala?”

She gasps. “It was *so. Much. Fun!*” she squeals. She prances back to the table with her mug. “I’m so glad I wrote in for that silly radio contest. There were so many

ponies there, and everyone was so pretty—“

We talk for over an hour. To be more precise, *Skittle* talks—about the Gala, mostly. She tells me about all the celebrities she'd seen, and how much fun she'd had, and so on. I don't have a whole lot to say, so I just listen.

Finally, she takes a sip of her tea and seems to remember something. “Oh, and *that model* was there, too.”

I raise an eyebrow. “‘That model?’ Which one?” I ask.

“Oh, I don't know her name,” she responds. “She was really famous last month, though. Didn't you see her? She was all over the place—on all kinds of magazines and stuff...”

I shake my head, smiling. “Skits, you know me. I don't have *time* for ‘magazines and stuff.’”

She sighs, irritated. “April, you *know* that's not good for you...spending so much time working, and—”

“*Anyways,*” I interrupt, “you were talking about a *model*?”

She shoots me a hard look, then continues. “Well, there was this model at the Gala. She was *so pretty*, wearing a dress that was all green and covered in butterflies, and she was so graceful too! And, best of all,” she says, leaning forward confidentially, “I think she might be a *Merriweather!*”

I raise an eyebrow. “What makes you say that?” I ask.

She sits back, looking smug. “Well, she has the coat and mane, for one thing. She has Grandma's temper, too. I don't know what the deal was, but she burst into the ballroom, *screaming* at the top of her lungs. Scared everypony out of their wits!”

I bite my lip, thinking. I can't remember anybody in our family who models...of course, it *has* been a long, long time since I've been to a reunion. Since before Dad died, at least...

Suddenly, I remember that pretty Merriweather at the Competition. Maybe she's the same one?

“...Do you happen to have a picture of her?” I ask. “I think I might have seen her

when we went to the Best Young Flyer Competition that one time.”

Skittle starts digging in her bags again. “I think I might have *something... Ah!* Here it is.”

She pulls out a page from a magazine, folded into quarters. She smooths it out, then slides it across the table to me. It’s an ad, with a model—a pretty yellow-and-pink pony—holding up a bottle of some kind of carrot juice and smiling.

I was right—she *is* the pony I saw at the Competition. I take a long, hard look at her. I feel like I *know* her from somewhere. Somewhere else.

As I set the ad down, I happen to glance at the clock. I stiffen. “Horseapples, look at the time!” I yelp. I glance apologetically at Skittle. “Um...it’s been fun and all, but...”

She smiles kindly. “You need to get to bed, I know. Don’t worry about it.” She stands and puts on her saddlebags. “Actually, I wasn’t planning on staying so long... you know me, once I get started...”

I show her out and stand on the front porch as she takes off. I wave as she glides away. As I lock the door, I yawn. It’s *way* past my bedtime.

As I walk past the kitchen, something catches my eye. I stop for a closer look. It’s the juice ad, still on the table where I left it.

As I glance at it, the model and I lock eyes. I *know* her. Where do I know her from?

I stare, entranced, until the clock chimes the hour. At the sound, I jerk away and stumble to the bathroom. I splash some water on my face, trying to clear my head, but when I look up at the mirror, the model stares right back at me. I shriek, then run to my bedroom and slam the door. I lay down but can’t sleep; I try counting sheep, but a line of supermodels jumps over the fence in my head.

After what feels like hours of tossing and turning, I finally start dreaming. I’m a filly again, and I’m at school. All the foals in my class have done their manes yellow-and-pink today. My supermodel teacher asks me where my juice is, and I notice everypony has a big juice bottle on their desk. I suddenly realize that today is Carrot Juice Day, and I forgot mine! All the other models start laughing at me, and I cry carrot

tears into my yellow-and-pink handkerchief.

I wake up screaming and covered in sweat. I run to the kitchen, grab the ad, and throw it in the trash, but somehow it flutters back out. I scream again, wad it into a little ball and stomp it flat. I run back to my bedroom, slam the door, lay flat on my bed and cry myself to sleep.

* * *

“Dear April, Sorry for the late notice, but Cloud Division is closed today.”

I groan and scan the rest of the note. Some idiot working graveyard shift managed to flood the Factory, and it’s going to be at least another week before they have everything cleaned up. It’s signed by my manager.

And I’m all ready to go, of course. I was actually on my way out the door when I stepped on the note. I sigh in frustration and wad the letter into a little ball. I shoot it at the trashcan—and miss. I groan again.

