

Newsworthy
Part 4: Rejection

Lead Reporter: Medicshy

Ink Well flew over Ponyville at high noon, having made much better time than previous flights due to his distress. He scanned the town, heart drooping at what he saw. There were three very large crowds, one around Sugarcube Corner, another around Carousel Boutique, and a third larger one around the Library. Ink Well banked, spiraling down towards the Library and landing on the edge of the crowd swarming the door.

National Equirers were being waved left and right accompanied by what must have been a hundred voices calling inside for attention. Ink Well tried to muscle his way to the door, but found himself pushed to the outside edge no matter what he did. He tried asking the ponies on the edge to let him in, but either they couldn't hear him over the yelling or they just ignored him. Finally, fed up, he backed up, pulling a random scroll from his bag. He cleared his throat, then yelled in the loudest voice he had. "EVERYPONY MOVE!"

The cry rang around the building, causing the crowd's heads all to turn as one and look at him. He waved the parchment in the air, keeping his voice authoritative and making sure nopony got a good look at the scroll in his hand. "Everypony, out of the way." He flashed the scroll at those around him. "Ink Well, Fire Inspector. This is far too many ponies for this building, I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you to leave." He tried to wave the crowd away, but they mostly just looked at him, confused. He kept his voice confident. "Come on! Move it! Am I going to have to start fining ponies? I said move!" The crowd reluctantly dispersed, clearing a path to the door. They didn't go far though, generally milling about along the street outside.

He walked up to the door, knocking on it and giving stern looks to anypony who got too close. After a few minutes of silence he knocked again, harder this time, and called inside. "Hello? This is Ink Well, open up!" The top of the door squeaked open, just the slightest of cracks, and from behind it peeked the fearful violet eye of Twilight Sparkle. He tipped his hat to the crack, maintaining the voice and air of authority as he stole quick glances around him. "Ms. Sparkle, this is the Fire Inspector. Please open the door." He held up the scroll, letting her read the contents, a story blotted out and scribbled over with a shopping list. She looked up at him, noticing the urging behind his eyes.

The door to the library swung open quickly, letting Ink Well inside before shutting immediately behind him. Twilight pulled him over to the side. "How did you do that?"

His eyebrow raised. "Do what?"

Twilight gestured outside. "How did you get past all of those ponies and get them to back off from the library? I've been trying to get them to leave for hours!"

"Oh, old trick I picked up from my dad." He could tell that Twilight was going to inquire deeper and held up a hoof. "It's not important. Where are the others?"

"I saw Applejack, Rainbow Dash and Fluttershy running towards Rarity's, a crowd at their tails. Pinkie is probably in Sugarcube Corner. Why?"

Ink Well looked at her, remorse on his face. "I'm sorry, I really am. I didn't think any of this would happen. I want to help. I'm going to go get Pinkie and then meet up with the rest of you. Can you make it to the boutique?"

Twilight nodded. "I can try. I'm sure I can find a spell."

"Good. Thank you. I'll be there in a few minutes." He walked over to the door. "Wish me luck." He pulled it open, delving into the crowd of ponies outside once more and snapping it shut behind him.

Twilight stared at the door as the noise from before slowly resumed, the lack of an 'inspector' causing the ponies to immediately resume mobbing the library. She turned and called into the main part of the library. "Spike! I need my notes on the teleport spell! Quickly!"

Ink Well walked calmly from the library to Sugarcube Corner, again pulling out the scroll. "Fire Inspector! Yes, the one from the Library. I am here too. How many times must I tell you that this many ponies in one place is a fire hazard? Now move it!" The ponies again moved aside with a lot of grumbling and complaining. A few demanded to see the scroll, causing him to have to do some quick flourishes to keep them from reading it. Eventually he made his way inside, pushing out the ponies jammed in there. After the last pony had exited the building, he closed the door, tossing aside the old shopping list and muttering to himself. "That isn't going to work again. Twice was already pushing it."

He turned around to find Pinkie Pie bouncing into the store from the kitchen with a pile of trays balanced carefully on her back. Muffins, cakes, cupcakes, cookies and pies teetered on her as she made her way across the store. "I'm sorry everypony, I wasn't expecting a party! Such a good surprise you even got the host! But the snacks are ready!" She placed down the snacks on a table and turned to the store, seeing only Ink Well looking at her very strangely. She tilted her head. "Where did everypony go? Did something happen?"

Ink Well shrugged. "Nothing big. The ponies had to leave, something about a fire hazard." He looked into her innocent, smiling face and raised an eyebrow. "You seem awfully cheerful. Have you read the Equirer article?"

Pinkie nodded. "Yeah! Why?"

"Why are you so happy about it?"

Pinkie bounced around him. "It was an Equirer article! And I was in it! And now that everypony knows about my parties, imagine the bashes I'll be able to throw! It'll be amazing! Would you like to come? One's happening now!" She moved over to the door, looking outside. "Doesn't seem like much of a party, but I'm sure it'll be great once the guests come inside! Why? Did you read the story?"

Ink Well's head reeled from the whiplash topic transition and her 'logic.' "Um... no. I didn't..." He coughed nervously. "Can I borrow your copy?"

