



A Day for Spike and Twilight

By Jetfire

“... so I need both of these delivered by the end of the day today. I know it's last minute... and I know you're supposed to have the day off... but it's a quick trip to Canterlot by air... and you're very fast...”

“Muffins!”

“And you're sure you have clearance for the Palace? You weren't just making that up, were you?”

“You can't handle the truth!”

A pair of violet eyes blinked, staring hard.

A pair of golden eyes, perpetually drifting opposite directions, blinked back.

Twilight Sparkle sighed. “Please, Derpy- I really need these packages delivered today. Are you *sure*?”

Derpy Hooves snapped her right front hoof up in a salute, her walleyed countenance growing serious. “Neither rain nor sleet nor snow nor dead of night!” For a brief moment, her eyes aligned. “I'll do it, Miss Sparkle!”

The lavender unicorn smiled; that was what she had been waiting for. “Thank you, Derpy. There's a half-dozen banana-nut muffins waiting for you when you get back, in addition to the usual rate.”

The gray pegasus gave her an enormous, friendly smile. She slapped one hoof against the satchel slung over her right side. Then, with a flap of her wings, she was airborne, her blond mane and tail fluttering in the breeze. With a flash of her bubble-emblazoned rump, she spun around, streaking away into the sky. Twilight watched her go, looked up, past Derpy, to the steep slope of Mount Equus, where the great shining city of Canterlot stood, perched like an eyrie on the mountain, its white towers and golden pinnacles glowing in the early morning sunlight. She so rarely came out to these lovely fields, just outside of Ponyville; the last time she'd been here was for Plowpony's Day. The view of the capital was spectacular.

I hope Derpy is quick, Twilight thought, turning around and heading back toward Ponyville. She was a day late as it was, but she hoped the two recipients of her gifts would not mind. Her midnight purple tail, shot through with a streak of hot pink, swished behind her as she trotted along; her mane, identically colored, wavered as she turned her head from side to side, admiring the beautiful wildflowers. She looked up at the sky again. It was late spring,

and the weather was gorgeous. Ponyville had a remarkable Weather Patrol for being so small, even if its ranks included the typically-lazy Rainbow Dash (and in the past few months even Dash had been extremely diligent). It rained when it was meant to rain, snowed when it was scheduled to snow, and at all other times the sky was cheery and bright, no small feat for being so close to the Everfree Forest. *Now*, she thought, *what to do?* Spike wouldn't expect her back for a while. The spirit of the recent holiday filled her, and she felt like taking a day off. *I should go see what the girls are up to!* With that, she turned at a bend in the road and headed in the direction of Sweet Apple Acres.

"Sorry, sugarcube," Applejack said, raising her voice from the midst of a swirling maelstrom of ponies of every size, shape and color. "But as you can see, I'm a mite busy lookin' after all the kin. Besides, I got plans for today."

"Applejack, the time to celebrate was yesterday!" Twilight called back, taking a moment to dodge a pair of colts hurtling by. "What more do you have to do?"

"Uh, let's see," the orange earth pony said, "I gotta help cook the big meal for Granny Smith, gotta- *Candy Apple you get offa that shed!* Gotta help serve the big meal for Granny Smith-"

"Wasn't that yesterday?"

"Naw," Applejack said. Her green eyes hinted at pain. "Yesterday... I had to spend some quiet time yesterday, out back."

Twilight's violet eyes softened. "Oh, right. I'm sorry."

"T'ain't no thing. But we're havin' our big lunch for Granny today, and it's gonna eat up all my time. I'm sorry, Twi. What say we go on walkabout tomorrow? We can chat aplenty then."

"That sounds fine," Twilight said, turning to go. "See you then, Applejack!"

"Rainbow Dash!" Twilight cried, shouting up at the floating mansion of clouds sprouting rainbow waterfalls. "Rainbow Dash, are you up there?"

No answer came. Twilight's horn shimmered, her hooves flickering with the spell. Then she focused on the landing of clouds just outside the house, picturing it in her mind. Her horn flashed, and in a burst of sparks she was standing on the fluffy white landing. Trotting across the cloud, she was about to knock on the door when she saw a note pinned to it by a small spark of lightning.

Gone To Cloudsdale

Be Back Tuesday

Twilight sighed.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, dearie," Mrs. Cake said sweetly, pausing to put a batch of cupcakes into the oven. "Pinkie Pie's out of town. She should be back later tonight, if you want to see her then!"

"That's all right, Mrs. Cake," Twilight said, though her eyes betrayed her disappointment. "I've still got plenty of friends I can spend time with."

