

# Forever

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*For there is nothing so characteristic of friendship as living together.*

*—Aristotle*

Eyes closed, Lyra sat upright on her stool and, using a combination of touch and magic to draw out a melody, stroked her hooves across the strings of her harp. Her concentration broke when she heard the door squeak open.

Without pausing in her playing, she said, “You know how hard it is to keep this harp in tune? Whenever you open the door, something sours.”

Bon Bon answered, “Lots of ponies say things go sour when I walk into a room, but most say it for a different reason.”

Lyra giggled softly.

“You look ridiculous when you play, you know,” said Bon Bon. “Eyes closed, chin lifted, lips parted. Like you expect somepony to kiss you.”

“Maybe somepony will.”

“Don’t count on it. Are you ready?”

The music ceased as Lyra took her hooves from the harp and opened her eyes. Standing in the doorway, Bon Bon leaned on the frame with one hoof on the knob and that ever-present frown on her face.

“Are you asking me if I’m ready to leave tomorrow,” said Lyra, “or are you asking me if I’m ready for this party Colgate’s throwing us?”

Bon Bon nodded toward the set of bags stacked against Lyra’s bed. “I see you’re ready to leave. And this isn’t a party. It’s a ‘ceremony.’ Colgate got grumpy when I called it anything else.”

“What did you call it?”

“A nuisance. And an intrusion. And a waste of time, of course.”

“You don’t mean that.” Lyra walked to Bon Bon and took her hooves. “You’ve changed, Bon Bon. Since you came back—”

“You’ll be different when you come back, too, Lyra.”

“Maybe I won’t come back.”

“Maybe.”

Lyra laughed and touched Bon Bon’s nose with her own. “I’m only going to Canterlot. *You* went to a griffon aerie for two years.”

Bon Bon sighed. “It was just a cultural exchange, and nothing came of it. They eat goats, which is horrific and disgusting, and they raise bees, but turn the honey into a poison called mead, which is more horrific and disgusting still. The only valuable thing I learned, if it even is valuable, is how to do impressions. With those beaks of theirs, the griffons can imitate most any sound, like parrots.” She contorted her mouth and released a passable imitation of the notes Lyra had been playing.

After a pause, Bon Bon added, “Must you really leave?”

Lyra shrugged and offered her a sad smile. “I won’t make it as a harpist in Ponyville. Sooner or later, everypony with a musical cutie mark goes to Canterlot.”

“And most wash out.”

“Octavia made it. Maybe I can, too.” Lyra rubbed Bon Bon’s nose again. “Come with me. Ponyville doesn’t need another confectioner. You could set up a shop—”

Bon Bon shook her head. “My life’s goal is more modest than yours, Lyra: drive the Cakes out of business, or at least drum up a respectable business of my own. I don’t need to be a famous candy-maker, and I doubt I have it in me to be one anyway.” She slipped her hooves out of Lyra’s grasp. “C’mon. The others are all in the kitchen, so let’s get this over with.”

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When Lyra and Bon Bon walked into the small, dingy kitchen, their friends had already arranged the room for the ceremony. Colgate had doused the lights and now, levitating a match with her magic, lit the last of the candles spread over the table and counters. Carrot Top crouched on the floor over a pot of simmering tea hanging above a portable gas burner, and Berry Punch lounged idly in a corner near the refrigerator.

“There’s gonna be sassy, right?” Berry asked. “Carrot promised me sassy.”

Carrot Top looked up from her pot and scowled. “Honestly, Berry Punch, that’s not quite decent. I brought two bottles of the best sarsaparilla I could afford, but you’ll just have to be patient.”

“One bottle for me and one for the rest of you,” said Berry. “That sounds ’bout right.” She belched.

Colgate snuffed her match and slipped a large pocket watch out of her double-breasted coat. “I’m sorry to be a bother, girls, but it might be best if we hurried. I’ll get an earful from Doctor Time Turner if I’m back late.”

