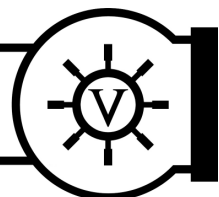


Yours Truly

Thanqol

PONY FICTION VAULT



From: Twilight Sparkle

To: Princess Celestia

Dear Princess Celestia,

This is the first day of being on my own. And so far, it doesn't feel any different. I keep expecting to hear the sound of Pinkie Pie bouncing down the street, or look up into the sky and see a rainbow. I keep thinking I can smell apples. And that I'm not seeing my friends right now doesn't bother me because I'm so *sure* they'll be by later. Even though I know they won't.

It's connected in my mind but not in my heart. And all the goodbye parties in the world can't change that.

Isn't that a good thing, though? Even though I'm leaving Ponyville I don't feel like I'm leaving my friends behind. I feel like they're still a part of me. That distance alone isn't going to keep us apart. We've been through too much for that to happen, for this to be the end.

It's going to be hard writing everything out by hoof again. I've grown far too used to having Spike with me – wait, that's not right. Surely there's no such thing as getting too used to having a friend nearby? And now I'm upset at myself for thinking this way. Spike goes into a Dragon Sleep, and he's not going to wake up for a hundred years, and I'm worried about having to do a little writing. Either way, I'm out of practise and my cursive has morphed into scribbles. Just one other thing to work on.

I'm looking forward to Hoofington. Professor Twilight Sparkle, can you believe it? Me, teaching? Actual students? I've been practising my lectures and preparing my course syllabus and I'm as prepared as I'm ever going to be. Remember that time you took me to Hoofington once, when I was just a foal? You showed me Starry Notion's old tower, and the scorch marks on the floor of the room where you created the sun. And I snuck out of my room and stayed up all night trying to create my own sun, because I wanted to be just like you.

Princess... promise me you'll visit? I made all the others promise that they would, but I want you to as well. Or at least promise me you won't forget to write. I don't have Spike anymore, so everything has to be sent through the mail, and sometimes mail gets lost or eaten or baked into muffins. So be sure to write plenty of letters, just in case some don't make it.

Your faithful student,
– Twilight Sparkle.

• • •

From: Royal Wonderbolts of Equestria Recruitment Council
To: Rainbow Miriam Dash

Dear R. M. Dash,

We are happy to inform you that your audition was successful. We would like to formally extend you an invitation to attend Sky Point in Cloudsdale in preparation for formal admittance into the Royal Wonderbolts of Equestria. We look forward to your reply.

Please find your uniform in the attached package.

Always Faithful!

– The Royal Wonderbolts of Equestria Recruitment Council

P.S.: Congratulations – Spitfire

• • •

From: Applejack
To: Twilight Sparkle

Twilight,

I've been missing you. Ponyville just ain't the same without you around. Been busy with the harvest but I'm making time to write because it's been a full few days.

Pinkie's probably the worst case. She keeps sighing, especially whenever she goes past the library. Rarity's not much better, she's trying to write you a letter herself but she keeps throwing it out because she thinks her hoofwriting is 'too messy'. At this rate I expect you'll be seeing it roundabouts spring.

Anyway, the main reason I wrote this is because Rainbow just got her acceptance letter from the Wonderbolts. She came over to my place all nonchalant-like, says, "I just got this letter, it's probably no big deal, why don't you look it over for me?" and she's shaking

so bad that she drops it before she can even give it to me. I open it and read it and she's trembling like a leaf. You ain't never seen a scarer thing.

And so I look up and say "Congratulations". And in retrospect, I probably should have broke it to her more easy because she looked like she was about to have a heart attack. And then she screams a cheer like you ain't never heard and runs off to find Fluttershy. Runs back three seconds later to grab the letter back off me. You should have been there, that was the happiest I'd ever seen Rainbow, no mistake.

Anyway, like I said, wish you were here. With Rainbow likely to be heading out as well it looks like it's going to get awful quiet around these parts before too long.

Best wishes,
– Applejack.

• • •

From: Rainbow Dash
To: Twilight Sparkle

I got accepted into the Wonderbolts!! I was worried that the Buccaneer Blaze was too showy, but I did it, and they liked it, and I'm in the Wonderbolts, and they gave me the uniform and everything hold on I'll get a picture taken – there, there's a picture, and it looks awesome.

Hey I wonder if we're going to tour Hoofington, if we do I'll make sure you get front row tickets, wouldn't want my friend to miss out

Fluttershy says 'hi', I think. She needs to speak up more.

I need to go practise I'll talk more later.

– Wonderbolt Rainbow Dash

• • •

From: Twilight Sparkle
To: Applejack

Dear Applejack,

I miss you too. A lot. I keep thinking of apples while I'm here, but the only ones the school has are the kind of waxy, icky ones you get with conjuration magic.

Thanks for keeping me informed; I'm really happy for Rainbow Dash. In fact, I've got a weekend off coming up and I think maybe we should celebrate it by getting together, flying up to Cloudsdale and watching one of her training sessions? I can make it if you meet me half-way in the balloon. What do you think?

Oh yeah, and how are you doing? Personally, I mean. You've talked a lot about everypony else but you haven't said much about yourself. I'm curious.

– Twilight Sparkle.

• • •

From: Applejack
To: Twilight Sparkle

Dear Twilight Sparkle,

That sounds like a mighty fine plan; a month is too long to go without seeing you.

– Applejack.

• • •

From: Pinkie Pie
To: Twilight Sparkle

Hey! It was super nice seeing you again at Rainbow's training session! No pony told me where we were going, they said it was going to be a surprise, and I was kind of depressed so I didn't want to go but then I said, wait, I remember what happened the last time my friends wanted to take me to see a surprise, and then we landed to see you waiting for us and it was the best surprise ever – right up until the point where you said we were going together to see Rainbow Dash! And that was the best surprise ever! Except for the time when Rainbow Dash saw us all sitting in the stands and waiting to see her, and the look on her face – *that* was the best surprise ever!

Oh yeah, I wrote this because I noticed Rarity was upset, and throwing her notebook across the room, and saying things like "Alas! I shall never phrase this accursed letter correctly!" and then falling on the couch and bursting into tears, and when I asked her

what was wrong, she said that the letter was giving her trouble, so I took it and posted it along with mine so that it wouldn't give her any trouble anymore! It's right below this one!

If you ever need to celebrate anything, you know who to write to! Be sure to write soon because it takes time for the letter to go both ways and then to plan the party and get to where you are and throw the party, but it doesn't have to be a party, we can just hang out. Any time with my friends is a party enough for me.

- Pinkie Pie

P.S. When I said "You know who to write to" I meant me (Pinkie Pie)

• • •

From: Rarity

To: Twilight Sparkle

My dearest Twilight Sparkle,

In your absence, Ponyville has been a positively desolate place. Many times have I turned, sure that the lavender unicorn who had been such a stalwart companion in my times of need would be present, only to have my hopes cruelly dashed. Your absence has left a far greater rift than you would ever know. I am positively beside myself *no, who uses 'beside herself' these days? surely I can think of something better than that.*

~~*-I feel like the light of my life has been lost in a stormy sea (perhaps too come-on-ey.)*~~

~~*-I deeply regret the loss of my most treasured companion (urgh, sounds like an obituary. She just went to Hoofington.)*~~

~~*-Your absence lends a feeling that is crawling under my coat, a wound that will not heal (what the hay is this)*~~

To Do:

- *Make sure Twilight is properly valued*

- *Include invitation for her to come by any time*

- *Inform her as to the state of my business (small talk)*

- *Ask about how she's doing, what Hoofington's like*

- *Comment on how much I miss Spike. It's not the same without him around. Ensure that he's sleeping comfortably.*

– ESP: include query about Deep Pockets who lives in Hoofington. Subtly. I don't want to appear churlish in my very first letter to Twilight in her new home!

Signature Practise:

Rarity. RARITY. **Rarity.** Rarity

• • •

From: Twilight Sparkle

To: Applejack

You didn't answer my question.

I want to know how you're doing.

– Twilight Sparkle

• • •

From: Applejack

To: Twilight Sparkle

Dear Twilight Sparkle,

I'm not sure what you want me to say is the thing. I'm the same Applejack I've always been; I work the farm and buck apples. I could go into detail but I'm sure you'd be bored stiff.

– Applejack.

• • •

From: Twilight Sparkle

To: Applejack

Try me.

• • •

From: Applejack

To: Twilight Sparkle

Dear Twilight Sparkle,

All right. If you think you can take this bull by the boring horns, I ain't going to stop you. Have the long version.

Currently there's a bad bout of Blue Leaf going through the southmost field, worst we seen for eight years. If you don't know, Blue Leaf's a crop disease that comes around every so often. It's like a blue fungus that grows over the top of the tree's leaves and basically suffocates the tree. It grows on contact too, which means it mostly spreads when a stiff breeze blows infected leaves through healthy plants. We've got a spray that can clear it off, but it's hard work to get through and we don't have much time. I asked the pegasus ponies to try to make sure that there's no wind for a couple of days while I get this sorted out, but Cloud Kicker ain't no Rainbow Dash and every so often a breeze gets through that sets us back hours and hours of work.

Then there's the financial problems. See, thing about seasonal work like farming is that you get a sudden boost of cash and then you got to live off that for the next year – and the year after that if something goes wrong with the harvest. I seen plenty of would-be farmers figure that they could live well when the money comes in, and then come to us in some bad winter with their hats in their mouths begging for some of what we had. And while we make enough on paper to keep us comfortably afloat, that's never the problem. The problem is the unforeseen, unpredictable one-off expenses. Granny Smith needs a new hip. Big Macintosh needs his back fixed. Barn needs to be rebuilt. Lose a crop to Blue Leaf. And while we're still in the black right now, there's no way to know if we'll have enough to cover every single disaster that's bound to happen this year. So I'm worried, and I'm worried about stuff that might not even happen and I can't do nothing about, which is the worst kind of worried.

Good news comes with the bad, though, and there's no sense filling an entire letter with misery and complaining. I've got my health, which is the blessing you always count first and then, if you've got any sense, stop at. I've been planning out the irrigation channel I'm going to run through the centre of the field and it's all working out in my head. I've had Pinkie over a few times so we could cook together, and after a bit of loggerheadin' about taste we made a dare that each of us would learn how to make a type of food they'd never done before. I think I'm going to try my hoof at French because she'll never see it coming. You know with French there's wine everywhere? Really, absolutely everywhere, never have a meal without it. The entire cookbook reads like a conspiracy so the Berry family can stay in business, and I wouldn't put a move like that past them.

