

Shimmer



A “My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic” fan fiction

*Written by **Autumn Wind***

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Cheerilee was enjoying a quiet winter evening at home, a mug of fresh, steaming coffee

sitting next to her. Earlier this afternoon, her students had handed in their latest assignment, "Talk About Your Family."

Lying comfortably by the fire on a soft cushion, she was perusing the works one by one as a series of parents, siblings, cousins and other relatives paraded through her reading. This assignment was always a favorite of hers, as it gave her a chance to get to know her students better. More than once, it had given her insight on troubled families and given her a chance to help the less fortunate of her students.

A short time ago, she had finished grading Apple Bloom's take on the assignment. The filly had taken on the task of mentioning every cousin of hers up to three times removed, enlisting her brother's help in completing the task. The resulting work was twenty-four pages long.

Cheerilee picked up her red pen, awarding Pipsqueak's work a B+. The descriptions of his parents and grandparents were well-written for a foal his age, though some of the trickier words he had employed had clearly given him trouble. She was quite surprised at how much the colt knew of his family's history back in Trottingham. He couldn't exactly be described as the artist of the season, but it was obvious to Cheerilee that he had done the best he could.

Moving on to the next work, a worried frown came upon Cheerilee's face as she read the name written in a young filly's clumsy yet effortful mouthwriting. "Dinky Doo." That was one story Cheerilee had been following closely. Some years ago, not long after Cheerilee had become a teacher, three ponies had moved into town: Ditzzy Doo, a pegasus mare, who soon took up the job of mailmare; her foal, Dinky, who had only been a baby at that time; and her adoptive daughter Sparkler, an older filly. Cheerilee had taught Sparkler for a year, and had been quite relieved to learn that the adoption had been a happy event for all.

Still, it wasn't without apprehension that she began reading Dinky's words.

*My mommy's name is Ditzzy. She brings the mail to everypony in Ponyville every morning. I really like her because she's the greatest mommy ever. I like it when we play together and when she makes muffins for breakfast. Sometimes, other ponies say she has weird eyes and that she speaks funny. It makes mommy unhappy when they say that. I think they're just being mean. When it happens, I give her a hug and she's happy again.*

*My sister is named Sparkler. Mommy adopted her before I was born. Mommy says she*

*didn't have nice parents before mommy took her in. She looks after me when mommy is at work. Sometimes we go play in the park. She's teaching me to use my magic, but I'm not very good at that. She says I'll get better when I'm a little older, so I'm still happy about it.*

*Mommy and Sparkler told me my daddy was a unicorn like me. They also said he was a really nice pony. Mommy said he loved her a lot and he would have loved me and Sparkler a lot too. I'm sad that daddy died before I knew him. Mommy always says he's watching over me from the great pasture in the sky, and that he'll always protect me from bad things.*

Cheerilee's smile was as warm as the air near the fireplace as she cheerfully marked the paper with a A and set it aside.

"Seems I was worrying for nothing after all. Dinky and her family look happy enough."

She sighed as she noticed the next assignment.

"Scootaloo. Not again..."

To Cheerilee's great disappointment, Scootaloo's homework was once again an unreadable, effortless mess. She could see the figure of a few ponies in the drawing, one of whom bore a distinctive rainbow mane, but trying to make out the Pegasus's mouthwriting was an exercise in futility. She set the paper aside, which now bore a single inscription: "See me."

The teacher was startled out of her thoughts when somepony knocked at her door. It took her a moment to process the unexpected event. Just who could have been out at such an hour? She set aside the students' homework and peered through the window.

Perhaps there was something to her worries about Dinky after all.

Cheerilee pulled the door open to find a sullen-looking Sparkler, motioning for her to come in.

"Sparkler? Is everything all right?"

Sparkler stepped in as Cheerilee closed the door behind her. The warmth was quick to wash over the unicorn as she worked up the courage to speak.

"I'm sorry to come knocking at your door so late in the evening, Miss Cheerilee, but I really

needed to talk to someone and you were the best pony for it that I could think of.”

The earth pony bit her lip as she listened, worried for her guest.

“Oh dear... is everything okay? Please, please, come in. Does your mother know you’re out here?”

Sparkler’s head sank low, the bright light of the fire reflecting in her eyes as Cheerilee helped her out of her boots and winter saddle.

“Don’t worry, my mother knows I’m out. Miss Cheerilee, I’ve been keeping a really big secret and I just can’t hold it anymore. I need to tell someone, but I’m scared that it might get out in the open. Do you think you’d be able to keep a secret for me?”

Cheerilee hesitated for a moment. What kind of secret? Who was it being hidden from? Why? Was it something bad? Sparkler was distraught, that much was clear. Whatever it was, she simply couldn’t leave the young mare in her state.

“I’m honored that you’d trust me with a secret, Sparkler. I promise I won’t tell anyone. Please, take a seat and make yourself comfortable. Just call me Cheerilee, no need for formalities here. Would you like something to drink? Coffee? Tea?”

Sparkler nervously settled down on Cheerilee’s sofa, nodding nervously. Her voice shook as she spoke.

“Tea would be good. Any kind, I’m not choosy.”