Carrot Top clucked, pulled her ladle from the teapot, and tried an experimental taste. “More clove,” she muttered. She crushed some cloves between her hooves and sprinkled their remains over the steaming liquid. “I’m sorry, Colgate,” she said more loudly, “but there are things that can’t be rushed and this is one of the things. You’ll just have to stop being a chronomistress for a few minutes and be a *friend* instead.”

“I’m not a chronomistress,” Colgate answered. “I’m a chronomaster’s apprentice, and if I’m not back in the shop in an hour, the chronomaster will have my haunch. And stop calling me Colgate; my real name’s Minuette, you know.”

Bon Bon sat down on a cushion and leaned her knees on the table. “I see you’ve dressed up for the occasion, Colgate, but since when do you care what the doctor thinks of you?”

Colgate touched her coat’s hem. “Well, it’s the only nice clothing I own, and I don’t care what the doctor thinks. I just don’t want to have to listen to him.”

“Keeping you working this late,” murmured Carrot Top. “It’s not quite decent.” She sipped the tea again. “Needs more pepper.”

“That smells *wonderful*, Carrot Top,” said Lyra, sitting down across from Bon Bon.

Carrot Top raised her head with a snap, fixed an eye on Lyra, and wrapped a foreleg around the bubbling pot, almost as if she were afraid somepony would snatch it away from her. “It *should* smell wonderful. It’s your big day, after all, and I won’t serve you anything but the best I can manage. This is the *traditional* recipe, passed down through innumerable generations, preserved even during the Reign of Chaos. Ponies drank this in the Valley of Dreams—”

Colgate laughed.

Carrot Top gave her a sharp glance. “And what’s so funny?”

Colgate sat down beside Carrot Top and put a hoof on her shoulder. “Not much has been preserved from the Valley of Dreams, Carrot. Not even the timekeepers’ Long Count stretches back that far. I don’t think your tea recipe—”

“Stuff and bosh,” said Carrot Top, cutting her off. “What about the writings of Clover the Clever? What about the Ponycalypse of Starswirl—?”

“The latter is almost certainly pseudepigraphical,” Colgate replied. “That’s what they taught us at the academy.”

“The Sacred Order of Timekeepers has rotted your brain.”

“Clover’s writings, however,” Colgate added, “are genuine. At least most of them. The *Letters on Friendship* are all legitimate except the fragmentary deathbed pledge, which careful linguistic study places—”

“Enough!” cried Carrot Top. “Today is supposed to be about Lyra and Bon Bon, not an opportunity for you to show off what they taught you in that fancy school.”

“Oh,” said Berry Punch from the floor across the room, “but Colgate needs to do the whole official thingy. We got a real honest-to-Celestia timekeeper here—”

“Apprentice,” said Colgate.

“—an’ we oughta use ‘er,” Berry finished.

“Timekeepers are *not* honest to Celestia,” said Carrot Top, her eyes fixed resolutely on her pot. “That’s the problem.” She took another sip. “Needs more vanilla.”

With a sidelong glance at Carrot Top, Colgate stuffed her watch back into her pocket and said, “Since I presume Lyra and Bon Bon haven’t memorized their parts, I’ll officiate. That’s allowed.” A grin passed over her face. “Carrot Top, by the way, made me go to the archives and dig out the *earliest* version of this ritual I could find. She’s convinced that ponies used it before the Exodus, though there’s not a single mention of it in the Long Count before the Medieval Period.”

Carrot Top looked ready to say something again, but Colgate quickly added, “Nonetheless, the *sentiments* this ritual embodies do of course date to pre-Exodus times.

We know that from Clover the Clever's extensive writings." She paused and raised a hoof. "Clover's most famous quotation, of course, is—"

"Friendship is magic!" cried Lyra with a giggle.

Colgate's eyes narrowed. "And you all say *my* schooling rotted *my* brains! No, Clover never said that. Not that we know of, anyway. That's a corruption of what she *really* wrote—"

Bon Bon rolled her eyes and released a long, exasperated sigh. "Honestly, get *on* with it, Colgate! You talk about being short on time, so why are you so long-winded?"

