

PRISONER OF LOVE

By GeodesicDragon

with input from

Lord Sabre

The continuing adventures of Geo, John and Ace in Equestria.

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1. PROLOGUE

As I finally tore myself away from my wife, I turned to see that Princess Celestia was looking at me expectantly.

"I cannot thank you enough, Princess." I said, bowing deeply. "Whatever punishment you wish upon me, I shall comply with it."

"Ah yes," said Celestia, "your punishment."

The smile on her face was unnerving, to say the least. I shared a worried look with Twilight.

"Do not worry," Celestia said, raising a hoof, "it is nothing too bad."

There was an awkward silence, eventually broken by Twilight.

"So," she hesitated, "what *is* his punishment?"

Celestia smiled.

"House arrest." she replied, rather smugly.

Twilight and I looked at each other and grinned. I hugged her tightly, taking care not to squeeze her too hard.

"At the palace."

Our grins turned to looks of shock.

"I'm sorry," I said, tapping the side of my head, "but did you say 'at the palace'?"

Celestia nodded.

"I realised that you never took me up on my offer of a chat," she said, "so this is the ideal punishment."

I chuckled awkwardly and rubbed the back of my neck.

"So, what exactly will my punishment involve?"

Celestia grinned.

"As with any normal house arrest," she said, "you'll be confined to a room for most of the day. However, for three hours each day, I will come and talk to you about various things. Your life in Equestria, your life back in your own world, your friends, and so forth."

I looked over at Twilight.

"Twilight is due to give birth any day now," I said, "and I want to be there. If you would be so kind..."

Celestia interrupted me.

"I will allow you to attend the birth of your child," she said. "Not only that, I will also allow you to spend weekends with them."

I smiled.

"That's great," I said, "because the last thing I want is for my own kid to not know who the hell I am."

Celestia and Twilight giggled. The former motioned with her head and a guard came over. I smiled when I recognised him.

"Hey, Shining Armour!"

"Hey, Geo." he said. "Hey, Twiley."

"Hi, bro."

"Since you are under house arrest, I still have to assign a guard to keep an eye on you." Celestia said. "I'm sorry, but it's protocol. I can't make any exceptions."

"No biggie," I replied, "but surely this sort of thing is more suited to a normal guard, and not the Captain?"

Celestia looked at Shining, who smiled.

"I volunteered." he said. "You are my brother-in-law, after all."

I returned his smile.

Then I noticed the manacles he was carrying.

"Let me guess," I said as I pointed at them, "they're protocol too."

Shining nodded, his smile fading slightly.

"Sorry," he said sheepishly, "but as Princess Celestia said, we can't make exceptions for anypony."

He put the manacles on me with his magic.

"I guess my sentence begins now?" I asked.

Celestia and Shining nodded.

"I'm coming too!" Twilight said as she stood up.

"I'm sorry, Twiley," Shining replied, "but those under house arrest are not allowed to have any visitors."

Twilight's face fell.

"No exceptions?" she said, putting on her best puppy dog eyes.

Shining sighed.

"Not even for you, sis." he said.

"Then," Twilight said, as she fought back tears, "at least let me come and say goodbye to him."

Shining glanced at Celestia, who nodded.

"Thank you." Twilight smiled.

The four of us left the courtroom and out into the corridor. Princess Celestia's presence had already been spread throughout the building, so there was no gasping. Instead, there was simply bowing and smiling.

Celestia fixed a large smile on her face as we walk, nodding at anypony who bowed before her.

I attracted a few curious stares, probably because I was a prisoner in the company of one of the Princesses.

As we stepped out into the cool morning air, I saw John and Applejack heading towards Sugarcube Corner.

'Make sure you tell her, you dolt.' I thought, as a chariot landed in front of us. The guards pulling it bowed to Celestia and saluted Shining Armour.

Celestia motioned for me to get in, which I did.

Twilight stood with a look of shock on her face. I chuckled.

"Don't worry, Twilight," I said to her, "I'm not going away forever. I'll be there when you go into labour."

There was a pause before Twilight replied.

"You're there already," she said, "because my waters just broke."

Celestia, Shining and I looked at her with shocked expressions of our own.

"What?!" Shining exclaimed, throwing a hoof into the air. "But, you're not due for another month!"

"She's actually been pregnant for a month longer than we thought." I replied. "She knew even before the scan."

"So that means her due date..." Shining trailed off.

"... is today!" I yelled, finishing his sentence. "We have to get her to the hospital, NOW!"

Celestia's horn glowed and Twilight was lifted into the air and placed gently into the chariot. The princess then conjured a blanket and placed it over her as I held her hoof reassuringly.

"You two," Shining barked at the pegasi pulling the chariot, "get her over to Ponyville General Hospital, ON THE DOUBLE!"

"Yes, sir!" the pegasi replied, saluting quickly.

They took off as quickly as they could, but also with a sense of delicacy, given the state of their passenger.

The trip to the hospital was quick. As we landed and Princess Celestia called out the doctors, Twilight's contractions started.

And then I started wishing I *hadn't* held her hoof the whole journey.

2. THE NAME GAME

Months passed, and I was still serving my sentence at the castle. Despite being a prisoner, I got a lot of respect from the staff and guards. Mostly because of what I went through with Derek, but also because of the fact I was a father now.

Twilight had given birth to two unicorn foals, which surprised us both. Even Doctor Haywick was shocked, because it didn't come up in the scan.

But we didn't care. We were proud of our two new bundles of joy. Twilight took to motherhood like a duck takes to water. And any apprehensions I had about being a father were thrown out the window once I realised how easy it was.

Because both foals were unicorns, like their mother, they shared a special connection with her. Twilight was always able to know what her children wanted.

It was incredible to see her suddenly freeze in place and then dash into the kitchen, before coming out with bottles or fresh nappies just as the foals started crying.

Minutes later, they were content and cooing happily. It stunned me.

"If only looking after human babies was this easy!" I exclaimed as we tossed the dirty nappies into the bin.

Twilight smiled just as there was a knock at the door.

Before I could open it, a burst of pink filled my vision as Pinkie Pie tackled me to the ground in a crushing hug.

"BABY SHOWER!" she screamed in my face.

I stuck a hand over her mouth and nodded to the foals, who were fast asleep.

Pinkie giggled sheepishly.

"Sorry," she whispered, "I just get excited around new foals."

She got off me and I stood up. I glanced over at Ace, her boyfriend, and grinned wickedly.

"Well, you can always have some of your own." I said with a smug grin. "All you have to do is stop using protection."

There was silence before Ace laughed.

"I *knew* you'd get me back for that." he said. "But I don't think we're quite ready for that yet."

"Anyway," Rainbow Dash said suddenly, changing the subject, "have you finally thought of names for them?"

"We have." Twilight replied.

She pointed at the colt.

"This is Azure Hopes," she said, before pointing at the filly, "and this is Evening Whisper."

"Those are simply lovely names," said Rarity, "how did you come up with them?"

Twilight and I looked at each other.

"Well to be honest," she said, "we didn't."

"Oh?" Rarity replied. "Then who did?"

"Well the other day," Twilight replied, "I was going to put on some lullaby music for the foals. But my record player broke down. So, I took it to Spark Plug."

"That unicorn who runs the repair shop in town?" Rainbow Dash asked. "Now *there's* a guy who knows how to fix things."

Twilight nodded.

"So, I went into town and then ..."

Twilight entered the shop carefully, levitating the broken record player in front of her.

The shop was full of items waiting to be fixed. Several pieces lay around, and shelves groaned under the weight of parts.

Placing the record player down on the counter, Twilight rang the bell on the desk.

"Just a moment!" came a voice from the back.

Twilight stood for a moment, shifting back and forth on her hooves. From the back of the shop came a unicorn stallion. He had a light grey coat, bright yellow eyes, a well kept pale green mane and a large bushy tail

He was wearing a small green jacket of sorts, which was sleeveless and littered with pockets. His cutie mark was much like his namesake - a spark plug.

"Ah, Twilight Sparkle!" he said. "What can I do for you today?"

"Afternoon, Spark Plug." Twilight replied. "My record player has broken down. Could you take a look at it?"

Spark Plug nodded and picked up the player with his magic, surveying it at all angles.

"It's nothing serious," he said, "it just needs a new needle. This won't take long to fix."

He rummaged around under the counter and took out the replacement part. Popping out the old needle, he put the new one in its place.

"There you are, Twilight," he said, "good as new!"

Twilight breathed a sigh of relief.

"Thanks a lot, Spark Plug." she said. "Hopefully now the foals will be able to go to sleep."

"Ah, yes." Spark Plug replied. "I heard you were a mother now. Congratulations! You must be very proud."

Twilight smiled and blushed.

"I am." she said. "My husband and I couldn't be happier."

"Have you thought of any names yet?" Spark Plug asked.

Twilight shook her head.

"Well, in that case, might I be so bold as to suggest a couple?"

"Be my guest." Twilight replied.

"And then he suggested Azure Hopes and Evening Whisper. I loved them, as did Geo." Twilight said. "And that, everypony, is how our foals got their names."

"That reminds me," I said, "I never thanked Spark Plug for that. Remind me to do it once my sentence is complete."

Twilight nodded.

I looked at my watch and groaned.

"Great, I've got to go." I sighed.

"Why is that whenever we're together," Twilight asked sternly, "time always seems to speed up?"

"Because the Universe is a bastard?" I said, shrugging.

Twilight giggled as the door opened, revealing Shining Armour.

"Hey everypony." he said. "Sorry, Geo, but it's time to g- hey, it's my niece and nephew!"

He trotted over to the foals and looked into the cot, a goofy smile spreading across his face.

"Awww, they're precious." he said. "Have you named them?"

"Azure Hopes and Evening Whisper." I said, indicating which foal had which name.

"Nice names." Shining said, as he continued to gaze into the cot.

"Er, Shiny?" Twilight said hesitantly. "Shouldn't you be getting Geo back to the castle?"

Shining snapped back to reality.

"Er, yeah," he said, chuckling awkwardly, "right. Come on, Geo."

I kissed my family goodbye and followed Shining to the waiting chariot. I got in and waved at everypony as we took off.

"You'll see them again soon," Shining said, "don't worry about it."

"I'm not worried," I replied, "I'm just happy."

Shining smiled at me before he put a hoof to his head.

"Oh," he said, "I almost forgot. Princess Celestia wishes to talk to you, as per your sentence."

I nodded.

"All right then," I said, "take me to her."

As the chariot began its descent, I found myself thinking about the upcoming conversation.

'It could be worse,' I thought, 'she could have sentenced you to talk to her sister instead.'

I chuckled to myself at the thought of the Royal Canterlot Voice throwing me across the room as the chariot landed.

I was still chuckling as I got out of the chariot and walked into the throne room.

I stopped chuckling when I saw both Princesses looking at me.