Moments later, Cheerilee settled down alongside the young unicorn.

“Miss- I mean, Cheerilee, it’s really, really important to my mother and I that Dinky never learns about the story going to tell you. It would really make her unhappy. Can I count on you?”

The earth pony nodded as complete silence boomed through the living room.

“If you and Ditzzy think it’s for the best, then I promise to keep it quiet.”

Sparkler took a deep breath and sighed.

“Well, back when I lived in Fillydelphia with my parents...”

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The sun was setting on Pinecone Alley as young Sparkler trotted home from school, her head low. Winter was always disappointing, especially due to the earlier sunsets. Sparkler shrugged at the thought; surely, Princess Celestia knew what she was doing.

Once again, Sparkler had been reprimanded for falling asleep in class. It wasn't that she didn't want to succeed, but with her parents arguing up to the early hours of the morning, she had hardly been able to sleep.

It didn't help that she'd been the first in her class to hit a major growth spurt, leaving her with a gangly, awkward stature and a ridiculous-looking gait. She could still hear her classmates' taunts.

"Nice stilts, Sparkler!' 'Reaching for the sky like your pegasus dad, Sparkler?' 'Tried to cast a spell to make yourself thinner and messed it up like everything else?' I wish all these idiots would just get lost and leave me alone!"

The tall buildings on either side of her cast the narrow street in shadow. It would have been hard to see anything without the street lamps dimly lighting the area. This area of the city was silent, soulless. It was rare to see more than two or three ponies walking around at once. Tightly packed, cheap apartments were the norm here, and ponies generally went to the more lively areas of the city to work. The alley was silent as she walked, and only the light clops of her hooves could be heard.

It would probably be an evening like any other, eating dinner in silence, being careful not to set off her mother and helping her dad take care of her little sister. She would probably try to work through the hostile ambience of the house by locking herself in her room.

Miserable. Every day was so miserable. She was absolutely sick of it.

Yet, if she had known what to expect when she approached her apartment complex, she'd have taken the miserable evening.

Sparkler froze in terror; the windows of her home were flashing with a sickly green light. Her mother was at it again. It was never a good sign when her mother's horn glowed. She was probably taking her frustrations out on her husband again. Sparkler couldn't remember a time

when her parents hadn't been fighting. She'd wanted to call the city guard on her mother many times, but her father had always stopped her. He didn't want to give up on his wife, no matter what. He'd take the bruises and the broken wings and would always tell everypony that he had suffered a flight accident. He didn't want to abandon his daughters and he feared that if he opposed his wife, she would manage to take them away from him.

Sparkler stopped in her tracks. She could wait before going home. She could go to the bakery and wait there, maybe catch up on her studies a little. She could wait until her mother calmed down and went to sleep like every other time this had happened. Then she would come home and give her father first aid for his cuts and bruises.

But then, another thought came to her.

Shimmer. She couldn't leave her little sister alone in the middle of this. Shimmer was just a baby. What if something had happened to her?

Sparkler burst into the apartment, and sure enough, there was a ruckus coming from the kitchen. Her mother was screaming at her father again, words she would never forget. Horrible, horrible slurs and insults. Shimmer was wailing like only a newborn filly could, unable to express her sorrows in any other way. The entire kitchen was a blaze of green light. Sparkler wanted to go in and help her father, but he'd told her many times to stay away, that it was too dangerous. Instead, she did what her father had asked of her. She walked into the room she shared with Shimmer and looked the filly over, finding with great relief that the young unicorn was unharmed.

Sparkler sat down on her bed, cradling the young unicorn in her forelegs. Tuning out her mother's shouts and her father's occasional yelps of pain, she rocked the foal lightly, looking out the window at the heartless city. Nearby buildings were bathed in the same green light that emanated from their apartment. Warm tears soon came to her, wetting the fur of her cheeks as the two sisters remained in the soothing darkness, hoping for things to settle down soon. Sparkler couldn't figure out why her father had agreed to have another foal. Nevertheless, there the little bundle was, gently held in her elder sister's comforting embrace.

Scenes like this happened every month. Her mother would come home, shouting loudly, hooves stomping as she walked into the apartment. Sparkler had long ago gotten into the habit of hiding in her room when her mother came home in that state, but the first few times, she had

noticed that her mother was off-balance, stumbling and slurring her speech.

Quicksilver! Where the hay're you!

The one time he hadn't been around, she had taken the brunt of the abuse. Sometimes, she'd come home and the fight was already ongoing. It was never a good thing when her mother's horn flared up. Things would start flying in the house, breaking against the wall, or more often, against her father's body.

You useless stallion!

Sparkler held hopes that one day, her father would stand up to her mother, that the guard would help, that something would come up to make things right. She wanted things to get better. Tonight, however, things would only get worse.

What good're you, anyway?

An unusually loud crash startled Sparkler, and her father's voice came out loud from the kitchen, loud enough to be heard over the mother's orders for him to be quiet. His voice was shaky with clear undertones of pain. Nevertheless, it was determined, the voice of a loving father who wanted nothing but the safety of his daughters.

You worthless mule!