Colgate snorted. "Fine. Clover wrote, 'No greater form of love is known to ponykind than that of friendship between mares.'"

"I like 'Friendship is magic' better," said Lyra.

"Don't forget what else she wrote!" cried Berry Punch, laughing and holding her stomach. "Quote it back to me, Colgate!"

"Berry—!" Carrot Top hissed.

Berry Punch sat up and raised a hoof in imitation of Colgate's gesture. "No two ponies can truly consider themselves friends until they have shared a bed!" She doubled over and whooped, slapping her hooves against the floor.

Colgate cleared her throat. "Remembering that Clover lived through a terrible blizzard that lasted for several years, I think you can easily understand why—"

"Hey, Lyra, Bonny," said Berry, still laughing, "you two ever share a bed?"

"Good Celestia, no," Bon Bon answered. "Lyra can hardly sit still for five minutes. You think I want her in my bed? It's bad enough with her in the next room tossing and turning all night."

Berry put a hoof to her face and said with a chuckle, "Colgate an' me shared a bed once. Remember, Colgy?"

Colgate sighed. "Ah, yes, at Sassaflash's slumber party. Where I learned that Berry Punch has gas."

Lyra clamped her hooves over her mouth, but burst into giggles anyway and fell on her back.

“This is not at *all* decent,” huffed Carrot Top. She took another sip from her pot. “I think this tea needs more... tea.”

Lyra bolted upright. “Hey, y’know who we shoulda got to do this instead of Colgate? The librarian! They say she’s a princess now cuz of friendship—”

“Great Celestia!” cried Bon Bon. “Lyra, what are you thinking? Have you gone crazier than usual?”

“Honestly,” said Carrot Top as she crumbled more tea leaves into her pot, “Princess Twilight scares me. I hate going in the library anymore. I had overdue books a month ago and I took them in and she just said, ‘That’s okay, no problem.’ Didn’t even give me a fine. But *now* what would I do if I had an overdue? I’d be afraid to take it back!”

Bon Bon coughed into a hoof, twisted her mouth, and said in a flawless imitation of Twilight Sparkle’s voice, “Spike! This customer has overdue books! Throw her in the dungeon!”

Lyra and Berry Punch both unleashed fresh fits of laughter.

“Goodness,” Carrot Top said, “she even has a dragon in there with her. I didn’t think of that.”

Bon Bon snorted. “More importantly, have you seen Mayor Mare scraping in front of her? It’s pathetic. What did we elect the mayor for in the first place if we were gonna wind up with a princess in town? Twilight Sparkle should be the one going to Canterlot instead of Lyra: she could throw her weight around on the Cosmic Council instead of throwing it around down here.”

Colgate said, “We are getting *way* off track—”

Carrot Top scowled. “That’s taking it too far, Bon Bon. You shouldn’t bad-mouth a princess that way.” She sighed. “Honestly, I was just a tiny filly when Cadance became a princess. It was the talk of all of Equestria for days and days, and I remember running to my dam and saying, ‘Mommy, I’m gonna be a princess too when I grow up!’ And she just looked at me and said, ‘But you’re an earth pony, dear.’” Carrot Top clucked. “Broke my little heart. I decided then and there that if I were ever so lucky as to marry and have foals of my own, they wouldn’t be earth ponies—”

Bon Bon's cheek twitched for a moment, and then her mouth turned up in a mirthless grin. "That must be why Daisy said she saw you in the Crystal Empire necking with Written Script. He's a unicorn, right—?"

Carrot Top's face turned the color of her hair. "Honestly, Bon Bon, you can be vicious. This isn't quite decent—"

"Oh no," Bon Bon said, the grin still fixed to her face, "from what I heard, it wasn't decent at all." She changed her voice to imitate Carrot Top's stuffy tone and added, "Oh, Written, hold me—"

"Enough," said Colgate firmly. "That's enough, Bon Bon. You really do take things too far sometimes."