3. PEP TALK

The Royal Sisters exchanged a curious look with each other as I stood firmly still, unable to speak.

They studied me with raised eyebrows for a few minutes before I was able to compose myself and formulate a sentence.

"Princess Celestia," I said hesitantly, "might I ask why your sister is here? I was under the impression my conversations were to be with you, as per my punishment."

Celestia smiled.

"They were," she replied, "but then Luna told me how much she would like to get to know you as well. You don't have a problem with that, do you?" She made sure to put a lot of emphasis on those last two words.

I shook my head.

"Good. Now come and sit with us. We have a lot to talk about."

I walked over to where the Princesses were sitting. They each moved to the side to reveal a chair positioned between the two of them. I sat down, both Princesses towering above me.

"So," Luna said, "how are things in Ponyville? It has been a while since I was last there."

"Things in Ponyville are going smoothly." I replied. "Life still goes on in the quaint little town, much as it always has."

"I heard that the Elements of Laughter and Honesty have each found a special somepony." Celestia said. "Is that true?"

I nodded.

"Pinkie Pie is with Doctor Sorou and Applejack is with John."

"And are they all happy together?" Luna asked.

"I'd certainly say so." I replied. "I just hope they don't have to go through what Twilight and I had to. Being separated from the one you love for so long is heartbreaking."

"I can't say we have ever experienced something like that." Celestia said softly. "As Princesses, we have very little time for romance."

"You don't know what your missing, then." I said with a chuckle.

Both Princesses smiled.

"Tell me," Luna asked, "what's it like? Being in love, that is?"

"I'm no poet, so I can't give you a long-winded answer to that." I replied. "But speaking as a normal man ... it's the greatest feeling I could ever hope for. The fact that I have somepony to love, and who loves me in return is what keeps me going."

"If only we could experience something so tender..." Luna trailed off, her voice taking on a tone equal to Fluttershy's.

"It would be nice to love somepony," Celestia said, "were it not for the fact we are alicorns."

I raised an eyebrow.

"And what does that have to do with the price of hay?" I asked.

"We're immortal," Celestia replied with a sigh, "so we'd have to watch our partners die."

Both Princesses were on the verge of tears. I stood in the middle and put an arm around each of them.

"I understand that that would make it hard to love somepony," I said as softly as I could, "but that doesn't mean you shouldn't. Yes, you will see many lovers die, but you know what won't die?"

Both Princesses looked at me expectantly.

After a pause, I smiled and pointed at their foreheads.

"Memories." I said simply. "Love may come and go, but memories are eternal. You shouldn't let that get in the way of happiness. You may have several relationships in your long lives, but you will have the memories of your time spent together."

"Are you speaking from experience?" Luna asked.

"When I was separated from Twilight," I replied, removing my arms from the Princesses necks, "I kept thinking of the time we had spent together. It was short, but I had a lot of memories of that time. Our first date, our first kiss, laughing with our friends, the first time we f-"

I cut myself off as the Princesses smiled.

"You get the idea." I said, as a blush crept onto my cheeks. "It was these memories that kept me going as I worked on getting back to her. And since I did, I have more memories to cherish, such as the wedding and the birth of our foals."

By now, both Princesses appeared to be in better spirits. Seizing the opportunity, I continued my little pep talk.

"I guess what I'm really trying to say is this. Don't let your emotions and fears stop you from enjoying life. Yes, it'll be hard to lose a lover. But you will move on eventually, and you'll have your memories to remind you of the good times. Just because you're Princesses, that doesn't mean you have to be confined to a life of solitude. If you have somepony in mind, you would do well to make them yours before it is too late."

Both Princesses had smiles plastered firmly on their faces as they watched me walk around the room as I talked. Once I finished, they both applauded.

Once the clapping had subsided, Luna spoke.

"You're right, Geo." she said. "I am a Princess, and if I want to have a relationship, then by Tartarus I will have one!"

"Hear, hear." Celestia nodded in agreement.

I grinned.

"That's the spirit, Your Majesties!" I said. "Now, who are the lucky stallions going to be?"

Both Princesses blushed.

"One of the nobles approached me the other day and asked if I would accompany him to dinner." Celestia said. "I politely refused, but he's not stopped asking. I don't know if it's love, or if he just wants to further his career, but I'll take him up on his offer the next time he asks."

"Atta girl." I said. "How about you, Luna?"

Luna traced a hoof along the ground, following the intricate pattern chiselled into the marble floor.

"One of my bodyguards has been getting a little bit too close lately." she said. "In fact, he tried to kiss me the other day. When I refused, he apologised profusely and blamed alcohol ... but I couldn't smell a drop on his breath."

"Talk to him," I said, "and see what happens."

"I will." Luna replied. "Thank you for the pep talk, Geo. It has been most enlightening. If you'll excuse me, I must rest now before I raise the moon. Good day to you both."

"Good day, Luna." Celestia and I said in unison.

As Luna left the room, Celestia sighed.

"What's wrong, Princess?" I asked. "Are you worried about what might happen with that noble?"

Celestia shook her head and nodded towards the clock on the wall.

"Ah," I said, "I must return to my room. Very well. But please, do tell me how things go."

Celestia nodded as Shining Armour entered the room.

"Princess." he said with a bow. "You ready, Geo?"

I nodded.

"Thank you for the chat, Geo." Celestia said, as Shining applied the manacles. "It was just what I needed."

"I'm happy to have been of service." I replied, as I allowed Shining to lead me back to my room.

As we walked along the gilded halls, I smiled.

Regardless of what happened, I knew that at our next meeting...

... the Princesses and I would have a *lot* to talk about.

4. A DASH OF ROMANCE

As Twilight recounted the story of how her foals got their names, Rainbow Dash wasn't listening. Her thoughts were focused solely on a certain pony.

"That unicorn who runs the repair shop in town?" she'd asked. "Now there's a guy who knows how to fix things."

The inflection at the end of that sentence had thankfully, for her at least, gone unnoticed by the rest of the group. And as Twilight finished her story, Dash found herself thinking that maybe she should act on her feelings and ask him out.

Feelings. There were plenty of those floating around at the moment, and as much as she hated to admit it, Dash didn't want to feel left out.

"Come on, Geo."

Dash was snapped out of her trance-like state and saw Shining Armour leading Geo from the library.

How long was I out? She wondered.

As the door closed behind the two of them, Twilight let out a sigh.

"He's right," she said wistfully, "the universe *is* a bastard."

"Twilight!" gasped a clearly shocked Rarity.

"Sorry, Rarity," Twilight replied with a huff, "but it's true. We've barely had any time to ourselves since he got back, what with the trial, his sentence, our friends - no offence - and these two."

She indicated Azure and Evening. The foals were sound asleep, oblivious to their mother's torment.

"Ah hear ya, Twi." Applejack said. "So Ah'll tell ya what. Next time he comes ta see y'all, we won't be here. Then y' can have all tha time ya want ta yerselves."

Rarity, Fluttershy and Pinkie Pie nodded their agreement with Applejack's idea. Rainbow Dash, on the other hoof, seemed to be focusing on a particular spot on the wall.

"Dash?"

The cyan pegasus continued looking at the wall, as if she were trying to win a staring contest.

"DASH?!" Applejack shouted.

"Huh? Wha-?"

"Ah was just sayin' ta Twilight that we'd give her and Geo some space next time he's here. Y'all okay with that?"

"Uh, sure," Dash replied, "no problem. I've got somepony to do ... er, I mean ... *something* to do."

Before anyone could stop her, she was out the door.

Spark Plug whistled contentedly to himself as he locked up his shop, preparing himself for his journey home. It had been a long day, and he could almost swear that he could hear a cup of coffee calling his name.

Glancing skywards, a familiar chromatic trail streaked across the sky. Spark smiled inwardly to himself.

"That's gotta be Rainbow Dash," he said to himself, "because only she can make flying look so beautiful."

"Beautiful?" said a voice from behind him, "Try *awesome*."

Spark jumped a few hooves into the air with a yelp, landing on the ground in a heap. He looked up to see a blaze of colour in the form of Dash's mane. She had a sly smile on her face, and was gazing at Spark with something akin to wonder.

"Sorry," she said sheepishly, offering a helping hoof, "it's just that I've been looking for you."

Spark gripped Dash's hoof with his and was pulled up. He dusted himself off before clearing his throat.

"If you want something fixed," he said, "you'll have to wait until tomorrow. I'm closed for today."

Dash shook her head.

"No, I don't want anything fixed." she said.

"Then what do you want?" Spark asked, raising an eyebrow.

A small tint of pink appeared on Dash's cheeks as she blushed. She scuffed a hoof along the ground.

"It's ... kinda awkward," she said, "given how I've never done this sort of thing before."

Spark's eyebrow raised even further, but he made no comment.

Dash let out a sigh and took a couple of deep breaths.

"I was just wondering ... " she said, " ... if you'd like to come and hang out sometime?"

Spark's eyebrow fell back to its usual resting place, while his jaw took a similar downward journey to the ground.

"You mean, like a date?" he asked.

Dash smiled and nodded.

"Uhh, yeah. Sure." he replied. "That sounds great."

Dash suddenly seemed to perk up, her blush vanishing and her smile replaced with a huge grin.

"Cool," she said, "so how does tomorrow sound?"

"Tomorrow is great." Spark replied. "I'll see you at seven?"

"Sugarcube Corner," Dash said, "don't be late."

Spark nodded as Dash shot into the sky, her trademark rainbow streak trailing behind her.

As soon as she was out of sight, Spark let out a cheer he didn't know he was suppressing.

"I can't believe that just happened!" he said to no pony in particular. "*Rainbow Dash* just asked *me* out! Rainbow-freaking-Dash!"

Spark walked down the street towards his home, an obvious spring in his step, and a huge smile plastered firmly on his face.

The next day, Spark stood outside Sugarcube Corner. The town clock read 6:59pm, and the smells emanating from the confectionery establishment caused his mouth to water, and his stomach to rumble.

As the clock struck seven, Rainbow Dash landed on the ground in front of him. She had clearly made an attempt to tidy her mane, but her efforts had been wasted from the high-speed flying she had been doing. The result was a wind-swept style that would have Rarity in a fit, should she see it.

"You're here, then." Dash said as she folded her wings neatly by her sides.

"Seven o' clock, just as we agreed." Spark said with a smile. He opened the door to the bakery and gestured Dash inside.

"Mares first." he said politely.

Dash simply grinned before propelling him through the door with a quick flap of her wings.

"I'm not really into that sappy stuff." she said by way of explanation. "That's more for the likes of Geo and Twilight."

Spark nodded and the two went up to the counter.

"Hello dearies," Mrs. Cake said, "what can I get you?"

"Oh, hi Mrs. Cake." Dash said, looking puzzled. "Where's Pinkie?"

"She's with that coltfriend of hers." Mrs. Cake replied. "They seem so happy together, though I still wonder how he's able to keep up with Pinkies endless energy."