“Sure!” She tossed him the magazine. He looked at her, confused as to where she had been hiding it. She just smiled at him. “I've got to go greet the guests! I'll see you later!” She bounced from the room as Ink Well moved to the kitchen to find a quiet place to read.

Ink Well walked from the kitchen, enraged by what he had read. Inside the store front all the ponies from outside crowded among the streamers and balloons that had sprung up. The music was blaring, signaling loud and clear a Pinkie Pie party. He pushed his way through the party, eventually finding her near a punch bowl, a cup in her hoof and surrounded by ponies asking about the article. With some effort he sidled up to her, being pushed in by all sides. “Pinkie, can I talk to you?”

She smiled at him. “Sure, silly! It's a party! You can talk to anypony!”

He shook his head angrily. “How can you be throwing a party? You were angry at me yesterday for much less than this... slander! How are you not mad?”

She giggled at him. “Oh, they didn't write anything too bad..”

“They said you assaulted half of the attendees and burned down the castle with your wild partying! Those are blatant lies! And your story was the mildest. They accused half of you for trying to assassinate the royals and the other half for trying to destroy the castle like some crazed revolutionaries! Even if you aren't mad, how can you not feel bad for your friends?”

She shrugged. “I do, but I invited them to the party to make it up to them! Once they have fun they'll brighten up. It'll be okay.”

“No! It's not okay! I...” Ink Well shook his head at her. “I don't get you Pinkie Pie. You just have your party. I'll be with the others at the boutique.” He huffed as he shoved his way out of the party, jostled by the ponies trying to get to Pinkie Pie. As he reached the door, he looked back at her smiling and chatting it up, shook his head, and left.

Ink Well walked out of Sugarcube Corner fuming and headed to the Carousel Boutique. The crowd was huge, pushing and jamming against the doors. Among the ponies with the magazine were a few with cameras, flashing pictures frantically of windows with drawn curtains and doors hung with a 'Closed' sign. Ink Well scanned the crowd, frowning as he recognized ponies from the Library. He talked to himself under his breath. “I'm going to have to sneak in here. Too many of these are from the other crowds, they'll get suspicious.” As he turned to leave, Ink Well recognized a rosy mane near the back of the crowd. He walked over, hesitantly tapping the pony on the shoulder. She turned, her ivy green eyes and rose cutie mark confirming what he'd feared. “Rose! What are you doing here?”

“Ink Well! Did you hear what they did at the Gala? Oh, the scandal! It's so juicy, isn't it? I never knew you could write like that!”

Ink Well's face hardened. "You think I wrote that..? You think that I wrote such blatant lies about these ponies?" He glared at her. "Do you even realize what you're saying? They're your friends! Your fellow townspories! Not three days ago you were praising Rarity, and today you stand before her door looking for dirt."

Rose looked at him, confused. "But isn't that what you do? Didn't you fake most of those stories?"

Ink Well's look could shoot daggers. "I always talked to them. I got the facts. I bent the truth, maybe full circle, but the truth was there. When I wrote a story on somepony, it was to entertain, not to declare war!"

Rose backed away from him, scared by the frightful look on his face. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to--"

He advanced on her, attracting the attention of the ponies around them "To what? To enjoy the shame of others? To accuse me of writing it? To not even read the name of the reporter on the article? To believe in a story over what you know of your own neighbors?" He looked around at the ponies staring at him, realizing that he had been shouting, then he looked into the trembling eyes of Rose. He backed up, doubt tracing over his features. He sighed, looking at Rose sadly. "I'm sorry... I guess I just thought higher of you." He trotted away to the side of the building. Rose looked at him, then down at the magazine in her hoof. After a brief time of contemplation she dropped it and walked away, the only one to leave the crowd.

Rarity, Fluttershy, Applejack, Rainbow Dash and Twilight all sat huddled in the back room of the boutique, windows drawn and ponies in various states of unease. Dash and Applejack were pacing angrily by the door, while Twilight was trying to comfort Fluttershy, who was weeping gently in the corner. Rarity was laying on her bed, ranting. "Oh the scandal! The humiliation! How can I go on like this? I shall die of shame if I walk out of here again! Oh what is a pony to do?"

Applejack stomped her hoof. "I can't believe that darn magazine! They print lies about us, and then when somepony finally does sumthin', they fire him and print the lies anyway! If I could just get my hooves on 'em!"

Rainbow reared up, smacking her hooves down. "We should fly out to the Equirer and burst into their offices hit 'em all if they don't take it back!"

Twilight frowned at her. "Rainbow, just calm down. Attacking them will do nothing. We just need to wait, it'll all blow over. It did last time... Besides, Ink Well is coming, and he's going to try to help us."

Rainbow crossed her front hooves, pouting. "Yeah, that's helped so much so far..."

Fluttershy curled into a ball. "I just wanted to be their friends... I didn't mean to do anything at the Gala... Everypony thinks I'm just awful..."

Twilight hugged her. “There, there. It's alright. No pony thinks you're awful.”

Rarity threw herself back on her bed. “Oh, woe is me! We will have to go into exile! Luckily, I packed the last time, just in case of an emergency. We will all live marvelously, even in a foreign land!”