What else? Winona chased a fox into Reichenbach Falls, you know, with the tar pits? And she got stuck there. Complete tragedy, still leaves a bad taste in my mouth even thinking about it. See, Rarity got to her before I did, and next I saw my poor dog she'd been styled beyond recognition. And she got airs about it too, the mutt, wouldn't even risk a bit of mud in case she messed up her hairstyle. Nothing worse than a dog with airs. Had to take her out back and toss her into the pig pen. She sulked for hours but seemed to forget the entire experience right around dinner time, at which point we were the very best of friends once again. Can always count on a dog.

Pinkie Pie's been at a loose end, but not in a bad way. She's sad about you and Rainbow being gone, of course, and she's clearly bored out of her skull, but – well, you know that feeling you get in the air just before the thunderstorm hits? That feeling like you should be running for cover? That's the feeling I'm getting with Pinkie Pie. She's planning something, and frankly, I'm scared to ask.

What *is* a worry is Fluttershy. She's not handling Rainbow being away well, and she's clearly pining for something. She's got her own attempt at a letter coming but she keeps asking that thieving rabbit for advice, which seems a mug's game no matter what way you slice it. I heard the shouting from out here when Pinkie nicked and posted Rarity's first draft, and even though the drama was something awful, I'm still mulling doing the same thing with Fluttershy's letter to Rainbow. It's clear that girl needs *some* kind of help.

Oh yeah, on that topic, I promised I'd do Rarity a favour and tell you that, and I quote, "I think it would be in everypony's best interests if that *draft* you got sent never arrived". She also said something about being "Forever in your debt", just in case you ever wanted to pull one over her at any point.

Ah, darn, I just realised I've been doing exactly what I resolved not to do and gone off into the lives of everypony else and not mine. I'm sorry. What do I have left to say about me?

Well...

Well, the sun's been setting as I've been writing this. I'm at Bay Hill Lookout right now, looking out over the orchards. Sky's red and gold, with big clouds like some clumsy painter spilled his ink all over his masterpiece. Normally I come up here to plan, helps me divide the fields in my eyes as well as my head. Downside of which means that this place feels like work. But writing this letter has really unwound me, and I'm noticing just how *nice* it is up here for the first time in a really, really long time. Wish you were here, Twilight. Wish I could be telling you all this in person.

Ah, but if you were here, I'd just make a careless apple pun and throw the moment away. Maybe it's better to write. Don't make as many mistakes.

I'm going to head down now. If you managed to get through this all, Twilight – and I don't blame you if you didn't – then I'm asking you to return the favour. Tell me about yourself.

– Applejack

• • •

From: Pinkie Pie

To: Sky Horse Shipyards

I need six hundred balloons, a cream cake, 0.35 metric tonnes of confetti, an aerial cruise ship with accommodations for two hundred, and a treasure map. Oh, and some pirates.

– Pinkie Pie

• • •

From: Sky Horse Shipyards

To: Pinkie Pie

You're going to have to supply your own cream cake. We're not bakers.

Sincerely,

– Sky Horse Shipyards Inc.

• • •

From: Fluttershy

To: Rainbow Dash

Dear Rainbow Dash,

I'm sorry I haven't written sooner. I haven't known what to say.

I still don't.

It feels like something's ended. Twilight's gone. You're gone. Pinkie Pie's drifting away. Rarity's thinking about moving to Canterlot. Soon it'll only be me and Applejack. That's fine, though. I know that Applejack won't ever go anywhere.

But you're the one I don't want to lose through all this. If everything else falls apart, I hope that I still get to see you.

– Fluttershy.

• • •

From: Twilight Sparkle

To: Applejack

Dear Applejack,

Applejack, you're mistaking going slow with being boring. I know what it must be like to be surrounded by ponies who do things that nopony else can do, ponies who can cause Rainbooms or defeat Ursa Minors. But there are things that you can do that I know for sure that I can't, and those things are just as important and interesting as anything loud and flashy. I've spent my entire life studying magic, and I can barely imagine what a normal life would be like. Your letters give me a chance to see that. Don't think I don't value them.

I've been swept off my feet as a professor, but I love it. I'm surrounded by the collected writings of Equestria's greatest unicorns. My colleagues are geniuses and I can talk to them about high level magical theory. The campus is beautiful. It's an old stone building and a collection of ancient wizard towers. There's a river choked with willow trees, and a library that puts my tiny one in Ponyville to shame.

But I'm so disorganised it's embarrassing. I have to write everything out myself, and my memory is awful. I miss having Spike. I know he's going to be sleeping for decades while he grows, but I keep wondering if I could come up with some kind of spell to accelerate him through it, so I could have my friend back. A spell to skip the boring moments in life. Like the time for the pot to boil. Or like the moments in between letters.

You know my short term memory's always been shot? I write everything down, and make enormous use of schedules and timetables because I often can't remember them without help. Sometimes I zone out for moments in conversation and forget where I am and who I'm talking to, and I have to reconstruct the events that lead up to that moment through logic and imagination. And I've got really good systems for figuring out where I

am using minimal details and cues. Maybe that's what makes me a good researcher? Because I've had to get really good at spotting connections and making logical leaps out of necessity. It all happens so fast most ponies don't even notice it.

Hoofington is everything I ever wanted. It already feels like home. The Princesses, both of them, come by regularly to discuss magical theory. And it's *amazing* what they know, and it's even more amazing what they don't know that they know. I made an offhoof joke about the Spirits of Harmony to Princess Luna, and she mentioned that she knew them personally. When pressed, she told me where to find their ancient sanctuaries all across Equestria, and seemed astonished when I told her that scholars had searched for the locations of the Spirits for generations. She hadn't known that the knowledge had been lost. Name any moment from history, any, and they'll give you a firsthoof take that is usually wildly at odds with the body of written down information on those events.

But for some reason, I haven't entirely settled. The food is rubbish, for instance. The chef has two modes: fancy cuisine or army rations. This means that I've either got the choice of eating in the teacher's lounge on finery which just isn't satisfying, or going down and eating with the students which just isn't tasty. And every time I eat a meal I get nostalgic, nostalgic for moments I've never had. A simple meal at Sweet Apple Acres, where food is made with care for others, and not as a way to inflate your own pride.

And while my colleagues are really smart and interesting, well, they're just colleagues. We talk, but always about work. But I'm not too bothered. If I could find friends like you and the others even one time in a lifetime that makes me lucky.

I did some reading on Blue Leaf, and there are ways of dealing with it, but they're all much less efficient than your technique. I think that I might be able to come up with something better, though, so give me a few months to work on it.

And thanks for telling me about that sunset. Reading that was the first time I felt really homesick. I need to take the time to watch more sunsets, it's so easy to forget or to be too busy.

Thank you again for writing to me.

Your friend,
– Twilight Sparkle.

• • •

From: Fluttershy
To: Rainbow Dash

Dear Rainbow Dash,

Thank you for flying all the way down to Ponyville to visit me. I still can't believe you snuck away from your training like that. I hope you didn't get into trouble. I had detention once and it was awful. I had to wring all the mud out of dozens and dozens of clouds and I wouldn't wish that on anypony. But then I suppose if I didn't there would have been a mudstorm over Fillydelphia and then everypony would have gotten muddy...

I'm writing to tell you that Pinkie had her own going away party today. She didn't call it a going away party, though, she called it a "Relocating To Begin Implementation Phase" party, and I was worried because she hadn't invited you or Twilight, but she looked me in the eye and said "The party will come to *them*." And then she started laughing, though maybe it was more like cackling.

But now she's gone. And I was wondering if I could see you again? If you could get some time off or away from training again, if it's no bother. If you wanted to.

- Fluttershy.

• • •

From: Fancy Pants
To: Rarity

Dearest Lady Rarity,

My dear, I would like to thank you first and foremost for your gift of socks that you mailed Fleur and I along with your Hearth's Warming card. I hope you forgive this small indiscretion of mine, but in those, Fleur looks positively *ravishing*. Not only that, she speaks glowingly of both their warmth and comfort. And this gave me an idea! I realised that this was a trend that could surely catch on.

What do you say, Rarity? With my backing and your talent, we could undoubtedly make socks a fashion trend that would envelop the entire pony world. No pony and nothing would be safe. If it has legs, we shall put those legs in socks. Winter Wrap Up, hoof in a sock. Running of the Leaves, hoof in a sock. Every single event, a hoof in a sock. *Glorious*.

I've got a charming little storefront in Canterlot you could operate out of, if you felt so inclined. So, what do you say, my dear? Up for a little revolution in the world of fashion?

Yours most sincerely,
– Fancy Pants

• • •

From: Rarity
To: Fancy Pants

~~YES TAKE EVERYTHING I HAVE~~

~~I'll have to consult with my cat, but consider me interested [wait, why am I consulting with Opal over this? I don't want him to know think that I'm a crazy cat lady]~~

~~This is the best offer and you are the best pony [Rarity, I swear, if you cannot demonstrate some basic self control then I am turning this letter around and driving me home]~~

~~I like your moustache and I had an idea for moustache socks [...I can't have written this.]~~

~~After some consideration, I have come to believe that your proposal has merit [a bit stuffy but it'll do, no reason to stress out about this too much or else I'll come up with more stupid ideas]~~

~~OH MY GOSH I'M GOING TO BE WORKING WITH FANCY PANTS!!!!~~

• • •

From: Rarity
To: Fancy Pants

Dear Fancy Pants,

After some consideration, I have come to believe that your proposal has merit. I shall prepare a small range of samples and head out to Canterlot presently.

Yours sincerely,
– Rarity

• • •

From: Fancy Pants
To: Rarity

My dearest Lady Rarity,

I am jolly thrilled to hear that you accept. I must say, though, this idea of moustache socks seems quite fascinating. I had until this moment been deliberating on what we could do to provide a male version of this fashion trend but, by golly, you've already gone ahead and done it for me! Why don't you bring a sample of those with you when you arrive in Canterlot?

All the best,
– Fancy Pants

• • •

From: Rarity
To: Fancy Pants

Yes. That is a thing. That I shall do.