Dash chuckled.

"Can I get a strawberry cupcake and a hot chocolate?" she asked, before turning to Spark. "And what about you?"

"I'll have what she's having." he replied.

"Take a seat, and I'll bring them over."

The two made their way over to a seat in the corner. Soon enough, Mrs. Cake arrived with their order, and Spark reached into his bit pouch, only to be stopped by a cyan hoof.

"I already told you," she said sternly, "that I don't do the sappy stuff. And the stallion paying, is sappy. I can pay for both of us."

"Oh," said Spark hesitantly, as he put his bit pouch away, "thanks Dash. I appreciate it."

You've got yourself a winner here, Spark. Not only is she cute, she doesn't expect you to be a total gentlecolt. Don't buck this up!

Spark ignored that part of his mind, focusing instead on the mare in front of him. She bit into her cupcake, smearing a bit of frosting across her top lip. Fighting back the urge to wipe it off, Spark took a bite of his own.

"So, Rainbow Dash..." he began.

"Just 'Dash' is fine," she interrupted, "as long as I get to call you 'Spark' in return."

"Of course, Dash." he replied. "Now, as I was going to say ... what made you ask me out like this?"

The pink returned to Dash's cheeks.

She's even cuter when she's embarrassed.

"Well, I've noticed you around town," she said, "and you seemed kinda cool, so I thought 'why not?'. "

Spark laughed.

"I guess fixing things does make me cool," he said, "but I'm nowhere near as cool as you."

Dash waved a hoof dismissively.

"Shut up..." she said, suppressing a giggle.

"I mean it!" Spark said. "You're the best flyer in Equestria, you're one of the Elements of Harmony, and you've saved our flanks on so many occasions! I may be cool, but I'll never top you."

Dash let out the giggle she was holding as her blush faded.

"Thanks," she said, "it feels nice to hear a stallion give me a genuine compliment. Usually when guys say stuff like that, they're only after one thing, if you catch my drift."

Spark's cheeks turned red and his ears flattened.

"I can guess." he said with an awkward chuckle.

"Anyway," Dash said suddenly, "we're getting close to the sappy stuff again, so let's change the subject!"

"Sure," Spark replied, "what subject did you have in mind?"

"Well," Dash said, "you know a lot about me. But then again, who doesn't? So, I want to know about you."

Spark sighed.

"There's not much to tell." he said. "I grew up in Ponyville with my parents. It was them who opened the store. My dad did all the fixing, while my mother handled the finances, since she was an accountant. I got my cutie mark after I saw my father give up on fixing something. I had a look at it, and out of curiosity, stuck a spark plug in it. Lo and behold, the item worked, and I wasn't a blank flank any more."

He chuckled.

"How ironic, that the very item I was named after would help me get my cutie mark."

"I got my cutie mark after pulling off a So-" Dash began.

"Sonic Rainboom," Spark interrupted, "I heard. I also heard that that same Rainboom helped your friends to get their respective cutie marks as well?"

Dash grinned.

"Now *that*," Spark said, "is cool."

"Yeah," Dash replied, "it is."

"I thought it was the *stallion* who had to walk the *mare* home," Spark enquired, "instead of the other way around?"

"Well I live in Cloudsdale," Dash replied, "and the last time I checked, you weren't a pegasus."

"Okay, I get it." Spark replied.

The two of them stood on the doorstep of Spark's home in silence, Luna's moon casting its light across the deserted streets.

"Thanks for tonight, Spark." Dash said. "It was fun. We should definitely do this again soon."

Spark looked at the sky.

"A wonderful evening, and a totally cool mare." he said. "Though I can't help but think that something is missing. Something that would make this night per-"

Spark's words were cut off as Dash's lips met with his, sending a wave of shock coursing throughout his body. He leaned back into the kiss, prompting a moan from the cyan pegasus.

After what seemed like an eternity, the two of them separated.

"Is it a perfect night now?" Dash asked.

"Totally." Spark replied.

Dash ruffled her feathers and grinned.

"Good," she said, as she took off and hovered above the ground, "because there'll be more nights like this."

Spark returned her grin.

"Goodnight, Dash." he said.

"Goodnight, Spark." she replied, as she flew off in the direction of Cloudsdale, leaving a smitten unicorn in her wake.

5. PRAESIDIO COR NOCTIS

(To Protect The Heart Of The Night)

Luna paced nervously around her chambers, replaying her recent conversation with Geo in her head.

"I am a Princess, and if I want to have a relationship, then by Tartarus I will have one!"

Those words stuck out the most. They were her words, and she wasn't prepared to go back on them.

The Lunar Princess' train of thought was promptly derailed upon hearing the knock at the door. It was a slow, dull knock - as if the pony knocking really didn't want to.

Putting her expression as neutral as she could, Luna spoke.

"Enter."

The door opened slowly and an earth pony stallion adorned with the armour of the Night Guard entered, avoiding eye contact.

"Thank you for coming at such short notice, Dusk Wind." she said, "Though I would appreciate it if you looked at me while I am talking to you."

The stallion known as Dusk Wind slowly looked up. His eyes were full of fear, and his face showed that he'd been crying. Profusely.

"Princess Luna, I-" he began, only to be silenced with a raised hoof.

"I will be doing the talking here, Dusk." she said, "Sit down, and listen carefully to what I have to say. I assume you know what I wish to talk to you about?"

Dusk nodded, his ears flattening against his head.

"The kiss..." he said painfully, wincing at the memory.

"Yes," Luna replied, "the kiss."

She exhaled sharply and began walking around the room, circling the nervous Dusk Wind as a shark would circle its prey.

"I am going to ask you some questions," she said, "and I expect nothing but honesty in your answers. Understood?"

"Yes, Princess Luna." Dusk replied.

"Call me Luna."

Dusk's ears perked up as she spoke those words, and a smile began working its way onto his face before he quickly changed it to a nervous frown.

"As you command, Pri- ... Luna." he said.

Luna smiled and took another deep breath.

"Okay," she said, "first question. Do you harbour feelings of a romantic nature towards me?"

Dusk swallowed a lump in his throat.

"Yes," he said nervously, "I do."

"Why?"

The question was short and to the point. Dusk fidgeted with his mane while his mind tried frantically to come up with the answer.

"Because..." he trailed off.

Luna looked at him expectantly, an eyebrow raised in question.

"Because...?" she said, trying to persuade him to continue.

Dusk sighed.

"Because you are a strong, independent, beautiful mare." he said, "You have been through a lot, and yet you don't let it get to you."

Luna stopped walking.

"No pony has ever said anything like that to me before." she said, pausing for a moment.

"And you honestly feel this way about me?"

"More than any pony else I've ever met." Dusk replied, his fear and nervousness slowly being replaced by confidence.

"So," Luna continued, "tell me what led you to kiss me that night."

As quickly as it had left, Dusk's sense of fear had returned. He swallowed hard, and began panting heavily.

"All I want is an explanation." Luna said, "Is that too much to ask?"

Dusk shook his head.

Taking a few deep breaths, he told Luna the events leading up to the kiss all those nights ago...

Dusk Wind stood ever vigilant at his post, his eyes darting back and forth on the lookout for any threats to Princess Luna.

Nothing was stirring.

Nothing, that is, but his emotions.

"Dusk Wind?"

The stallion in question turned on the spot to see Princess Luna herself approaching him. He quickly stood to attention and bowed, thankful that she couldn't hear his heart beating in his throat.

"Princess Luna," he said, "what brings you here?"

"Boredom." Luna replied bluntly.

Dusk chuckled.

"And, if you don't mind me asking," he said, "were you planning to accomplish out here on the battlements?"

Luna shrugged.

"I was hoping to find somepony to talk to." she said, "And it would appear that my hopes weren't dashed."

"I'm sorry to say, your Highness," Dusk said solemnly, "that I won't be here for long. I'm being relieved shortly."

Luna nodded.

"And why should that stop you talking to me?" she asked.

Dusk smiled.

"You have a point, your Highness." he said, "What would you like to talk about?"

Luna looked out over the battlements and down into Canterlot. The city slept soundly, and the glow of her moon made her coat shimmer. After a moment, she turned her eyes towards Dusk.

"You are one of my bodyguards," she said, "yet I know so little about you. So please, tell me about yourself."

Dusk's expression changed to one of disbelief.

She's really asking me that?

"There's not much to tell, your Highness." he said, "I grew up in an orphanage after my parents died, and I joined the Lunar Guard as soon as I was old enough."

"So many ponies choose to join the Solar Guard," said Luna, "so why did you decide to join my guards instead?"

"Because I have nothing but the utmost respect for you." Dusk replied, "That, and you are a Princess just as much as your sister."

Luna smiled a little.

"Why do you respect me, Dusk Wind?" she asked.

"When I was in the orphanage," he explained, "I used to sit up at night and try to count the stars. Most of the other foals were afraid of the dark, but not me."

"You admire my night?" Luna said.

"Indeed I do, your Highness." Dusk replied, "Your night was a thing of beauty. I used to imagine that I was up there with you, watching as you raised the moon and aligned the stars. It's what helped me get through the seven years I spent in the orphanage."

While he had been talking, Luna had taken a few steps towards him. Their muzzles were just inches apart.

"Tell me, Dusk Wind," Luna said, "is there anything else you admire about me, besides my night?"

Dusk could no longer control himself. Lunging forward, he planted a kiss on Luna's lips.

With a muffled gasp, Luna backed away.

"Dusk Wind!" she said sharply.

Dusk's ears flattened as he realised what he had just done.

"Oh, no." he said, "Princess, I am so sorry! I ... er, had a few drinks before starting my shift. I guess they only just started affecting me."

"But-" Luna started, but was cut off by the sound of hoofbeats.

"Hey, Dusk." a pegasus mare said, "You're relie- Princess?!"

The mare bowed to Luna, who simply nodded.

"Star Storm!" Dusk yelled, "Good, you're here! You can talk to the Princess, while I ... er, go get some sleep!"

He took off down the battlements.

"See you later!" he called over his shoulder.

"Er, yeah." Star Storm called back, "See you later..."

She shrugged.

"That stallion," she muttered, "always acting weird. So, your Highness. It looks like its just you and me."

Luna did not reply. Looking around, Star Storm saw that the Lunar Princess was gone.

Shrugging, she took up her position, unaware of the awkwardness still lingering in the air.

"And that's the story, your Highness." Dusk said with a sigh. "Once again, I am extremely sorry for my behaviour. As I said, I had a few drinks before starting my sh-"

"I know you didn't have any drinks," Luna interrupted, "because I didn't smell anything on your breath."

She paused.

"Nor did I taste anything when you decided to stick your tongue down my throat."

Dusk flinched.

"Well," he said, "I'm sorry. I'm sure you want to punish me, so please. Go right ahead. I deserve it."