I stomp back to my bedroom and strip off my uniform. I fold it up and put it away, then flop on my bed. I suppose I *could* get up and see if my friend needs any help moving today...

I feel a sudden wave of apathy wash over me. I don’t want to move boxes today. I don’t want to do *anything*.

I roll on my side, and grimace as I see Fluttershy’s little bed leaning against the wall. I’ve been meaning to move it out of here for *years*, but I’ve never gotten around to it. Not going to do it today, either. I stand up, and start walking into the kitchen. As I walk through the doorway I pause, then take a few steps backward. *That model* is staring at me from her place on top of my dresser.

Yes, I had recovered the ad. I was scared that night, but no denying there’s something special about her. The ad had been migrating around the house for months; I’d pick it up, carry it with me for a bit, then I’d absently set it down somewhere. I must have brought it into my room with me and left it on the dresser by accident.

I pick it up and carry it into the kitchen. I drop the ad on the table, then flop down in a chair opposite Mom, her bowl of soup still steaming.

I gaze listlessly around the room, letting my mind wander. I really should be doing something right now, but I don’t care. I just feel like sitting here, doing nothing until something better comes around...

Suddenly, I sit up.

In the corner of the kitchen stands a small bookshelf, where we keep a few cookbooks and some personal mementos. In the place of honor is a big red book, the

words “FAMILY ALBUM” embossed in gold on the cracked leather spine. I stare at it for a moment before I decide to take it down off the shelf. It’s been a *long* time since I’ve looked at it. Maybe memories of better times will cheer me up.

I pull down the album and set it on the table. I open it to the first page. There’s a photo of Dad’s first race, a faded blue ribbon pressed underneath the plastic. Below that, a picture of Mom trying to hide behind an older mare, who I’ve always assumed is Grandma. Below that, a fourth grade class photo, with Mom and Dad sitting next to each other, avoiding eye contact.

I turn the page. I smile and turn it again. And again. These pages are full of photos of Dad racing, nearly all of them accompanied by a photo of him in the winner’s circle. If I look carefully, I can find Mom in almost all of these photos—she’s always on the front row of the stands, cheering like crazy.

Next page. Photos from high school: Mom in a production of *Death of a Salesman*. Dad hanging out with the track team. Mom and Dad sitting together at lunch. Graduation: Mom and Dad hugging, Dad kissing Mom on the cheek, Mom blushing bright red. After that, a photo of Dad talking to an older pony in a suit. Dad’s wearing his bright red varsity jacket, a pair of gold wings pinned to the white letter “C” on his shoulder. He’s trying to hide a smile.

The next few pages are wedding photos. A picture of Mom and Dad in the church, he, handsome in a rented tux, she, beautiful in a long white gown. Photos of the reception: Mom and Dad dancing in the middle of the floor, grinning like idiots. Dad stunned, face plastered with cake frosting, Mom with her head thrown back laughing. A group photo of everyone, Mom and Dad at the front and center.

I stare at that last photo for a long time. Is that a little bump under Mom’s dress? I can never decide.

The next page starts with a photo of Mom in a hospital bed, a tiny me in her arms. Dad sits in a chair by the window, looking happy but exhausted. His factory uniform is so new he still hasn’t worn out the creases. A few photos of me as a toddler— me in a high chair, face covered in applesauce, and another of my first steps,

Mom close behind with arms outstretched.

Next, another baby photo. Mom and Skittle in the hospital, Dad holding a bewildered two-year-old me in his arms. A few photos of me pretending to be Skittle's mommy: me holding her bottle, me trying to burp her, and a third of me crying while Mom tries to clean the spit-up off of me, a big smile on her face.

A picture of me on my first day of school, standing nervously by the front door, saddlebags full of pencils and notebooks.

I turn the page and pause. These are photos of Dad's last race. The first one is of Dad himself, standing in front of the Cloudiseum, a card with the number 13 pasted on his flank, Skittle and I standing by his side. He's flashing the camera a nervous grin. Behind him is a banner that reads "WELCOME, AMATEUR RACERS." Next is a faraway photo of him in the starting gate, muscles tensed, tongue between his teeth. Skittle and I are in the bottom of the frame, our arms in the air, cheering.

I sigh. That was the only race he ran in his adult life, I think. I slowly turn the page.

This time, there is no winner's circle. Just a picture of us, together, close to the finish line. Dad is covered in sweat and trying to smile, but there's pain and disappointment in his eyes. Skittle and I stand off to the side, forcing smiles for the camera. Mom leans on Dad, eyes closed tight. She looks sad and worried and disappointed all at the same time.

She also looks like she's gained a lot of weight...