"Sparkler. Take Shimmer and run to Ditzzy's house. You hear me? Run and don't look back. I love you, Sparkler. You too, Shimmer. I'll come and pick you girls up as soon as I can, but no matter what happens, don't turn back."

Why'd I ever think you'd make a good husband?

What happened next would remain a mystery to her. She secured the filly to her back with her father's foal carrier and made sure to take the filly's favorite Doctor Smarty Pants doll along. Then, she ran out. She could hear her mother shouting at her, but the words escaped her through the haze of panic. She heard the echo of the fight raging on as she stumbled down the stairs of the apartment block. She saw nothing but that horrible green glow.

Always hangin'out with that lazy eyed freakshow of a mare! 'Just friends,' my

gemstone-marked flank!

Soon, she heard nothing but the sound of her hooves against the asphalt and the wailing of her little sister. The poor foal struggled against her older sister, confused and scared. Sparkler did what she could to soothe the filly as she ran. Everything became a blur.

I ought to make sure my daughters know not to listen to you, you waste of space!

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“... I don’t remember what happened too well after that... but...”

Sparkler sniffled, feeling a lump in her throat. She could hardly bear to relive the memories. She stopped for a moment, unable to keep going.

"Oh dear, how awful... I’m so sorry..."

Cheerilee instinctively moved closer to Sparkler, hesitantly bringing forward a foreleg to gently rub her back. To her great relief, the filly appeared reassured by the gesture.

“I’m so sorry... I troubled you just to tell you this and now... I’m having trouble letting it come out.”

“It’s okay, sweetie, take all the time you need. Would you rather finish telling me another day?”

Sparkler swallowed before taking a deep breath and shaking her head, wiping tears out of her eyes.

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The next thing Sparkler knew, she was lying on a sofa, exhausted. Not too far from her, a pony was gently rocking her little sister to sleep. The young unicorn slowly came to her senses, sitting up on the comfortable cushion, and observed the mare. It was, to her great relief, Ditzzy Doo.

Slowly, the haze of the adrenaline rush cleared out of her mind. She’d run to Ditzzy’s house at her father’s beckoning, taking her little sister along. It hadn’t been the first time, but this time,

dad's tone had been... different.

"Muffin? Is everything okay?"

Ditzy's voice snapped Sparkler back to attention, and she smiled at the term of endearment. As far as she could recall, ever since she had been a little filly, Ditzy Doo had always used that sweet nickname for her and her sister. A close friend of her father, Ditzy Doo foal-sat for them on a near-weekly basis, and Sparkler wouldn't have had it any other way. The lazy-eyed mare's apartment was a safe haven, a place of peace away from her broken home.

"I'm fine... I think. Is Shimmer okay?"

Ditzy silently nodded towards the corner of the living room where the baby was sleeping soundly in the small crib Ditzy kept for her. The filly was gently sucking on Doctor Smarty Pants' plush stethoscope, holding the doll tight to her chest.

"Oh, thank Celestia she's alright. I would be devastated if anything were to happen to her..."

Seeing the filly's worried eyes, Ditzy pulled her into a tight hug. Her panic having finally washed away, Sparkler lost what composure she had left. She laid her head against the mare's chest and lost herself to her tears.

"It'll be okay, Sparkler. I promise. I know these are hard times for you, but everything will work out fine..."

At other times, Ditzy would embark on some elaborate odyssey of ridiculous shenanigans to make Sparkler laugh, like so often before. Despite that experience, she knew better than to try such a thing for a filly so devastated. Instead, she did her best to comfort her, promising things she knew she couldn't deliver on but would be good for temporary comfort.

It was an all-too-familiar scene for both of them. Sparkler would turn up at Ditzy's house late in the evening, emotionally annihilated, and Ditzy would give her time and space to stabilize until the filly was feeling okay enough to explain what had last happened back at her broken home.

Ditzy had often tried to reason with her friend about how his reluctance to escape his wife was hurting his daughters, but there was no reasoning with the poor stallion. His wife had

terrified him with the idea that she'd be the one to keep the children if he tried anything. Ditzzy was determined help in any way she could, however, so she'd resolved herself to help Sparkler and baby Shimmer as best as she could, providing food, cover and an attentive ear whenever needed. She would have given a wing to help these foals.

Finally, after a few minutes, Sparkler regained enough clarity to recount the events of the evening. Ditzzy nodded silently, knowing full well what to expect.

"You know my two little muffins are always welcome here. Don't worry your little tail off, you fillies can stay as long as you need."

The next three days went by in a blur, without any news from home. Ditzzy tried to call the fillies' father, but the phone at his house was disconnected, which was par for the course. Sparkler's mother tended to break everything in her outbursts, and it often took days before everything was back in order.

Ditzzy called Sparkler's school to explain the situation, and Sparkler was thankfully excused. In the evenings, a nice classmate of Sparkler would come by to drop off her homework.

When Ditzzy wasn't out hauling packages for her job, she'd do her best to keep the fillies occupied, distracted from their issues. They'd play board games, go for walks, bake muffins and have fun. Shimmer was too young to truly comprehend what was going on around her, but she was certainly enjoying the attention from her older sister and her babysitter. Her big golden eyes would look up at them with love and amazement as they played with her. Unlike her elder sister, she couldn't quite realize the troubles that happened around her.