A short while later, she was walking sadly away from the Carousel Boutique's front door, upon which a notice had been posted informing callers that the owner and her younger sister had family business in Hoofington and would not be back until late Monday night. The lavender unicorn trotted through town, headed for the Everfree Forest. Halfway there, she detoured off to the north, toward the picturesque little cottage built into a tree and nestled around an adorable little pond; it stood far at the end of the road. She arrived just in time to see a butter-yellow pegasus with a long, beautiful pink mane and tail trot out through the wooden door. She was wearing a pair of burlap saddlebags. "Oh," the pegasus said as she approached, "hello there, Twilight."

"Hello Fluttershy," Twilight Sparkle asked, "what are you doing?"

"Well, I was just on my way to the Everfree Forest. I have some... creatures I need to see."

"Do you want some company?" Twilight asked a bit too eagerly. "All the others are either busy or out of town so I was wondering..."

Fluttershy blinked her turquoise eyes, then shook her head. "I'm sorry, Twilight- it's not that I don't enjoy your company, but this is really a visit I need to make on my own."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure," Fluttershy said with unusual firmness.

"Oh," Twilight said, sadness creeping into her voice. "Well... how long do you think it will take?"

"Not terribly long," was her response, "but please don't wait for me to do something nice. There must be somepony, or some *other* creature, you could spend some time with... right?" Fluttershy gave her a gentle smile.

"Oh, I suppose," the lavender unicorn admitted. "Thank you anyway, Fluttershy. I'll see you later, okay?"

"Of course," Fluttershy said with a nod. She watched Twilight turn and go, then let out a breath. She'd played her part, and it hadn't been a lie, so she didn't feel so bad- and it was for a good cause. If she had fingers, she supposed she would cross them now. Flapping her wings, she sailed over her cottage and toward the dense forest to the west. There really were some creatures she needed to see today.

Twilight pushed open the door to the library with her magic, feeling dejected. What she had hoped would be a day of fun with her friends had turned into a day spent all by herself, in her library, with her books, the very thing she had been sent to Ponyville to avoid. "Spike?" she called.

"Heya, Twilight!" the little purple dragon said. He slid a book into one of the shelves high up in the wooden walls, then slowly climbed down the rolling ladder. "I was just cleaning up the library a little."

Twilight looked around. The library did in fact look clean. Indeed, it looked immaculate. "It looks wonderful, Spike," she said. "Thank you."

"Aww, don't mention it." He grinned a sharp-toothed grin. "So, what are you doing here? I thought you said after you mailed those packages you were going to spend some time in town."

"Well, I was going to see what the others were doing," and here she sounded sad again, "but they're all either busy or out of town. I guess that's what I get for thinking I can have some fun right after a holiday." Her ears drooped.

Spike put his hand to his chin, stroking it in the appearance of thought. His green reptilian eyes widened. "Hey, I've got an idea!"

"Yes?" Twilight said, looking over at him.

Spike put his hands behind his back. "Well..." he gazed at the floor, "I don't think you and I have really hung out together in a while, just the two of us I mean. If all your friends are busy..."

"Oh, Spike, why didn't I think of that?" the lavender unicorn said, her mood brightening. He was right- she really *hadn't* spent much time with Spike in a while. It made her feel a little guilty now, actually. "I'd love to spend some time with you. You're my friend too, you know!"

"Really? That's great!" Spike said with an eager smile. He looked excitedly at her. "So... what do you want to do?"

Twilight Sparkle thought for a moment. "I don't know, Spike, what do you want to do?"

"Well, it is getting close to lunch time," the little purple dragon reminded her. "So I was thinking maybe we could have a picnic?"

"That sounds like fun!" Twilight said.

"I've already got it almost packed!"

"Now that you mention it," the lavender unicorn said, "I've got a spot in mind that we could go to. Would you mind if I took some supplies from my laboratory? Maybe I can combine my research with our picnic."

"Is this the research about those magical healing plants?" Spike asked. "I'd be happy to help out, if you need it."

"That would be wonderful, Spike," Twilight said.

A short while later, Spike was carrying a picnic basket with his short arms and following Twilight Sparkle out of Ponyville to the west, across some rolling green hills. Reflecting on the weather again, Twilight realized it was perfect for a picnic: there was no rain scheduled, it was warm, not hot, and there was almost no breeze. They finally halted on top of a hill where an old bur oak stood, its enormous trunk towering over them, its great, broad branches shading the surrounding grass. The lavender unicorn turned to him. "This is the place. What do you think?"

"This is great!" Spike said happily, setting the basket down. He opened it and began to rummage through its contents. "I made you a petunia sandwich, and I made a summer salad, too."

Twilight arched an eyebrow. "How did you make a summer salad in spring?" She removed her white saddlebags and set them by the trunk of the tree.

"I got lucky and found some strawberries at the market," the little purple dragon replied, taking out a large wooden bowl with a wooden lid on top. "They were also selling fresh feta that day, so it just sort of came together." Raising his head, he happened to look westward, and was surprised to see how nearby the dark mass of the forest was. "Aren't we a little close to the Everfree Forest?"

