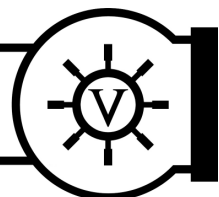


Moments Worth Sharing

TheBandBrony

PONY FICTION VAULT



The great Princess Celestia sat alone on the cold, rigid hardwood of her personal student's library home. A simple check-up on her most prized pupil was all she had in mind when she flew over to the quaint little town a few short hours ago. Just a quick, simple affair – say hello, catch up, and get back to Canterlot before the day court had adjourned.

Instead, the residents of town caught wind of her impromptu visit and decided to throw her a "Welcome to Ponyville" party, orchestrated by none other than the Element of Laughter herself.

Needless to say, things got out of hoof pretty quickly.

Ah, the fickle folly of mortal ponies. Always focusing on the here and now, never caring about the future.

So, after several hours of forced smiles and politely idle conversation with her subjects, she retreated back to her protégé's library haven, thankful to be away from the populace's polite insanity. Pinkie Pie, with nothing but the most noble of intentions in mind, took the princess's leave of absence as a sign to hunt her down and continue the party at her new location. Twilight had thankfully volunteered to talk the pink mare out of her celebratory state of mind (a task that would definitely take some time, considering how much Pinkie Pie loved parties), leaving the princess alone in the sanctuary of the Ponyville Library.

For a while Celestia absentmindedly perused the library's collection, pausing every so often to peek out of the windows for any sign of the pink mare and her entourage of party-goers. Eventually though, she grew bored, and finding nothing else of real interest to do until her pupil returned, she contented herself with staring from the viewing balcony out into the great expanse of rolling hills that stretched from the outskirts of Ponyville to well beyond the horizon. **Her** setting sun, wilting against the late evening horizon, still managed to fill the sky to the bursting point with a ripe display of reds and oranges and yellows, all swirled together as if somepony had turned the entire sky into a watercolor canvas. The display bled onto the ground, bathing the earth below in a soft, radiant pink glow.

Yet even though she was intimately familiar with each and every last insignificant swirl of color (she made the dazzling display, after all), she never ceased to be amazed at **her** creation. It was a thousand sorts of beautiful all mixed together and painted onto **her** sky. It was glorious.

Yet she wasn't happy.

We will never be happy as long as we keep concerning ourselves with the lives of such mortal creatures.

She wasn't angry at anything – heavens no. This had actually been a particularly good day for her. No nobles fighting over petty contracts or ancient birthrights, no disastrous attempts by her sister (bless her heart) to assimilate into modern Equestrian society, no world-ending cataclysmic villains showing up out of nowhere to take over her throne or destroy life as she knew it. It was the most peaceful Equestria had been in years. She should, for all intents and purposes, be happy.

Yet she wasn't.

It couldn't be boredom, either. Although it could only get so interesting watching **her** sun slowly recede over the grasslands, it was certainly better than having to stand there and smile politely while an entire town groveled and shoveled praise onto her just for considering them "worthy" enough to be in her presence.

No, it wasn't anger or boredom that gave the princess that hollow, aching feeling that lurked inside her chest like an old friend.

It was loneliness.

Loneliness was the worst kind of pain possible. That stomach-churning need for the companionship of others that slowly but surely tightened around her heart as if it had been caught in a vice. Only others could heal this hurt.

And Celestia had no pony.

We never had any pony. We only have ourselves. We are the only thing that will matter, in the end.

She didn't have her pupil, who was off talking the party out of Equestria's premiere party pony. She didn't have Spike, who was off doing goddess knows whatever dragons do at this hour. She didn't even have her sister, who was deep in Griffon territory negotiating yet another peace settlement with whichever king had decided to usurp the throne that month.

Her ears perked up a bit at the thought of her sister. Steadfast and steady like her namesake – surely she would be a perfect confidant for the age-old alicorn.

That's a laughable notion. Even now that she's back from the moon, she is still going through the culture shock to end all culture shocks. Do we really think she would be able to accept all the decisions that we have had to make in her absence? Would she even understand them?

Yes, loneliness certainly hurt, but it wasn't a new feeling to the poor alicorn. It was more of a self-inflicted wound, really. She had always refrained from making many friends over the course of her life. Friends only withered and died while she lived on, stuck like a fly on a spider's web in the prime of her life for eternity. She learned the hard way that friendship was a mortal pleasure, only suited for those fortunate enough to have clocks ticking on their existence.

But what of Twilight Sparkle and her studies in friendship? Was she so hypocritical that she sent her student to study what she herself could not afford to have? Now that she thought about it, she found herself second-guessing the rationality of sending young Twilight to Ponyville in the first place.