Luna walked up to him, her eyes fixed upon his.

"I will decide what to do with you," she said, "once you tell me exactly how you feel about me."

"But," Dusk spluttered, "I just did."

"Yes," Luna replied, "but I want to hear the short version."

"The short version?" he said.

Luna nodded.

Dusk looked into Luna's eyes. As he did so, his demeanour changed. He stopped panicking and stood up.

"The short version," he said gruffly, "is that I love you, Princess."

Luna smiled.

"That's all I needed to hear." she said.

Dusk returned the smile.

"So," he said, "what happens next?"

The answer came in the form of a dark blue blur as it launched itself at him, pinning him to the ground. Before he could protest, he felt the soft touch of Luna's lips against his.

And suddenly, nothing else mattered any more.

6. DIGNUS SOLIS

(Worthy Of The Sun)

Celestia smiled as she saw the ragged looking stallion leaving her sister's bedroom, doing his best to act as nonchalantly as he possibly could, save for the swagger in his step.

As he passed her, he bowed.

"Good morning, your Highness." he said.

"Good morning to you as well, Dusk Wind." she replied.

Dusk stopped dead in his tracks.

"How do you-" he began

"Do not worry," Celestia interrupted, "for my sister has told me a lot about you. And as long as you make her happy, you both have my blessing."

Dusk's grin came back as he nodded feverishly, before continuing his swagger down the hall towards the barracks.

Celestia laughed at his antics before entering the meeting room. In the middle of it stood a unicorn with a nervous look on his face.

"Ah," Celestia said as she spotted him, "there you are, Worthy Cause. I'm glad you came to see me on such short notice."

Worthy cleared his throat.

"Anything for you, your Highness." he said, "Now, what can I do for you today?"

Celestia took a seat at the head of the meeting table and indicated to Worthy to sit in the seat adjacent to hers. As he sat, she spoke.

"As you know," she said, "you have invited me to dine with you on many an occasion."

Worthy nodded.

"And as you also know, I have politely refused."

Worthy smiled weakly.

"I understand you are a very busy pony, your Highness." he said.

"That is not the reason why I refuse," she replied, "although that is the reason I keep giving."

Worthy cocked his head to one side in confusion.

Celestia sighed.

"As one of the rulers of Equestria, I have to be mindful of who I socialise with." she said, "There are a lot of influential ponies who would like nothing better to get me on side, so that they can take advantage of our friendship to further their careers and wealth."

Worthy's jaw hung open as he spluttered.

"I can assure you, Princess Celestia," he said, his voice trembling on the brink of rage, "that I am not that sort of pony."

"So if it's not that," Celestia replied, "then why do you invite me to dine with you?"

Worthy sighed.

"When I said 'dine with me'," he said, "I meant just the two of us. Alone. Not with a group of my peers."

A small smile appeared on Celestia's face.

This is taking too long. she thought, I'm sure my sister didn't have to wait this long for her special somepony to crack. Time to start dropping some hints.

She noticed that Worthy was looking at her, waiting for her to reply. She coughed sheepishly.

"I see." she said, "But I'd appreciate an explanation as to why it has to be the two of us. I can't imagine what everypony would think if they were to hear of the two of us dining alone."

"I'm ... I'm not sure I understand what you are getting at, your Highness." Worthy replied.

"Think about it." Celestia said, "The princess, dining alone with the philanthropist. It would imply that we are together ... romantically."

There was a long moment of silence as Worthy processed what he had just heard, after which he let out a nervous chuckle, and rubbed the back of his head with a hoof.

"I guess there is no point in trying to hide it any more, is there?" he said, looking at the small smile on Celestia's face.

"Hide what?" Celestia replied, trying her best to act naive, "I'm assuming you do have an ulterior motive for inviting me to dinner?"

Worthy sighed.

"I have always admired you, Princess Celestia." he said, "Since I was a foal, in fact. Your poise, your calm yet commanding nature, and your almost maternal approach to your subjects have always appealed to me."

Celestia opened her mouth to reply, but Worthy raised a hoof.

"Please," he said, "let me finish."

Celestia closed her mouth and nodded.

"I have heard stories of the many stallions who have tried to woo you through strength and wealth. I thought that if I could show you a stallion who had a heart as caring as yours, I could be the one who would win your heart."

Celestia's eyes began to fill with tears. She wiped them away as Worthy continued talking.

"I made a vow to always treat ponies with the same respect and dignity that you do. I threw myself into volunteering, and soon I got my cutie mark."

He pointed at the symbol of a collecting tin with a heart above it.

"I knew then that my life lay in charity work, and soon I created the Canterlot Charitable Trust. With the help of others, I began to make life better for others. I raised money through events such as bake sales, sponsored races, carriage washes, and so forth."

Celestia nodded.

"Soon, I had made a name for myself in the charity world. And then I got the letter that would change my life."

He pulled a piece of paper out of his pocket.

"This letter, right here." he said, "It bears your royal seal, and says that my charity was chosen to receive a share of the profits from the sale of tickets to the Grand Galloping Gala."

He unfurled the letter and read it, laughing as he did.

"I'm not sure it was actually you who wrote this," he said, "but I knew you still had a say on what charity received the money. And that is when I realised that I had done the right thing with my life."

He blinked back tears of his own as he spoke, wiping them away with a hoof as Celestia wrapped a wing around him.

"I did write that letter." she said, "I had heard so much about what you were doing for my little ponies, I wanted to help. Which is why I ordered the proceeds from the Gala to go to you, since I knew you could use them far better than I could."

Worthy let out a snuffle.

"After that," he said, "our donations skyrocketed, and our ranks swelled with new volunteers. We were able to do so much more, for so many more."

He sighed deeply.

"I received an invite to attend the Hearth's Warming Eve ball a few months later. I was pleased. I knew that I would be able to thank you personally for the money. But, once I saw you, I couldn't even think of approaching you."

"Why?" Celestia asked.

"Because as soon as I saw you, I realised just how beautiful you were. You are far more caring than anypony else, and I felt I wasn't worthy enough to be in your presence."

He laughed, "Not worthy ... how ironic."

Celestia let out a small chuckle.

"Which is why I sent you that invite to dine with me." Worthy said, "I felt that if I could get you alone, I could prove myself to be better than all the other stallions who tried to win your heart."

He hung his head and exhaled sharply.

"But when you kept turning me down, I began to realise that I was wasting my time. I mean, you're a *princess*, and I'm just ... me."

Celestia put a hoof to Worthy's chin and raised his head up until she was looking into his eyes.

"At first, she said, "I took your constant dinner invitations to be an attempt at squeezing me for more funding. But, I talked to a friend of mine, and he told me to give you a chance."

Worthy smiled.

"Which is why I summoned you here today." Celestia continued, "I wanted to hear your side of the story before I jumped to any more conclusions. And now that you've told me, I think I am ready to come to one more."

She brought her face closer to Worthy's.

"You don't want money." she said, "Because you want me."

Worthy nodded feverishly.

"That's true." he said, "I ... I love you, Princess."

Celestia smiled and leaned in further, planting a soft kiss on Worthy's lips. The sensation caused him to tense up and almost fall out of his seat.

After a while, Celestia broke away.

"I knew you loved me," she said, "but I wanted to make sure first."

Worthy smiled sheepishly.

"I do love you, Princess." he said, "With all my heart."

Celestia smiled.

"You were wrong about one thing, though." she said.

Worthy raised an eyebrow.

"About what?" he asked.

Celestia kissed him again, more passionately than the last time. He returned the kiss eagerly, both of them moaning softly.

Breaking off, Celestia gazed into Worthy's eyes.

"I can't think of anypony else who is more worthy to be in my presence," she said, "than you."

7. STOP DRAGON IT OUT

The sound of knocking resonated throughout the library, rousing a young dragon from his peaceful slumber. He glanced over at the nearby bed and saw that it was freshly made, indicating it had been empty for a while. With a yawn, Spike got out of his basket and went downstairs.

As he reached the bottom, he saw that Twilight had already opened the door and was talking to Ace. The latter saw him and raised a hand in greeting before resuming his conversation.

"Come on, Twilight." he said, "Celestia knows you need the help, and these guys helped me out a lot when I watched the Crusaders."

"I'm not sure, Ace." Twilight replied, the hesitation in her voice causing Spike's ears to prick up, "As much as I would love the extra help, I'm not sure I can afford it right now."

"Which is why I'm offering you mates rates." Ace said.

Spike approached the door and glanced out. On Ace's left was one of his Nurse-Bots. Spike recognised the contraption from the many times Ace had been left to watch over the three-filly wrecking crew known collectively as the Cutie Mark Crusaders.

"Mates rates?" Twilight asked, "I'm not familiar with that expression. Could you elaborate?"

Ace sighed.

"In the UK, we have several words for 'friend'. 'Mate' is one of those words." he said, "So when I say I am offering you 'mates rates', it means I am giving you a great discount because you're my friend."

"I can't ask you to do that, Ace." she said, "It's not fair to your business. How can you make money if you're giving discounts?"

Ace laughed.

"First of all, you never asked me." he replied, "I offered. Secondly, have you *seen* how much Vinyl Scratch is paying me to rent out Tiny as a mobile stage? Needless to say, I'm pretty sure giving you a fifty percent discount won't eat into my earnings."

Twilight let out a laugh of her own and looked at the bot.

"Okay, Ace." she said, "I accept your offer. Can you start tomorrow? Geo is coming over for the weekend, so he can help me with Azure and Evening for now."

She glanced at Spike, who was still in earshot, and leaned closer to Ace so she could whisper to him.

"That," she said, "and we also need to do more... intimate things."

A sly smile appeared on Ace's face as he nodded knowingly.

"Say no more, Twilight." he said, "Say no more. I'll bring the bot around on Monday. Okay?"

Twilight nodded.

"That's fine, Ace." she said, "Thank you."

"Thank you for what?" a voice said.

Twilight looked behind Ace and saw a chariot had landed outside the library. Her brother was there, as well as her husband. She let out a squeal of delight and threw herself at the latter.

"That's my cue to leave." Ace said, "See you on Monday! Nice to see you, Geo. We should catch up when you get a moment."

Geo nodded and resumed hugging Twilight.

"What's happening on Monday?" he asked her.

"I'll tell you later." she replied as she broke the hug. "In the meantime, you have a couple of foals who are missing their father, and a wife who *really* needs some attention."

Geo grinned and entered the library.

"Spike!" he said, bumping fists with the young drake, "How's it going, big man?"

"Out the door." Spike replied. "I know you and Twilight want some alone time, so I'll go see if I can find something to do."

"All right," Geo replied, "but we're gonna catch up while I'm here. Got it? I want to know what's been going on."

Spike nodded and walked out the library.

"Spike," Twilight said as he walked past her, "you can take the day off. Geo and I can handle things from here. Thanks for your help."

"No problem, Twilight." he said, waving dismissively, "Anything for a friend. Have fun!"