Sparkler wished the young filly would never have to.

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"That's very sweet of you, Sparkler, to have cared so much for your little sister. I can't help but wonder, where is she now?"

Sparkler recoiled at the question, taking an awkward sip of her tea, hesitating to answer immediately.

"Oh, I'm sorry, sweetie. Maybe I shouldn't have asked that..."

Sparkler shook her head.

“No, it’s fine, Miss Cheerilee. I’ll... be getting to that soon.”

Cheerilee nodded warmly and returned to listening calmly as the young mare poured her heart out.

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The next evening, they received news.

While Shimmer was resting peacefully and Ditzzy was helping Sparkler with her math homework, there was a knock at the door to Ditzzy’s apartment. Ditzzy flapped her wings a few times, rising from the couch and gliding to the door.

It was a stallion of the city guard, clad in his barding as per the protocol. He was a tall pony, towering over her by a head and a neck. Despite his protection, he displayed none of the usual sternness of the patrollers. Rather, in his deep blue eyes, Ditzzy could detect an air of concern, perhaps of worry.

“Miss Ditzzy Doo?”

Ditzzy nodded nervously.

“I would like to have a word with you.”

Taking notice of Sparkler, who was focused on a particularly tricky problem, he lowered his head close to Ditzzy’s and whispered.

“I think it would be for the best if the filly didn’t hear it from me...”

Ditzzy nodded, expecting the worst, and stepped out of the apartment, shutting the door behind her.

“I’ll be right back, Muffin, just a moment.”

A few minutes later, the pegasus mare walked back into the living room, taking back her place next to Sparkler. Noting her caretaker’s blank expression, Sparkler couldn’t help but inquire.

“Is anything wrong, Miss Ditzzy?”

Ditzzy Doo shook her head almost suspiciously fast.

“It’s... nothing really. Somepony at my job got hurt pretty badly and they wanted to know if I’d seen it happen.”

Not the most credible of lies, but Sparkler took Ditzzy’s word for it. When they finished their movie, Ditzzy kissed Sparkler goodnight on the forehead and tucked her into her bed on the living room sofa.

That night, Sparkler slept peacefully, full of hope.

To her great sadness, she would learn some years down the line that this had been perhaps the most troubled night of Ditzzy’s life.

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Unconsciously, Sparkler had moved closer to Cheerilee, letting herself be pulled into a soft embrace. The unicorn quivered for an instant. The most difficult part of the story was coming; Cheerilee could guess as much.

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Sparkler would finally learn the bad news the next day. Early in the afternoon, after the three had finished a hearty snack of banana muffins and Shimmer had been put to bed for her mid-day nap, Ditzzy asked Sparkler to come sit down with her at the kitchen table.

“Sparkler, I have to tell you something. It won’t be easy to hear, and it’s okay if you’re sad or angry. I’m sorry that you have to hear about it.”

Puzzled, Sparkler remained silent, hanging on the pegasus’ every word. Ditzzy looked focused, serious; both of her eyes were looking straight at the young unicorn.

“Yesterday, when the guard pony came, it wasn’t about my coworker.”

Sparkler looked surprised. Why had Ditzzy lied to her? Before she could answer, the mare continued.

“I’m sorry for lying, Muffin. I just needed to wait for a better moment to tell you.”

The young unicorn nodded. She didn’t know what Ditzzy was going to tell her, but the sheer tension was enough to make her tear up.

“Your parents... They won’t be...”

Cursing her own inability to get the words out straight, Ditzzy paused for a moment. She took a deep breath and finally forced the words out. It would hurt, but it had to be done.

“They’ve passed away...”

Sparkler stood motionlessly, staring at Ditzzy in complete incomprehension.

“You mean... they’re... dead?”

Ditzzy nodded glumly. She rose from her chair and gently approached the filly, knowing full well what would come.

It would be many years before Sparkler would finally work up the courage to ask Ditzzy what had happened to her parents, and the answer had been a troubling one indeed. In an excessive fit of unbound fury, her mother had committed the unforgivable.

Panicked, the unstable mare had sought refuge in the only course of action she could find. She had taken the easy way out.

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Sparkler couldn’t hold her tears in anymore. She let her head fall against Cheerilee’s shoulder and broke into tears, letting out bottled-up emotions that were screaming for freedom.

Cheerilee remained silent, comfortingly stroking the young mare’s mane as she cried.

“It’s okay, sweetie. Take your time.”

“I’m sorry, Cheerilee. I didn’t think it would be... so hard to tell after all this time.”

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One would expect an entire day spent lying on a bed in the dark to be the least memorable

day of one's existence, but it was clear to Sparkler that she would never in a million years be able to forget the day that followed learning the bad news. Ditzzy had let the unicorn sleep in her room rather than on the living room couch, knowing that the filly would want some quiet thinking space.