– Rarity.

• • •

From: Applejack
To: Twilight Sparkle

Dear Twilight,

It's the strangest thing, these letters. I feel like I've learned more about you after you left than I knew when we were together. Thanks for taking the time to write, it's come to get right quiet here in Ponyville recently.

The memory thing, especially, I never imagined of you. Normally when talking to somepony smarter than you, you assume they're just generally smarter than you and that's the end of it. I didn't figure that there'd be something to do with thinking that you'd be worse at than me, or that this problem could be the reason you came across as smarter. When you need to use books to remember, you must get really good at books, right? No wonder it was always your first resort.

I'm glad to hear you like Hoofington. Being honest, there was some small part of me that was hoping you'd get sick of it and come back to Ponyville. Just a small part, though, because you being happy is much more important than me being lonesome. It's just that

Ponyville's lost some energy now that everypony's moving away. It's just me and Fluttershy now, which means that most problems get settled in very different ways than they used to. Quieter, safer, for sure, but never really quite as fun.

Fluttershy's doing surprisingly well recently. She finally sent off that letter to Rainbow and, next thing you know, Rainbow flies right on down to visit her. From what I hear, she just dropped everything she was doing and came to visit. Fluttershy's been walking on air ever since. It's sweet to see.

Rarity got a big business order and moved out to Canterlot to see it through. Pinkie's got her mystery project and is heading in the same direction. Hopefully they'll keep each other company. More likely they'll spend it fighting, though – Pinkie mailed another one of Rarity's drafts and Rarity was pretty enraged about it.

But it's just... I don't know, I shouldn't be writing this. It's just a bit lonely, And I'm just a bit jealous. Fluttershy has Rainbow coming down to see her, Pinkie and Rarity can keep each other's company, And that kind of leaves me outside the circle a bit. All I really have that's mine right now is writing these letters to you, and you're a scholarly pony who probably writes hundreds of letters every day, and it's probably not as big a deal to you as it is to me. I don't really have anypony else I can talk to, other than you, like this. Family's fine, but family ain't the same as friends. I'm sorry to pressure you, 'Twi', but your letters are the only contact I got left and I don't want to lose that.

Yours,
– Applejack

• • •

From: Twilight Sparkle
To: Applejack

Dear Applejack,

Please, Applejack. Don't worry about me not writing back. Don't worry about being left behind. I'll still write to you, no matter what. I do go through a lot of letters each day, true, but they're all students asking for extensions, colleagues asking for help; ponies needing things from the Professor and not caring – well, not having time – for the pony. And that's not their fault, they've got their own lives. But your letter is the only part of my life these days where I'm free to unwind, be myself, and think my own thoughts

alongside yours. So don't be fearful, don't worry about me drifting away like the others. I'll be here. I promise.

It's winter, which means it's crunch time for the students. We hold the final exam on the first day of Spring, when the Weather Unicorns use magic to change the seasons, and the old tree in the middle of the courtyard blooms. The actual language of the school's programme hasn't been revised for centuries, which actually means that if the tree doesn't bloom then we can't hold the exams at all. There are a lot of rules like that, ancient, meaningless rules that we all follow. It seems silly, but the University is a place built on magic by inspired magicians. They had reasons for a lot of the strange rules they set down, and breaking them often has unexpected consequences. There's this one rule in particular about never passing notes, for any reason. Somepony tried that in Professor Sharpe Note's class and the words on the note wrote themselves into her forehead. She had to walk around with "Whitefire is really cute" on her face for a week, poor girl.

There's also the rules that were made because the founders were senile. There was an injunction against going on the fourth floor of the main building, something everypony took very seriously. They didn't know why – spell gone wild, ghosts, curses, the most ridiculous things you ever heard educated ponies saying. I went up there to investigate and found a floor of empty classrooms, as well as the old Chancellor's office. It had some of the most fascinating and rare books I'd ever seen in it, just lying around, collecting dust. I've come up here almost every week since I found it and there have been no signs of any disturbance, mystical or otherwise. In fact, the office is so nice I've actually cleaned it up and moved some of my things up here. It's private, so nopony can find me, which means I come here if I want to be alone with my thoughts. Like when I'm writing this letter.

I think that if I can achieve anything this school will truly appreciate, it's testing each of these nonsense rules and finding out which ones are important and which ones are superstition. I can't think of a better legacy than a series of solved mysteries.

Oh yes, I almost forgot. Well, I did forget, but I wrote it down – I found a far more efficient way for dealing with Blue Leaf. You might not like it, but it works in all the models I make. When you notice a tree is infected, you have to stampede at least twenty ponies around the tree until all the leaves have shaken free. It'll also strip a lot of the healthy trees around the infected one, but it contains the situation before it can get any worse.

And remember, Applejack, like I said before: Don't worry about this. Your letters are more important to me than you know.

Yours,
– Twilight Sparkle

• • •

From: Rarity
To: Pinkie Pie

Dearest Pinkie Pie,

Firstly, I would *appreciate* it if you stopped kidnapping my customers. At very least, have your sky pirates *wash* before they attack Canterlot again. Every minute I had to spend in the presence of those ruffians had to be answered with an *hour* of cleaning and styling! And would it be such a frightful impossibility to get them to eat an *orange* every now and then?

Regardless, I did not write this letter to discuss our personal differences. I find myself needing some advice and, well, you are the only pony who I can really trust to keep a secret.

It's about Spike. I'm spending more time missing him than I think is healthy, and it's cutting into my productivity almost as much as the pirate attacks are. He was really getting to be quite the charmer towards the end, and, well, he was prepared to sacrifice for me. I've got ponies from all over Canterlot asking for my time, and yet they expect me to be an accessory for them. Like it's *my* job to make *them* look good, and any time I ask for something in return they look at me with horror, like I've just committed some incredible faux pas. I thought Blueblood was the exception, but he's the *majority*.

And I keep thinking of Spike and what he was prepared to give up for me. And how I never really gave up anything for him. I treated him the exact same way as I'm being treated now, like courting was just a one way street.

Oh, Pinkie. I'm at a loss. What should I do?

Most sincerely,
– Rarity

• • •

From: Pinkie Pie
To: Rarity

Well, if Spike makes you happy, and you miss Spike, ~~and Spike has a~~ – AAAH I ALMOST SLIPPED UP why don't you go and see Spike? Or if he's all sleepy when you get there, do a spell that'll skip you to when he wakes up? Or do a spell that'll make a party that'll wake him up! If you're unhappy, you should do what makes you happy!

Oh yes, and if you ever want to see your cat again, you will send me the patrol schedules to the castle by the next full moon.

– Pinkie Pie

• • •

From: Rarity

To: Pinkie Pie

Do what makes me happy? And give up my business in Canterlot just when things are starting to go well? Hmph! Obviously I went to the wrong pony for advice!

Take your dumb patrol schedules. You've got *no* idea how difficult it was to acquire these.

– Rarity

• • •

From: Fluttershy

To: Rainbow Dash

Dear Rainbow Dash,

I really enjoyed your last visit. I can hardly believe how fast you've become. I mean, I always knew you were the best, but ever since you started training with the Wonderbolts you've become even better. That move you did, last time, where you tied those clouds together with that rainbow? It was *amazing*.

Did you want to come by again sometime soon?

– Fluttershy

• • •

From: Applejack
To: Twilight Sparkle

Dear Twilight Sparkle,

I'm sorry again for doubting myself, and for doubting you, Twilight. I just had a bit of a dark mood. I'm not the sort to worry about how other ponies see me, but when you get told for so long that you're boring you start to believe it. Sorry to be, well, clingy.

It's good to hear you've got the courage to move into the creepy, haunted, and locked off section of the magic school. I ain't never heard any ghost stories start with *that* line. And the rule about the tree blooming before the exams made me laugh; it's a good reminder. Before you can study books, you got to make sure that you're going to be able to *eat!*

Now, I took a group of ponies down to June Bug's farm, where she's been having some trouble with Blue Leaf herself and tried out the trick you came up with, and it worked like a charm. Truth be told, I was expecting some big magical ritual thing, or complex machinery. I wasn't expecting something so *practical*. Something good in Ponyville must have rubbed off on you.

As a result of the stampede, there were a lot of broken branches and trees dead from the Blue Leaf already, so it was a group effort to clear 'em up. We started piling them and were getting ready to haul the entire lot out to a ditch. And that's about when Apple Bloom pipes up and tells us we're doing it wrong. Without waiting for another word, she grabs Mac's saw and is in there, cutting and slicing and sawing. I went over to stop her, because it was dangerous for a little filly to be working with tools like that, but by the time I get closer she'd already sawed all the wood. Another couple of minutes, and she had made it into a wooden wagon, which was stacked high with all the remaining wood. And sure as sunlight there was a saw-and-apple cutie mark on her flank.

I'd never been prouder in my whole life.

Yours,
– Applejack

• • •

From: Spitfire
To: Fluttershy

Dear Fluttershy,

I apologise in advance for writing this letter.

Our new entrant and mutual acquaintance, Rainbow Dash, is currently enrolled in the Wonderbolts Advanced Flight Training. This is a regimen that requires commitment, dedication and focus. Rainbow Dash has been displaying none of these. Despite her natural skill, she is neglecting her training to make multiple long distance flights to and from Ponyville. To visit you.

We all want to see Rainbow Dash be all she can be. You have a part to play in making that happen. Would you be able to try and help her focus? Try not to invite her away from her training. Help her prioritise. Figure out what's important to her and important to you. I've tried talking to Dash about this directly but she is defiant. I believe it has to come from you.

I can't make you do anything you don't want to, but please, consider Dash's future. She could be one of the greatest fliers in Equestria – if she put her mind to it.

Sincerely,
– Spitfire

• • •

From: Fluttershy
To: Rainbow Dash

Dear Rainbow Dash,

I really enjoyed our last meeting. It was good to see you. It's always good to see you.

But, thing is, I've got the annual bunny census coming up and it's slow and boring work, and I'm sure you've got better things to do than help me count bunnies. Maybe you shouldn't come around until it's done?

– Fluttershy

• • •

From: Fluttershy
To: Rainbow Dash

Dear Rainbow Dash,

Um, wow, I didn't expect you to help me with the census. I'm still amazed you flew all the way out here to help me count bunnies. You were a really big help and you made a really big job go faster. The bunnies thought so too. We're all still thinking that you were the coolest thing ever.