Carrot Top huffed. "We were there on a short holiday, he had to stay after on business, and I gave him a little goodbye nuzzle. If that's so—"

Berry Punch erupted into loud guffaws and Carrot Top's face colored again. "Someday," Berry cried, "we should get Princess Cadance to put the whammy on ol' Bon Bon here an' make her fall in love."

"Let her try," Bon Bon answered. "I'll rip that horn right off her face and turn her back into a pegasus."

"Bon Bon!" cried Carrot Top.

"Everypony, be quiet!" Colgate shouted. "This is supposed to take a few minutes, not all night!"

Carrot Top winced.

Colgate shuffled a stack of parchment. "Here, Bon Bon, Lyra, I wrote out your parts so you can read them. That way, I won't have to recite them to you."

"Good ol' Colgate," Berry said. "Always organized."

Colgate passed the pages to Lyra and Bon Bon. Bon Bon's lip curled as her eyes skimmed the text. "I have to say this?"

"Yes," Colgate answered. "Well, I mean, no. You don't *have* to, but I assumed you wanted to."



Lyra slid a hoof across the table and placed it over Bon Bon's. Bon Bon stared at it for half a minute before saying, "Let's get it over with."

Colgate gave a small sigh. "Very well. Now, before we begin, I do think there's something I ought to say. I know you all don't like the Order of Timekeepers much, and I don't really like it either, but if there's one thing it's taught me, it's that you should never make a promise lightly. A lot of ponies these days either skip this little ceremony entirely, or they do it frivolously. I don't want you two to be like that."

"We won't be," said Lyra, gazing happily at Bon Bon's face. Bon Bon kept her eyes on the table.

"By this ritual," Colgate said, "you will become Pony Friends Forever. That isn't just a cute title. It means complete honesty and complete faithfulness. It means you will never lie to each other or reveal each other's secrets. It means you will trust each other with your lives."

"I can't even trust Lyra to turn off the stove when she leaves the house," Bon Bon answered.

Lyra giggled.

Though she appeared to be trying to suppress it, a grin appeared on Colgate's face. "It doesn't mean you ignore each other's faults. But it does mean you bear with them. And it can be *especially* difficult to be PFFs when you live apart, so, considering that Lyra is getting on the train tomorrow morning, think hard before you do this."

"Hey, Colgate," Berry called, "wanna do this with me later?"

Colgate glanced at her. "I'm studying to be a timekeeper. We avoid such obligations."

Carrot Top snorted.

"We're already honest with each other," said Bon Bon. "I frankly don't care one way or the other, but if it makes Lyra happy—"

"Oh, stop it!" said Lyra with a laugh. "Stop pretending to be such a tough girl, Bon Bon."

Bon Bon paused. "Fine," she said, and she picked up the parchment as if to read, hiding her face behind it.

“Let us begin, then,” Colgate said. She began reciting from a scroll, “We have come together today to—well, we’ve covered all that. Let’s get on with it: Lyra, you read part one, and Bon Bon, you can read part two.”

“It says we’re supposed to have tea,” Bon Bon answered.

“Oh, the tea!” Carrot Top cried. “I forgot!”

“Forgot?” said Colgate. “But you’ve been fiddling with it for—oh, never mind. Just serve it.”

Carrot Top jumped to her hooves and clattered around on the counter with a set of five thick ceramic cups. “Would somepony with levitation please lend me a hoof?”

Colgate’s horn glowed blue, and the cups lifted into the air and circled the pot bubbling on the floor. With a sieve clutched in one pastern and the ladle clutched in her teeth, Carrot Top filled each cup to the brim.

“I know you have levitation magic, Lyra,” Colgate said, “but you’re supposed to hold the cup between your hooves so you can feel the warmth. The hot tea represents the fires of your hearts.”

Bon Bon made a faint retching sound.

Lyra laid her parchment on the table and took the cup as she was told.

Colgate added, “The rest of us can drink too after they’ve said their parts.”