Sparkler couldn't sleep, wouldn't eat, and didn't want to do anything. She just remained in the dark, limply sprawled upon the mattress as she felt her life crumble around her. What would she do? What could she do? What would happen to her little sister without her parents to care for her? The same thoughts skipped over and over again through her mind, like dissonant melodies from a broken record.

"Daddy... why did you have to go?"

She could still imagine him by her side, draping his wing over her to keep her warm when she was cold, helping her with her homework when she had difficulties, caring for her when she was sick... protecting her from her mother. Thinking of her little sister made the feeling even worse. The poor filly wouldn't even get a chance to know how great a stallion her father was.

Some of the thoughts she had, however, filled her with shame. For one, knowing her mother was gone was a relief. No more screaming or beatings, no more coming home and finding her mother assaulting her father. No more broken home.

No more broken home. The words would have been wonderful, if not by their secondary implication: No more home.

The realization made Sparkler's blood freeze. She walked out of the dark room, dazzled by the afternoon sunlight.

"Oh, Muffin, you're up. Are you hungry? You haven't eaten all day."

The question brought a simple fact to Sparkler's attention; she was starving. She hadn't eaten a single bite since learning the horrible news the previous day. Sparkler nodded silently, taking a seat at the kitchen table as Ditzzy busied herself with cooking some vegetable soup for dinner.

She turned her attention to Shimmer in her high chair, gently burying her muzzle in the filly's light purple coat. The filly giggled in amusement, reaching out for her sister's muzzle with

her little hoof. Sparkler gave her a sad smile.

“Ditzy... I have a question.”

The mare turned away from the oven, facing Sparkler. Her lazy eye was off somewhere in space, looking at some indistinct point on the ceiling. Sparkler was used to the mare’s physical defect, and paid no heed to it.

“Go ahead, Muffin. I’m listening.”

Sparkler kept looking at Shimmer, holding the little filly’s hoof gently between her own.

“What happens now? Where do I go? What’ll happen to Shimmer? I can’t just stay with you forever, you have your own well-being to look out for.”

Ditzy nodded calmly, turning to face the stove again. Sparkler couldn’t shake the feeling that her babysitter couldn’t stand to answer the question while looking at her.

“I’m not sure either. You can stay here until we figure out what to do...”

Sparkler was no fool. She might not have been the wisest filly in the world, but she knew Ditzy’s delivery mare salary couldn’t support both her and the two fillies.

“I’ll call the Family Services office tomorrow. They’ll be able to tell us what we should do.”

“Thank you, Ditzy. It means so much to me that you’re helping us. I don’t know what I would have done without you...”

“Sparkler, your daddy often asked me to make sure things would go well for you two if something were to happen to him. I won’t let you fillies down. It’s a muffin promise!”

The muffin promise was an old tradition between the two of them, dating from before Shimmer’s birth. It had begun with a solemn swear that the honor-bound pony would never be allowed to eat a muffin again if they were to break the promise, and had shortened to those two words through the years. To most ponies, it would have meant nothing. To Sparkler, it meant the world.

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Cheerilee's mind was running wild. She had never realised how strong-willed a pony the quirky mailmare could be. She made a mental note to commend the pegasus for her actions if she ever got a chance.

Sparkler was regaining her composure, having gently broken up the embrace. She sat mostly upright as she continued to pour her heart out.

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The next afternoon, at the office's request, the three ponies came down to meet with a counselor. Workers from the Family Services Office were no strangers to troubled foals; nopony appeared to be judging them. All they saw were encouraging smiles.

The counselor who had asked to meet them was a plump stallion with a soft smile and a teddy bear cutie mark. Teddy Cuddle, as he introduced himself, had made it his life's career to find loving homes for foals. No stranger to dealing with fillies, Teddy spoke kindly and softly, even taking a moment to return Shimmer's little smiles. He explained that they would verify whether or not either parent had left a will specifying what was to happen with them now that the tragedy had happened.

Noting Sparkler's panicked reaction at the thought that either of the parents' wills could specify a guardian, Teddy was quick to add that the guardian would have to be approved by the Office, as well as by an adult invested in the fillies' well-being.

Should the wills not specify such a measure, the Office would find an appropriate guardian for the two of them. Many families were seeking children, and fillies like them would have no trouble finding a home.

She wouldn't admit it and did her best to hide it, but that prospect frightened Sparkler. What if she were separated from her sister?

The counselor theorized that after a few days, the parents' wills would have been attended to. He explained that the administrative processes would take a day or two, and that he would contact them as soon as possible.

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“Wait, wait, Sparkler. I’m sorry to interrupt, but... did you say Teddy Cuddle?”

Sparkler nodded.

“Well I’ll be, Equestria sure is small.”

Surprised and somewhat amused by Cheerilee’s sudden reaction, Sparkler gave the mare a puzzled look.

“He was actually my instructor for a year, back during my occupational training in the prevention of family troubles amongst students... Oh, dear, listen to me rambling. I’m sorry, please go on.”

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They were invited to meet Teddy Cuddle again two days later. This time, another pony would be joining them: Dotted Line, the notary in charge of the wills of Sparkler’s parents.