Fluttershy wiped away the tears, looking at Twilight. “I don't want to leave all my friends. What will the animals do when I'm gone?”

Applejack came over, calming down from her own anger. “It's okay sugar cube. It'll all be alright. We'll make it through this, somehow. And none of us will have to go away or nuthin'.”

A tap came at the window, drawing the fearful attention of all the ponies. It tapped again, slightly quicker this time. Every pony within the room looked at each other, trying to figure out who should go check it or if they should at all. A third tap came, rattling the windows behind the curtain. Fluttershy turned her head away, curling into a tighter ball and drawing back the attention of Applejack and Twilight. Rarity nodded towards Rainbow Dash, then tilted her head at the window.

Rainbow crept over, working very hard to move silently. She crawled beneath the curtain, looking up at it worriedly. The tapping came again, slightly more frantic. From outside Dash could hear a voice whispering, but couldn't make out the words. She slowly lifted herself up, sticking her head under the curtain so that she could see outside.

Peeking in from the side of the window was Ink Well, his back pressed against the wall to minimize his profile. He looked at Rainbow, who herself was peeking from the bottom of the window, and smiled. Rainbow popped up, pushing the window open, letting Ink Well shoot inside, closing the window behind him and swirling around the curtain, holding it with a hoof to stop its movement. When he turned around, Rarity jumped up, pulling her covers over herself. “My! A colt in my bedroom, uninvited! How improper!”

Applejack rolled her eyes. “Not now Rarity!” Rarity pouted at her, but Applejack ignored her, walking over to Ink Well. “Twi said you wanna help us. Now, I'm all for that, but the first thing I wanna know is why the story ran. I thought you got kicked for it.”

Ink Well took out the magazine, flipping to the article. “I think the whole thing was written blind. I think...” He checked the magazine for the author, “this 'Checkers' was just given the rumors and the information known and told to write a story. They didn't get you or Pinkie by name, so they can't have actually gathered any information.” He shrugged. “They did the same thing when I wrote the Appaloosa story. But this guy was just... crazy. This is the kind of story from an international intrigue novel, not a Gala gossip piece.”

Fluttershy sniffled in the corner. “How could they write all of those horrible things?”

Ink Well sighed. “I don't know.” He walked over to her and knelt down next to her, placing his hoof on her shoulder. “But I vow that I will do everything in my power to clear your name. All of you. You have my word that your corrections will be printed and this slander will be set right.”

She looked up at him, tears at the edges on her eyes. “Really? You mean it?”

He nodded. “Yup. Cross my heart and hope to fly, stick a cupcake in my eye.” A gasp came from the rest of the room, but Fluttershy's face broke into a smile. Ink Well smiled back, then stood up and turned back to the other ponies, who looked at him with shocked expressions. Ink Well coughed nervously. “Was it something I said?”

Rainbow Dash shot over to him, smacking him on the back. “No way! How do you know the Pinkie Swear? You know it's unbreakable, right?”

Ink Well looked offended. “I wouldn't say it if I didn't mean it.”

Twilight looked around, finally noticing something. “Hey! Where is Pinkie? Weren't you going to bring her with you?”

“She's at Sugarcube Corner, throwing a party. I think we're all invited, but there's quite a lot of Equirer fans there. I have no clue what she's thinking... seems insensitive.”

Applejack shook her head at him. “It's not as bad as all that. It's just how she is. She just always wants to see us happy, and how she does it with parties. She really means well.”

Ink Well shrugged. “Whatever you say. I still don't get it, but then I guess I don't have to.” He walked towards the window, pushing it open. “I'm going to get out of here, get to reworking the correction piece. I'll check in with you after I send something, alright?”

Twilight nodded to him. “Alright Ink Well. And thank you.”

He tipped his hat to them. “Of course. It's the least I can do.” He looked around outside, seeing the path clear of ponies. “I think if you hurry you might be able to slip away. Good luck out there.” Ink Well took off out of the window, flying into the sky and back to his house.

Ink Well spent the afternoon analyzing the story, trying to determine the best angle to use to incorporate this article into the rest of his corrections. He looked over his notes and his edit-ridden story, and with a little work determined the best way to denounce the 'revolutionary activities' of the 'Ponyville 6'. As night fell, he lit a candle on his desk before continuing his work. Around him danced the shadows of stories long written and tales long forgotten, edging their way into the writer's mind and trying to sap his focus. But he remained resolute, concentrating solely on the task at hoof, preparing a story that anypony would read, and more importantly, one that contained only the truth. He heard the clock chime the hours, ticking away the night until all that remained was that silent stillness before dawn.

He yawned, the fountain pen falling from his mouth as he raised his hooves and stretched. He looked down at the discarded pen, then up to the clock, then to his paper. The words stared at him, urging him onwards towards completion. He blinked the sleep from his eyes, then picked up the pen once more. “No time to rest yet,” he said around the pen. “They'll be plenty of time to sleep when it's

done.” He returned to writing, the clock forlornly marking the time behind him.

A gentle knock on the door roused him from his sleep. The sun gleamed in the windows from a high angle. He looked at the puddle of candle wax staining the corner of the desk, it having burned out long ago. His pen sat at the bottom lip of the desk where it had rolled as he slept. He picked his head up, dry ink sticking the paper to his fur for just a moment before it drifted back to the desk. He looked down at the paper, frowning at the sentence stalled mid-stroke. “Shoot, how long was I out?”