So, um, how are you for this weekend?

– Fluttershy

• • •

From: Twilight Sparkle

To: Applejack

Dear Applejack,

Oh wow, my congratulations to Apple Bloom! Carpentry is a wonderful job and it's plain that she enjoys it, and I'm looking forwards to seeing what she makes in the future!

It's funny, though; I've never seen a pony as blind to what makes them special as Apple Bloom. We could all see what her talent was, clear as day, but why couldn't she?

But in a way, wasn't that the point? If she, and the others, sat down and thought about it at any point they would have figured it out. But they never did that because they were so busy helping each other to find their talents instead. It's like they knew if they ever achieved what they were searching for they wouldn't have cause to be friends any more.

I hope they find a new cause. That their friendship proves stronger than that.

Yours,

– Twilight Sparkle

• • •

From: Applejack

To: Twilight Sparkle

Dear Twilight,

I see what you're really talking about. And it's sad, for sure, but its part of how the world works. See, when I was younger, I knew a filly called Daydrop. We were inseparable, did

everything together. We mostly competed in rodeos and talent shows, and even had a bit of a group act going. We were just fillies, though, and most of the time our act ended with us tied up in the other's lasso. And then we'd argue for hours about whose fault it was.

And then...

I started working the farm. She committed to being a showpony and started travelling to keep up with all the shows. And we just... drifted apart. Without ceremony. Without nothin'. My life had just changed to not have a spot for her any more, and I forgot what it was like when it did. We only really saw each other when a rodeo came to Ponyville, and then we'd compete like in the old days, and wind up in a salt bar together. But there was this... gap. Like we didn't share common interests any more. Like all I knew how to talk about was apples, and all she knew how to talk about was rope tricks. And we each had our own friends and our own lives and we'd just trail off into these silences where we weren't sure how to bring back the magic that'd kept us going before. Stuck in a crowded room, desperately searching for something to say, some funny story to relate, wanting to make an excuse to leave but not having the courage to. Telling a story that's important to you and getting an awkward "that's really nice" in return.

I don't know how it happened, but my best friend became a pony who I just exchange nods with at the show. Nothin' more between us.

And it's happened other times, too. Good friends just drift away. They're still where they were, there just stops being time or reason to see them. The things you have in common stop being uniting factors. Or they're busy, so you leave 'em alone, so they'll have more time... and then you just stop asking. And just stop going around. And then the friendship's gone, like fog in the sunlight. And you didn't even notice it happened because now you're with your new friends, the next stage of your life.

Cycles rise and fall. Friends once closer than your own heart stop being recognisable. Regrets so sharp they make your chest hurt when you finally get around to remembering them.

- Applejack

...

From: Twilight Sparkle

To: Applejack

Applejack,

Darn it, Applejack. I've been crying all day because of your letter. It can't be true. I'm not going to let it happen to us. Not with you.

You're the only pony I talk to. Who I really, truly talk to. I've come to love the sight of that grey pegasus landing outside more than anything else, because I know that means I'm about to get a letter from you. I've found myself drifting, staring at the sky, waiting for your responses. It's like my life is being lived in between letters.

It's like it's something more than friendship at this point.

Do you feel the same way?

– Twilight Sparkle

• • •

From: Fluttershy

To: Rainbow Dash

Dear Rainbow Dash,

All right. I have to say this. You can't keep doing this, Rainbow Dash. You can't keep flying all the way down here just to see me. You've got to study and train to keep up. This is your dream, and you can't give that up just to see me.

– Fluttershy

• • •

From: Fluttershy

To: Rainbow Dash

Dear Rainbow Dash,

I know I was kind of harsh in my last letter, and I'm really sorry. I didn't mean you should never come down and see me. It's been weeks. Maybe if you could find some time off, I could come to Cloudsdale to see you or something? If that would be okay?

– Fluttershy

• • •

From: Twilight Sparkle

To: Applejack

I'm so sorry, Applejack. I was out of line and I made a stupid mistake and I said some things I shouldn't have and I can't imagine what you think of me. I didn't mean it. I was just rambling.

But please don't let it end like this, this silence, this nothing. Don't just turn your back on me, please. I take it back, I take it all back – can we just still be friends? Nothing else, just friends?

I'm sorry.

• • •

From: Rainbow Dash

To: Fluttershy

What do you want from me, Fluttershy?

Come over. Stay away. Come over. Stay away. It's like you're two ponies. Half the time you're smiling because I'm with you and half the time you're worried I'm going to be late in getting back. Your letters are all like this too. Some of them are asking me to come over and see you. Some of them are making excuses for cancelling dates you never asked me on.

I can stay. I can go. Pick one.

• • •

From: Applejack

To: Twilight Sparkle

Twilight,

When I got your second letter, I kicked down the door to the Post Office and yelled for a good ten minutes at the mailmare. I ain't never been so angry in all my years. And... I don't really regret doing it. She deserved it, for the pain she put you through.

Because I wrote you a letter. I swear as I'm the Element of Honesty that I wrote you a letter. And it was long, and beautiful, and poetic and it was writing like I'd never known I could even make. I'd worked on that letter all day to get it just right, make sure it came from the heart. And I'm scrawling this on a notepad in a wrecked post office.

But the letter must have gotten lost, and as Celestia is my witness, I wasn't the one to lose it. My answer then will have to come in a much shorter and direct fashion, a way that doesn't nearly do justice to you or what you deserve. And it's that I feel the same. Your letters are what I live for these days, and while not all my thoughts are about you, it's quickly getting to be that way.

I'm giving this to Derpy with the threat that if she doesn't run like Nightmare Moon were chasing her all the way to Hoofington and not stop until she's put this in your hoof, she'll *wish* that it were Nightmare Moon that was after her. I wish I could find the words to make this letter right, but I'm too angry to think and every moment I'm putting this off is hurting you all the more. And I can't have that.

– Applejack.

• • •

From: Fluttershy
To: Rainbow Dash

I can't. I can't pick one. You're asking me to choose between your dream and mine. I can't make that choice. I can't.

• • •

From: Twilight Sparkle
To: Applejack

Dear Applejack,

Thank you.

I'm sorry. I'm shaking too much to write. But not so much I can't write this. I think I love you, Applejack.

– Twilight Sparkle

• • •

From: Rainbow Dash

To: Spitfire

I quit.

• • •

From: Applejack

To: Twilight Sparkle

Dear Twilight,

It's like one of those days when everything is right with the world.

Sun's up. Spring's here. Working the fields again. Feeling strong. And looking forwards all the while to my evening on Bay Hill where I'll be able to relax and write. It's another wonderful sunset. The sky's like a golden road leading from one horizon to the other. No artist could ever paint this in half the detail it deserves.

First off, Rainbow Dash came home. Permanently. She just quit the Wonderbolts. Upped and left. Didn't even tell 'em, she just left a note. She's staying with Fluttershy and it's sweet. One of those things which was meant to be. I don't know what they're going to do, what they've said to each other. But I think, whatever it is, it's for the best. Fluttershy was pining away without Dash, and Dash was spending all her time flying down here to see Fluttershy. Keeping them apart was doing no pony right.

Spring Dance is coming up, and wouldn't you know it, I actually got invited. First time that's happened in two years. Turned him down, o'course, I like to think I could do better.

Irrigation channel is working beautifully. If everything stays right, I reckon this year's crop will be the best in a while. I'm even going to try growing some strawberries. Always wanted to try growing strawberries but never really felt comfortable in doing so. I reckon I can pull it off.

Oh yes, and Pinkie Pie swung by to see off our cooking contest. She's got an eye patch now, by the way, but it switches eyes every time I look away for a few seconds, so I figure she's not been hurt by anything. Anyway, the contest came down to my French verses her

"Pirate Grub". I won pretty handily, on everything except the drinks. Turns out that Big Macintosh, who was our judge of the day, prefers cheap rum to quality wine. Who knew?

Anyway. I hope you're doing as well as I am. Because I think I love you too.

– Applejack

• • •

From: Twilight Sparkle

To: Applejack

Applejack,

It's spring.

Which means that everything's a disaster right now.

Remember the old tree, the one that blooms when it's time for exams? Turns out some bright spark of a student got the idea that if they poisoned the tree to not flower when spring came then there'd be no exams at all. And they were right – the university rules forbid it, and nopony but me has the courage to try and break them. I like to think that I have the problem in hoof, though. I set two extra credit assignments to the class – one for anypony who cures the tree, and one for anypony who discovers the culprit. With luck the situation will resolve itself.

I'm so glad to hear about Fluttershy and Rainbow Dash getting together. Will they be going to the dance together? For that matter, will you be going stag? I'd love to join you, but the only way for my workload to decrease right now would probably be a fire. That is, if you don't think you can do better than me!

Congratulations on beating Pinkie, too. I really admire that you were willing to go so far out of your comfort zone to learn new things. That takes courage. Same thing with the strawberries.

I'm sorry I can't make this longer, Applejack. It's like winter didn't wrap up here, it just migrated indoors and turned into paper. I promise I'll write more as soon as I can.

Love,

– Twilight Sparkle

• • •

From: Applejack
To: Twilight Sparkle

Twilight,

The tree's sick? Darn it, if that ain't a case of putting the cart before the pony if I ever heard one.

Alright, let's do this and let's do this right. Tell me the exact type of tree you got going there and exactly what's wrong with it.

– Applejack.

• • •

From: Twilight Sparkle
To: Applejack

Applejack,

It's a Fire Cherry tree, and it's not blooming. There's a faint blue discolouration on the leaves, which also got a strange, sharp smell to it. The bark is peeling off in strips and some of the branches are very brittle. No matter what magic we use on it, we can't make it bloom; only generate these small, hard seed pods.

Yours,
– Twilight Sparkle

• • •

From: Applejack
To: Twilight Sparkle

Twilight,

Alright, sorry about the size of the attached package. What's wrong with your tree can be fixed, but it'll take time, and you need those blossoms now. So, I went out and purchased a Fire Cherry from a friend and had it mailed across to you; plant it in the courtyard and you should be golden.

Now, what's wrong with yours isn't a spell. It's a weed, we call it Old Memory. You put the weed under the bark of one tree, leave it for a few months, then extract and put it under another type of tree. The weed then starts messing with the new tree, making it more and more like the old one. From what you described, your tree got muddled into thinking it's a Eucalypt. Find the pony with the Eucalypt and you'll find your criminal.