Sparkler was thankful that Shimmer had fallen asleep in her forelegs shortly before the meeting began, because the dullness of the proceedings would have made the filly miserable. Sparkler couldn’t help but space out at times herself. Ditzzy had her best interests at heart, and she trusted the mare’s ability to sort it out.

She hardly noticed them finishing up with her mother’s will and moving on to her father’s, still reflecting on what had been said. Her mother had left her and her sister enough money to last a few years. If nothing else happened, Sparkler could probably divvy up the money over time and take a part-time job while she finished her studies and found a more permanent financial solution. There was hope yet, and Shimmer wouldn’t go uncared for if she could help it, even though it would certainly be rough. She was at quite a young age to become fully self-sufficient.

A single sentence out of Dotted Line’s mouth interrupted her train of thought.

“Should anything happen to me that would make me unable to act as a parent, I would like to request from my long-time friend Ditzzy Doo that she take them in. Ditzzy, you-’, actually, Miss Doo, I think you should read this one for yourself.”

Ditzzy gently slid the document in front of herself over the table, and motioned for Sparkler to

read it with her.

Ditzy, you've been a wonderful friend for years, and I'm sorry to ask this of you, but there's no one I can trust as much as I trust you. You've been so good to Sparkler all these years, and just as wonderful to little Shimmer since her birth.

Of course, I wouldn't burden you with such a request without providing some form of help. As detailed further in this document, I have reasonable monetary reserves stashed away to help whomever will take in my daughters.

Ditzy, you've been a wonderful friend to me all my life, and I hope deep in my heart that my daughters will see in you the same light: A wonderful friend and an amazing mare.

As she finished reading, Sparkler heard a snuffle and turned to look at Ditzy. She was shocked to see the mare crying. She reached for her caretaker and gently pulled her into a gentle hug.

"I'll do it for you, Quicksilver... I'll do it for them," she could hear her caretaker whisper to herself. "I'll make them happy, just like you wanted..."

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Sparkler paused for a moment when her adoptive mother's words came to mind. They rang loud and clear through her mind after all these years, and she knew she would never forget that day. Those words would stay with her forever.

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Through the next few days, Sparkler slowly regained most of her energy, her sorrows mitigated by the idea of living with Ditzy. She had had such good times with the mare in the past, and she could only imagine how her life might improve.

Some weeks passed, and the three of them settled into their new routine. Ditzy had requested a change to the evening shift at her company, to accommodate for watching the baby while Sparkler was at school.

In the evening, while Ditzy was out delivering packages, Sparkler would babysit her little sister and do her homework. It wasn't an easy life for them, but they got by, and they were

happy.

At least, Sparkler was.

After a few weeks spent at Ditzzy's, Sparkler began to realize that the pegasus mare loathed to go out. She would come home in the evening, sad or angry, muttering about ponies judging what they don't know.

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"You mean she wasn't happy because of..."

"Yeah... the eyes, the odd flight patterns. People in our neighborhood of Fillydelphia were all about 'normalcy'. She got a lot of strange looks; it really weighed down on her."

"Oh..."

Cheerilee looked glum for a moment. Ditzzy's particular quirks had never attracted much attention from the locals in Ponyville, and she had never truly stopped to consider what things might have been like for their mailmare before she'd moved to their little village.

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One evening, though, everything changed thanks to some wonderful news. Sparkler was at home, giving her little sister a bath. Shimmer's mane had begun growing a while ago, fine white hair that would darken as she grew. Since their parents and grandparents had come from various ends of the spectrum, Sparkler had no idea what color it would turn out to be, but she did know one thing: It needed to be washed after the rather messy meal they had just gone through.

As she was applying some foal-formula shampoo to the filly's head, the door to the apartment swung open and Ditzzy fluttered into the house, making it to the living room without landing. A package swung from her mouth, wrapped in brown paper and bound with string.

"Muffin! I'm home!"

"Good evening, mommy! What do you have there?"

The two of them chuckled at the greeting, though it was far more than a simple joke. For a

broken filly taken in by a caring mother, for a second filly who would never have to know her sister's past misery, and for a sad mare finding solace in the care of two daughters, it was a dream come true.

"It's a package from Carrot Top! I wonder what she's sent me this time."

Sparkler stepped out of the bathroom, carrying the squeaky-clean filly on her back. She gently levitated Shimmer into her high chair, and the two of them watched as Ditzzy unwrapped the package from her friend in Ponyville. When the hidden treasure came into view, Sparkler couldn't help but smirk.

"Shock and surprise. Carrots."

Ditzzy chuckled at her daughter's remark. Her laughter was only joined by Sparkler's as the two of them noticed that Shimmer had gone wide-eyed at the sight. Shimmer gave a little squeal, hopelessly reaching for the carrots with her little forelegs despite being much too far away.

"Well, that's a hungry little muffin if I've ever seen one."

Sparkler giggled nervously.

"Well... I tried to feed her earlier, but... I think she won that one. More food on the ground than in her mouth, as it were."

Ditzzy shrugged. She knew how picky the little filly could be sometimes. She snapped off the thin half of one of the vegetables and pushed it over to Sparkler.

"Oh well, I guess it can't be helped. Mind giving me a helping horn with that?"