The knock happened again, so soft as to be barely heard. Ink Well's attention turned to the door, thoughts on his story now behind him. He walked over slowly, moving carefully to unknot his muscles before reaching the door. He swung it open, shielding his eyes with a hoof as the midday sun tried to blind him. Standing outside was a figure, though Ink Well couldn't make out detail while he squinted in the light. “Hello? Can I help you?”

The figure took a step back. “Oh, I'm sorry. Is this a bad time?” Ink Well blinked to aid his eye's adjustment to the light. The figure before him quickly resolved into the form of Fluttershy.

Ink Well perked up immediately, rubbing a hoof through his mane in a failed attempt to straighten the tangle atop his head. “Fluttershy! No, it's not a bad time. I'm sorry, I wasn't expecting a visit.”

Sheepishly she kicked at the ground. “Should I come back later? I don't want to bother you.”

Ink Well stepped aside, smiling awkwardly. “No! No, it's fine. Come in, take a seat.” She walked into the house, which hadn't changed at all since she'd last seen it. “Sorry I didn't clean up or anything, though I suppose you've seen it in worse shape.”

“Oh, no. It's fine. Really.” Fluttershy walked to the sofa, moving a pile of papers from one side and trying to get comfortable on the wafer thin padding.

Ink Well walked over to the writing table, the only seat in his house that he ever took. He smiled at her. “So, what brings you all the way out here?”

“I had to get away. There were just so many ponies visiting my house to ask me questions.” She shuddered in place on the couch. “It was scaring the animals. They'd be better off if I weren't there right now.”

Ink Well shook his head. “Sometimes I wonder about those reader ponies, scaring innocent creatures. It's not right.”

Fluttershy stared into the paper veneer on the floor. “I couldn't handle it anymore. All around town ponies just keep hounding me, so I flew out here. At least the only pony here knows the truth.”

Ink Well smiled at her. “Well you're welcome any time, but I can't promise much in the way of hospitality. I don't have a lot in the way of food or drink and I'm kind of focused on fixing that story

right now.”

Fluttershy giggled. “I can see that.” Ink Well looked at her, confused. She pointed at his cheek, where words had clearly dried on his fur. He looked around until he spotted his reflection in the metal of the sink. Frowning, he began to wash the words from his face. “Did you fall asleep while writing?”

Ink Well smiled nervously at her. “Yeah... I guess I just wasn't paying attention to the time, woke up just before you got here.” He pointed to the paper sitting on his desk. “But at least I have the layout all finished. I just have to dress it up for the magazines I'm going to submit it to and all will be well. Getting that first layout was really the hardest part.” He turned off the sink. “Well, that and getting it published, but that part's always difficult.” He turned around, finding Fluttershy reading over one of the papers on the stack next to her. “Enjoying your read?”

Fluttershy jumped, trying for a second to look as nonchalant as possible. She looked at his face, then sighed, resigning. “Oh, I'm sorry... I was just curious. What little I read while cleaning was great! Even better than everything you did for the Equirer.”

Ink Well tilted his head at her. “Really? You read the Equirer? I thought you just got humiliated by it.”

She looked down while she was talking. “Um... well, I always liked the stories. They were written so well, even though they were fake. I didn't take it seriously, but it was fun to read! It's only the few rare times that it was hurtful...”

“Yeah... well...” Ink Well smiled at her. “At least you enjoyed the story. That's the attitude I wish more ponies took with it. But instead, well... you know how they react.” He walked back to his writing desk and sat getting ready to write. As he did, he looked back at Fluttershy, who was reading the story next to her again. He smiled. “Hey, I'm going to be working on the article for 'Ponies Magazine,' but if you like my writing so much, feel free to read whatever you want.”

Fluttershy smiled, taking the first story off of the stack and placing it in an easier place to read, diving right into it. Ink Well pulled out a fresh piece of paper, picking up his pen and starting to write. Behind him he heard Fluttershy humming quietly to herself. He smiled as he wrote, glad to have the company.

Fluttershy stayed until sunset, reading all of the stories in the pile next to her, as well as a few around the room. She looked outside, seeing the reddening sky. “Oh no! It's so late! I need to go.”

“Wait!” Ink Well wrote quickly, the pen dancing across the paper beneath him. “Hold on... hold on... Finished!” He plunked the pen into the ink pot on his desk, then grabbed the story and held it to Fluttershy. “Before you go, could you read over this? I just want to make sure it's up to your standard before I send it off.”

“Oh... alright.” Fluttershy took the story, setting it down on the couch and settling down to read it. While she read the story, Ink Well cleaned up the melted wax on his desk, tossing its remains in the

trash outside before placing a new one on his desk. He set up a few pieces of paper on the desk, sitting and readying himself to write when Fluttershy finished the story.

“This is perfect. Exactly what we were all asking for.” She gave him back the story. “Thank you.”

Ink Well smiled. “No problem. I'm glad I got it right.”

“No, I mean... thank you for doing all of this. Writing our corrections, trying so hard to get them all printed, even after losing your job... It means a lot.” She smiled at him, a very warm smile.