Lyra scanned the paper. “What am I supposed to—oh, here it is. ‘As this warms me, may I remember that you warm my heart still more.’”

Bon Bon, eyes on her own parchment, sighed. “As you warm mine.” She took a sip. “Ow! This is *hot!*”

They all drank in silence for a few minutes, swirling the tea in their cups. The only sound was Berry Punch’s slurping.

Lyra cleared her throat faintly. “It’s really good, Carrot Top.”

Carrot Top beamed.

“Too much clove,” Colgate said. “And too much pepper. And vanilla.”

“Then *you* make it next time,” Carrot Top answered.

“Whose milk did you use?” Lyra asked.

“Daisy Jo’s,” said Carrot Top.

“Ooh,” cried Lyra, “my favorite cow! She makes the *best* milkshakes!”

“Ahem,” said Colgate, “if we’ve all finished, let’s—”

“Still drinking,” said Berry Punch. She slurped again.

“Well,” said Colgate, “next up is the sarsaparilla—”

“*What?*” Berry rapidly guzzled her tea, but then threw the cup to the floor. “Ow! Hot!” She ran to the sink and knocked over several candles as she wrenched on the tap and ran water over her tongue.

“I’ll get it,” Carrot Top said. “I left it in the fridge.” She pushed past Berry, opened the refrigerator, and rummaged around. “It’s so nice to see a fridge that’s stocked... but I see it’s mostly stocked with maple syrup.”

“That’s Bon Bon’s,” chirped Lyra. “She’s trying something new.”

“Maple crème chocolates,” said Bon Bon.

Carrot Top pulled a large bottle out of the refrigerator and began fiddling with a corkscrew. “I hope it got chilled—”

Berry pulled her head out of the sink. With water dripping from her mane, she snatched the bottle from Carrot Top. “Lemme see, lemme see—”

“Berry Punch,” said Carrot Top, “that’s not decent.”

“Hmm, not my favorite label,” said Berry, “but it’s okay. Ooh, and this was a good year for sass—”

Carrot Top snatched the bottle back. “You get one glass, like the rest of us.”

“None for me,” said Colgate.

“I know that,” answered Carrot Top.

“I’ll take hers,” said Berry.

Carrot Top pried the cork out and poured sarsaparilla into a low, saucer-shaped cup, which she set on the table. She then filled a pair of stemmed glasses for herself and Berry Punch. Berry moved to drink hers, but Carrot Top slapped her fetlock.

“Wait for Lyra and Bon Bon,” Carrot Top hissed.

Colgate coughed and said, “While I don’t personally approve of the recreational use of euphorics—”

Bon Bon glared. “This would go faster without your editorializing, Colgate.”

Colgate coughed again. “Right. The cold sarsaparilla means that friendship is both refreshing and intoxicating. Go ahead and drink it.”

“You don’t have to tell me twice,” said Berry as she raised her glass.

“Not you!” Carrot Top shouted.

Lyra looked down at her parchment and started laughing.

Colgate sighed. “I know it sounds a little corny, but—”

“Do we really have to say this?” Bon Bon asked.

“I didn’t write it,” said Colgate. “It might be a little over the top, but I find it touching.”

“Impossible,” said Bon Bon. “That would mean you had emotions.” She raised her parchment and, imitating Colgate’s voice, announced, “Through careful analysis of word order and sentence structure in these passages, with reference to the best historico-linguistic sources, I have determined that the text is ‘touching.’”

Colgate’s mouth turned to a thin line, but she said nothing.

“Stop it,” said Lyra, still laughing. “Okay, I’ll say this. Give me a moment.” She took a deep breath and began, “Nothing is sweeter than your—” She burst into giggles again.

Berry Punch held her empty glass out to Carrot Top. “Hey, Carrots, I’m dry.”

“Berry!” cried Carrot Top. “I told you to wait!”

“But I got thirsty!”