"That's on purpose," Twilight said, using her magic to remove a checkered blanket from the basket and spread it across the grass. "It occurred to me as we were walking that I really could use your help. Remember when I was sick and Zecora sent you into the forest to get some poison joke?"

"I really wish I *didn't* remember," Spike said. He didn't like to think about all the pain Twilight had endured.

"Well the poison joke didn't affect you, did it?"

"Nope," the little purple dragon replied. "I don't think it could get through my scales."

"Then you can get some more, right?" Twilight asked. She levitated her sandwich, wrapped in paper, out of the basket. "I need to study a poison joke plant for my research, but I don't want to risk getting too close to it after what happened last time."

"Heh," Spike chuckled, "wouldn't want to see Twilight Flopple again?"

"I'll pass," the lavender unicorn said with a smile. She levitated another wrapped parcel out of the basket. "Is this yours?"

"Yep!" Spike said, taking it out of the air. Unwrapping it, he revealed a rock split down the middle. He cracked it open and showed her the insides, filled with glistening purple crystal. "I found a geode the last time I went gem-hunting with Rarity! I've been saving it for something like today." He licked his lips. "Mmmmm, it's like a pastry with cream filling...."

"I'm sure it looks delicious to a dragon," Twilight said. Her stomach grumbled. "All right, let's dig in! I don't think I can wait much more, this sandwich looks great." She picked it up between her hooves and took a bite. Spike crunched up a mouthful of crystal.

"Hey, Twilight," Spike asked a few minutes later, "why do you want to study poison joke?"

"Because poison joke is a magivascular plant," the lavender unicorn explained. "You remember the Beneviolet, right?"

"Do I ever," Spike replied. "That thing was a lifesaver- literally!"

"I know I won't forget," Twilight Sparkle said. "I wouldn't be alive today without it." Pain flashed across Spike's face, but he suppressed it. "After all that happened, I got curious about just how the Beneviolet worked- how it had the power to heal me- so I started doing some research. As the *Super Naturals* book explained, Beneviolets belong to a very small family of plants called magivascular plants."

"Magi-what?" Spike asked.

"Magivascular," Twilight repeated, her voice growing eager as it always did when she was teaching. Opening one of her saddlebags, she used her telekinesis to lift out a large brown book and open it to a marked page, covered in an illustration of a dissected plant. "Most plants have an interior mechanism called a vascular system, which draws water and nutrients out of the environment and then transports them through the stem and the leaves and the flowers of the plant." She flipped through a few pages more, stopping at an illustration: a series of lines running through a plant, highlighted in blue. "A select few species of plants have a secondary vascular system, bound around the primary one, that piggybacks off it, but where the primary vascular system draws in raw nutritional stock, this vascular system draws in etheric energy-magic. It's similar to the magic circuit that's found in unicorns. It works by ionizing conduits through cellular..." she saw Spike begin to look lost, so she just smiled. "It draws in and lets out magic just like of a unicorn. The Beneviolet is one of these plants, and I've recently found out that poison joke is another. Since I can't easily get another Beneviolet, I've determined that I'm going to study a poison joke plant. They should be fundamentally the same, at least as their secondary vascular systems are concerned."

"That's pretty cool, I guess," the little purple dragon said. "So what are you going to do with what you learn?"

"Write it down, I suppose," Twilight said. "If I can learn enough about how these plants store and conduct magic, I might be able to figure out how to make medicines from them, but even if I can't, I'll be happy just to learn more about how they work."

Spike smiled at that. Some ponies talked about how they loved learning for its own sake, but Twilight really did. Truth be told, she had rubbed off on him. He would find himself organizing the encyclopedias or the scholarly journals, then break off his work to flip through them, looking for something interesting or cool. There was no particular reason for it- he had simply grown to enjoy learning new things. It also reminded him of his younger days, curled up with Twilight in her room, watching her point at things in the encyclopedia and explain them to him, even though she sometimes barely understood them herself. He had never gone to school like she had, but she had always tried to make him learn, and she had mostly succeeded.

Twilight Sparkle finished her sandwich with a final bite, chewing thoughtfully as she gazed upon Spike. She was having a wonderful time, as good a time as she could conceive of having with any of her other friends. A flicker of worry passed across her mind at that, because Spike *wasn't* just any friend. She had known him since his birth, had in fact been responsible for his birth- it was her burst of magical power that had hatched him from his egg. They had been inseparable ever since, he so often following after her that Princess Celestia had once joked that he was her shadow. Yet she worried, from time to time, that there was a distance between them, a gap that she hadn't worked hard enough to fill. He had been with her so long, rarely complaining, always by her side. Did she appreciate it? Did she really? "Hey, Spike?"

"Yeah?" he said, chewing up the last bit of his geode.