Ink Well looked at her, surprised by the compliment. “Oh. Well... It wasn't right what they were doing, you know? Somepony had to do something.”

Fluttershy smiled at him. “Well then thank you for being the pony to do it.” She walked to the door, looking at her flight path. She looked back, seeing Ink Well sitting at his writing desk once more. “Um... would it be alright if I visited again? I don't want to impose.”

Ink Well looked at her. “Of course! It's no imposition. To be honest, I like the company. Especially when they like my stories. Feel free to come by any time you want.”

She looked very happy to hear him say that. “Okay. Thank you again. Have a nice evening!”

Ink Well smiled. “You too! Fly safely!” Fluttershy took off, flapping her wings and jumping into the air without hardly disturbing anything around her. After she had gone, Ink Well turned to the story and readied his pen. “That's one down. Just a half dozen to go!” He placed pen to paper, setting about another night of work.

Ink Well spent the next few nights writing, starting at dusk and working into the wee hours of the morning. He worked diligently, readying the spin for whichever magazine he was writing, and waking at his desk the next day, work nearly finished before him. He would spend the day writing the cover letter for it, as well as preparing the envelope for mailing. In the afternoon he's place the letter in the mailbox, flipping up the little flag so it would be picked up the next day. Then the cycle was repeated.

Fluttershy visited again three days after her initial visit, bringing along her bunny, Angel. She again woke Ink Well with her knocking, who gave her the story he'd written the night before to begin with. “This one is going to 'The New Republic.' It's another gossip magazine, most of the ones on the list are, but since you're here, I'd like you to make sure I'm still writing to your standards.” Fluttershy agreed, reading the story as Ink Well wrote the cover letter.

As he finished it, Fluttershy placed the story on his desk. “Just as good as last time, Ink Well. It's good to print.”

Ink Well spent the day writing again, this time with Angel sitting on his desk, watching him

work. After a few hours of writing, Ink Well looked at Angel, then reached out a hoof hesitantly. The rabbit looked at him dourly. After a moment more of hesitation, Ink Well put his hoof down. "Alright Angel. You don't have to like me yet. I won't force the issue." He turned back to his work, and Angel bounced over to Fluttershy.

She looked at the distasteful look on the bunny's face and frowned. "Oh Angel, he just wants to be friends! You don't have to be so mean about it." Angel stuck his tongue out at her. "Well fine. You go play outside then. I'm going to stay in here."

Fluttershy finished his completed stories over the course of that day, placing the last one in the finished group just before sunset. She looked sad as she did, sitting quietly for a few minutes. As Ink Well noticed the quiet, he turned to her, noticing her expression. "Are you alright?" She nodded, still looking down. "What's wrong?"

"Oh, well, that was the last of your stories. I was really enjoying these visits." She sighed, heading to the door. "I guess I'll see you later."

"Yeah. I guess." As Fluttershy was about to fly off, Ink Well walked over. "Well, if you like my writing so much, you could read my book. I don't think anypony else has, you could be the first!"

Fluttershy turned to him, a sad look in her eye as she heard him talk like that. "Don't say that. I'm sure lots of ponies read your book. It was great."

"Oh, yeah, well I didn't think you'd-" Ink Well's jaw dropped, registering what had been said. "What?"

She smiled at him. "I said your book was great."

Ink Well looked at her as though she had suddenly sprouted another head. "You've read my book?"

"Yes. I got it a few days after it came out." Ink Well placed a hoof on her shoulder, which was quickly smacked by Angel. He then stared at her, examining what he must have thought of as an impossibility. She backed away from his gaze, starting to feel uneasy. "Is something wrong?"

"No... Nothing is wrong." His face changed from an analytical look to one of sheer joy. He hugged her, catching her off guard and unsteady. "I had to make sure you were real, and you are! You really are!" He released his hug, flying joyfully around his house. "Somepony who read my book! I never thought this day would come!"

She looked at him, disbelieving. "You mean no pony had complimented your book before?"

The grin slowly faded from his face. "No. Not a one. I told you, it didn't sell. I made no money from commissions on the book. So far as I know the only ones that went into circulation went to the libraries, lost among the ages of reality written down within... I'd thought it was trash, a complete waste of time..." He looked back at her, the grin plastering itself on his face once more. "Oh, thank you Fluttershy."

She looked confused. “What did I do?”

“You liked my book. That's more than anypony's ever done before.” He looked outside at the ever darkening sky. “Oh, geez, look at the time. You should probably be heading home. I've held you up too long.”

Fluttershy smiled. “It's alright. I'll see you later, okay?”

“Yeah. Of course. Have a nice flight.” Ink Well paced around the room, beaming at everything around him as Fluttershy quietly took off, gliding into the dark. After a few moments, Ink Well realized that Fluttershy had gone and dashed out the door. He caught up to her a few dozen yards outside. “Wait. Um, well... If you want to come visit again, I don't have much in the way of food or anything, but if you'd like you could read my incomplete stories. I could use some input on them...” He rubbed his mane sheepishly, “if you want.”

Fluttershy smiled at him, marveling at how he was so far from his house without his usual accessories. “Sure, I'd like that. I'll see you soon Ink Well.”