The next photo is all of us in the hospital again. Dad and Skittle stand on one side of the bed, smiling wide. I'm on the other side, staring in awe. Mom is in the middle, lying in the bed, and, in her arms, a little yellow thing with a poof of pink mane...

I freeze.

Slowly, I turn to look at the juice ad sitting on the table. I look back at the baby picture, then back to the ad, unbelieving.

*Holy Celestia. **Fluttershy!***

I scramble out of the chair and grab the ad. I scour it for a name. No mention of

the model, but I find the name and address of the juice company, printed in tiny letters underneath. They have an office here in Cloudsdale!

I top off Mom's bowl, grab my coat, and I'm gone.

* * *

“Next stop, Ponyville. If this is your stop, please start gathering your things. Next stop, Ponyville...”

The train conductor moves into the next car, repeating his announcement. I look down at the sandwich I’m holding. I stick out my tongue, wrap it up in its wrapper, and leave it on the seat. *Wasn’t even worth the two bits.*

I look out the window at the night sky and sigh. I’ve been on the road for almost two weeks, and, if there’s any justice in this world, this is my last stop.

I found the juice company office easily enough. The receptionist told me that the model was, indeed, Fluttershy (I almost jumped for joy), but *their* office hadn’t actually hired her; if I wanted to get in touch with her, I’d have better luck at the company headquarters in Manehattan. After making arrangements for someone to take care of Mom, I flew to the nearest train depot and bought a ticket.

Unfortunately, the main office couldn’t tell me anything either, but said the PR office in Fillydelphia might have something. They, of course, wouldn’t talk to me, but the secretary *hinted* that they *might* have hired her through a talent agency in Baltimore. When I got *there*, they told me that Fluttershy hadn’t worked for company for months, and they *legally* couldn’t tell me anything. “Sorry, kiddo,” said the secretary, patting me on the shoulder.

I brushed away his arm and choked back the tears. All that work—all those nights sleeping on the hard wooden benches, all those cheap premade sandwiches—for nothing?

In desperation, I boarded a train to Canterlot. Somepony there *had* to know *something*, right? I managed to find Skittle’s apartment above the bakery where (I think) she works, and asked if I could crash there for the next few days. She asked me what I was doing in town, and I told her I was looking for that Merriweather model, but I had no idea where she lived. Skittle blinked in surprise. She said, “I’m *pretty sure* she lives in Ponyville—I see her almost every time I go! Didn’t I tell you that?”

I wanted to kiss her on the mouth and punch her lights out all at the same time.

So, here I am, on my last train, on my way to see my long-lost sister. I sigh and

try to figure out what I'm feeling, but I realize I have no idea. I'm excited, yes—but scared, too. What if she doesn't recognize me? Worse, what if she *does* recognize me, but doesn't want anything to do with me?

What should I say? What *can* I say? It's been almost eight years...what can I do that could even *come close* to making it better?

The train whistle blows and I glance out the window. I yelp as an evil black face with acid-green eyes flashes past. I lean forward, and see we're pulling into the train station, which is covered in lit jack-o-lanterns and wooden Nightmare Moons painted black. I check my ticket—tonight is *indeed* Nightmare Night.

For some reason, I feel a sudden sense of dread.

I step off the train and walk straight to the ticket office. The station attendant looks up as I approach; he's dressed as a robot or something, I think. "How can I help you, miss?" he asks.

"Hi, um..." I begin nervously. "Do you know where, um...*F-Fluttershy* lives?" A little shiver runs through me as I say her name. It's the first time I've said it in years—even when I was at the offices, I just showed them the picture.

The robot-pony hasn't noticed. He's already deep in thought. "Fluttershy, hm...well, I *think* she lives on the edge of the Everfree Forest, just outside of town." He grabs a train schedule, flips it over, and starts drawing on the back, tongue between his teeth. "Le'see, you go this way... an' Main Street's over here... and then..."

He slides a crude map across the counter to me. "Thanks very much for your help," I say, picking up the map.

"No problem, missy!" he says jovially, "Good luck!"

Thanks, I think to myself as I walk away, *I'm gonna need it*.

I go stand under a lamp post and examine the map. After a moment, I put it in my bag and head into town. I take the side streets to avoid town square; there's a Nightmare Night dance in full swing, and I'm not in the mood for a party.

A few minutes later, I'm on the path to the forest. I'm all alone. It's quiet.

As I walk, my mind starts to wander. I start thinking about Fluttershy, rehearsing

what I'm going to say.

Hi, Fluttershy, do you remember me? I'm your big sister, the one that abandoned you to the forest—

I shake my head. I try again.