Now that that's all dealt with, I'll respond to your last letter properly. Sorry my last was so short.

I did end up going to the dance, and I did end up going solo. It was a nice evening. I know you missed it last time around, so I'll try to describe what it was like, and a bit of the history.

When its wintertime, we stock up a lot of food and firewood so that we won't run out in the middle of a blizzard. We usually stock more than we need too, to be on the safe side. And so, if everything goes well, by the time we wrap up winter there's usually a fair bit of surplus. So everypony piles up all the firewood they didn't use, and sets out all the food they didn't eat, and there's a celebration. Normally there's between four and eight bonfires; this year we did six, which wasn't too bad.

So there are these six bonfires and tables with food and drink, in the middle of an open field under the stars. Fireworks are sent up. Most of the town comes to watch. The bonfires are set in a circle, the centre of which gets quite hot. Couples enter the circle to dance, normally five, six couples at a time. And they dance until the heat gets the best of them and they have to back out. Daydrop once explained it to me that the more devoted the couple, the longer they'd be able to keep dancing, even through the heat. Like a challenge to see which pair is prepared to go through the most to stay together.

Most pairs last ten, perhaps twenty minutes? Lyra and Bon Bon typically win the event, though. Lyra can tango, you know? She's really good. And over the top about it, too, puts on the mask and hat and rose in her teeth and everything. She spends the entire evening in character. My favourite was, "How can you stand the heat that long?" "*Ze fires of passion, my friend, are far fiercer than ze mere burning of wood.*" So they wow us all, as usual, and we think that it's going to be the end of it. And then Rainbow Dash and Fluttershy step into the ring.

And they start dancing. It's a curious and sweet thing to watch, those two. Rainbow keeps coming forwards, challenging, and Fluttershy just steps around her, behind her, coming up by her side. Rainbow keeps looking for resistance that isn't there; you can see it with

every step. Tense and waiting for a fight that's not coming. And then there's these moments where she relaxes and for a few seconds they're dancing in perfect harmony.

But it's hot in the middle of those fires, and before long they're both sweating. They keep going, though – Rainbow's being stubborn and Fluttershy's not complaining. And then, Rainbow sweeps her up, stops – and she drops her. Fluttershy falls backwards as Rainbow flies up into the clouds. And then there's the crack of thunder above, and Rainbow dives back down. She catches Fluttershy just before she hits the ground, and they kiss at the exact moment it starts raining. The bonfires quickly go out as the rain starts pouring.

Rainbow breaks away. Stands straight. Says, "We're going to dance here all night."

I didn't know the girl had such a romantic side.

Yours,
– Applejack.

• • •

From: Princess Celestia
To: Rarity

Dear Rarity,

I would like to thank you for the gift of socks you sent my sister and I. I hear it's become quite the fashion trend, so congratulations! Honestly, just between you and me, it's a nice change for fashion to look good rather than incomprehensible.

Would that this letter could be entirely good news, however. You no doubt remember Spike, Twilight Sparkle's draconic assistant? And that last year he entered a century sleep so that he could grow up? Unfortunately, word has reached me that Diamond Dogs have tunneled into the cave where he was resting and have stolen most of the diamonds he was sleeping on. If those diamonds are not returned, he might wake up early.

And I know what you're thinking, but that would not be a good thing. Spike needs to sleep and he needs to grow. It wouldn't be fair to deny him the chance to become an adult.

There is nopony better suited than you to this task. Please consider it.

– Princess Celestia of Equestria

• • •

From: Rarity

To: Fancy Pants

Say, Fancy Pants, do you have any experience in combating Diamond Dogs? If not, would you like to?

– Rarity

• • •

From: Rarity

To: Princess Celestia

Dear Princess Celestia,

I have decided to keep a journal of my adventure as I go to save time writing a retrospective letter at the end. Now, if I've done this spell right, this animate quill will take notes by itself, letting me focus on the task at hoof! Quite a clever little time saver, if I do say so.

I have in my team Hoity Toity, Fancy Pants and Fleur, who have all graciously agreed to assist me overcome whatever Diamond Dog ruffians we encounter. It's not the same as having my old friends with me, but I'll say now that we are the most well dressed and fashionable adventuring party I have ever travelled with.

I can already feel the gems, they're right this way!

–

I wonder how Spike is doing? It's been so long since I've seen him. I suppose that was how it was meant to be, though. I did promise him that I wouldn't wait for him while he was asleep. By the time he wakes up I'll be gone, and so will everypony he knows...

No time for reflections. Dogs ahead.

–

Lesson for the day: Cave-ins are a serious threat in underground mines. Suspect it was deliberate. Split off from the others, will keep moving.

–

Back you ruffians! Don't make me hit you! Really, don't make me, I just got my flail polished and I don't want to chip the gemstones

–

I think I got away. That was close. Let me check for mud.

Alright. Mud levels are *far* above what I'm comfortable with. But I have to be strong. This is for Spike, and for Spike's pile of diamonds. I owe them this. I can endure a little – ooh, is that the sound of running water?

–

Besides, what does Pinkie Pie know? I've got friends in Canterlot. And connections. And a business. And an entire fashion industry. So what if I'm not happy? I'm the most successful in all the land, I can have my pick of anypony, so I just need to find one I like as much as I liked Spike. Surely it's only a matter of time. And then I can have fame *and* happiness.

–

Well, turns out that running water was correct. Downside is that it's the river at the bottom of a huge underground ravine. It looks cold, too. I suppose I'll just cross this rickety rope bridge and hope that it doesn't break

–

In retrospect, I might not have thought that through quite enough. I certainly hope somepony comes by to rescue me.

–

Right, Rarity, I want you to stop this very second and not move until the image of Hoity Toity swinging from the ceiling on a rope to rescue you from certain death is ingrained on the inside of your eyelids forever.

–

I mean, it can't be all that bad for Spike, when you think about it. It was just a crush. He'll get over it. And Princess Celestia will still be here when he wakes up, and she's almost his mother, right? And even though he was generous, and kind, he was kind of gross sometimes. Dragon sweat, ergh.

No. We decided it was better this way. I'll just get the diamonds and go. I'll live my life and he'll live his, that's how it was meant to be with ponies and dragons.

–

What's that screaming? Fleur! She's in trouble! *Back! Back! Get your filthy claws off that dress; you're going to tear it! If you break it, I'll break you!*

–

Charmed to meet you again, Fancy Pants. Shall we proceed?

–

Kicking dogs and looking good doing it.

–

Are those the diamonds? Those are the diamonds! Oh, I *knew* you had taste, Spikey-wikey! Oh, look at this one – it's transcendent! And... Oh. I remember this one. He really kept it, didn't he?

Let's get these back.

• • •

From: Rarity

To: Spike

Dear Spike,

You don't know this, because you were sleeping, but your treasures were stolen by a group of Diamond Dogs and I came down to get them back. And I know we said

goodbye back in Ponyville, but I don't think I realised what it meant back then. I think I do now.

We made a promise, Spike, not to put our lives on hold for each other. That we wouldn't spend time in misery, waiting for a relationship that would never happen. But here, right now... I want to break that promise. I want to wait. I want to spend time with the little purple dragon, the time that we deserved to spend together, even if I have to wait a hundred years.

I have a life here. Friends. Colleagues. A lifetime of fame, fortune and fashion ahead of me. I'm popular. I could have anypony I wanted, anything I wanted. It's everything I wanted. And I know you wouldn't want me to throw it away.

I'm sorry, Spike. But I think I'm going to do it anyway.

I'm going to have Fancy Pants cast a sleep spell on me. I'll sleep, ageless, by your side, for a hundred years. Until you wake up.

I hope you can forgive me for breaking my promise. But... I think this is something worth waiting for.

Good night, Spike. I'll see you in the morning.

Love,
– Rarity.

• • •

From: Twilight Sparkle
To: Applejack

Applejack,

All right, everything is finally in order.

We planted the tree you so generously sent us, opposite the courtyard from the old one. We started holding the far overdue tests right away. And while that was happening, we searched everypony's rooms to see who had the Eucalypt you told us to look for. We didn't have any luck in the building, but what we did find was a rickety old carriage outside with a really big mirror. We didn't wind up catching the culprit, she must have

caught wind of us and bolted, but according to roll call we're missing a "G.P. Ixy", so I might have a few suspicions.

Then came the marking and the paperwork. And oh, the paperwork; you can hardly imagine. I was flat out for days. But it's done. I'm clear. And I'm ready to take the next step.

First, I'm going to hand in my resignation to the Academy. It was fun, being here, but I've got more important places to be. I'll give them my two weeks' notice, and I'm going to be packing my bags and saying goodbye.

And then I'm going to come home, to Ponyville, to see you. Properly. Permanently.

Love,
– Twilight Sparkle.

• • •

From: Applejack
To: Twilight Sparkle

Twilight,

Woah, there, Twilight. Don't you think you're rushing things? You can't just quit your job. You worked long and hard for that job, and you love it. It's everything you ever wanted.

I don't want to be the one to take that away from you. Slow down.

Yours,
– Applejack

• • •

From: Twilight Sparkle
To: Applejack

Applejack.

No. I'm sick of distance. I'm sick of not being able to see you. And if I've learned anything from Rainbow Dash it's that sometimes you have to sacrifice something to get what you want. And I value you more than I value this.

We'll argue about this more, I'm sure. In person. When I see you next week.

– Twilight.

• • •

From: Twilight Sparkle

To: Pinkie Pie

Pinkie,

Hey. It's been a while, and I know we haven't talked much. But... I need to tell somepony, and I need somepony who I can trust with a secret. Pinkie Pie swear you won't tell anypony about this letter.

Over the past... kinda while, Applejack and I have been sending letters. And we got kind of close. Romantic close – oh I can't believe I'm writing this. I'm sorry; it's just all tumbling out. I'm just so... so – alright. Doing this properly. Sorry, Pinkie.

So we've been in contact, and Applejack really showed me a side of her I never saw in Ponyville. She's really smart, much smarter than I gave her credit for. And she was lonely, and I was homesick, and we found a common ground that we'd never really known we had. And the letters were great, I loved getting her letters, but recently they'd... not been enough. I'd started thinking about her, guessing when her next letter was going to come, imagining what she'd say, planning out my response in elaborate detail to what I guessed she was going to say, and then getting the letter and having it be something totally unexpected and having to start all over again... It was fun. But it was occupying all my time, all my thoughts.