Ink Well's grin grew even wider. “Yeah. Fly safely!” He flew back to his door, dancing on air all the way back.

Ink Well sent off the last of the correction stories the next day, having written three over the course of the night. He hadn't fallen asleep at his desk, being much too excited while writing, only waiting until after he sent the letters to go to bed. With a content smile, he lay his head wearily on his cloud pillow. Dreams came unbidden, a vivid wonderland that no words could describe, though he would definitely attempt when he next wrote.

Ink Well's eyelids rose cheerfully with the morning sun. He smiled, having for once actually slept through the night, a relatively unknown experience to him. He got up from his bed and stretched before looking around the room. It may have been just a bed, a few hanging papers and a low roof, but it was the best looking place in the world this morning. He fluttered happily into the bulk of his house, the writing desk clean and tidy, the stack of read stories still sitting neatly on the couch. He moved them aside, clearing the couch. He stood back, taking in the sagging green couch cushions that he hadn't seen in... “Huh, when did I last see that thing clear?” He looked around the house, seeing pile after pile of papers and scrolls, bundles and sheaves, and frowned. “This place is a mess!”

Ink Well started to straighten piles into stacks, consolidating the mess into a reasonable area. From there, he organized the stacks, moving them into the corners and out of the way places around the house. He even tidied up the pile of rejection letters, collecting the crumpled balls of paper into a bin until a mountain was sticking out of it. It was amazing how much of the scuffed wood floor was revealed when the papers were organized, and it was suffocating how much dust flew into the air. After an hour of rearranging his house, Ink Well threw the front door open, coughing and sputtering for breath. “I really need to clean this place more often.” He walked from the door, letting the dust settle, and found the flag on his mailbox to be raised. Pulling open the cover, he found two letters within, both

with the magazine's logos on the front.

Excited, he ripped open the envelope from 'Ponies' magazine, dumping the letter onto the grass. He ducked down, reading it where it had landed. "Ink Well, we are happy for your submission... yada yada yada... your story was very well written, but..." He slowed down, scanning the rest of the letter slowly, wings drooping. "Rejected." He picked up the paper, crumpling it with his hooves. "Welp, that's why you sent it to more than one magazine!" He was more careful with the envelope from 'Solar,' keeping his pace slow and his emotions calm. No need to work himself up about the contents, it certainly wouldn't change them. He pulled out that letter, reading it expectantly despite himself. "Ink Well, we thank you for your... get to the good bit... but..." He sighed, crumpling up the other letter. "Figures."

He picked up the compacted letters, taking them within the house and tossing them towards the bin of rejection. They bounced off of the mountain, causing a small avalanche which scattered paper balls around the room. Ink Well sighed, blowing away a swirl of dust before him. After a few seconds, he frowned. "C'mon Ink Well! Just one bad day, nothing to get so down about!" He walked to the door, smiling as the wind blew through his mane. "Today shouldn't be spent in the house. It's a day for flight!" He walked inside, grabbing his hat and putting on his bag, placing his pen from the ink pot into its holster. He then trotted outside, closing the door behind him, and took off.

Ink Well glided around the valley, enjoying the wind under his wings and the sun on his back. He flew up to Cloudsdale, walking among the clouds and taking in the beautiful architecture. He'd always liked the design of this city, the columns and statues made of solidified cloud having an aesthetic impossible to replicate on the ground. He still marveled at the Cloudiseum every time he saw it, and the weather factory on the edge of town made such a striking silhouette against the sky. He spent the entire day enjoying the sights and sounds of the glorious city in the sky. Window shopping, the floating park, touring the weather factory, just experiencing the town for all it had to offer.

The final part of his day in Cloudsdale brought him to the National Equirer's office at sunset. He glared at the building, hating how its boxy design contrasted with the ornate pillars and decorative nature of the buildings around it. It was so out of place, sitting on its own cloud, refusing to share either space or design with its neighbors. It was like some cheap Manehattan building flung into the wonder of the clouds. It just... didn't fit.

Ink Well watched the building for a few minutes, not really sure what to make of himself. Eventually he turned away and took off, spiraling from Cloudsdale back to his home in the valley below. As he walked in the door, wings weary and mind full, he decided to go to bed early, welcoming the change of pace his waiting life had.

That night, his sleep was uneasy, tossing and turning through the night, dreams dark and foreboding, centering around accusations of him and the Equirer. He awoke mid morning when he tumbled out of bed, his hair an absolute mess. He gingerly made his way outside, seeing the small mailbox flag up again. He walked over, opening it to find two letters, each emblazoned with their own logo. He flipped open the first, from 'Night,' hoping for good news. "Ink Well... blah blah blah... Ah, there it is, but..." He dropped the spent envelope, turning his attention to the other. "Ah, 'Canterlot Weekly.'" He flipped it open, jumping half way down the page.

There it was, that tiny three letter word that marked its fate. He dropped the letter to the ground, walking forlornly back inside. “What did you expect? Everything would suddenly change? Just getting your hopes up Ink Well.” He closed the door with a soft 'thunk' that knocked over the rejection bin, scattering papers across the floor. He then trudged over to the writing desk, kicking away papers as the energy drained from him, the bad news taking a toll. He picked up his pen, pulled out a sheet of paper, and just started writing. He filled the page with ramblings and notes, scribbles and doodles, nothing of real substance, just sitting and writing to clear his head.