Hey, Fluttershy, long time no see! It's been, what, eight years now?

I bite my lip. *Stupid.*

Maybe I *won't* rehearse anything. I'll just let it come.

Hi Fluttershy.

Hi April. How's the family?

Well, Mom is broken because you got lost, Dad got killed because he was so tired from spending all his time looking for you, and Skittle hated me for close to a decade because she thought it was my fault you were gone. Other than that, we're fine. How are you?

I stop walking. What am I thinking? That she's just going to accept me back into her life with open arms? *Idiot.*

I hang my head. I stand there, on the edge of the forest, for a long time, mulling over what to do.

After a while, I hear a noise. I look up to see a gaggle of ponies coming up over a rise.

I groan. The *last* thing I want to do is to talk to somepony tonight.

I jump off the path and hide in some bushes. Thankfully, the other ponies haven't seen me, and walk right on by. As they trot past, I peek through the leaves at them.

The pony in front is dressed as—a *chicken*? What? Behind her come about a half-dozen fillies and colts, dressed like monsters and things. One of them, a little princess, trots by as I watch. Her coat is yellow, and her long mane flows in the wind as she runs past...

Just like little Fluttershy...

At that, I take a deep breath. I had screwed things up, I know that. But it's only fair to Fluttershy that I make it up to her. *It is* my job, after all. I stand up from behind the

bushes, determined to march up to Fluttershy's front door, and...

...I duck again. The ponies are running back this way, screaming bloody murder. After they pass, I stand up again, only to duck as a tall, regal pony and a unicorn in costume come around the bend. *Why on earth is there so much traffic out here tonight?*

After the coast is clear, I get up and keep walking. Just around the next bend sits a cozy little cottage, with a roof of thick green grass, birdhouses and animal burrows everywhere you look.

I sigh. So, this is where my sister Fluttershy lives.

Suddenly, I feel ashamed. What am I doing? What can I do, or say, that will make the hurt better? Make her want to love me again?

I stand there for a long time, staring at the house. Finally, I reach into my bag and slowly pull out a sheet of paper and a pencil. I sit down on a rock and start writing.

Dear Fluttershy,

I don't know if you remember me, but my name is April Showers. I'm your big sister.

I would like to meet with you, and get to know you again. I live at our old house, 42 Altostratus Way, in Cloudsdale. Please write ahead and let us know if you're coming.

Love,

April

After I finish, I bite my lip and read it again.

It's terrible.

It's worthless.

But it's all I can do.

I fold the sheet into thirds and push it under her door. I hear a frightened squeak and a clatter of dishes. That's so like the Fluttershy I remember that I almost smile.

Almost.

I turn and start walking back towards the station. I look up at the moon, my eyes

burning with tears of shame.

Coward.

* * *

“Go ‘way, Mom, it’s not time for school yet...”

The tapping comes again, and I open one eye blearily. There’s a red and white blur inside a blue blur. I blink: there’s a little red bird hovering outside my window, holding an envelope that’s almost as big as he is.

I sit up and rub my eyes, then get up and open the window. The little bird flies inside and drops his envelope on my bed, then flops down beside it, exhausted. I pick him up, carry him to the kitchen and give him a little dish of water. He looks up at me gratefully, then starts gulping it down.

I walk back to my room and sit on my bed. I pick up the envelope and look at it carefully. It’s addressed to me in a flawless cursive, with a Ponyville return address. I swallow and slowly open it.

Dear April,

Yes, I would love to meet with the family! I’m really looking forward to spending time with you, and Skittle, and Mom and Dad! Will they all be there?

I clench the letter tighter. I feel like someone’s punched me in the stomach.

I was thinking maybe we could do 7 o’clock on Tuesday, if that works for you! Though I don’t want to interfere with any plans you might have already! Just make sure to let me know as soon as you can, and I’ll be there whenever you need me!

Also, please take good care of Huey! He’s probably exhausted, and I don’t want him to get hurt or anything! I’m sure you’ll do fine, though!

See you soon!

Love, Fluttershy

As I fold the note, I notice my hooves are shaking. So, Fluttershy is finally coming home. But what if she’s not the Fluttershy I remember? Maybe she’s still bitter about... about everything. I had robbed her of everything a young filly deserves—friends,

schoolmates, two older sisters, a mother, a father—

A father. Sweet Celestia, what on earth am I going to tell her about Dad? She has no idea he's gone.

I lay back on my bed and let out a long sigh. There's so much pain here—maybe it would be better just to...