Twilight took a deep breath. "VRoooAAAArrrr-G-G-G
BiiiiVVVVVVvvvvVVVaaaa TtTtTtTAAaaaAAA GAAAACCCK-K-
KRRRRREEEEEEEEEEeeeEEEEEEE."

Spike's face lit up with pure glee. "ZZEEEEEEeeeeeeAAAAAAAAAAAA
VGoooooooouuUUUUUrrrrRRR VVVVVAAAAA MmmmG-G-Ka!"

<How am I doing?> Twilight asked. <It's been a while since I've spoken Draketongue. I'm probably out of practice.>

<You seem fine to me,> Spike sang. <Of course, I wouldn't know; you're the one who *taught* me, remember? I can't really judge.>

Twilight smiled. <So you don't have an ear for your own language?>

<I've never heard it enough to pick up an ear,> he sang. <Equestrian is my language... even though I wish I could speak Draketongue like a native.> His green reptilian eyes grew troubled. <Shouldn't I be able to?>

Twilight looked gently at him. <You sound fine to me.>

Dragons, as a whole, were violent, terse, and ill-tempered, prone to vanity and possessing a general disdain for any creature smaller than they. It was therefore easy to forget that they had one of the most beautiful languages in the world. Many of the world's languages- Equestrian, Laewtil, Zebrahi, Lopetongue and more- were phonetic languages. Their words were made up of sounds that were formed by the differing shapes of the mouth, a vast number of complex sounds denoting tense, parts of speech, first- second- and third-creature, and much more. Draketongue, by contrast, was a tonal language. It had fewer distinct words and far fewer mouth sounds than the average language, because a huge amount of information was conveyed by the pitch and the tone of the word being spoken. The same 'word' in Draketongue could have more than a dozen different meanings depending on *how* it was said. The dragons enhanced this harmonic aspect of their language by carrying one or more melodies around their entire sentence, monologue, or speech, overarching tones that would convey a general mood. Dragons didn't just speak their native tongue- they *sang* it. Princess Celestia had told Twilight Sparkle that at night, in Carcosa, the mountains rang with the singing of dragons.

<Maybe I should be breaking into song with you girls more often,> Spike sang, switching his pitch to a more forlorn one to convey disappointment. <I'm a little out of practice when it comes to singing.>

<You're doing great!> Twilight sang with a smile. <You've got the broad tones down better than I do. It's got to come more naturally to you than it does to me.> In fact, Spike and Twilight weren't speaking proper Draketongue, but a modified form of it. The full language included tones that their small lungs and vocal chords weren't capable of making. Even Princess Celestia couldn't sing full Draketongue without the aid of her magic. "Some day, Spike," she switched back to Equestrian, "some day I'll take you to Carcosa. I promise."

"Aww, Twilight, you don't have to do that," the little purple dragon said. "Equestria is where I've grown up. I'm fine here."

"But don't you want to be with your own kind? Even just to visit?" Twilight asked.

"*You* are my own kind, Twilight," Spike said, looking seriously at her. "You..." his gaze faltered. "You're the one who hatched me. You're the one who's looked after me all this time."

"You can't spend your whole life around ponies, Spike," Twilight said.

"I've spent my whole life around you, and I haven't regretted it one bit."

A tremor ran up Twilight's spine. "We... we should probably eat your salad," she said softly.

"That's a good idea," Spike said, taking the lid off the wooden bowl. He dished it up in silence, and they ate in the uneasy quiet.

After cleaning up the picnic, Spike followed Twilight down the hill and towards the Everfree Forest, hoping he hadn't ruined the mood of the day. The lavender unicorn said nothing during the walk, but she was in brighter spirits by the time they reached the forest's entrance, her horn glowing as she searched for a patch of poison joke. In short while, she found a spread of the bright blue plants, and with a smile and a nod she ushered Spike toward them. "You said they don't affect you, right? I only need one."

"You got it!" Spike said, setting the basket down and strutting boldly into the poison joke. He searched about for a moment, looking for just the right stalk of blue leaves. Seeing a sprig prim and bright, he plucked it, barely noticing the magical plants brushing against his scales. "Here you go, Twilight!" he said brightly, walking out of the patch.

"Hold on there, Spike," Twilight said, taking several steps backward. "I don't want my horn to go all funny again." She levitated a small bag out of the picnic basket. "Put it in here." Spike did so. "Now we just need to get back to the library and I can start cutting into it!"

"Do you need any help?" Spike asked.

"I might, actually," Twilight said. "Are you volunteering?"

"Anything you need, I'm on it!" Spike said.

"Are you sure?" Twilight asked. "I... I don't want you to get bored..."

"Twilight, I want to spend time with you today. I promise I won't be bored," Spike said, looking earnestly into her eyes.

That look... Twilight glanced away. "We should get going," she said. "The sun's not..." well, it was only early afternoon. "I mean, we've got a lot of work to do- not that you have to if you don't want to!" she hastily added.