Sparkler's horn shone as a cutting board and a small, dull-bladed knife hovered over from the kitchen. In a simple gesture, the carrot was sliced in filly-friendly bites and then sacrificed to the foal's ravenous appetite.

"There you go, Shimmer."

The little filly awkwardly tried to use her hooves to bring one of the small pieces to her muzzle. After a few fruitless efforts, she gave up and chose to eat the old-fashioned way. She thrust her muzzle right down against the tray, attacking her food with the passion of a hundred

parasprites, to her sister and mother's great amusement.

"Well, well, what do we have here?"

Moving aside the fresh veggies, Ditzzy extracted an envelope out of the package's remains, which she opened with practiced dexterity. She read the letter attentively, only pausing to burst into laughter when she noticed the scene her daughters were making.

Sparkler had taken to levitating the carrot slices one by one, hovering them in front of the filly's muzzle and giggling when Shimmer inevitably snatched them out of the air. The little unicorn had an utterly baffled look in her golden eyes, amazed at the discovery of a rare flying snack.

Ditzzy's eyes grew wide as she moved to the letter's second page. A wide smile appeared on her face.

"No... really? Oh my..."

Sparkler's curiosity was piqued by the reaction.

"What does aunt Carrot Top have to say, Ditzzy?"

Ditzzy chuckled. The two of them had been making a game of deliberately overstating family titles, which amused them immensely.

"Well, with you and Shimmer growing up, I don't think this apartment will be enough for us for much longer. Thing is, the prices of housing around here are really steep; nothing anypony sane would ever spend their bits on."

Sparkler gave her a puzzled look. What did that have to do with Carrot Top?

"So, you remember how Carrot Top lives in that nice little village, Ponyville?"

The unicorn nodded, gently cleaning up the filled-up filly with a foal-wipe.

"Apparently, the local mailpony retired a few days ago, and they're looking for a new one. The pay would be much better than what I make here, too. She's suggesting the three of us come to live there. Can you imagine it?"

Could she imagine it? How could she not have imagined it? She remembered some years ago, during a particularly extended stay with Ditzzy, she had been in Ponyville to visit. The place looked amazing, nothing like the lifeless streets of their neighborhood in Fillydelphia. They could get away from their troubles and move on to a new life in a new place.

“That sounds wonderful! What about housing, though? Is there a house for sale?”

Ditzzy beamed.

“Well, actually, I was thinking... Ponyville is still growing; they’re building new houses often. I could use the bits I’ve saved up and get a loan, we could get a nice house built for the three of us, so you two could get your own rooms.”

She paused for a moment, making some calculations in her mind, not noticing her lazy eye drifting off as she thought. Finally, she concluded with a sigh.

“We’d be on a tight budget for a while, though...”

Sparkler thought for a moment, thinking back to the money she had inherited from her parents, and which was sitting uselessly in a bank account, waiting for a time of need.

“What if... I got some money from my parents. Maybe we could use that to help pay for the house. It’d mean we wouldn’t have to live tight for a while, no?”

Ditzzy sat down and faced the filly, surprised by the offer.

“That’s... awfully generous of you, Muffin, but I’m not sure I could accept. It’s your money, not mine, and it wouldn’t be fair to you if we spent it like that.”

Sparkler wouldn’t have any of it.

“No, no, I insist, mommy. If it means the three of us can be happier, then I want to use it.”

Ditzzy finally relented.

“Well then... if you insist. I’ll find a way to make it up to you one day, though. Muffin promise.”

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“Sparkler, about Shimmer...”

The unicorn looked glum for a moment. This was what she’d come about all along.

“I’m getting to that soon, I promise.”

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Just a few weeks later, everything was well underway. They’d signed the papers about getting a new house built in Ponyville, and Sparkler was enrolled for her last year of school.

“I can’t wait until we’re there... It sounds so wonderful.”

Sparkler was daydreaming, talking to herself as she played with her little sister. She couldn’t help but notice that the filly’s mane had started to darken, taking on a blonde color uncannily similar to Ditzzy’s.

It wasn’t exactly helping that Shimmer took a lot more after her father than Sparkler did. Where Sparkler had inherited the lithe, high-standing stature shared by most unicorns, Shimmer was developing the slender and aerodynamic shapes so typical of her pegasus heritage.

A strange idea came to her. What if... Was such a thing even thinkable?

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Cheerilee sputtered, accidentally spraying a mouthful of her coffee onto the table.

“So... you mean...”

Sparkler simply nodded.

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“Mom... I’d like to talk to you about something.”

It was late in the evening, past Sparkler’s bedtime, but she couldn’t sleep. She needed to get this off her chest, and she needed to get it off right then.

“What’s wrong, Muffin?”

Sparkler cast her eyes on Shimmer who was peacefully sleeping in her crib.

“Have you noticed how much Shimmer looks like you?”

Ditzy nodded, it was hard to miss. She could remember at least three or four times now since she had adopted the fillies, that ponies would comment about her daughter looking just like her.

“I think it’s because she takes after your daddy. He and I did have kind of a resemblance. Actually, now that I think about it, it’s part of what brought us together. But... why do you bring that up?”