No. I grit my teeth. I've come this far. To back out now would make me even *more* of a coward. I swallow hard, then go and dig a postcard and pencil out of the cupboard. I manage to write in a shaky hand,

Fluttershy,

7:00 Tuesday is fine.

April

I quickly walk back into the kitchen. Huey has just finished his water and is now lying flat on his back. I grab him, thrust the postcard into his claws, open the window, and toss him outside.

I slam the window shut and lean on it, shaking.

Had I waited any longer, I would have torn up the card.

* * *

“Skittle, don’t forget to dust the top there.”

She turns to look at me, her eyes wide. She stands a little taller and dusts the top of the cabinet. I glance around the living room one more time. Everything looks perfect.

I hope it’s good enough.

I sent a note to Skittle right after I threw Huey out the window. She came up right away, and we’ve been scrubbing and vacuuming and polishing almost nonstop since she got here. The house shines like it never has before. Skittle even did Mom’s hair. It’s not much, but it makes her presentable, at least.

Skittle hasn’t said much today. She must be nervous. And who could blame her?
I’m terrified.

I glance at the clock: 6:48.

I sit down on one of our ancient couches and nervously straighten the picture frames on the end table. We pulled all of Fluttershy’s photos out of the album and framed them—all of her baby pictures, school pictures, everything. *We’ve been thinking about you, Fluttershy, they say, Honest. We didn’t mean to leave you in the Forest for almost a decade.*

6:52. Now I’m pacing. What will she be like? Does she like playing with the weather? Does she have a boyfriend yet? *Does she hate me for everything I’ve done?*

I look at the clock and flinch. 6:57. I can’t do this. I can’t. I’m leaving.

I stand and walk to the front door. I put my hoof on the doorknob.

Knock knock knock, three petite little taps.

She’s here.

I gulp. I look at Skittle, and she returns the gaze, eyes wide. I realize I’m sweating. I can’t do this. I can’t.

But I must.

I see myself, in slow motion, turn the knob. I see the door, like a glacier sliding down a mountain, swing slowly open.

And I see Fluttershy.

She stands there, in the porch light, looking like everything I’ve remembered. She

wears a simple traveling cloak, and, under that, two big bulges: she's brought something with her.

I see it. It's subtle, but it's there. She paws at the ground. She doesn't look at me. *She's terrified, too.*

I step back, and, all of us silent, she steps in. The door closes behind her. She moves to the table, takes off her cloak, folds it, and puts it down. She takes off her saddlebags too, and sets them on top of the cloak, carefully avoiding eye contact. She slowly turns around, eyes on the rug. We stand there, no one even breathing, for what seems like an eternity.

Finally, she licks her lips. She opens her mouth.

"April, I—"

Slowly, I step forward. I reach up and put my arms around her. I hold her for a second, and I whisper, "Oh, Fluttershy—I missed you *so much*."

Suddenly, it all comes out. I sob like a little filly, thick hot tears running down my cheeks.

Fluttershy hugs me back. "I missed you too, April," she says, her voice quivering. Skittle hugs us too. I can feel her body shaking.

Together, we weep. We weep out eight years of grief, of pain, of love and loss, eight years gone.

No one says anything. Nothing needs to, or, indeed, *can* be said at this moment. We simply open our hearts and wash our souls clean.

I lose track of how long we've been standing here. I don't care. I just want this moment to last forever.

After a long while, blinking through the tears, I see Fluttershy's saddlebags. Something inside is moving.

I pat Fluttershy's shoulder; she looks up at me, eyes full of tears. "Fluttershy, what's in your bag?" I ask, nodding towards the table.

Fluttershy, still sniffling, lets go of us. She moves over to the table and opens one of her bags. Out jumps a little white thing, with long ears and two little eyes. Fluttershy

gently picks him up, and walks to where Mom is sitting, still as a statue.

"Mom," she says carefully, "There's someone I'd like you to meet. Mom, this is Angel."

As I watch, a miracle happens.

Mom blinks.

She blinks several times, and, finally, her eyes come into focus. She looks down at the bunny before her, slightly confused.

And, slowly, she smiles.

* * *

“Fluttershy, do you *really* think the Princess is gonna want to read this?”

I look up from my paper to see Fluttershy staring at me across the table, concerned. I glance away again, suddenly embarrassed. “I mean, it just feels so...” I gesture weakly, “...*sappy*.”

Fluttershy smiles. “Oh, she’ll *love* it,” she says encouragingly, “She likes the sappy ones *best*. She can tell it’s from the heart.”

“If you say so,” I murmur, unconvinced.