Twilight entered the library and closed the door, locking it behind her. Spike smiled and walked into town.

Arriving at Sugarcube Corner, his attention was caught by a voice calling his name.

"Spike!"

He looked around for the source and saw Applejack at her stall, with John standing next to her, serving customers.

Spike walked over to the stall.

"Howdy, Spike." Applejack said, "Haven't seen ya in a while, pardner. How are y'all doin' at the library?"

"Well, things have been tough, I won't lie." he replied, "But Ace has offered Twilight the services of one of his Nurse-Bots."

"Holy crap," John spluttered, "she must be desperate."

Applejack poked him roughly in the side.

"Now hold on there, darlin'." she said, "Twilight ain't desperate. She needed help, somepony offered it, and she took it. There ain't nothin' wrong with helpin' a friend in need."

She paused.

"Though I gotta admit that some o' them metal critters give me the heebie-jeebies." she shuddered.

John laughed.

"Don't worry," he said, running a hand through Applejack's mane, "Ace knows what he's doing. I'm sure those bots of his will help Twilight immensely. And if they don't, I'll make sure to go double-oh seven on his ass."

Applejack and Spike laughed.

"Well, Geo's at the library just now," said Spike, "so I've got the day off. You need any help?"

"Awww sorry sugarcube," Applejack replied, "but we're nearly done fer the day. Ah'm sure somepony else could use ya though."

"You don't need any help at the farm?" Spike asked hopefully.

"That's what she pays me for." John said, as a wicked grin appeared on his lips. "Wait... sex counts as pay, right?"

Applejack gasped and jabbed John in the stomach forcefully, causing him to grunt and fall over laughing.

Spike blushed and began backing away slowly.

"I can see that I'm not needed." he said, "I'll just see if Fluttershy needs any help with the animals."

As he ran off, Applejack's raised voice could be heard berating John, who was simply howling with laughter.

Spike knocked on the door to Fluttershy's cottage and stood patiently as he waited for her to answer.

The door opened slowly, to reveal Angel. Spike looked down at him, the rabbit looking back with a bored expression on his face.

"Hey Angel." Spike said nonchalantly, "Is Fluttershy home?"

Angel shook his head and began miming. He waved his arms as if he was flying, before throwing himself onto the ground and then holding one arm as if he was hurt.

Spike gasped.

"So she hurt herself flying, and is now in the hospital?" he asked.

Angel nodded.

"Darn." Spike replied, "Oh well, I guess I'd better go and visit her then. Thanks, Angel."

Angel replied by shutting the door in Spike's face. The dragon snorted and turned away from the humble abode, before walking back towards Ponyville.

As he walked past the repair shop, he saw that the door was open. Glancing inside, he saw Rainbow Dash talking to Spark Plug.

"Hey, Rainbow Dash!" Spike called.

Dash turned around and saw Spike waving. She waved back before trotting over to him.

"I'm on my way to the hospital to visit Fluttershy." he said, "You wanna come with?"

Dash shook her head.

"I was already there." she replied, "I was there when she hurt herself, so I rushed her over. She's fine."

Spike groaned.

"Well, I'm still gonna go visit her." he muttered.

"Whoa, what's up with him?" Spark Plug asked as he came to the door. "You okay, Spike?"

"Not really." he replied, "I've got the day off and everypony is too busy to hang out with me."

He looked between Dash and Spark.

"Unless you two want to?" he asked.

Dash and Spark exchanged a cautionary glance.

"Sorry Spike," Spark said, "but Dash and I have plans. I'm taking her to a Wonderbolts race."

Spike's face fell.

"All right." he replied, "Well, I'm sure Fluttershy will be more than happy to talk to me. See ya later."

As he walked away, he felt a stab of jealousy.

Spike sat under a tree and looked over the lake. His expression was one of pure concentration.

Twilight has Geo, Pinkie has Ace, Applejack has John, Rainbow Dash has Spark Plug and now it would seem that Fluttershy and Doctor Haywick are together. Well, I hope they are. She seemed really interested in kissing him when I saw her earlier.

He picked up a stone and skipped it across the surface of the water. It skipped elegantly before sinking to the bottom.

Reminds me of my courage. I work up the nerve to tell Rarity how I feel, but I bottle it at the last minute. No wonder she only ever sees me as her 'adorable little Spikey-Wikey'.

He picked up another stone and simply tossed it into the lake.

All of our friends are finding love. So now seems like the best time to tell her how I feel. No fear... and no regrets. Why should I be the one who is left out in all of this new-found love?

He stood up, his facial expression changing to one of determination.

You're a dragon, Spike, so it's high time you started acting like one! With Celestia as my witness, today is the day I tell Rarity that I love her!

Letting out a low growl, Spike turned away from the lake and began running, his legs propelling him all the way to the Boutique. He saw Rarity at the door, waving goodbye to her last customer of the day, before she shut the door and turning the 'Open' sign to 'Closed'.

Approaching the door, Spike held out his hand to open it.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING? SHE'LL JUST LAUGH IN YOUR FACE!

She won't do that. She loves me too, I know it. She's just waiting for me to make the first move!

YOU IDIOT, SHE'LL BREAK YOUR HEART AND YOU'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO LOVE ANYONE EVER AGAIN! TURN BACK NOW AND FORGET ABOUT THIS!

"Spike?"

Spike looked up to see Rarity standing in the doorway, the look on her face somewhere between confusion and concern.

"Are you okay, darling?" she asked, "You look troubled. Is everything all right at the library?"

Spike gulped.

JUST TELL HER YOU'RE HERE TO OFFER YOUR ASSISTANCE, AND FORGET ABOUT THIS FOOLHARDY IDEA OF THE TWO OF YOU EVER BEING TOGETHER!

"Why don't you come in, Spike?" Rarity said, stepping aside, "You look like you could use somepony to talk to."

Come on, Spike. Get in there. You can do this!

NO, YOU CAN'T! LEAVE NOW.

"Okay." he said weakly.

FINE. BUT DON'T COME CRYING TO ME WHEN SHE SPITS ON YOUR DREAMS AND BREAKS YOUR HEART IN TWO.

Spike entered the boutique slowly. The shop was littered with ponykins, each one wearing an outfit - some finished, some still in development. The floor was littered with fabric. Taking a deep breath, Spike tried to find relaxation in the chaos around him.

Rarity came from the back of the shop, levitating a cup of tea and an emerald in front of her. She put the tea on the table and offered the emerald to Spike as she sat down.

When he shook his head, she let out an audible gasp.

"Spike, you're worrying me." she said, her tone both warm and demanding, "Please, whatever is the matter?"

Spike took a deep breath.

"You know how most of our friends have a special somepony now?" he asked, "Twilight has Geo, AJ has John, Pinkie has Ace, Dash has Spark and now Fluttershy has Doctor Haywick."

Rarity raised an eyebrow.

"Fluttershy and Haywick?" she said, tapping her chin with a hoof, "That's news to me. It's about time that mare did something."

Spike looked at her blankly.

"Oh, I'm sorry." she laughed sheepishly, "This isn't about Fluttershy, it's about you. Please, continue."

"All this love going around has got me thinking that I'll never find someone to love me." Spike said flatly.

Rarity did a double-take.

"Whatever makes you say that?!" she asked.

"I'm the only dragon here, remember?" Spike deadpanned. "And I'm not welcome amongst the others. We both know what happened when I tried to integrate myself with them."

Rarity nodded.

"The one pony I do have feelings for only sees me as a friend." Spike continued, "I want us to be more than that, but I'm sure she doesn't feel the same way."

"And how do you know that?" Rarity asked.

"I don't." Spike replied, "And I won't know how she feels unless I do something drastic."

"Oh, darling." Rarity said soothingly, "Whatever do you mean by 'do something drastic?'"

Spike looked Rarity straight in the eyes and took a deep breath.

"This." he said.

Before Rarity could question him further, he had grabbed her head and planted a kiss firmly on her lips. Stunned, Rarity made no attempt to break away. Thirty seconds had passed before Spike finally broke away.

He looked into Rarity's eyes again. The stunned expression was gone, replaced by one of anger.

"I'm sorry, Rarity." he said, "But I had to know. I can tell by the look on your face that you want me to leave, so I will."

He stood up and went to the door, opening it. A chill breeze entered the room, stirring paper and fabric.

Before Spike could step out, the door was covered in a light blue aura and slammed shut, locking from the outside. Spike turned to see Rarity advancing towards him, the angry expression still fixed onto her face.

"How dare you!" she said, raising a hoof.

Spike covered his face to protect himself from the impending blow.

I TOLD YOU THIS WOULD HAPPEN, YOU IDIOT. DON'T SAY YOU DON'T DESERVE THIS, BECAUSE YOU DO.

The blow never came. Instead, Spike found himself trapped in another hug. He removed his hands from his face to see tears running down Rarity's cheeks.

"How dare you..." she choked, "... try to leave without letting me kiss you back. It's about time *one* of us acted on these feelings."

Spike's eyes widened. Before he could respond, Rarity had her lips locked with his. Fireworks exploded in his mind, and all the negative thoughts in his brain had been banished, leaving behind nothing but the positive ones.

Way to go, big man.

8. TWO KINDS OF KINDNESS

"Come on, Fluttershy!" Rainbow Dash shouted, "I've gotta meet Spark soon, so what did you want to show me?"

"It... it can wait." Fluttershy replied, "You go and meet Spark. I don't want to keep him waiting."

Dash sighed.

"I've got plenty of time." she said, "Besides, I like to make him stew for a while. So just tell me you need to tell me already!"

Fluttershy pawed a hoof at the ground nervously.

"Well, it's just that... I've been practising the tricks you've been trying to teach me, and I really want to show you how I've improved... if that's okay with you."

Dash's sour demeanour was replaced with a warm smile as she nodded to her friend.

Fluttershy took a deep breath and unfurled her wings. She took off into the sky and flew around in circles. As she done so, the scowl began to reappear on Dash's face. She opened her mouth to shout something when Fluttershy went into a corkscrew spin.

"Whoa!" Dash said smugly, "I guess I taught her we-"

A loud crash interrupted her as Fluttershy hit the ground.

"Fluttershy!" she cried, rushing over to the injured pegasus, who was lying on her side with her wing bent at a ninety-degree angle. Dash hissed upon seeing the injury.

"Ow, ow, ow, ow, ow..." Fluttershy squeaked, as she tried to move her injured appendage.

"Don't move it, Shy!" Dash scolded, as she gently picked her up and placed her across her back, "I'm taking you to the hospital."

Fluttershy nodded weakly before passing out.

"Miss Fluttershy?"

Fluttershy's eyes flickered open, the light beginning to fill them. She let out a low groan and looked at her surroundings.

She was lying on a bed. The walls around her were a plain white, and the room was sparsely furnished. As she looked around the rest of the room, her eyes focused on a brown unicorn stallion, who was looking back with concern in his eyes. She gasped in shock.