Spike laughed. "Come on, you- let's go science." He headed past her.

Twilight followed him, trying to understand what was going on. Spike was in an unusual mood today. They had built a comfortable relationship over the years, one that had rarely been interrupted through all her studies and all his time in her service. Granted, it wasn't so long ago that she had been afflicted with Horn Rot, and he had acted very strangely then, but she had hoped with her return to health they could reclaim their typical rapport. Yet now, or at least since lunch, he was treating her... delicately. He seemed to be carefully watching her face every time he talked, as if trying to read her reaction to his slightest act. It was cute, she had to admit, but it also worried her. *Does he have something he needs to tell me?*, she wondered. He could sometimes be fidgety when he was keeping secrets. *I hope it's nothing bad. He knows he doesn't need to lie to me.* After the incident with Owloysious, she had made him promise never to lie to her again.

Reaching the library, Spike toddled through the open door and was about to head to the kitchen, when Twilight's magic pulled the picnic basket from his hands. "I'll get it, Spike," she said. "You go down to the lab and set up the exam slab." He nodded wordlessly and headed down the stairs to the basement, clutching the sack in one hand.

Clopping down the stairs, the lavender unicorn saw her exam table already set up, her microscope ready to one side, the poison joke laid out on a stone slab, scalpels and calipers and pins set neatly to either side. A large magnifying glass on a metal arm hung over the table, and a bright firefly light fixture was close above. "Thank you, Spike," she said, finding him standing attentively nearby. "You don't have to stay- go off and do something fun."

"But I want to stay, I said so," Spike said. He looked worried. "Unless you don't want me to, I mean."

There was that nervousness again. Twilight smiled, hoping she looked gentle. "Spike, you're welcome to stay. I just don't want you to be bored."

"I never get to watch you work down here!" he said. "I've always wanted to see it."

"Then here, let me get you some goggles," she said, using her magic to float two pairs of goggles off nearby pegs. One pair she slipped over her own eyes, the other she levitated to Spike, who proceeded to don them as well. He grabbed a nearby stool and set it next to her, hopping onto it so he could see up on the table. Twilight stood over the poison joke and picked up a scalpel with her telekinesis. "Now, we want to start by making an incision right down the stem to expose the vascular tissue. However, we have to be careful- I don't

know the exact biology of magivascular plants, and I don't want to cut the etheric vascular tissue by accident. We'll try and stop at the ground tissue-

"What's that?" Spike asked.

"It separates the outer surface of the stem from the vascular tissue. The outer layer of a plant stem is called dermal tissue, and it acts like the layer of skin that covers animals- or scales, in your case. Then comes the ground tissue, which helps provide structural support. The vascular tissue typically lies at the center of the stem in a plant like poison joke. It's usually contained in a matrix called pith." Narrowing her eyes, Twilight carefully cut into the stem of the blue-leafed plant with her scalpel. She grabbed two pins with her magic and left them floating beside her, ready to be stuck into the cut to hold it open when she was satisfied. "It looks here like the ground tissue may be permeated with the etheric vascular tissue." She leaned in closer, and she felt her horn tingle. "I'm definitely picking up magic from these blue striated surfaces." She levitated a yellow quill waiting nearby, dipped it into an inkwell, and wrote on the pages of an open notebook.

"What does 'striated' mean?" Spike asked.

"It means 'striped' or 'furrowed.' See in here?" Twilight lowered the magnifying glass with her magic. "These blue veiny lines that run along the surface of the ground tissue?"

"I see!" the little purple dragon said excitedly, leaning over the table.

"Instead of cutting further, I want to leave them intact and test their magical reactivity. If you'll get my ether nodes..."

They worked together for hours, Spike peppering Twilight Sparkle with questions she was happy to answer. His inquiries probably made the investigation last longer than it otherwise would have, but Twilight didn't mind. She loved to teach as much as she loved to learn. He seemed to enjoy himself as well, eagerly helping her with whatever she required. When she finally closed her notebook, it was full of notes and drawings and scribbles along the margins. Ascending the stairs close behind Spike, she emerged in the library surprised to see the windows dark with night. To further illustrate the advance of time, her stomach gurgled.

"Hungry?" Spike asked.

"A little," she admitted.

"I think there's some fruit salad in the fridge," he said, toddling toward the kitchen. "It's from the Feeling Better Again party that Pinkie Pie threw for you, so it's a little old..."

"Then we should probably eat it," the lavender unicorn said, trotting through the kitchen door. Spike was already pulling the big ceramic bowl out of the refrigerator, so she opened a drawer and pulled out two place-mats. "Hey, Spike?" she asked, setting them on the table. She hoped she wouldn't regret asking this.

"Yeah?" Spike put the fruit salad on the table.