Fluttershy turns back to watch Mom and Angel. Mom is lying on the rug in the living room, trying to cuddle with him, but he’s struggling to get away.

I smile and turn back to my stack of papers. I’m a little surprised at how big it’s gotten, but Fluttershy said I should tell the Princess *everything*. I pick up my pencil and start again.

Beyond that, Princess Celestia, I don’t think there’s a whole lot to say. That night, we all sat on the couches in the living room and talked into the wee hours of the morning. Mom spent most of the evening cuddling with Angel; she didn’t say a word the entire time, but she did make little noises when she had something to contribute. I told Fluttershy what had happened after she fell—how hard Dad and I had looked for her, and how we’d ultimately failed.

I have to stop to brush away a tear.

She told us her story, too. Her fall had been broken by, of all things, a cloud of butterflies, which brought her down to the ground safely. She made friends with all the animals, and, when night came on, they led her to an old, abandoned shack. It was filthy and a little scary, but it was dry and warm. With the animals’ help, she slowly turned it into a cozy cottage. We realized later that’s probably the reason we never found her: the animals had taken her far away from where she’d landed—and far away from where we’d been looking for her.

Fluttershy told us it took her years to build up enough strength to fly back up to Cloudsdale, and, when she finally made it, she realized she had forgotten where we lived or how to get there, and she was too afraid to ask anyone for directions. She stood

alone on a street corner crying, hoping that someone would notice her and ask her how they could help, but no one did. That night, she flew back home and cried herself to sleep.

After that, the urge to look for us got weaker and weaker. We would be mad at her, she thought, for leaving us alone for so long. She'd given up hope entirely of seeing us ever again, until I slipped my letter under her door.

I hear Fluttershy laugh, and I look up. Angel has finally wormed his way out of Mom's grasp, and he's made a break for it. Mom is chasing him around the living room like a little filly, snapping playfully at him. He darts under the sofa, and Mom crashes into it. She collapses into a heap, her body shaking with silent laughter. I smile and turn back to my writing.

Since that night, things have been so different. Mom is getting better every day. I still catch her staring out the window every so often, but she is up, and is slowly starting to do chores again. Once or twice a week, I come home to a simple homemade meal, Mom beaming quietly from the kitchen. She still doesn't talk, but that's okay—it's nice just to see her alive again.

I hear Fluttershy scoot her chair back. I look up to see her trotting over to Mom. She helps Mom untangle herself and sit on the couch, then reaches underneath it to grab Angel. She sits next to Mom with Angel on her lap, petting him. He's glaring daggers at Mom, but she doesn't notice. I smile.

Fluttershy visits at least twice a week, and brings up Angel almost as often. He hates the trip, but we all love to see Mom light up so much that we don't really care. . . Most of the time when Fluttershy visits, we don't do a whole lot—we just sit around and talk. Sometimes, though, we go out and do things, and, often as not, Fluttershy takes us back to Ponyville. To be honest, I don't really care what we do; I just love being with her. Being a family again.

I pause. I tap the pencil on the table several times before I trust myself to continue.

I don't think I've ever been happier.

I sigh happily, and, after a pause, continue.

Fluttershy's probably already told you about a lot of our visits to Ponyville—like that time Fluttershy invited us down for cider season (SO GOOD), or when she convinced me to go with her to see some motivational speaker (for “moral support,” of course). She even convinced me to come down and help out when it was Ponyville's turn to send water up to Cloudsdale (It was kinda fun to see one of those tornadoes up close!).

I stare out the window for a long moment. I have to swallow several times before I can continue.

One visit I don't think she told you about happened just a few weeks ago. It was a nice day, and we didn't have anything planned, so the four of us went to go see Dad. It was so peaceful up on that hill, with the breeze blowing through the trees and the smell of flowers in the air. It was the first time Fluttershy had visited him, and I hadn't been back since the funeral. We'd told Fluttershy about him that first night, of course, but I don't think it really sank in until she saw his name on the headstone. When she saw it, she collapsed in the grass and started crying. One by one, we lay down beside her, and all of us cried together. After we had used up out all our tears, we talked about him for a long time. We all miss him so much, but together we're gonna be okay.

Right as we were leaving, Skittle pulled a bouquet of roses out of her bag—red roses, the kind that they give racers in the winner's circle. I think he would have liked that.

I hear steps on the front porch, then someone putting a key in the lock. Mom jumps off the couch, dashes to the door and yanks it open. Skittle jumps, but she smiles, gives Mom a hug and trots in. “How'd the interview go?” I ask.