"I'm sorry," the stallion said, "I never meant to startle you."

"It's okay Doctor Haywick," Fluttershy replied, "I forgot you were there for a moment."

Haywick raised an eyebrow.

"How did you know my name?" he asked, "I don't recall giving you it in the time you've been here."

"Oh, I'm sorry." Fluttershy replied, "It's just that I recognised you from the times I've accompanied Twilight here for her check-ups."

"Ah, yes." Haywick replied, "And how is Twilight doing? I heard about what happened to her husband."

Fluttershy looked at the floor.

"She's doing... good." she said, "It's tough, but her friends are there for her."

"As they should be." Haywick said, "Now, let us change the subject at hoof back to you, shall we?"

Fluttershy nodded.

"You broke your left wing in five places when you hit the ground." Haywick stated, "You'll need to rest it for three months, which means that you'll need to undergo physiotherapy before you can use it again."

Fluttershy slumped back onto the pillows in shock.

"Don't worry, Miss Fluttershy." Haywick soothed, "The therapy isn't all that bad. You'll be flying again before you know it."

"Umm, if you don't mind," Fluttershy replied, "I'd prefer it if you called me 'Fluttershy'."

"Oh, of course." Haywick said, "The formality is part of the job, since many patients prefer to be addressed in such a way. Though there are exceptions, like you."

He flashed a smile, which Fluttershy returned timidly.

"When can I leave the hospital?" she asked.

"Not for a few days, I'm afraid." Haywick responded, "We need to be sure that there are no hidden injuries."

"Okay..."

In the silence that followed, Fluttershy looked around the room while Haywick glanced over his notes repeatedly. Her eyes eventually settled on the doctor's cutie mark, which was a syringe against a red cross.

"If you don't mind me asking," Fluttershy timidly spoke, "how did you get your cutie mark?"

"I did a First Aid course at school." he replied, "I got beat up a lot, and so I took the course so I could treat my own injuries."

Fluttershy looked shocked.

"One day during the holidays, my father had a severe allergic reaction. He had a syringe full of adrenaline which somepony would administer to him, but since my mother was out, the responsibility was thrust into my hooves. So I thought about all the times I'd seen her do it, and stuck the needle in. A few seconds later, he was fine, and my cutie mark had appeared."

Fluttershy smiled.

"I bet your father was proud of you." she said.

Haywick wiped an errant tear from his eye and nodded.

"He was. I had saved his life, and found my talent. I was also proud of myself. So, the first chance my father got, he enrolled me in the Manehattan Medical Academy. And since then, I've dedicated myself to helping others."

"You remind me of me." Fluttershy said, "Except I help animals." She paused for a moment, "But that doesn't mean I don't help ponies as well."

Haywick laughed.

"I know all about your love for the animals." he said, "I've been past your home. But how on Equestria do you manage it? Surely animals would be harder to treat than ponies?"

"It's not hard at all." Fluttershy retorted, "My special talent is communicating with animals, so I can simply ask them what the problem is, and work out a treatment plan from there. And they're ever so quiet while I work on them."

"If only my patients were as quiet." Haywick said with a chortle, "You should have heard how much screaming Twilight did while she was in labour. She also squeezed Geo's hand so hard, she broke three of his fingers."

Fluttershy laughed timidly.

"I have to return to my rounds now, Fluttershy." Haywick said, as he went to the door, "But I would very much like to continue this conversation with you at some point. Perhaps over lunch?"

A trace of pink appeared on Fluttershy's cheeks as she nodded.

"That sounds lovely, Doctor." she said, "But when?"

"I'll come back at one o' clock." he said with a smile, "And please... call me Haywick."

As Fluttershy nodded, Haywick opened the door and left the room, closing it behind him gently.

Relaxing on the bed, Fluttershy felt a warm feeling in her chest. Holding a hoof over it, she realised that her heart was beating a lot faster than normal.

"Is it because of Haywick this is happening?" she asked herself, "He seems like a good, caring stallion. But I'm just a patient to him, nothing more."

She removed her hoof from her chest and sank back into the pillow.

"Nothing more..." she said quietly, as sleep took her.

The days had gone by in a blur, and Fluttershy had come to realise that her feelings for Doctor Haywick were more than mere friendship, but she was feeling conflicted as to what she should do.

I like him, so maybe I should go ahead and ask him out. The worst he could do is say 'no'. We both have so much in common. We both like taking care of others, we both like peace and quiet, and we were both bullied in school.

"But what if he doesn't feel the same way I do?" the love-struck pegasus moaned, "I'd just feel embarrassed and silly."

The door opened with a soft click, derailing Fluttershy's train of thought. Cocking her head, she saw the stallion of the hour entering the room. Panicking, she quickly threw herself onto her pillow and feigned sleep as Haywick trotted over.

"Good morning, Flutters- oh." he said, noticing that his patient appeared to be in a deep sleep, "You're not awake yet."

He sighed.

"I'll come back later." he said, "I just need to do another quick check-up, and then you'll be free to go."

Fluttershy heard the clip-clop of hooves against the floor as Haywick turned and headed for the door.

"And then you'll be out of my life fore- OH, DAMN IT ALL!"

Fluttershy winced at the sudden outburst as she heard the doctor stomp a hoof into the ground and turn around again.

"Stop being such a coward, Haywick! March your flank right back over there and tell her exactly how you feel!"

Fluttershy opened one eye just enough to see, but still give the impression of sleep. She watched as Haywick trotted over and put his muzzle close to her ear. She resisted the urge to squeal as she felt his breath against her fur.

"This is very unprofessional of me," he said, "but I haven't got the courage to say this to you while you're awake."

He took a deep breath and continued.

"I've always admired you, Fluttershy. Even before you came to this hospital as a patient. I've heard of the heroic deeds you and the other Elements of Harmony have accomplished. Then again, who hasn't? While the others, especially Rainbow Dash, may appreciate the fame, in every photo, you are hiding at the sides. You remind me so much of myself. And your caring nature outmatches even my own. In the time we've spent together having lunch, I have learned so much about you, and I realise that I now see you as much more than a patient."

Closing her eye, Fluttershy tingled in anticipation as Haywick planted a gentle kiss on her cheek.

"I... I love you, Fluttershy." he said, "Yet I don't have the guts to tell you. What kind of stallion does that make me?... A worthless one, that's what."

He sighed contentedly and smiled.

"Thanks for listening," he said, "even if you didn't hear a single word of it. It just felt good to get it off my chest."

As he turned to leave, Fluttershy's eyes shot open and she grabbed his leg with a hoof. Haywick gasped in shock.

"I heard everything." she said quietly, "And you're not worthless. You're the best stallion anypony could ask for."

Haywick's mouth hung open in surprise. Before he could respond, Fluttershy had wrapped her wings around him and pulled him in for a kiss, which he returned eagerly.

And in the magic of the moment, neither of them noticed a small purple dragon backing away from the door.

9. APPLE OF MY LIFE

"Are y'all quite done laughin'?" Applejack asked of John, who was lying on the ground clutching his sides.

"You should have seen the look on your face!" he replied, "Oh, Celestia, it was *priceless!*"

Applejack's raised eyebrow look turned into a scowl.

"The last time Ah heard those words," she said, "Ah was corrupted by Discord. Now, Ah was hopin' ta get over it, but y'all just had to go an' remind me of how Ah let mahself and mah friends down."

John stopped laughing and stood up.

"Oh, shit." he said, "I'm sorry, Applejack. I didn't mean to."

He reached out to hug her, but she pushed him away with a hoof, her scowl even more prominent on her face.

"Y'all just went too far." she said sternly, "Just go home, John. Ah... Ah don't want ta be near ya right now. And consider yerself confined to the couch until further notice."

"But I-" John began, but was cut off by Applejack's raised voice.

"BUT NOTHIN'!" she yelled, tears beginning to flow freely, "Just git on outta here! Now!"

John looked around and saw that many of the ponies in the market had stopped to watch the show. Sighing dejectedly, he did as he was asked, not bothering to apologise to anypony he pushed out of his way as he did so.

"Celestia damn it all." he muttered, "I've gotta make this right."

His legs propelled him towards the train station.

"And I know just who to speak to."

"I'm sorry, John. But I cannot allow you to see Geo. You know the rules of his house arrest. No visitors, no exceptions."

John groaned in exasperation.

"Dammit, Shining Armour!" he said, "Not even for ten minutes?"

Shining shook his head.

"Sorry, John." he said sternly but fairly, "But I can't."

John propelled himself around on his feet and punched the wall.

"FUCKING HELL!" he roared, causing Shining Armour to jump, and the nearby guards to survey their surroundings, looking for the source of the outburst.

"Whoa, whoa!" Shining said, trying to calm down the raging inferno that was John's emotions, "What's the matter?"

John sighed.

"I royally fucked up with AJ, and I need to make it up to her somehow." he replied, "I was hoping Geo could give me some pointers, because he's known her longer than I have."

Shining patted John on the shoulder.

"Well, as bad as that is, I still can't let you see him." he said, "However, I might be able to help. Celestia knows Cadence and I have had the occasional falling out, so if you'll let me... maybe I can help?"

John smiled.

"I'd appreciate that." he said, "Though I think making it up to Applejack will be much easier than making it up to a Princess."

Shining nodded.

"Yes, I'm sure it will be." he said, "Now come on John, we've got a lot to discuss. And once we put our plan into action, I guarantee Applejack will be more than willing to forgive you."

John grinned and followed as Shining Armour led the way down the halls of Canterlot.

Applejack sat on the edge of her bed and wiped her eyes with a hoof. She had returned from the market to find that her boyfriend wasn't there, and that nopony had seen him. The worries that plagued her mind replaced the worries of what Discord had put her and the other Elements through.

The front door opened with a click.

"AJ?" John's soft voice called, "Are you home? I've got something that you really need to see."

Applejack's ears perked up and she rushed downstairs to find John standing with a small smile on his face. But rather than return the gesture, Applejack ploughed into him and sent him onto his back.

"Where the hay have you been?!" she yelled, "Ah've been worried sick about you! Ah was beginning ta think that y'all had been beaten up by another brother ya didn't tell me about!"

"I went up to Canterlot." he replied, "I was hoping to speak to Geo, but Shining Armour wouldn't let me. However, he was more than willing to help me out."

Applejack slid off John's chest, allowing him to stand up.

"Help ya out with what, exactly?" she said, raising an eyebrow.

"How I could make up for what I did." he said, "I'm sorry I said what I said, and I'm sorry it brought back those memories. I guess my time as a spy left me blind to the well-being of others. So, I talked to Shining, and together we worked out how I could apologise, as well as show you how much I care."

Applejack sat down and watched as John produced a large envelope from within his jacket.