"Did you..." she paused. "Did you mean it when you said you didn't want to go to Carcosa?"

Spike's green reptilian eyes met her purple pupils with intense focus. "Well... yeah, I guess." He broke his stare and pulled back a chair for her. "I mean, I don't need to go. Sure, I'd kind of like to see it some day. But if I never get to, I won't mind. I like Equestria."

"But Spike..." Twilight realized she had very quickly moved into uneasy territory- into matters she had hoped to avoid discussing, matters she had always avoided discussing in the past. "Spike, I think it would do you some good to be around other dragons. I can't imagine what it must be like for you, growing up being the only one of your kind."

The little purple dragon hesitated for a moment. "I haven't really minded. You know that. I've always had you-"

"Spike, I'm not going to be around forever!" Twilight cried, her heart growing heavy. "You're a baby dragon, and you've been a baby dragon for almost fifteen years." She had to push through now. It was time to have this talk, even if she hated it. "You're probably going to live to be more than a thousand years old. If I'm *really* lucky, I'll make it to one hundred. You won't even be full grown by the time I..."

"Please don't say that," Spike said softly. He clutched his claws together apprehensively- holding something he was afraid he would break. "Twilight, I know. You don't have to tell me." His green eyes looked away from her. "I know some day you're going to... to die."

Twilight stepped closer to him. "So you have to understand what I'm talking about. You need to learn about the creatures that are going to be there

for you when I'm not. You need to begin making connections among your own kind."

Spike sighed. "If I say I'll think about it, can we drop this for now? I really don't want to talk about it."

The lavender unicorn nodded. "I understand, Spike. I don't like to think about it either. But it is something we can't avoid, because it is going to happen, whether we like it or not."

"I know," Spike said. He grabbed the chair again and pulled it out further. "So are you gonna sit down, or what?"

Twilight smiled. "Such a gentleman- how can I resist?" She tried to flutter her eyelashes like Rarity, but Spike just laughed, and she joined in. Taking the seat he offered her, Twilight used her magic to levitate a serving of fruit onto her plate, then did the same for Spike. He started talking about the research he had helped her do, and she was happy to oblige him, eager to move on from the subject of his future. She knew she had to broach it sooner or later, but she still hated it. Spike had been with her his entire life, which was a huge chunk of her own life. She had grown to rely on him as an assistant, but more deeply, she had grown to rely on his presence. Spike was like... what was he? She had to think about that a little bit. He was an assistant, but more than that. He was a friend, but more than that. Was he family?

After the salad was finished, she helped him do the dishes, and as he was drying off one of the plates, he looked sidelong at her, and smiled. "Hey Twilight, you know what this reminds me of?"

"What?" Twilight Sparkle asked.

"This reminds me of when your dad hadn't gotten home yet, and your mom had to work late. Remember when that would happen, and we'd be all alone in the house?"

Twilight smiled. "Of course- it seemed to happen a lot more as we got older. Mom worked so hard. I'm glad she seems to be taking it easier these days."

The little purple dragon arched an eyebrow. "Do you remember what we used to do when we were alone?"

Twilight thought for a moment. When they had been all alone in her house, they had- she gasped in delight. "Do you want to?!"

"That's what I was thinking," Spike said.

"But we don't have the record..."

"Oh yes we do!" Spike proclaimed. "I found it last week at a yard sale."

"Oh boy!" A surge of exciting nostalgia filled her heart. "I'll get the phonograph!"

The two of them dashed from the kitchen. Twilight cantered to the closet on the western wall of the library. Shoving the door open, she quickly saw the wooden record player, its horn an ornate flower branching from the square turntable. Using her telekinesis, she floated it out into the library, setting it on a table near the middle of the large room. Spike was hopping down the stairs at that moment, and when he reached the bottom step he proudly lifted a dark sleeve with the gray illustration of a pegasus pony playing a saxophone. Flowing script on the cover proudly proclaimed, *Saxy Smith & His Quartet Go To Work*. "You ready?" Spike said.

Twilight fidgeted excitedly in place. "Let's go!"

Spike toddled over to the phonograph, having to climb up on the table to reach it properly. He removed the record from its sleeve and set it on the turntable. Twilight used her magic to switch the device on, then lifted the needle up onto the spinning black disc, fitting it into a groove. The unicorn and the baby dragon stared at each other in anticipation.

A whirlwind saxophone solo burst from the phonograph's horn. Twilight Sparkle rapidly sidestepped, spinning around and rearing back on her hind legs. Spike slid beneath her, then bounced to his feet and stepped in and out. The saxophone was joined by a bass, a piano, and two trumpets, streaking off at blazing speed and dizzying complexity. Twilight and Spike threw themselves into dancing. They followed no particular dance, with no particular order; they let the jazz carry them, letting the swing notes and the improvisations dictate their steps. What they did keep track of was each other, each moving in reflection of the other's movements, just as they had when they were both much younger, when dancing in the house had been an act of rebellion.