Now don't overthink this. She deserves to know the pleasure of friendship. There's an old saying that goes, "As the master does, so does the apprentice." Just because we can't enjoy all that companionship has to offer, doesn't mean we have to drag her down with us.

After all, it made sense to let her student explore friendship. Twilight would never have to watch her friends grey and turn to dust while she never aged a day. No, the princess would make sure that her protégé enjoyed the finest of mortal pleasures while she still could.

After all, she will surely find more value to it than us. What good are friends to us when they do such cruel things as dying and leaving us alone to mourn? There will only be us in the end.

How many times had she spent hours on end alone, stoically standing vigil over graves, begging and pleading with herself to just weep and let it all out instead of bottling it up and sweeping it under the rug? But no, she needed to be strong, not just for her ponies, but for the entire world that depended on her raising the sun. It wouldn't be fair to let her own grieving hinder others' lives. Only a terrible excuse for a leader would let their own pain interfere with the upkeep of their world.

We are a good leader. We do not allow our own petty personal problems to get in the way of running this nation. Friends are just... nuisances, distractions that should be avoided.

Romance... that was out of the question too. She had loved once, a long time ago. Still foolish by royal standards, still foolish by alicorn standards. He had been a unicorn scribe, every bit as amazing and caring as she was. It came as a surprise to nopony when they finally announced their courtship.

Marriage, the honeymoon... it was all one big beautiful blur to Celestia. So deep and abiding was her love for him that whenever the two were together, the sun shone brighter than it had in centuries. She had been a queen for such a wonderfully brief time, finally having a kind and noble king as her equal. The land was overcome with an almost alien peace – a golden age in every sense of the word.

He was still mortal, though. No amount of love, no matter how great, could change that. When he finally left this world, she was so hopelessly crushed, so completely torn down that the very sun flickered and died. She had to miss his funeral, orchestrating relief efforts for the mini-crises that had followed in the wake of the calamity. Her mind felt like it had simply imploded in her head like a dying star, so deeply had it shaken her. How she ran the entire country in the months following was a miracle crafted by equal parts chamomile tea and crying towels.

We learned our lesson. No, we won't fall into the blissful trap of love again.

Sure, she had had resorted to magic in a desperate attempt to preserve the ones she held close. She tried everything, from immortality brews to age reducing spells to time-stopping serums. Some failed, others failed catastrophically. In the end, she was still just as helpless (and her friends just as mortal) as before.

All she could do now was sit and remember, still staring wistfully at **her** sky. Alone.

She could, of course, still go out to Pinkie Pie's party. She could mingle with her ponies, let loose, drink some of the sweet apple cider her constituents spoke so highly of, have a good time. She wouldn't be lonely then. She wanted so badly to believe that something as simple as showing up to a party could even begin to solve all her problems.

But that was just wishful thinking.

Our people would be too busy bowing to enjoy the party. We can't put our own selfish desires above those of others. Besides, how would we ever be able to live down such uncouthness as an informal party?

No, she couldn't have a normal good time. She was far too regal to have fun, stuck in her own little bubble and forced to watch the world fly by from afar.

Oh well. We don't need fun anyway. Fun is simply mindless frivolity masked in smiles and sunshine.

Her own little bubble... now that she thought about it, it actually made a little bit of sense. The sight of so many of her friends and loved ones passing must have put so much stress on her mind that it just... snapped. While her appearance may have been able to keep up with the constantly shifting social landscape, her mind simply refused to adapt. It was, in a way, trapped in its own bubble in her head, far too weighed down by the past to live in the present – right from her coldly aloof refusal of friendship to the melancholy majestic plural voice in her head. Was the benevolent Princess Celestia that everypony knew and loved just a façade, a shell of a pony who had lived far past her mind's expiration date? That was a question she still didn't quite know the answer to.

It's also a question we don't need to know the answer to. And besides, we don't want to live in the present. There is no comfort in the here and now – only temporary pleasures that wilt far too soon for us to bear.

And so she sat on her worthless perch, staring into **her** worthless sunset, not a soul in sight to disturb her from her lonely lament. Sighing inwardly, she let her mind wander, feeling the peace of early evening wrap around her like a warm blanket. Alone, basking in **her** creation, she found the strangest bit of calm. At least she could find some form of solace in the emptiness that never seemed to leave her.

There, see? No pony but us now. We can enjoy this moment together, like we always have. We don't need any mortals to be happy.