And so, I made a decision. Because I loved Applejack – remember you promised not to tell – I was going to retire from the Academy, leave Hoofington, and go back to Ponyville. I just had the idea one day, and suddenly it was all I could think about, at any time, ever. I would just drift, sitting and imagining what she'd look like when I finally saw her again, what I'd pack when I left, what I'd say in my retirement speech, how awkward it'd be when we explained to Big Macintosh. It took me about a month to work up the courage to actually tell Applejack I was intending to do any of this. And, being Applejack, and caring, she immediately told me not to do it, reminded me of just how

much I loved living in Hoofington. But I had too much momentum behind me to stop now, so I brushed her off and made ready to leave. All my bags were packed, the transport was organised, the resignation was handed in, and I just had to sleep one more night before I'd leave to see her.

It was raining. Big, heavy rainstorm. I was reminded of the time we had that slumber party at the library, remembering the fighting with Rarity and how Applejack was a big enough pony to swallow her pride and apologise when everything was gone to pieces. And then my door started pounding. I ran to open it.

And there, soaking wet, looking like she'd been running all day and all night, was Applejack. And – and she kissed me.

And then we – uh. Well, some things aren't really... exactly needed to be told. Even though I trust you to keep a promise! It's just – well. Rainbow Dash doesn't have anything on Applejack as a romantic, and I'll hear no lies to the contrary.

But the next morning, when I woke up, I found that all my bags were unpacked. All my clothes were back in the drawers. All my books were back on the shelves. And Applejack was sitting there in the sunlight, waiting for me to wake up too.

And she said to me, she said these words. "I love you, Twilight. And I know you. I know that this is what you want to be. And I could no more see you leave it than you could see me leave Sweet Apple Acres."

I tried to speak, reason with her, but she said, "And before you leave Hoofington, I'd leave the ranch. I'd come to this place, be a gardener. Tell me, Twilight, would that work for you?"

And I couldn't say anything other than "No". I could see it in her eyes. Those trees, that ground, was as much a part of her soul as my books were a part of mine. And I could see my care reflected in her eyes. Applejack wasn't going to let me give up on my dreams.

And she said, "Twi', this isn't a case of sacrificing for love. We can be more, together. I don't want half a Twilight, and you don't want half an Applejack. We've got places that are a part of us and that ain't about to change. So really, ask yourself – what's wrong with what we have? Your letters make me happier than I've ever been. And more, I get to see what you're thinking, every time. In person, thoughts get diluted behind mundanity, chores, work, and confidence. Back like we were in Ponyville, always on the job, never sitting down and having a real heart-to-heart. But every time we write a letter, we tell

each other everything. We sit down and pour our heart out onto paper, and show the side of ourselves we've never shown to anypony else. Every letter we've sent contains more honesty than any conversation we've had."

And I said, "But what about when words aren't enough?"

And Applejack smiled and said, "It's only a few days' run from Ponyville. We can have the best of being together and being apart."

"But you run all that distance! You'll be tired!" I cried. And then – um. Well, she showed me that she wasn't.

Anyway.

She stayed a few more days, made sure I cancelled my resignation and that the tree she sent me was growing properly. And it was wonderful having her there. But she's just left, a few hours ago, and I see that she was right. When we were together, we were both so focused on each other that we hardly spoke. We laughed, and stared, and had awkward, blushing conversations, and there were these long, comfortable silences. But I had no idea what she was thinking through any of it. And, like Applejack said, a lack of communication can be as much a lack of Honesty as any lie. And it was Honesty that brought us together.

Applejack was right. We're never going to live together. Not like what everypony thinks a relationship should be like. We're not going to be traditional; we're not going to get used to each other, bored of each other. We're not going to argue over dishes, or any other of those tiny, meaningless domestic quarrels.

Instead, it's going to be like a permanent series of dates. We'll meet, for what'll be like the first time, every time. We'll enjoy each other's company when we're together and explore each other's minds when we're apart. We'll never keep secrets. We'll always be excited to see the other, either directly, or in the form of that grey mailmare. We'll never get bored. We'll always be together, we'll always be thinking about the other.

And you know what?

That's what I want it to be.

I want to know that she's out there. Bucking apple trees of gold. I want her to know that I'm here, waiting for her, whenever she decides to come by. I want to teleport in and sweep her off her hooves, and I want to be able to write down every thought in my mind

so that she knows exactly who I am underneath it all. I want this. I didn't know I wanted this, but she knew. And she knew because I was always, always able to tell her everything I've ever felt; because she knows me better than I know myself.

Love doesn't have to be sacrifice. It doesn't have to be physical contact.

It just has to be trust.

So... I hear you're a sky pirate these days? How's that working out for you?

Sincerely,
– Twilight Sparkle

• • •

From: Pinkie Pie
To: Twilight Sparkle

Hey Twilight! Don't worry; your secret is safe with me. I zipped up my lips and keelhauled the key. Arr.

But I'm sorry, I really tried, but your letter had me sniffing and crying all day. I don't know if any of the crew suspected as to why, and some of them tried a mutiny because they thought I'd gone soft. But I didn't breathe a word, and I fought them off and made them walk the plank. But if any hint of it gets out, that's why. Can't even trust these pegasus ponies to walk the plank properly.

You and Applejack sound like the greatest things that have happened to each other. Promise you'll invite me when you make an honest mare out of her – or let me run the catering. Ooh! You know that as a captain, I can marry ponies? I do it all the time, sometimes as a punishment, though sometimes they argue and tell me that's not how it works – as if that's not how it works! I'm the captain and I make the rules and if I decide that you two are married you're going to eat your wedding cake and *like* it!

Good luck, Twilight. And good luck to Applejack. Arr. Gummy says hi.

– Pinkie Pie

• • •

From: Applejack
To: Twilight Sparkle

Dear Twilight,

This winter's been harsh. One of the worst, I reckon.

A storm came rolling out of the Everfree some months early, and not even Rainbow Dash could do anything to stop it. More than half of the harvest froze on the branch. Every day, Big Macintosh has to go out into the blizzard to harvest firewood, and even then it's not enough. We've given up on our own rooms, and we've all moved into the living room. We sleep side by side to save heat. You should see it in here; we've got every blanket, pillow, mattress and article of clothing we possess all stacked into this one room, like the kind of couch fort a foal would make.

It's not all bad, though. Granny Smith told us stories about the time before Equestria, stories from the time of Windigoes. If you don't mind, I've taken the time to write it all down. Maybe you'll like it? I cleaned up Granny's language a little to make it happen.

"In the Old Country, the Skylands at the Roof of the World, far from Equestria, there are nights and days that last months and years. It is a harsh land; a place of absolute cold, a place without pity or weakness, and a place of honour and duty. It takes unity, dedication and strength to survive the nights and work throughout the days. These are traits that not every pony possesses.

"In the old days, when even the stars were young, lived a mare as beautiful as the moon and as courageous as the sun. It was her duty to guide and protect her people through the Long Winter, and she led them wisely. In spring, when all the fillies would dance with flowers in their manes, she would sit and plan for the winter. In winter, when ice froze along the backs of the stallions and supplies ran low, she would be the first to go hungry to make sure the youngest could eat.

"She was dedicated to her herd, and never found friends or love. She grew older and lost her beauty; her mane faded to gray and her voice lost its sweetness. But still she led her ponies through winter after winter.

"But one day, a young colt wandered off into a blizzard and was lost. The old mare, hearing of this, said '*Ainz thar tak'sho*'; in Equestrian, 'I am going for a walk, and I may be some time.'

"She walked out into the blizzard alone, and walked through the endless white. Every time she opened her mouth to call for the colt, the cold stole the breath from her lungs. She who had once been the strongest had lost the power of her legs and the endurance of her back, and the endless night was very cold.

"Hours passed, days – who could tell in the blizzard? But it was a long time before the old mare found the Princess Luna, standing in the blizzard, watching her. The princess asked the mare, 'You are old, and weak, and dying. You have transformed one death into two. Why is it that you continue to search?'

"The old mare kept walking, not stopping or bowing even for the Princess. 'I walk because I have never lost a colt, nor will I.'

"The Princess said, 'Your pride has wasted your youth, ruined your beauty, condemned you to a life without family or friends. You have thrown yourself away, old mare, and now you cast the last of your life into the snow.'

"The old mare raised her battered head and said, 'If I have done this, it is so others may live. I need only search a little longer. Already, I can feel spring's warmth.'

"The Princess said, 'The warmth you feel is the white fire, the frost so cold that it burns. Spring will not come. Turn back.'

"The mare said, 'If the white fire reminds me of spring, then it is good. For I know that the spring will someday come, and the snow will one day melt. And if I have to walk this blizzard for another six months to see it so, I can and I will.'

"And so, six long months passed. When Celestia finally turned her light to the roof of the world, and the ponies emerged into the sun, all had come to terms with the deaths of both the colt and the old mare. None knew how they would survive the next winter without her guidance, but they knew they would try.

"But walking across the frost, the coldest white fire, came two: the young colt and the old mare. As they approached the disbelieving family, the old mare clipped the colt once around the ears and said, 'That'll learn you for running off!' As the colt ran back to his family, safe and sound, the spirit of the old mare faded away into the sunlight. The only thing she left behind was happiness."

It's not a happy story, but it's an Old one, and it has a lot of power to it. And the best kind of stories, I find, are the ones you can live your life to.

And... even though the winter is harsh, and I've got to put on three layers before I even go to the bathroom, and we're at half rations every day, I don't particularly mind this. A family spreads out during summer, everypony each going their separate ways. But in winter, we're all brought together because we're the only ones who'll look after each other. And we're the ones who'll look after each other no matter what.

Heh, with one notable exception. I tell you, Twilight, if Derpy wasn't going through hell and braving the storm to make her mail rounds, I'd walk out into that blizzard to find you and bring you home. Happy Hearth's Warming.

– Applejack.

• • •

From: Twilight Sparkle

To: Applejack

Applejack,

You "cleaned up Granny Smith's language a little"? Applejack, that was a beautiful piece of writing – and we both know that Granny Smith, bless her, is barely intelligible at the best of times. No, no, no, my sneaky author-pony, that came from *you* and your carefully concealed creative genius. And I'm going to do whatever it takes to get more out of you.