"You are the bearer of the Element of Honesty," he said, "so I figured that the best gift I could give you would be showing you just how honest I am about us and our relationship. So, I made a few stops and got a few things. Things which I hope will tell you exactly how much I love you."

He handed Applejack the envelope and she opened it with her teeth, emptying the contents onto the floor. As she cast her eyes over the paper, her sour expression vanished, as John watched nervously for her reaction.

"Ah can't believe it." she said, "Y'all did this... fer me?"

"Of course I did, AJ." John replied, "This is my way of showing you just how committed I am to us. I want us to spend the rest of our lives together, here... on our farm."

Applejack looked down at the documents. Clearly visible amongst them was a title deed with an official-looking seal, naming Applejack as the owner of Sweet Apple Acres.

Her eyes filled with tears as she propelled herself at John yet again, this time wrapping herself around his chest and kissing him. A minute later, the two of them broke away and Applejack cast her gaze towards the pile of paper.

"How in tarnation did ya manage it, darlin'?" she asked, "Every time Ah try to buy the farm, the bank wouldn't let me."

John laughed.

"It would seem that having connections to royalty helps me out a lot." he replied, "Once they realised that I was with Shining Armour, who was married to a Princess, they were more than willing to let me buy the farm."

"But it must have cost ya a fortune!" Applejack retorted, "Y'all didn't take out a loan or nothin', did ya?"

John shook his head.

"I've been saving up since I got here." he said, "And Shining gave me the rest."

"So it is a loan." Applejack sighed, "Just without the interest. Well, Ah guess we can pay back Shinin' Armour when we can."

"It's not a loan, AJ." John interjected, "It was an early gift."

Applejack looked perplexed.

"An early gift?" she asked, "What for? Both our birthdays have passed already, so Ah really don't know why-"

John silenced her with a raised hand, and reached into another pocket with the other. He pulled a box out and dropped to one knee, eliciting a gasp from Applejack.

"We have our own home now," he said, "but I still want to make an honest mare out of you. AJ... will you marry me?"

Applejack bit her lip as more tears threatened to cascade down her cheeks. She didn't speak a word as she nodded vigorously.

John smiled and opened the box to reveal a gold necklace, adorned with rubies which were arranged in the same style as Applejack's cutie mark. He slipped the jewellery over her neck and brought her in for a hug, only to be tackled to the ground as the farmer invaded his mouth with her tongue.

Breaking apart, John smiled.

"Remind me ta thank Shinin' Armour next time Ah see him." Applejack said, "He's given me... us, a mighty fine weddin' gift."

John nodded at that, before suddenly groaning.

"What's wrong?" asked Applejack.

"I just realised that I slapped Geo on his wedding day." he replied. "So please, could you remind me not to show any signs of nervousness on our big day?"

Applejack nodded and the two of them lay in contented silence among the pile of paper.

10. IT TAKES TWO TO PARTY

The air outside the library was thick with excitement. Twilight, Shining Armour, Rarity, Applejack, Rainbow Dash and Fluttershy, the latter four standing with their coltfriends, watched and laughed as Pinkie Pie relentlessly peppered Ace with kisses after accepting his proposal of marriage.

"Okay, Pinks." Ace said between kisses. "I can see that you're happy, but I would like to stand up now."

Pinkie stopped her assault and giggled sheepishly.

"Sorry Acey." she replied as she got off his chest. "It's just that you've done so much for me today. You saved me, my family and all those other ponies, from those mean old Diamond Dogs."

She nuzzled Ace's leg as he dragged himself to his feet, dusting himself off.

"I guess it reminded me how lucky I am to have you." she said.

Ace smiled and ruffled her mane.

"I'm lucky to have you as well, Pinkie." he said. "Though I wonder... who is going to organise the wedding?"

Pinkie laughed and waved a hoof dismissively.

"I'll do it, silly!" she said. "I did a good job on Twilight and Geo's wedding, didn't I?"

Ace looked over at Twilight, who smiled and nodded.

"Yes, Pinkie." she said. "You did an excellent job."

"There, you see?" Pinkie said, as she zipped over and gave Twilight a crushing hug. "If I did well on her wedding, I'll do an even better job on mine!... No offence, Twilight."

"None taken." Twilight replied.

Ace simply shrugged and nodded as Pinkie began rattling through a list of things she'd need for the big day. Feeling something on his shoulder, he turned to find himself face to face with John.

"I got a couple of questions, Doc." he said. "First of all... who's your best man gonna be?"

Ace put a hand to his chin in thought.

"Well, it would make sense to ask you..." he said, "... but I was actually thinking it should be Geo."

John breathed a sigh of relief.

"I was hoping you'd say that." he replied. "After all he's been through, he could use a pick-me-up. I'm sure he'd be thrilled to do the job. I don't think I could handle the pressure."

Ace nodded.

"I'll be sure to ask him once his sentence is complete. The poor guy has a lot to catch up on. All these new romances, the Diamond Dogs, my new job, and now a wedding that'll no doubt rival his."

John laughed heartily.

"I'm sure Pinkie will throw him a 'Welcome Back' party. He can catch up with everypony then." he said. "But that doesn't mean we can't celebrate now."

He turned to the small crowd and cleared his throat.

"Hey everypony!" he said loudly.

The group turned to face him and he began speaking again.

"As you all know, a lot has happened over the last few months. We've seen new romances blossom, families reunited, a wedding is being planned, and our good friend Geo will be returning to us soon. While we can't really celebrate that last one without the man himself, that doesn't mean we can't celebrate the other joyous occasions that have blessed us. So, with that in mind..."

He paused for effect, before throwing his arms in the air.

"... let's hit the bar!"

There was a slight pause before everyone cheered, except for Spike, who grumbled about not being able to have any alcohol before Rarity silenced him with a peck on the cheek, and Twilight, who wondered if it was okay for her to leave her foals, before being reassured by her brother that their parents could handle the two.

With any and all doubts cast aside, John led the group towards the bar. Ace and Pinkie stayed behind, and once everyone was out of earshot, the former grabbed the latter in a hug.

"Pinkie," he said, "I just want you to know that although I have this new job, protecting you is, and always will be, my top priority. I couldn't bear for anything to happen to you, or indeed Ponyville as a whole. I love you too much for that."

Pinkie seemed surprised by Ace's words. Her voice took on a serious tone as she replied.

"I know you do, Acey. And don't worry too much about protecting me. Ponyville is our home, so you focus on taking care of that. I can take care of myself."

She paused for a moment, before a grin appeared and her voice resumed its usual bouncy tone.

"After all, I *did* manage to beat up a load of Changelings at Shining Armour's wedding. So I'm pretty sure I can take care of myself."

She looked up at Ace, who had a caring smile on his face.

"But I guess having you there to watch over me won't be so bad either." she said, nuzzling his chest.

Ace laughed merrily as he released his hold on his fiancée, the two of them moving quickly to catch up with the others.

As they entered the bar, they saw their friends crammed into a booth in the corner of the room, a round of drinks in front of them.

"There you two are!" John said. "I thought for sure you had decided to have the honeymoon early!"

Ace and Pinkie shared a blush as the others roared with laughter.

"Always with yer mind in the gutter, huh sugarcube?" Applejack said, rolling her eyes at the huge smile on John's face.

"Yes." Ace said. "But I think it's better for all of us if it stays there. I mean, come on. Can you imagine what it would be like if John's brain was actually capable of cognitive thinking?"

John blushed as the table erupted into laughter again, this time at his expense.

Eventually, the noise subsided, and the group of friends gathered their drinks.

"I'd like to propose a few toasts, if I may." John said. "First of all, to Ace and Pinkie on finally deciding to tie the knot."

"To Ace and Pinkie!" the assorted ponies and humans chorused.

"Secondly, to new relationships. I think it's safe to say that all of us present now have somepony to love. And that... is just great."

"To new relationships!"

Ace and Pinkie joined the toast with their glasses held high, and similarly sized smiles on their faces.

"If I may," Ace said, "I'd like to propose a toast as well."

John nodded, and Ace stood up.

"I would like to propose a toast to Ponyville as a whole." he said. "This wonderful place has given us all so much. It has given us a new home, new friends, and new lovers. And I am honoured to be its new guardian. I will perform my duties with the same vigour and determination that I showed those Diamond Dogs. For nothing, and I mean *nothing*, will stop me from protecting my friends... or the love of my life."

He raised his glass in the air.

"To Ponyville!" he proclaimed.

"To Ponyville!"

Everyone at the table clinked glasses and drained the contents in one gulp, prompting John to order a new round. After dishing out the beverages, he cleared his throat.

"I was actually about to propose one more toast before we all get shit-faced." he said. "I'd like to propose a toast to Geo. He has been through hell to be here, and it's only fitting that he gets to live his life the way it was meant to be. To Geo!"

"To Geo!" everyone chorused, with Twilight's voice coming out louder than she thought possible.

"Right, now we can begin." John grinned. "Let's get wasted."

"I second that emotion!" cried Rainbow Dash, with Spark Plug nodding his approval.

Fluttershy and Doctor Haywick both nodded meekly.

"I'd love to," said Shining Armour as he shuffled out of the booth, "but I'm on duty tomorrow, so I can't. I'll see you later, everypony."

Everyone waved as Shining turned to Ace.

"Since you're celebrating your engagement, I'll give you the day off tomorrow to... recover." he grinned. "But I expect to see you at your lab on Wednesday at 0700 hours, got it?"

Ace saluted.

"Yes, sir!" he replied.

Shining saluted back and then said his farewells, leaving everyone to enjoy their evening.

"Anyone else got a problem with getting plastered?" John asked, eyeing everyone in the booth.

Spike raised a hand, prompting a chortle from John.

"And what, pray tell, is your problem?"

"The fact that I can't!" Spike said with a defeated sigh.

"Oh, Spike." cooed Rarity, "You'll have plenty of time in the future to savour alcohol. But right now, you are my little gentledrake, and I won't have you any other way. If it makes you feel any better, I will not touch a drop either. After all, *somepony* needs to be there to keep everypony else in check."

Spike blushed and opened his mouth to reply. Instead of words, he instead belched green flames, followed by a scroll, which landed on the table. He picked it up and looked at it.

"It's addressed to you, Twilight." he said, handing it to her. "It must be from the Princess."

Twilight took the letter and opened it before reading it out loud.

"Dear Twilight... I'm free. Love, Geo."

The table was silent for a moment before everyone cheered.

"All right!" John roared. "NOW we can fucking party!"

He dashed off to get more drinks, as Ace turned to Pinkie.

"Well, Pinks." he said, "It looks like you don't need to organise Geo's 'Welcome Back' party."

Pinkie waved a hoof dismissively.

"This is our engagement party, silly Acey!" she said. "Geo just happens to be coming along. I'll throw a party for him coming back later, don't worry!"

Ace laughed.

"I've got a great home, great friends, and a mare who loves me, a mare whom I am prepared to spend the rest of my life with."