Lyra took another deep breath as she struggled to suppress her laughter. “Okay, I’m gonna say it.” She reached out, took Bon Bon’s hoof again, and looked into her eyes. “Bon Bon,” she said, “nothing—” She got no further before she doubled up, squealing.

“This is going to take all night, isn’t it?” said Colgate.

“No, I can do it!” said Lyra. Holding the parchment in her hooves, still doubled over, with her voice cracking, she shouted, “*Nothing is sweeter than your friendship and I cannot drink enough of it!*” She snatched up the low dish and sipped, but then put a hoof to her mouth as she nearly spit it out. “Oh, Carrot Top, it’s still warm. You should have put it in the freezer.”

“Bon Bon,” said Colgate, “it’s your turn.”

Bon Bon glared across the table. “You’re telling me I have to drink Lyra’s backwash?”

“Oh for crying out loud!” yelled Colgate. “It’s really a beautiful little ceremony, but you two are *butchering* it!”

Bon Bon sighed. “Fine.” She turned away from Lyra, scanned her parchment, and then looked up to the ceiling as she said with a tone of affected indifference, “As my lips touch the dish from which you’ve drunk, may the taste remind me of—oh, great Celestia, Colgate, I can’t say this!”

Berry Punch held out the empty sarsaparilla bottle to Carrot Top and hiccupped. “Hey, Carry, ya said ya got another o’ these, right?”

“Berry Punch!” cried Carrot Top. “That was still half full!”

“Bon Bon,” said Colgate, “why don’t you just drink? We’ll call it good and move on to the meal.” She glanced at Berry Punch. “I think Berry should have some food now anyway.”

Bon Bon sipped from the dish and dropped it back on the table with a clatter that spilled half its contents. Lyra frowned and patted Bon Bon’s hoof.

“Last step,” said Colgate.

“I made salad,” said Carrot Top, rushing to the counter and pulling out a large bowl from behind the row of candles. “Lemongrass and bamboo shoots. It’s the traditional meal to end the friendship ceremony, passed down through countless generations—”

“A hundred and sixty-seven generations, approximately,” said Colgate. “Assuming your highly dubious dating of the ritual is correct, of course.”

Carrot Top wilted. “Oh, just eat your salad, everypony.” She loaded plates and, with Colgate’s help, passed them around. Then she refilled the teacups.

“Do we have to say anything for this part?” Bon Bon asked.

“No,” Colgate replied. “That’s it. You share a meal, and then you’re Pony Friends Forever.”

“This is so exciting!” Lyra cried. She squirmed in her seat and dug into her salad.

Bon Bon rolled her eyes. “It’s silly.”

Colgate chewed for a moment, swallowed, and said, “Bon Bon, I asked you to take this seriously.”

“You ask for many strange things, Colgate.”

“I admit I’m glad we’re about through,” Carrot Top said as she picked at her own salad. “I’ll need to get home soon. If I’m out too late, little Dinky might get hungry. And if Dinky gets hungry, Derpy might try to use the kitchen. And if Derpy tries to use the kitchen, we might not *have* a kitchen by the time I get there.”

Bon Bon deepened her voice and said with a lisp, “I just don’t know what went—”

“Don’t,” said Carrot Top, now stern. “You can mock me if you please, Bon Bon, but not her.”

With sharp strokes of her fork, Bon Bon picked the bamboo shoots out of her salad. After she bit into them, she said, “I don’t get you, Carrot Top.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean you’re always going on and on about how you want everything decent and proper, but then you cuddle up to any unicorn stallion who comes your way while your flatmate cranks out illegitimate foals.”

With a clatter, Colgate dropped her fork to her plate and glared silently across the kitchen at Bon Bon.

Bon Bon bent over her food and continued eating. Carrot Top stared down at her plate while tears formed in her eyes.