We're not taking the winter much better here in Hoofington. We're on a knife's edge as far as food supplies, and that's even with conjured food. Conjured food is terrible for a lot of reasons, not least because it takes a lot of magical energy to create. We actually had to disenchant some of the teachers' magic hats just so we'd be able to eat, and you've never seen a unicorn bitter before you've seen a unicorn forced to give up her hat. I half expected them to decide that starving to death and leaving a properly behatted skeleton was the preferable alternative.

But the struggle of fashion versus survival aside, I'm actually a little worried. Part of the reason this winter is so bad is because Princess Celestia has fallen ill, and Luna is having to raise the sun – and she's not doing it nearly as well as Celestia could. She's exhausted, all the time. She gets up, walks to the balcony, raises the sun, and instantly collapses into an exhausted heap and is taken back to bed. I looked into it, and apparently it was the

same with Celestia raising the moon back a thousand years ago. It took her almost fifty years before she was strong enough to raise it properly.

Think about that. Fifty years of the most exhausting, total, physical and magical exertion you can possibly imagine. While also holding onto the guilt of banishing her sister... I can't imagine. I just can't imagine the kind of willpower you'd need to keep going through all that, especially when it didn't seem to be getting any easier...

I suppose that comes back to your story, though. Luna told the old mare to turn back and save herself, and she didn't – and now Luna's doing the same thing. Its stubbornness, but the kind of stubbornness that drives you to do the right thing no matter what... that can only be called *heroism*.

I'll see you for Winter Wrap Up. I wouldn't miss it for the world. Happy Hearth's Warming.

Yours,
– Twilight Sparkle.

• • •

From: Applejack
To: Princess Luna

Dear Princess Luna,

This may be presumptuous for me to address you directly like this, Princess, but I heard what you were doing for us, and for Equestria. And I wanted to say thank you. Thank you for persevering. You're keeping me and mine safe. I owe you more than I'll ever know.

Thank you, Princess Luna.

Your loyal subject,
– Applejack.

• • •

From: Applejack
To: Twilight Sparkle

Dear Twilight,

Winter took a bit of a turn for the worse. The Berry family came to us, hats in hooves, saying they'd run out of food entirely and were going to starve. We're already on short rations and I don't know if we'll have enough to feed both families through the winter. No, that's a lie; I know for sure that we won't have enough to feed us all. But neither am I turning them away.

I don't know how we're going to make it. I'll think of something, I'm sure. You must keep telling me I'm smart for a reason.

– Applejack

• • •

From: Twilight Sparkle

To: Princess Luna

Dear Princess Luna,

It just occurred to me today, with my friend's life in real danger, that you and your efforts are all that's standing between her and death. I know it's easy to think that you're not up to the task, that you're too weak, and that because of your weakness bad things are going to happen. But that's not true at all. You are the only pony who can do this. You are the only pony who is standing between my loved ones and the snow.

Thank you. Thank you so much for keeping them with me, even if it was just for this much longer, even if it was just for these last few letters. Thank you.

Your faithful subject,

– Twilight Sparkle.

• • •

From: Twilight Sparkle

To: Rainbow Dash

Rainbow,

I've got a plan that'll help us stop anypony starving in Ponyville. I'm going to draw mana out from the Element of Magic and use it to create food... but I need somepony brave

enough to get through the blizzard and get the food home. It'll be dangerous, carrying that much, that far, in the snow. I don't even know how I can ask you to do this. But if there's anypony in the entire world who can fly through this blizzard, it's you.

Meet me in Hoofington if you agree. And if you don't, I don't blame you. I love you, Rainbow Dash.

– Twilight Sparkle

• • •

From: Fluttershy

To: Princess Luna

Dear Princess Luna,

I don't know if I'm allowed to write to you like this, and I hope its okay. But Rainbow Dash is going out into the snow today. She's going to risk her life in the blizzard to get to Hoofington, to get food back here to feed a starving family. And she's everything to me, and I don't know what I'd do if she didn't make it.

So please. If you can, if you've got even an ounce of strength to spare... hold the sun just a little bit closer, just for today. Please. If you can. Please.

Please.

• • •

From: Twilight

To: Princess Celestia

Dear Princess Celestia,

Today my most loyal friend flew through the worst blizzard in six hundred years, risking her life to save the lives of others. When I saw her land, frozen to the bone but still determined, I knew that if she could do that, I could do anything.

I tapped into the Element of Magic. I knew it was dangerous, knew that I could permanently lessen the Element's power, even break it. But I knew that none of those things would happen. If Rainbow Dash went through all this and didn't let me down, then I knew for an absolute fact that there was no way that I was going to let her down.

And I feel it was that decision, more than anything else, which made the spell work. I applied my full power, all my magic, to that gemstone and held absolutely nothing back. And it shattered like glass. I felt like if I'd given anything, even a whisper, less than everything it wouldn't have worked at all. The magic flowed, and I created food. Real food, natural food, and a feast like nothing I'd seen before.

We worked hard to pack Rainbow Dash with everything she could carry. And then she took off again, pulling that carriage out into the storm.

Princess Celestia, today I learned that friendship is the most powerful force in the universe. I heard, I knew, academically that friendship could even defeat blizzards. That's what the stories tell us.

But there is nothing remotely like seeing it with your own eyes.

Your faithful student,
– Twilight Sparkle

• • •

From: Rainbow Dash
To: Fluttershy

Storm's too bad. Can't see, can't navigate. Stopped being able to feel my wings days ago. Stopped being able to feel anything else either. This – this is probably the end.

Tell them something stopped me. A dragon, or a Windigo. Tell them that I was attacked and fought off the monsters but there were too many. Tell them something cool.

Don't tell them I failed.

I love you, Fluttershy. I love you so much. Don't hate me for failing.

Goodbye.

• • •

From: Lyra
To: Princess Luna

Dear Princess Luna,

My name is Lyra; I played at your coronation when you returned from the Moon. I just wanted to let you know that my wife and I are very grateful for all you're doing. If we live through this blizzard, it'll be thanks to you.

- Lyra.

• • •

From: Pinkie Pie
To: Princess Luna

Dear Princess Black Snooty,

I don't write to ponies often, and I write to the royalty of the nation I plunder even less often - this is actually the first time - but my friend Gummy is in trouble. He's cold blooded, you see, and we're running out of stuff to keep the fires going. And if that happens, in this snow...

I promise I won't kidnap you again if you raise the sun. Pinkie swear.

- Dread Pirate Pinkie Pie

• • •

From: Pipsqueak
To: Princess Luna

Dear Princess Luna,

I'm Pipsqueak the Pirate; we met on Nightmare Night when you came to Ponyville. My mummy told me that you're now raising the sun and moon every day. You really are the best Princess!

Will you come to Ponyville's Nightmare Night again next year? If you do, do you mind if I can't give you much candy? I'm really hungry and mummy's saying that we're almost out of food, so we might not have enough to share.

Avast!

- Pipsqueak

• • •

Surrounded by letters, the night princess stood on the balcony.

She would do this for them.

She gathered her fractured, broken strength. She stood tall, raising her head. She slipped on the ice, trembling legs refusing to carry her weight, collapsing to her knees. She accidentally stained one of the letters with tears in the process.

"Oh", was all she could think, looking at the smudged ink. "I've ruined it."

And then, from nowhere, a white and gold hoof crossed her vision. Without thinking, she took it, and was dragged to her hooves.

Celestia – pale, sick, courageous Celestia – smiled at her.

"I believe in you."

Princess Luna of the Moon took a deep breath.

And she raised the Sun.

• • •

From: The Royal Equestrian Guard

To: All Citizens of Equestria

WANTED
FOR THE KIDNAP OF PRINCE BLUEBLOOD

PINKAMINA "PINKIE" PIE
AND HER SKY PIRATE CREW

RETURN HIM DEAD OR ALIVE
REWARD

• • •

From: Ponyville General Hospital

To: Fluttershy

Patient Name: Rainbow Dash
Diagnosis: Hypothermia/malnutrition
Patient Account Number: 24981167

INVOICE:
ADMISSION 27
MED/SURG/SEMI PRIVATE ROOM 62
HYPOTHERMIA TREATMENT 100
MISC PHARMACY 16
FINE FOR DAMAGED HOSPITAL EQUIPMENT 67
FINE FOR FOILED ESCAPE ATTEMPT 120

Subtotal: 392 bits (300 bits with apology)

• • •

From: Rainbow Dash
To: Twilight Sparkle

Agrabay is awesome. Had to deck a camel for spitting at Fluttershy. Desert's a nice change from snow. Vacationing is great. Wish you were here!

• • •

From: Twilight Sparkle
To: Pinkie Pie

You remember your offer about weddings? I'm calling that one in.

- Twilight Sparkle

• • •

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From: Twilight Sparkle
To: Applejack

Dearest Applejack,

Do you remember that winter, fifty years ago? The winter we thought was going to end the world?

A lot of young ponies have been asking me questions about it. Was it true there were Windigoes? Was it true that the storm came out of the Everfree? Was it true that you wielded the Elements of Harmony against the Spirit of Winter herself? Within a single generation, the tale has been distorted almost beyond recognition. A hundred years from now I'm sure we'll be fighting giant snowponies side by side in robot suits. Now I know how Celestia feels, about everything, all the time.

The questions got me to thinking, though, about writing an account of it. Try to set the historical record straight, and clear up misconceptions. But every time I try to write, it comes out dry and factual and boring. I need your help for this, my love. I can tell ponies how cold it was in degrees, but I can't tell ponies what it was like to be there, or the fear, or desperation. I need you.

I've only got mundanities to tell you. Students remain vapid and irreverent, more focused on their relationship drama and love triangles than the study of magic, and I remain the stubborn foal who believes that if I talk long enough some of it will get through. Some days I wonder if it's worth the effort. But then I remember, though, that every class has at least one. Some bright young unicorn with the stars in her eyes and a passion for magic, a young version of me. And I have to go in every day and give my all, because that pony – and even if it's just that one pony – wants to hear what I have to say, and what I have to teach. And if I'm able to share my passion with that pony and help change a life that way, it's all worth it. It's more than worth it.