She smiles brightly. “I think it went really well—but we still have to see what *they* think, of course.” She gives Fluttershy a big hug before going back to our bedroom. I sharpen my pencil and start writing again.

Speaking of Skittle, she's moved back home. She's applying to the Weather Patrol right now, but for a different division. She wants to join the PR department, and,

with that motormouth of hers, I can't think of a better job for her.

I pause and start tapping my pencil on the table, thinking. Skittle comes out of the bedroom and starts going through the cupboards in the kitchen. I turn back to my papers.

As for me, well... I never actually graduated high school after I started working at the factory, so I've dropped a shift and gone back to school in the evenings. I only used up two of my three applications to the Weather Patrol, so I'm going to apply again as soon as I graduate. I've been working with the weather for so long, they can't turn me down this time.

Skittle takes out a glass and fills it with milk from the fridge. As she carries it back into the living room, she gives me a friendly nudge. "So, *lover girl*, have you heard from Dewey recently?" I roll my eyes.

Believe it or not, I've also found a very special somepony. His name is Dewey Decimal, and he works in the Cloudsdale Library. He's smart, and so sweet and kind, Princess. He hates it when I call him "Dewey" though—thinks it's a dumb name—but he's so cute when he's mad I do it anyway. If you'd like, I can send another letter telling you how we met.

I pause for a second, then start writing again.

Now, you're probably wondering, Princess, why I've sent you my life story. Fluttershy told me that you once asked her to send back lessons on friendship, and I thought I'd contribute what I could.

I stare at the paper for a long time, biting my lip. I have no idea what to write now.

I hear a giggle, and I look up. Fluttershy and Skittle are laughing at something, and Mom is smiling along. Something about seeing them together just makes me *glow* inside.

My eyes widen, and I turn back to the paper, writing quickly.

There's something special about family. Even though you might not get along all the time, there's a bond there that means more than anything.

I pause to wipe away a tear.

I've been without a family for almost a decade now, and, now that I have it back, I literally would not trade it for the world.

I smile.

If that's not magic, nothing is.

Your faithful subject,

April Showers

I hear Skittle laugh again. “Come *on*, April, get over here!” she calls.

I smile at her. I put down my pencil with a snap and stand up to join my family—Skittle, my mother, and my sister Fluttershy.

Author's Note:

In December of 2011, I was watching the episode “Sonic Rainboom.” In the scene where Rarity is shining light down on the Weather Factory workers, I noticed a respectable-looking pegasus mare in a factory uniform with the same yellow-and-pink color scheme as Fluttershy. My first thought was that she was family—a sister or a cousin, maybe. I kept watching, and noticed the dozens of yellow-and-pink ponies at the Best Young Flyer Competition, and the idea began to form that, perhaps, Fluttershy had a large extended family—an idea which seemed to fit her oddly well.

Immediately afterwards, I watched “The Cutie Mark Chronicles.” During the race for Fluttershy’s honor, I noticed that the same yellow-and-pink pony (“Ms. Respectable,” as I was calling her) was watching the beginning of the race, but she wasn’t there at the end. Now a story was beginning to form: this pony was Fluttershy’s sister, and, more importantly, her *long-lost* sister. Noticing that Fluttershy had fallen, she had gone looking for her (without success), which is why she didn’t stick around for the end of the race.

As I continued to watch more episodes of the show, I noticed a second pony very similar to “Ms. Respectable,” except that she had different-colored eyes and wore a skirt. She, of course, became another sister.

Given the “Origin Stories” for the sisters, I tried to integrate as many of their in-show appearances into the story as possible. It turns out I missed *quite* a few, but that’s okay. I’ve written up a list of the appearances I used in the story, as well as how I used them, which you can find at the end of these notes.

As I started writing the story, I had to come up with names for my protagonists. Initially, April was named “Parasol,” her fanon name according to the MLP Wiki. After doing a little digging, I found someone had suggested “April Showers” as an alternate name, and I loved it so much I started making changes to the story almost immediately. (Side note: in the week before this story debuted on Equestria Daily, I noticed that a *different* background pony had been given the fanon name of “April Showers.” Oh well)

Skittle, on the other hand, was rather easy. One of her suggested names was “Skittles,” plural—I just took it and made it singular, which, I think made her sound cuter

(For what it's worth, a "skittle" is totally a thing—it's a kind of child's toy).

Before I started writing, I did some research to see if Fluttershy already had a fanon family (she doesn't, not really. Unless you count this story, of course). While doing my research, I stumbled on "[Fluttershy's Mom](#)," a piece drawn by Yamino on DeviantArt. I really liked the design, and decided to use her. Yamino didn't have a name for her, so had solicited suggestions, one of which was "Angel Bunny." I loved it, and added her to the story right away.