Without him realizing the passage of time, shadows fell on the room. He shook his head, noticing the darkness around him. He looked down at the papers spread around his desk, half a dozen sheets covered in rambling. He sighed. “What a waste of a day.” He lit the candle sitting on the edge of his desk and pulled out a new sheet of paper, pen moving slowly back to writing position. He sat in the lone candle's light, the darkness slowly swallowing the room.

A gentle knock came at the door, rousing Ink Well from his slumber. He got up, bleary eyed, from his desk, and looked down at the paper. Doodles of ponies, mostly a familiar pegasus and earth pony, covered the sheet. He pushed it from the desk, groggily heaving himself away from the desk and dragging his weary wings to the door. He pulled it open slowly. “Hello?”

“Hello. I- Eep!” Outside the door Fluttershy jumped back, surprised by the vision before her. “Ink Well! Are you okay?”

“Huh? Oh! Fluttershy!” He straightened up trying to look cheerful despite the bags under his eyes. “How are you? Long time no see. What time is it, by the way?”

“It's almost noon. Did you stay up all night writing again?”

Ink Well looked back at the papers thrown haphazardly to the floor. “Something like that...”

Fluttershy sighed, shaking her head. “Oh Ink Well, you need to treat yourself better...” She walked inside, noticing the crumpled papers scattered throughout the room and the wax sculpture dripping from the desk. Ink Well watched her examining his room and tried with little success to straighten his mussy mane. After a few seconds he noticed Fluttershy looking at him, smiling. Ink Well quickly brought down his hoof and smiled nervously back. “Oh!” Fluttershy reached into the small bag she had with her and pulled out an envelope. “I almost forgot why I was here! Rose asked me to deliver a letter to you.”

Ink Well tilted his head in confusion. “From Rose? Did she say what she wanted?”

“No. She just walked up to my door yesterday and said that she was sorry for how she'd acted when the article came out. I thanked her, and as she was walking off she said something about mailing a letter to you.” She kicked one of the paper balls at her feet. “I'd kind of been wanting to visit anyway, so I offered to deliver it.”

Ink Well smiled, accepting the letter. “Thank you. That was very kind.”

Fluttershy smiled. "It was really no problem." She looked around the room, pointing to a stack of papers. "Are these your unfinished ones?"

Ink Well paused mid envelope rip to look. "Yeah, those ones. Help yourself." He opened the letter, leaning against a wall as he read it:

'Dear Ink Well,

I'm sorry for what I said the other day. After seeing you outside of Carousel Boutique, I went home and read your old articles in the Equirer, and you're right. You have an element of truth in them that this writer just didn't have. In fact, your words were more believable because they were true, something that it seems none of the other writers at the Equirer understand. It made me realize how foolish I was for being taken in by such obvious lies, and I could tell I lost your trust with my actions. I just...

I'm sorry. From the bottom of my heart, I wish that I had realized my folly before you had to yell it at me, and I wish that the others in town could see theirs. It was silly and stupid and it was hurtful for those on the receiving end. But I guess that isn't the main point of this letter. I want to invite you to my shop the next time you're in town, just to talk. I feel that I said and did some things that could really stifle our friendship, and I don't want it thrown away over something as silly as an article.

Hope to see you soon!
Roseluck'

Ink Well put down the letter on his desk, looking at it sadly. "Yeah... I said some things I shouldn't have either." He folded it away carefully, placing it on the edge of his writing desk. He turned around to find Fluttershy looking at him as though she wanted to ask him something. "Yes Fluttershy?"

"Oh, um, well... When I was cleaning your house all those days ago, I went into your room and I saw your story on the wall. I was wondering, if it's okay with you, if it would be alright for me to read it."

Ink Well looked surprised that she even had to ask. "Go ahead! You've earned it, my only reader! Enjoy."

"Oh! Thank you." Fluttershy hovered up to the room above, leaving Ink Well alone with his stories. He walked to the door, letting a slight breeze into his stuffy house. Outside he could see the mailbox, flag raised and announcing mail.

Ink Well thought about just closing the door, but shook his head. "Not reading it isn't going to change the result." He walked slowly outside, pulled open the mailbox, and took out the three letters sitting within. He then walked calmly back into the house, sitting down at his writing desk before even thinking about opening them. He held them up, the responses from 'The New Republic', 'The Inquisitor', and 'The Times' all looking at him. "Maybe if I just open all three at once, it won't sting as badly." He opened each envelope, careful not to catch a glimpse of the letters before he laid them out side by side. Then in one motion he flipped them all open, scanning down into them to see what they

held.

His wings dropped, his ears flattening against his head. “Rejected. All of them.” With a defeated sigh his head dropped, forehead colliding loudly, though not painfully, with the desk. He pushed his chair back so that his body was slumped over the divide, hooves splayed across the rejections before him. “Congratulations, Ink Well! You just failed a week of work AND your new friends! Tell us how you feel.” He brought up his head a few inches, just to let it drop once more painfully into the desk. “You really thought you could help them, didn't you? You thought you could fix everything with a pen and ink and a dream.” He banged his head against the table again, this time causing his forehead to throb with the impact. “You really got yourself worked up, didn't you? Just a stupid writer whose only good piece of work was years ago. You're a hack Ink Well!”