A sudden, gentle tapping on the library door pulled her out of her reverie. "Um... hello?" The voice emanating from outside the library seemed as meek and gentle as that of a newborn foal. As much as the serenity of **her** sunset beckoned Celestia to stay at her perch, she still forced herself up and trotted inside the cozy library dwelling, eyes locked on the door as two more weak knocks reverberated through the tree.

Don't you dare answer that. Whatever it is, we're sure that it can be handled without our intervention.

"Hello? Princess? Are... are you there?" She recognized that voice immediately. That sweet, gentle, soft yet carrying melody belonged to none other than the Element of Kindness herself. She smiled a bit.

No, don't open that door. We won't allow it –

With a dim sizzle from her horn, the door swung open, revealing the timid pegasus. Her coat matched the backdrop of the sky near-perfectly. A transient ray of stray pink light bounced off her mane, intensifying its beautiful glow.

She spoke again. "Oh, hello Princess. I saw you leave the party a while ago, and I thought that something might have been wrong." Glancing at her worriedly, she added, "You are okay, right?"

Celestia's face brightened a bit. Fluttershy's caring nature was certainly on display now more than usual as she gazed at the princess, a concerned look in her crystalline cyan eyes.

She won't understand our troubles. Don't tell her anything.

"It's alright, my little pony. I'm... just fine." Celestia hated lying through her teeth to such a sweet, innocent thing like Fluttershy, but surely nopony would understand the problems that came along with being immortal. Whenever she tried explaining, they would only see the upsides to eternal life. Nopony ever thought about the future as a curse. To complete the ruse, she flashed a clearly forced smile.

Good, very good. Soon it will be just us.

"Oh, okay then. I just thought..." The timid pony hesitated. "Nevermind." She turned to leave, but spun back around before the princess had a chance to close the door. "Oh, wait! I almost forgot!" From beneath her wing she produced a small, blandly-colored paper bag. "Pinkie Pie brought out a cake right after you left. I didn't know if you wanted some or not, so I saved you a slice."

The forced smile on the princess's face melted, replaced by a small, wistful grin. Such a simple act wouldn't have stirred her interest on any other day. Yet this small, sugary treat somehow made her feel like the massive, empty hole in her heart had, even in the smallest bit, been filled.

By a slice of cake. How fitting.

"Uh, are you okay?" Fluttershy's caring instincts once again shone through even as she shrunk back into her mane. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have disturbed you. I-I'll go - "

"Wait!" Celestia nearly shouted a little too enthusiastically. For a moment, it crossed her mind that she sounded a tad desperate. Pushing the negativity out of her head, she tentatively trotted next to Fluttershy, lowering herself so that she was eye level with the

buttery yellow pegasus. She liked it best when she was low like this, looking ponies eye to eye as equal to equal, not goddess to subject.

"Fluttershy," she began wistfully, "thank you for the cake. It was... very nice of you to think of me."

"Well, it's just cake."

The alicorn sniffed, chuckling a bit as it finally dawned on her that she, the princess and goddess of the entire world, was getting emotionally conflicted over a piece of cake. "Yes... I guess so."

Taking this as her cue to leave, Fluttershy began to backpedal ever so slowly out of the tree home, her twinkling eyes still half-hidden behind her mane. "Well," she squeaked, "I'm glad you liked it. I'll just go now –"

"Wait..." Celestia's thoughts screamed with dripping malice, assaulted her mind with poignant rage.

How dare you do this to us? We do not need any mortal fools beside us. They will only leave us! In the end, it will be us, alone... again.

"Would you like to stay here for a while and watch the sunset with me?" She winked. Great stars, she *winked*. If she weren't so caught up in conversation she would have hit herself. "We can even share the cake, if you'd like."

For the first time since she arrived, the pegasus showed her face from behind her pink veil. "Oh, really? That sounds lovely." An errant cloud drifted by, blocking the sunlight and obscuring her face under a dark shroud. "Oh, but I'd hate to intrude –"

Fluttershy was cut off by a hearty laugh from the goddess. "Don't you worry. I can't think of a better way to spend the evening than with a friend."

No! She is not your friend! She will be dead and gone in the blink of an eye! We cannot allow this imposter to separate us!

"Maybe I want her to separate us..." mumbled the princess.

Fluttershy turned. "What was that, Princess?"

Now it was Celestia's turn to hide behind her mane, a small but noticeable blush on her cheeks. "Oh, nothing. Please," she gestured to the staircase leading to the balcony, "follow me."

As the two ascended the stairs, the princess turned to face the pink-maned pegasus. "And dispense with the formalities. Call me Celestia. Or Celly. Or Tia." She let out a barely contained chuckle. "Oh, I haven't been called Tia in ages."