He leaned in and gave Pinkie a gentle kiss on the lips.

"What have I got to worry about?"

Pinkie hugged him, and the two of them spent the rest of the night celebrating with their friends.

With nary a care in the world.

11. RELEASE

Even though I was invited into the throne room, I still felt like I was an intruder as I watched Celestia and Luna with their special someponies. But at the same time, I couldn't help but feel proud about the fact that were it not for what I said to the Princesses, neither couple would be together at all.

I thought about what I was missing out on back in Ponyville. I tried to imagine that everything was going on as normal — well, about as normal as it can possibly get in that crazy town. My visits were infrequent, and when I was there, most of my time was spent with Twilight, Azure and Evening.

Princess Celestia saw the solemn expression on my face and finally managed to tear herself away from Worthy Cause. She coughed to get my attention, and I swung my head around to look at her.

"I'm not surprised you look bored." she said. "My sister and I haven't exactly been the best of hostesses today."

I looked over at Luna, who was whispering something to Dusk Wind. He let out a small cackle before clamping his hooves over his muzzle and blushing fiercely.

"I couldn't possibly imagine why you think that, Princess." I said. "But in all honesty, I'm just glad you and Luna took my advice."

I thought for a moment before adding, "No, wait. I'm not just glad, I'm actually surprised you took my advice."

"It was good advice!" Luna shouted, causing Dusk to flinch. "Why are you surprised we took it? I for one am glad I did."

She nuzzled Dusk, who returned the gesture fondly.

"Apologies, your Highness." I replied. "It's just that I've never had someone listen to me the way you and your sister did. Normally when I gave advice, I was told it was 'crap'."

Celestia giggled.

"And is that what you think?" she asked me.

I shook my head.

"Seeing the positive results my advice has had, I can't say that I do think that." I said. "I think you make cute couples."

"Why thank you!" Worthy said, a huge grin on his face.

"No problem." I said. "Though I have to say that watching you make out is making me jealous. It's reminding me of all the kisses that Twilight and I have shared... amongst other things."

Celestia looked at me with compassion in her eyes. Getting up from her seat, she walked over to Luna and whispered something in her ear. Luna nodded in return, and Celestia went over to her desk. She rummaged around in the drawers before removing two rolls of parchment, a quill, some ink, and her royal stamp.

Scribbling some words on the first roll of parchment, she rolled it up and came back over to me, levitating it in front of her. I realised that she wanted me to take it, so I did. Unrolling the parchment, I first wondered why she had bothered rolling it up to begin with.

I soon stopped that train of thought when I realised I was looking at a set of release papers. I looked up at the Princesses — Luna having joined her sister — and then re-read the paper again.

I was free.

"FUCK YES!" I shouted gleefully, grabbing both Princesses in a tight hug. I stayed like that for a moment before I realised what I had just done. I sheepishly withdrew.

"Eh, heh heh heh... sorry." I mumbled. "Thank you, this means a lot to me."

Celestia raised a hoof.

"It's not a problem." she said. "My sister and I both agree that you have done us a wonderful service in helping us find our special someponies. Therefore, we are helping you return to yours."

Luna pointed towards the other roll of parchment on the desk.

"Write Twilight a letter, and I shall send it to her assistant." she said. "Then, go and get your belongings. A chariot will be ready to take you back to Ponyville momentarily."

"Thank you, your Majesties." I said, offering them a bow. They responded by giving me a crushing hug. Have you ever been hugged by two alicorns? It's nice — but HOLY HELL, is it dangerous to your health!

"No, Geo." Luna whispered. "Thank *you*."

I felt Celestia nodding and managed to squirm out of the hug. I rushed over to the parchment and grabbed the quill, writing a short note for Twilight.

Dear Twilight,

I'm free.

Love

Geo.

Folding the letter up, Celestia sent it to Spike as I rushed to gather my stuff from my room.

As I packed, I had only one thought on my mind.

Where the hell did I put my razor?

The chariot dropped me off outside the bar in Ponyville. One of the pegasi pulling it had suggested that I celebrate with a drink, which struck me as a great idea.

As I entered the bar, I heard raucous laughter coming from within, followed by a dull thud.

"Yes! I win again!" a voice roared. "That's what MI6 training does for you, bitches! Don't be fucking with the spy man!"

"And here was me thinkin' Ah already was." another voice replied.

The voices definitely belonged to John and Applejack. I figured that they must be here to celebrate my release, though I was a bit pissed off that they'd started without me.

Entering the bar, I saw them sitting at a table, several empty bottles in front of them. Twilight was nowhere to be seen, but I assumed she was with the kids. I put on my loudest voice to get the attention of the others.

"And you don't fuck with a guy who needs to see his wife and a cider in his arms, pronto!"

The chatter stopped as all eyes turned to me. Upon seeing me, John cheered and shot over, giving me my second crushing hug of the evening.

"Ahh, there he is!" he said. "Listen, it's about fuckin' time you showed up, mate. You've got a *lot* to catch up on."

"Yeah, yeah." I replied, pushing him off me and punching him lightly on the shoulder. "I just want to know why you lot started the party without me. Couldn't you have waited for me a while?"

"Oh, this party isn't for you, silly!" Pinkie Pie chirped. "This party is to celebrate Acey's promotion... ooh! And our engagement!"

"Promotion? Engagement?" I spluttered. "Fuck me, how much have I missed?"

I noticed a couple of familiar faces at the table.

"Haywick? Spark Plug?" I asked. "What are you two doing here?"

"Sit down, mate," John said, "and I'll explain everything."

Before I could take a step forward, I felt something grab onto me from behind before my vision was obscured by a pair of hooves.

"Guess who?" Twilight cooed in my ear.

"Vinyl?" I asked. "Shit, I know I've missed a lot of work, but I can make it up to you, I swear."

Twilight giggled and brought herself around to face me. We looked at each other wordlessly for a moment before latching on to each other's faces and falling to the ground.

"Hey, hey, hey!" yelled the bartender. "Do that somewhere else!"

The two of us pulled apart and grinned. Twilight led me over to the table and I sat down. John put an open bottle of cider in my hand and smiled. I turned to Ace.

"Well, it looks like congratulations are in order." I said, raising the bottle to him. "Enjoy married life, mate. I know I do. All that's left to do now is get John to propose to AJ!"

"I have every intention of enjoying married life." Ace said, as John and Applejack exchanged a sly wink with each other. "And the wedding, Pinkie assures me, will be even more extravagant than yours was."

I shrugged.

"It's not a contest." I replied, taking a swig of cider. "Now, John. You were about to explain to me exactly what the fuck I've been missing out on during my absence."

John nodded.

"Er, right." he said, scratching his head. "Now, where to begin...?"

I looked around the table. Everyone was holding on to their special somepony. Dash and Spark, Fluttershy and Haywick, Spike and Rarity (which surprised the hell out of me), Ace and Pinkie, Applejack was lying on John's lap and Twilight had draped herself across my chest.

And as John began his story, I sighed contentedly.

Finally, my new life could begin properly.

12. EPILOGUE

As I watched Ace and Pinkie depart for their honeymoon, I felt a great sense of accomplishment washing over me. I had found a new home, made many new friends... killed a man... and started a new family — all within in a remarkably short timespan.

The accomplishment soon gave way to dread. I began to think that I was dreaming. I thought that... perhaps... I was still hooked up to a life support machine with a bullet in my back. And that everything which had transpired from that point was just the delusions of my morphine-addled consciousness.

But then I think of Twilight. And our children.

And realise that sometimes...

... I can be full of shit.

Twilight saw me with a far-away look on my face and bumped her flank against me playfully, snapping me out of my stupor. I looked down at her, and she gave me a warm smile. I returned it and tousled her mane, before scooping her into my arms.

"Something on your mind?" she asked me.

"Just my brain being a bastard again." I replied. "I keep thinking that none of this is real. That it's all a dream, and I'm lying on a hospital bed with a bullet in my arse and a tube up my nose."

Twilight nuzzled my face as she sighed contentedly.

"Your brain *is* a bastard." she said. "You should know by now that all of this is real. And if it isn't, then I don't want to know what 'real' is. This is our life. You, me, our children, and our friends. Together no matter what."

I chuckled into her shoulder.

"You always know what to say to make me feel better." I said. "It's one of the reasons why I love you so much."

Twilight nodded.

"And I love you because you're my kindred spirit. We're both alike in so many ways." she laughed. "I'll never forget the night when we both realised that. The feelings I had for you... I've never had them for anypony else. Ever. I guess fate was just waiting for you to come along."

Hearing her say those words brought tears to my eyes, which ran down my cheeks onto Twilight's coat.

"Fate works in mysterious ways." I choked out. "It waited to bring us together, broke us apart... and finally decided to stop fucking around and bring us back together, albeit for a while."

Twilight giggled.

"All that matters now," she said, "is that we're together. Fate has been cruel to us, I know. But now, I won't let it get in the way of us enjoying the rest of our lives together. And I'm sure that you'll help me with that."

I brought my head away from her body and looked into her eyes. I could see the steely determination in them. I knew that she was serious, and I gave my approval by kissing her.

"Come on." I said as I drew away. "Let's get the kids from your parents. They'll probably be getting tired."

Twilight coyly batted me with a hoof.

"Cheeky." she said with a small laugh. "They're not that bad."

I allowed Twilight to get back on the ground, and we began the walk to her parent's house. As we walked, we bumped against each other and shared a laugh. It was like I'd never been away.

Along the way, I observed Shining Armour coming out of a restaurant, with Cadence behind him. Sticking my fingers in my mouth, I let forth a sharp whistle to get their attention. Ears pricked, they both swung around, smiling as they saw me (which wasn't hard, given my height).

"Hey Shining, Princess Cadence." I said. "I heard you two have given John and AJ an early wedding gift?"

"Indeed we have." Cadence replied. "It was very nice of Shining to give John the money. Celestia knows we have plenty. And please, you don't have to address me as 'Princess'. Just 'Cadence' is fine."

I bowed my head in response, to which Cadence giggled and rolled her eyes sarcastically.

"You going to see Mom and Dad?" Shining asked of Twilight, who nodded. "Last time we saw them, they were at the park. We're heading there now, you can come with us if you'd like."

"Lead the way." I said. "It's been a while since I saw your folks, Twilight. I hope they're not mad about me not being there for you and the kids."

"They understand completely." she assured me. "They know why you did what you did. They're not mad."

I smiled.

"Now, might I suggest that we stop living in the past, and instead look towards the future?" Twilight said sternly. "All that matters now is us, as well as our family and friends."

"Indeed." I replied. "We must always look to the future. My adventure may be over..."

I leaned down and gave Twilight a gentle kiss on the forehead.

"... but *our* adventure is just beginning."

And with those words, I placed her on my shoulders and followed Shining Armour and Cadence down the street.

***** THE END *****