Sparkler braced herself. Ditzy would probably think her crazy, call her a loony or something of the sort. Maybe she’d be scolded for suggesting such a strange idea. One way or another, though, she wanted it out.

“I was thinking... since we’ll be moving to a new town soon and mostly nopony will know us, what if we told everypony that Shimmer was your daughter? Then she wouldn’t have to deal with the same bad memories I have of my parents. She’d be happier thinking of you as her mommy than just her caretaker. You’ve been like a mother to the two of us for so long now, I think she’d be happier if she thought you were her real mother.”

“Oh, Muffin... That’s...”

Ditzy stepped towards her daughter, embracing her affectionately.

“I... don’t know what to make of this. I’d be happy to take the role of her true mother, but I’m worried about what it could mean for you. That would mean... You’d give up your bond as her true sister...”

Sparkler nodded solemnly, returning her mother’s embrace. She stood firm in her conviction.

“If it means Shimmer and you can be happier, then yes, I would give that up. I’ve already seen awful, awful things, but she... Shimmer is still a blank slate. She can still be happy. I’d like her to have the best chances in her life, and if that means she won’t know she has the same parents as I do, then so be it. I’ll still be her favorite sister.”

Ditzy clung even tighter to her daughter, her eyes tearing up, her voice shaky.

“Sparkler, that is... I don’t even know what to say. That you would make this sacrifice for her... and for me. I love you, Muffin. You’re the best daughter a mommy could ever dream of.”

Sparkler buried her muzzle in her mother’s shoulder, herself giving in to her emotions.

“You’ll see, mommy. When we get to Ponyville, we’ll have an amazing life, all three of us. It’ll be... perfect.”

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Cheerilee fell silent. The secret had been passed on, and what a secret it was.

“So... little Shimmer became...”

Sparkler nodded silently.

“Yes. We had to change her name to make things more believable. I kind of miss calling her by her old name, but Dinky’s new name quickly grew on me. It’s been hard, but I don’t regret what I did about my sister. We’ve been so much happier since we’ve moved to Ponyville. The ponies here are so nice, it’s almost magical. I lost a lot in Fillydelphia, but coming here is the best thing that could have happened to me.”

Sparkler paused for a moment, suppressing a snuffle and collecting her thoughts.

“Thank you so much for taking the time to listen to me, Cheerilee, I really can’t think of anypony else I could have shared this with. It truly means a lot to me.”

Cheerilee gave a quiet smile.

“I could see you really needed it and I’m always up for helping. Don’t thank me, thank yourself for having the strength to trust someone with your story. I must admit though, I’m curious to know why, of all ponies, you came to me with this? Not that I’m not glad that you did, but couldn’t Carrot Top have helped you better, since she already knew more about Ditzy?”

“Actually, since I came to Ponyville, you’ve been such a great help to me. I guess I felt I could trust you with this more than anypony else. Plus, Carrot Top is Ditzy’s friend more than my own and I don’t think it’s up to me to tell her. If she ever learns our secret, it should be from my

mother. ”

“Oh! Well then, I’m honored. I must admit I’m quite amazed that you’ve managed to hang to that secret for so long, you’re a very strong mare, did you know that?”

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“Mommy! Dinky! I’m home!”

Sparkler walked into the brand new house, calling out to her adoptive mother and sister.

“Welcome home, Muffin. How was your first day at Ponyville Elementary?”

“It was fantastic. My teacher, Miss Cheerilee, is really nice. I told her I’d been having trouble back in Fillydelphia, and she said I’d have no problem catching up in time for finishing school this summer and- Well, what do we have here?”

Sparkler looked down at the little bundle that had just crawled towards her, dragging poor Doctor Smarty Pants by her purple yarn mane. Sparkler gently picked her little sister up and set her on her back, trotting into the living room to the filly’s greatest pleasure. She gave her mother a hug and a kiss on the cheek.

“I’m so happy, mommy. I’m so glad things turned out this way for us.”

Ditzy answered in-kind, nuzzling her daughters each in turn.

“I’m happy too, Sparkler. You two little fillies are the best thing that’s ever happened to me. I love you two.”

Dinky cooed as her mother nuzzled her, clinging to her older sister’s neck. Sitting down, Ditzy picked her younger daughter up in her forelegs, and spoke to her slowly and nicely.

“Dinky, who am I?”

The filly squealed, and thought for a moment.

“Mommy!”

She turned the filly to face Sparkler and asked again.

“And who is this?”

Dinky reached for her sister.

“Sissy ‘parkluh!”

With a big goofy grin, Sparkler nosed at the filly’s tummy, provoking a fit of giggles from the little pony.

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Sparkler smiled back to her teacher.

“Let’s just say some things make it worth braving the tough times.”

Cheerilee hesitantly inched towards the filly again, smiling and wordlessly offering a hug. Sparkler was more than happy to accept and threw her arms around her.

“Don’t worry, your secret is in good hooves. Muffin promise!”

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The End

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All comments and criticism are welcome, either through comments wherever you've read this fic, or through email at [autumnwind.mlp@gmail.com](mailto:autumnwind.mlp@gmail.com).

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Thanks for reading!

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