As the last few notes of the final movement withered in the air, they were breathing hard. They were also grinning from ear to ear. "That was so much fun!" Twilight cried. "I'd forgotten how much fun that was!"

"You're telling me!" Spike said. "You've still got it, sister."

"Do you want to do it again?"

"Sure!" Spike said. "You pick the record this time. I know we've got more jazz."

"It's in the closet here," the lavender unicorn said, trotting over to the closet where she'd found the phonograph. Opening the door, she stuck her head through some of the boxes, searching until she found a cardboard box filled with records. Carrying it out of the closet with her magic, she set it down, pried it open, and began to rifle through it.

Spike was quiet as she worked- at least, she didn't hear any noise from him. Not until he spoke behind her, very softly. "Hey... Twilight?"

"Yes, Spike?" Twilight did not turn around.

"I know it's a day late.... but..."

"Spike, what is it?" Twilight asked. She turned to face him. "What are you..." she stopped.

Spike was holding a small white box wrapped in red ribbon. He smiled sheepishly and offered it to her. "Happy Mother's Day."

Twilight's breath hitched.

"I know," Spike said, disappointment crossing his face. "I started to think... after everything we've talked about... that I shouldn't give it to you. You're right: I'm not a pony, and you're not a dragon. Some day I probably will have to leave Equestria, go be with other dragons. You're right, you're not going to be around forever. But..." his green eyes wavered. "I wanted to give you something to let you know how I feel about you. You've always been there for me. You raised me when I was little, you taught me how to read and how to talk and a whole bunch of other stuff, you've always given me a home... you've always loved me, Twilight. I... I'll never know the dragon who laid my egg. But I know the pony who's my mother." He glanced eagerly at Twilight Sparkle. Her face was scrunched up and contorted. He looked at the ground. "I know you don't feel that way about me..."

"Oh, Spike!" Twilight cried, barreling into him. They toppled to the ground. She rolled over onto her back, clutching him in her front legs, and she hugged him tightly to her chest. "Oh, Spike! I love you! I love you, Spike! Never forget that I love you!" She leaned her head against his. Spike could feel the tears on her cheek. She kissed him on top of his head.

The little purple dragon closed his eyes and leaned into her. He could hear her heart beating. It was the most soothing sound he knew; he had always fallen asleep to it when he was very small, when a much younger Twilight had curled up beside him in his crib. Twilight sniffled and sobbed into him, still holding him tightly to her chest. He wished he could stay like this forever. He did eventually open his eyes. "So... are you going to open it?"

"Oh," Twilight said shakily. With great reluctance she released him, rolling over onto her stomach. The box had fallen to the floor. Grabbing it between her hooves, she undid the ribbon and pulled off the lid. She gasped again: inside was a beautiful horn ring, made from gold and set with rubies. "Spike... this is beautiful," she whispered. "Thank you so much."

"I know it's a little fancy," he said, "but I figure there's got to be other fancy parties you're going to, right?"

"I... suppose so," Twilight said quietly. Spike suddenly yawned loud and deep. She looked at him with a gentle smile. "You should probably get to bed. It's late."

"I..." he blinked, eyelids drooping. "We're not done with the dishes..."

"I'll finish them. You've been so sweet today." She rose to her hooves, stepping closer to him. "You need your rest. I'll be up shortly." She kissed him on the forehead again. "Never forget, Spike. Please never forget."

His green eyes wavered. "I won't. I promise." He reached up on his tiptoes and planted a kiss on her cheek. "Good night, Twilight."

"Good night, Spike. Sweet dreams."

The little purple dragon ascended the stairs and wandered down the darkened hallway. He was in such a state of trembling he almost forgot to brush his teeth, but a quick trip to the bathroom rectified that. Reaching his and Twilight's room, he was about to pull back the covers in his basket when there was a tapping on the window. He turned to see the dim shape of a pegasus pony fluttering just outside. Grinning, he hopped up onto Twilight's bed and opened the window. "Hey there, Rainbow Dash!"

Dash smiled. "So? How'd it go?"

"It went great!" He looked down past her to the ground. Rarity, Fluttershy, Applejack, and Pinkie Pie were standing at the base of the tree, smiling happily and peacefully. He waved at them. "Thank you all so much for your help!"

"T'weren't nothin', sugarcube," Applejack said. "It's the least we could do. Shoot, I really was busy- I just had to pretend to be busier."

"It wasn't really lying," Fluttershy added. "We all just made sure we had things to do and places to be today." The butter-yellow pegasus smiled. "So Twilight is happy?"

"I... I think so," Spike said. "She did cry..."