Lyra chewed her lip for a minute while she studied the nicks and scratches in the tabletop. Feeling a few tears of her own starting, she sniffed and wiped her nose with a foreleg. “Bon Bon,” she said quietly, “say you’re sorry—”

“For what?” Bon Bon snapped, throwing down her own fork. “I mean, look at this, look at *us*. Do you really believe any of this? Does anypony? Colgate,” she said, slapping a hoof against the table, “what was that thing you quoted? ‘No greater love than friendship between mares’? Do you really believe that? Really?”

Colgate opened her mouth, but paused a moment before she said, “I think it’s... a pleasant sentiment—”

Bon Bon forced a laugh and rose from the table. “This is ridiculous. Colgate, tell me again, since your head’s so full of numbers, about how many fillies are born every year, and how many colts?”

Colgate sighed. “Of live births, the ratio of fillies to colts is about ten to one. Why—?”

“And how many mares get married, ever?”

“About one in ten.”

Bon Bon walked to the kitchen door and leaned on the frame. With her back to everypony, she said, “You all know I was with the griffons for two years. The ratio of tiercels to hens in Griffonia is one to one. Almost all of them marry, and they’re so close that when a griffon’s mate dies, that griffon also dies soon after from grief. *That’s* love.”

Bon Bon spun around and gestured with a hoof. “All this talk here in Equestria about *friendship*, friendship this and friendship that and friendship everything, it’s just... *compensation*, is all.” She pointed at Lyra. “Lyra and I were *already* best friends! You

really think your stupid little ritual is going to change anything? You really think it *means* anything?"

Bon Bon's last word rang around the kitchen, followed by a moment of utter silence. Then Lyra burst into tears.

Colgate began to speak, but Bon Bon shook her head. "Don't, Colgate. Don't give me another one of your philosophers' platitudes." She turned and walked out.

The others looked at each other, not speaking, as Lyra continued to sob. After a minute, Berry Punch said, "This salad is *really* good."

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The western sky was dusky pink, the moon was rising, and the first stars were already peeking through. The evening was warm, and in the soft light, the gaslamps of distant Canterlot twinkled against the slopes of Mount Eohippus. There was no wind, and the only sound was the occasional crunch of hooves on Ponyville's roads. Lyra found Bon Bon wearing a pair of saddlebags, standing on a bridge, and watching the placid surface of the full stream reflect the moonlight.

Bon Bon didn't look up as Lyra approached, but said, "We don't think about it much, but this water flows through Canterlot before it reaches here. Every day I see it, I'm going to remember you."

"I can see Ponyville from Canterlot's towers," Lyra answered as she walked to Bon Bon's side. "So I'll remember you, too. Maybe it didn't mean anything to you, Bon Bon, but it meant something to me. I made you a promise."

Bon Bon shook her head. "You're going to become a great musician. I know that because I hear you play. You're going to be a harpist for the Canterlot Philharmonic, and you'll meet some nice stallion, settle down, and forget all about your marefriends in Ponyville."

"I won't."

Bon Bon turned and poked a hoof against Lyra's breast. "You will. You'll be a great musician, you'll get married, and you'll forget me."

"But—"

"Promise."



Lyra tried to find words, but none came. She saw tears welling in Bon Bon's eyes.

"If you're really my dearest friend," Bon Bon said, "you'll promise me that you'll be happy. Promise."

"I... I'll try," Lyra whispered.

Bon Bon turned away, fumbled in her saddlebag, and pulled out a small box, which she left on the railing. "Here. Maple crème chocolates, made this morning. If the others are still there when you get home, share these with Carrot Top and tell her I'm sorry." Sniffing a few times, she kept her back to Lyra and walked away.

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Lyra cleaned up the kitchen and went to bed, but couldn't sleep. Turned away from the door, by the dim moonlight shining through the window, she traced the cracks in the plastered wall and thought about the train trip she'd be taking at dawn.

Well after midnight, the door of her bedroom creaked slowly open. She didn't stir as she heard Bon Bon walk softly across the carpet and lie down. The bed squeaked softly and sagged. Bon Bon said nothing.

Lyra didn't move, but merely watched the wall, listened to her best friend's steady breathing, and waited.