Fluttershy's dad was a little more difficult. I had an idea for his name and his general backstory, but I had a hard time picturing what he looked like. Saliant Sunbreeze, from the Equestria Daily chatrooms (Where he's known as "Sali") kindly did [some concept art](#) for me, which was a big help. His name, "Scratch Racer," comes from horse racing: to "scratch" a horse is to remove it from a race. Thus, Scratch Racer, who gave up a promising racing career to focus on his family, is a "Racer" who's been "Scatched."

Most of the other names were easy—I tried to pick common nouns that sounded good. The two exceptions were Gullywash and Dewey Decimal. When trying to come up with a name for Gullywash, the camp counselor that pushes Fluttershy, I noticed that his cutie mark is three big raindrops. I started doing research into names for heavy rain. One of the results was "Gully Washer" (regional slang from back east, I think), and I tweaked it slightly to make it sound better.

Dewey Decimal (April's Very Special Somepony) had several suggested names on the wiki, but I didn't like any of them. Given the fact that his cutie mark is a scroll, I assumed he worked in the library, but couldn't come up with anything beyond that. When talking to Sali about it, he suggested naming him "Dewey Decimal"—which sounds cute and fits his role as a librarian really well (I just realized it's also vaguely weather related ["dewey," i.e. "dew"], so, bonus points for that).

One last thing: the scene where Fluttershy runs across the backyard trying to fly was inspired by one of my family's pets. We once had a goose, who, for some reason, couldn't fly well—but that didn't stop him from trying. He'd run across our (fairly large)

backyard, flapping his wings as hard as he could, and he'd just *barely* lift off the ground before he had to stop. When I was trying to figure out the scene where Fluttershy tried to fly for the first time, that stupid goose was the first thing that came to mind.

Thank you very much for reading. Writing this story has been a blast, and I've been a little overwhelmed at all the positive comments I've been receiving. I hope you enjoyed this story as much as I enjoyed writing it!

-brokenimage321

This is the list of April's and Skittle's in-show appearances I used in the story, arranged in the order I used them.

Episode	Appearance	Use in Story
The Cutie Mark Chronicles	April is present at the beginning of the race for Fluttershy's honor, but not at the end.	April sees the race start, but goes looking for Fluttershy before it ends.
A Bird in the Hoof	Skittle is at the brunch with Princess Celestia.	When Skittle complains that she's bored, April asks her about all the high-society brunches she sneaks into.
Feeling Pinkie Keen	April is part of the same moving crew as Derpy.	April works part-time for the moving crew.
Look Before You Sleep	April is one of the ponies moving the stormclouds into position.	April tells Skittle how the Weather Factory workers are occasionally assigned to move clouds.
Sonic Rainboom	April is one of the ponies in the Cloud Division, shown pumping the bellows on the boiling vats. She is also one of the ponies that are distracted by Rarity's wings, and is present at the Best Young Flyer competition.	April works in the Cloud Division, is assigned to pump the bellows the day of the competition. She describes Rarity's wings in detail, and is also present at the competition.
The Ticket Master	Skittle is part of the mob that chases Twilight Sparkle, trying to get her ticket to the Grand Galloping Gala.	At the Best Young Flyer's competition, Skittle starts telling April about how she <i>almost</i> got a ticket to the Gala the last time she went to Ponyville.
The Best Night Ever	Skittle is present at the Gala.	Skittle tells April about her experience at the Gala.
The Super Speedy Cider Squeezy 6000	April is among the ponies that buy the Apple's cider.	April says that Fluttershy invited her down for the event.
Putting Your Hoof Down	Fluttershy stands next to April while listening to Iron Will.	April says Fluttershy brought her along for "Moral Support."
Hurricane Fluttershy	April is among the ponies that help create the tornado.	April tells us that Fluttershy convinced her to come down and help out.
Hearts and Hooves Day	During the musical number, April is shown seated across from a stallion, looking into his eyes and blushing.	April talks briefly about her "very special somepony," calling him "Dewey Decimal."

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Yunrui & Diane

Thanks for putting up with my pestering.
I hope you're as happy with the final product as I am. :)

Also, very special thanks to Yamino, on DeviantArt. I used her piece, "[Fluttershy's Mom](#)," as the inspiration for Angel Bunny (who is, well, Fluttershy's Mom).

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If you'd like to contact me, you can email me directly at brokenimage321 [at] gmail.com
I'll do my best to respond to everypony's comments and questions.

Thanks for reading!
-brokenimage