He raised up his head again, winding up to bring it down hard, when a hoof was placed gently on his forehead. He opened his eyes to see Fluttershy hovering above him, sadness filling her eyes. “Don't. Please. You don't deserve it. You have been doing a wonderful job, and you write so well. These magazines don't know what they're talking about.” Fluttershy removed her hoof from his head, letting him straighten his neck. She then landed softly next to him. “I finished the story.”

“Yeah? And how was my crowning achievement?” Ink Well didn't mean to, but disdain dripped into his voice. “Spectacular right? Best thing I've ever written? Yeah, I know. It was all down hill from there.” His head hung low, no emotion bothering to come to his face.

Fluttershy frowned at him. “It was a wonderful story, but it's not better than your current work.”

He slumped forward onto his writing desk. “Then how come everything I write gets rejected? It can't be because its good.”

Fluttershy shook her head, rubbing his back with her hoof. “There there. I know you're upset right now, but its alright. I don't know why other ponies don't like your work. I think its wonderful. All of it. You've only been improving as a writer, Ink Well, it's just your attitude that's deteriorated so.”

Ink Well gestured to the pile of stories Fluttershy had read. “But none of those had the spark!” His hoof rounded the room, pointing out the unfinished works and the articles. “Not one of them was inspired like that first one! They were just come across as my mind rambled. Nothing special, just words on a paper.”

“Ink Well, that's all any writing is. Letters, books, magazines, stories, they are all just words on paper. It is up to the author and the reader to make them more.” She walked around him, picking up the letters on the desk. “These rejections are from ponies who don't get it. They don't want a story with feeling poured into each word. They don't want a world to come alive in front of them. They want words so simple anypony will read them and want to know more, and they do that by taking horrible private things and making them news.” She placed the letters face down in a stack in the corner. “You have a great gift Ink Well. You need to realize that. Don't let rejection stop it from coming out.”

Ink Well sulked at his desk, looking at the rejections sitting face down next to him. He sat up, looking past Fluttershy to the pile of rejections by the door. His eyes drifted down to the rejections carpeting the floor. How could he go on against odds like that?

Then he looked at Fluttershy. She looked at him compassionately, trying her best to make him feel better, but he could tell she meant every word she said. She believed in him, even though he didn't believe in himself. He smiled. "Well. If you insist, I'll give it another shot." He spun around in his chair, facing himself back to his writing desk. Behind him, Fluttershy smiled, glad to see him active again. He flipped over the rejections, reading over them individually. "Let's see what they actually have against the article."

After he looked them all over, his brain registered something. A thought, fleeting, but... He held up two of the letters, examining them closely side by side, then slowly running one behind the other. "Interesting." He did this with the other letter, then tossed it to the side. "Hmm..." Fluttershy watched him, confused.

"What?"

Ink Well quickly put down the letters, turning to her. "Fluttershy, on the floor around here are two recent letters from 'Ponies' and 'Solar'. See if you can find them, and if you can, smooth them out on the desk." Ink Well hopped from his chair and trotted outside, looking around for any sign of the two letters he'd dropped out here the day before. After a minute of searching, he found them snagged under a nearby bush. He untangled them, trying not to rip them too badly, and ran back inside. As he reentered Fluttershy was smoothing out the letters on his desk.

Ink Well placed his two torn letters next to the creased ones and the ones from today, looking between them all carefully. He then rearranged them, mixing up their order. "Huh... Very interesting." He held up one letter from each category, trying to back light them from a nearby window. "Would you look at that..."

Fluttershy watched him doing all of this from a few steps away, questions about his sanity popping into her head. "Ink Well? What are you doing?"

Ink Well placed down the papers and motioned her over. "You have to see this. Come here, look at these all carefully. I can't believe I didn't notice it before." Fluttershy walked over, looking at the six form letters in various states of distress. After a few seconds of analysis, she looked over to Ink Well, confused.

"What is it? What am I looking for?"

"Look at the writing, both how they're written and the wording used." Fluttershy turned her attention back to the papers, not sure what she was looking for. She sat reading them for almost a minute in silence, about to give up, when she noticed it.

"Wait." She read over the letters again, shock slowly creeping over her face. "No. That's so odd."

"Ah! You saw it!" Ink Well held up the letters to the window again, letting Fluttershy look over his shoulder. "There, in the corner, do you see that too?"

Fluttershy stepped back, covering her mouth with her hooves. “No!”

Ink Well smiled at her, a suspicious, playful smile. “Oh yes! This is the kind of thing that really sparks a mystery!” He held up all of the letters. “What do you think? Think the others will want to know?”

Fluttershy nodded. “That's just so strange. We have to show them.”

Ink Well picked up the letter he'd tossed aside, as well as the other six, and placed them in his bag. He swung his bag over his shoulder, placed his hat on his head and grabbed his pen from its ink pot and placed it in its holster. “This just got a whole lot more interesting.”