But these fillies and colts, passing letters in class and giggling in the locker rooms, they don't know anything about romance. Not like we do. Remember the days when you'd pull a Rainbow Dash, and leave the farm and come running day and night to Hoofington to spend the weekend with me? When we didn't so much as exchange 'hello' before we began kissing, and didn't say as much as two words to each other until goodbye? And then I'd get a long and rambling letter apologising for 'not treating me with dignity'? You were only ever a traditionalist when it suited you, Applejack, bless your heart.

Speaking of, though, I have some time off during the upcoming teaching break and will be taking a carriage down to Ponyville to see you; if you'll still have me, that is?

Love,
– Twilight Sparkle

• • •

From: Applejack

To: Twilight Sparkle

Twilight,

Of course I remember the winter. Who could forget?

I remember being out on the field, scrambling to buck every last tree before the snow came. I remember how the sun almost seemed to fall out of the sky at the end of every day, and struggle to rise in the morning. I remember having to watch the crop freeze on the branch.

I remember the first day the sun didn't rise; I woke up in what I thought was the middle of the night, fully rested. I went downstairs to write you a letter. By the time I was finished, Big Macintosh and Apple Bloom were both awake too, so we started telling stories around the fire. And it was only when we'd finished telling stories hours and hours later and the sun was no closer to rising, and the wind was still battering at the windows, did we really realise that for the first time ever the sun wasn't coming up.

And I remember putting on my coat and hat, and going to face the door and thinking to myself, "If there's anywhere I'm going to be through all this, it's with Twilight."

The only thing that stopped me going out and freezing to death right then was Derpy. She showed up at that exact moment, having tunnelled through the snow to get to our door, freezing with the chill. I tried to get her to relax, take it easy, and winter up along with us. And then she looked me in the eyes... sort of... and said,

"Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds."

I told her she was being crazy, And she said, "Remembelly what happened the forehenst time a letter went awry?" And I didn't really have an answer to that. She took my letter and went out into the snow without another word.

And then, it was just a long quiet, us family together in the living room. I spent a lot of time re-reading our letters. It's a habit of mine; like walking down paths of memory, remembering what it was like to be that pony was who was writing those things so long ago. And it stayed that way until the Berry family came to us.

And while everything else in Equestria was happening because of that, and while brave ponies were risking their lives or pushing themselves to their very limits, it was just us two families in that room together, singing 'round the fire and waiting for the sun.

I don't think we ever truly doubted that the sun was coming up, strangely. No pony in that room seemed given to despair. We did kind of understand that we might all be frozen and dead long before it ever came up, but that seemed... *okay*. We all knew what it was to be a farmer, and we all knew what it was to go through a winter. And even though I didn't have you, I had the knowledge that you were warm and safe, and I had your letters to keep me company. And that was comfort enough for me, I think.

And despite all that, despite being prepared for the end, despite having found a kind of happiness that any kind of pony would have been glad to feel even once, it was nothing compared to the joy I felt when the sun came up after all. It was like I'd managed to find the happiness hidden in despair, and now I had that along with the happiness of joy too. I went up to the roof and watched the sun shine over Equestria for the first time in months. I saw the blizzard end.

And before long I saw a blue pegasus slogging her way through the snow, dragging a cart behind her.

After tasting death, there was this desperate need in everypony's hearts to prove they were alive. They came out into the street and the snow, and without so much as a word exchanged, it became a celebration. Lyra began to play music, and suddenly there was dancing. Everypony under the sun, moving together to remind themselves that they were alive, and that they had survived.

The Princesses held celebrations in Canterlot later, but they had absolutely nothing on that first, joyous dance. But it had a different kind of happiness to it. For the first time in a long time, we were all together again. You, me, Pinkie, Rainbow, Fluttershy, side-by-side to celebrate the end of the Long Winter, like it was supposed to be. Distance had made some of us drift apart, distance had brought some of us closer together... but that moment taught me that no matter the distance, we would *always* be friends.

And Twilight, if by year forty-six of our marriage you don't consider yourself as having a standing invite into my home, and think you have to ask each time you want to come over... you're the adorable kind of stupid. See you soon.

Love,
– Applejack

• • •

From: Twilight Sparkle

To: Applejack

Applejack,

I have four PhDs, an entire departmental wing, and the personal blessing of the Princess to confirm that I am not stupid and am, in fact, very very smart.

I also care less about any of those things than the fact that you still think I'm adorable.

Love you. See you soon.

- Twilight

• • •

From: Apple Bloom

To: Twilight Sparkle

Dear Twilight Sparkle,

I know we've never really been in contact, and I'm sorry that this is the first time I've ever really taken the time to write to you. But yesterday evening, my sister Applejack peacefully passed away.

I'd also like to beg your forgiveness, Twilight, because I've intruded into your privacy without your permission. Please give me a chance to explain.

A few days ago, Applejack took ill and was confined to her bed, and I stayed by her side to look after her. She slipped in and out of a fever dream, only emerging from the haze to ask me if Twilight's letter had arrived yet. When I told her 'no', all the strength went out of her and she sank back into the bed and her pulse became terrifyingly slow.

So I made a hasty decision. I went to her room and opened the drawer where she kept all of your letters, and I took them through to her room. When she next woke up and asked about the letter, I showed her one, the very first one you ever sent her. She was having trouble sitting up to read it, so I took it from her and read it aloud. When I finished, she was smiling, and asked in a sleepy voice, "What comes next?"

So I took the next letter, and read that out as well. And she asked the same question, and I read the next letter as well. I stayed up all night, reading her those letters, every single one.

And then, just as dawn broke, the mailmare arrived with your most recent letter. So I took that upstairs and read it to her as well. She didn't ask what came next.

Twilight, I understand, perhaps better than anypony how painful this news must be. You two have had the most beautiful romance I can imagine, and I feel privileged to have even touched on it. Applejack lived for your letters; when one would arrive, she would retreat from the world with it. She'd read it and re-read it, and think out loud about what she might say over dinner and while she was working. I know that you know, but I want to tell you again: She loved you, with all her heart.

And I don't know if it's possible to do such a thing as dying happy, but if it is, my sister managed it. And it was thanks to your letters. So I also want to say thank you, thank you for making my sister's life as wonderful as it was. She loved life because she loved you, and that passed on to everything she did, and everypony she ever talked to.

And you were with her, at the end. Don't ever think you weren't; you were in her ears, in her thoughts, in her heart. You were there for her, every time she needed you the most.

Thank you for making my sister happy.

Sincerely,
– Apple Bloom

• • •

From: Twilight Sparkle

To: Princess Celestia

Dear Princess Celestia,

You ever get that feeling like the world's moving without you?

It's like everything's still going ahead at a full gallop, and if you blink you'll be left behind in the dust. But at the same time, everything that really matters to you is in the past. If you stop and linger, you'll get trapped in the past, and never be able to catch up with reality again.

I try my best to stay connected these days. I don't want to spend my time in memories and regrets, Applejack wouldn't want that. I write to friends when I can, and talk to ponies when they'll listen to me. Sometimes I go down to the market and just walk around for hours. It's good to get out of the house. Good to interact with others.

It never really occurred to me how much I was rushing everywhere until I got too old to rush anywhere. I've always liked looking at the scenery, and now I've always got an excuse to. It might take me an hour or so to walk down to the shops, but I've stopped thinking of that as a bad thing. It's an hour of action, of activity, of exploration. There's nothing I could be better spending my time on in that hour than taking that walk.

I try to keep up with the news, but it all seems so far away. And it seems like it's all been done before, like I'm hearing the same stories I once wrote. I try to keep up so that I'll have something to talk about when I talk with a younger pony, something that isn't myself. It feels solipsistic to always be talking about me and my life, and I know that's what most old ponies do. I don't want to be a bore. I want to be able to have intelligent conversations with other ponies, and not recitals of fact.

I don't want to do any of this. But it's what I should be doing. I don't want to not do this either.

I know that regrets can crush a pony, and I know that it's important to keep on going anyway, until you're strong enough to carry them. I learned that from you. You spent fifty years after banishing Luna having to carry your regrets, physically and spiritually. As long as my entire life with Applejack just dealing with the guilt until you were capable of bearing it. I'm going to be the same. I'm not going to let you down, Princess.

I sometimes re-read her letters, but only sometimes.

I miss getting mail, though. Any mail. I see Derpy, still, walking her route. She's as old and creaky as I am but if the Blizzard couldn't get her to miss a delivery, then mere age isn't going to stop her either. She's passing by outside now... and strange. She looks... young.

like she's shining with the light of a borrowed sun

She just dropped something in my letterbox. And then she started flying, I didn't know she could still fly. She flew to that blue box on the other side of the road. I'm going to see what she got me.

...

It's the letter. The letter that never came. Ah, Celestia, I'm so happy –

• • •

From: Applejack

To: Twilight Sparkle

Dear Twilight Sparkle,

I feel the same way. I think I love you, Twilight Sparkle.

Those words are too important to hide, or conceal, or wrap in layers of justifications or text. They come first. I ain't going to let there be any chance that they don't get through, or get lost in translation, because they're the important words. And it's a mark of shame that I was too cowardly to pen them before, and made you write them first.

When I got your letter, suggesting that we were perhaps more than friends, it was the greatest relief and revelation of my life. It was a hope and a dream I'd nursed for months without speaking of. I scarcely dared to acknowledge the thought. I told myself that any hints I saw in your writing were the product of my own mind. I told myself that what I had with you, a chance to write letters where I could speak my free and untroubled mind and have them returned in kind, was too precious to risk. And that was tearing me apart; how could I value Honesty if I had to be dishonest to keep it?

And I was telling myself wrong. Because this is my first chance to be genuinely, totally honest; perhaps the most honest I've ever been. Your letters make me happier than I've ever been. When I read them, I hear your voice amidst my thoughts, closer than anypony's ever been. We may be distant physically, but I think our souls are as close as it's possible to be.

And now I'm doubting again, worrying that I've been too forward, too direct, too over the top and clumsy with my words. I want to throw this letter out and rewrite it in a less committal, less honest way to save myself the embarrassment and pain if I've read you wrong. But I'm not going to do that, not again.

Twilight, you will have my honest thoughts, my honest truth, no matter what.

And if I was to get the same from you, I would consider it the most valuable gift I could ever be given in this life or any other.

Yours truly,
- Applejack.