That's because nopony's deserved to call us that in ages. What makes you think that this foolish pegasus is so high and mighty that she may address us like that? We deserve respect!

"Nopony has used that name since my last student..." A flood of warm memories hit her, enveloping her mind with thoughts of her past protégés. She would have drifted off into her own little world of nostalgia had Fluttershy not spoken up then.

"Oh, you've had students other than Twilight?"

"Many. But they weren't just students, Fluttershy. They were friends." The warm memories suddenly gave way to dark clouds, images of marble headstones, a lone, regal figure outlined against an icy rain, crying in the cold downpour as thunder rolled in the background like drums –

She shook herself. "But that was a long time ago." Her face returned to a cold, almost stoic expression. "Why don't we go upstairs?" Fluttershy just nodded her head and followed the figure of Celestia up the steps.

As they reached the balcony, Fluttershy took an unusually deep breath. As she stared in total amazement at the skyline, the princess stood beside her, watching her awestruck expression with mild amusement. **Her** sky had only gotten richer since she had last laid eyes on it, the gentle yellows and rolling pinks melding together in fluid tides of color that washed over them with radiance. Contrasting, biting oranges and reds sliced through the softness, piercing the sky with majestic undertones.

The goddess had seen the same sky far too many times to count, but for the timid pegasus beside her the beauty of the rich sky seemed to steal her ability to think, let alone speak for a moment. Finally, she managed to stutter out a tiny, "Oh my."

Celestia gazed wistfully at **her** sky. "Yes, that's the normal reaction. It's quite nice, isn't it?" A nod from her pegasus companion interrupted Celestia's thoughts. "Let's sit down, shall we?" With that, she curled up her legs and plopped down on the hardwood with a soft thump, allowing **her** sun to bathe her in color.

This sky is far too beautiful for such a simpleton as her. We are the only ones who should be able to be able to bask in it. She is... unworthy.

"Fluttershy?"

"Yes, Princess?"

"You enjoy this sunset, am I correct?"

The pegasus nodded meekly. "Oh, of course I do. I've always found sunsets very beautiful, this one especially."

The alabaster alicorn turned to her companion, eyes foggy in thought. "Why?"

"Um... *why*, Princess?"

"Yes." She gestured briefly at the lighted landscape below. "Why do you find pleasure in such short-lived elegance? Eventually the sun will set, and then you will be left with nothing but darkness. It is nothing but a fleeting beauty."

Fluttershy opened her mouth to respond, but no answer came. Screwing her face up in concentration, she rubbed her chin thoughtfully. Finally, she managed, "Well... I guess you are right. Once this sun sets, there will never be another one quite like it again. It's unfortunate, but it's just part of life."

Just part of life? That's the best she can come up with? We knew that these mortals could be simple minded, but please! A foal could've come up with better words.

"But," Celestia perked up a bit as the pegasus continued, "that's the beauty of it, too. There will be another sunset tomorrow, and the day after that, and the day after that. There may never be another one just like it ever again, but that only guarantees that there will be an even better one just around the corner." She looked up at the princess, the rays of light turning her blue eyes into rippling oceans. "Why focus on the end of one sunset when the start of another one is just a day away?"

The words took a moment to sink in. The princess bit her lip lightly, connecting the pieces of the poetic puzzle in her mind until the picture of realization finally formed. As much as she wanted to convince herself that friendship was out of her reach simply because of her immortality, the reality finally settled in that the only thing keeping her from finding friendship was herself.

Celestia turned to the pegasus, a sad smile on her face. "That... was very wise, Fluttershy. You are a very smart little pony." With that, she turned back to face the waning star and allowed it to warm her coat. Taking the cue, Fluttershy did the same, brushing against the princess slightly.

How dare you disobey? Who was there in your hour of need? Who was there for comfort when you had nopony? We were! We are the only thing you will ever need! You think you can replace us with these... these mortal fools? They will all leave us... we can't handle any more of it! We demand that –

Celestia shook her head lightly, letting her mane flutter in the wind as she did her best to ignore the thoughts from her head. She knew all too well that as long as she was alive that horrible voice would follow her. Wherever she went, whatever she did, her own conscience would remind her of the malicious truth of her existence. But for now, she could try to ignore it. For now, all she needed to worry about was herself, Fluttershy, and the sunset before them.

As the two sat, enjoying the view and each other's company, Celestia had an epiphany. Her lips curled upward in realization as the comforting rays of light bathed her form. She was no longer watching **her** sunset anymore. She finally had somepony to share it with. Somepony to admire it with her. It wasn't **her** sunset anymore.

It was **theirs**.