"Because she knows how much you love her, of course!" Pinkie Pie exclaimed. "When two ponies or a pony and a dragon or a dragon and some other thing have the most super-fantastical love for each other, they can't help but explode with joy! That's what happy tears are!"

"She liked her ring, didn't she?" Rarity asked.

"She sure did! Thank you so much for helping me pick it out, Rarity!"

The white unicorn fluffed a curl of her violet mane. "I knew rubies would look good on that girl. I can't wait to design her a dress to accent it." She was already thinking of ideas.

"Tomorrow, let's all go to breakfast," Rainbow Dash said, fluttering back to the ground. "You too, Spike. We should probably tell Twilight what we were up to."

"That sounds..." Spike yawned. "That sounds... great."

"Get some sleep, Spikey!" Pinkie said. "We'll see you right on the morrow!"

"Thank you girls so much, again," the little purple dragon said. "Good night, all of you." He shut the window.

"I'm so happy it worked out," Fluttershy said.

"They make a cool family, don't they?" Dash remarked.

"Always did," Applejack agreed. "I'm surprised Twilight ain't seen it before now."

"She's still very young," Rarity said. They all began to depart, going their separate ways. "Shall we plan to meet at the library tomorrow?"

"First thing!" Pinkie Pie exclaimed, bouncing off.

Back in the library, Twilight Sparkle exited the kitchen, all the dishes washed and dried. The horn ring was lying on the floor near the stairs. She trotted to it, slowing to a walk, then barely a crawl. Part of her felt... frightened. She was skittish going near it. Finally drawing close, she sat down beside it. She rolled over onto her back, picking up the ring between her front hooves. "Mother," she whispered. *He thinks I'm his mother.* There was the other, self-evident side of that declaration: Spike had not only declared her his mother, he had declared himself her son. Her heart was flooding with a thousand new emotions. It was so unexpected.

Mother... She hadn't thought much about it. When she thought of mothers, she thought about... well, her mother. Princess Celestia, too- which is why she'd given both of them gifts for Mother's Day. Mothers were older mares, mothers were wise and gentle and kind. She? She was no mother. She was clumsy and stubborn and stupid and *young*. Sure, she had always thought that if she met the right stallion, if she fell in love, she would get married, have a foal, maybe two. That had always been in the future, though- it had always been something that would happen to *another* Twilight Sparkle, one so different from her that they were scarcely the same pony.

I'm not ready... I can't be his mother! I'm not wise enough, I don't know how to raise a son, I- oh gosh, is he learning enough? Have I taught him to be good? Have I taught him to be brave? She was terrified now. She had used Spike as an assistant and treated him as a friend. That wasn't enough! Shouldn't she have been doing something more?

A memory slowly floated to the surface of her mind. *She was still dancing excitedly beside her parents. She hadn't just gotten into Princess Celestia's school- she was going to be her personal student! And she had gotten her cutie mark! This was the best day ever!*

Finally settling herself, Twilight glanced back toward Princess Celestia, ready to thank her all over again. The Princess, however, had moved over to the wreckage of the wooden cart. The unicorn mages who had sat for her examination were likewise gathered around the destroyed cart, and just as Twilight looked their way, the door on the far side of the room opened. Two new unicorns entered: a dark brown stallion with a sky-blue mane and tail, and a dark green mare with a white mane and tail. They both wore golden circlets around their heads. Celestia smiled. "Starcatcher, Wizenbach, thank you for coming on such short notice."

The new unicorns bowed low. "We are ever at your service, My Princess," the dark green unicorn said. "Though I was intrigued by your summons- you spoke of a dilemma?"

"The dilemma is this," the white winged unicorn nodded her snout downward. The tiny purple dragon lay on the floor amid the piled straw, sucking his tail and gazing up at the sun goddess with brilliant green eyes.

"Ah, dear," the dark brown unicorn murmured.

"I don't understand how this could have happened," the yellow unicorn who had examined Twilight stammered. "The point of the exam is to see how the egg reacts to each potential student's magic. No pony was actually supposed to **hatch** it!"

"So now we have a baby dragon on our hands," the dark brown unicorn murmured.

"More than a baby dragon even, Master Starcatcher," the gray unicorn mage said. "Look... it's **purple**. You know what **that** means."

The dark green unicorn, Wizenbach, rubbed her lower jaw with her front hoof. "Where did the egg come from?"

"I'm not sure," the blue unicorn mage admitted. "The egg exam has been given since the foundation of the school, some four hundred years ago. We've always used the same egg as far as I know."

"The egg was a gift from me," Celestia said. "And I took it from Glaurâg when I laid him low."

"You stole the dragon emperor's egg?" Starcatcher said.

"To steal it would imply that someone wanted it," the Regent of the Sun explained. "Glaurâg's death meant that a new emperor would be chosen, and when a new bloodline ascends to the throne in Carcosa, it is tradition to exterminate all members of the old bloodline." She gazed gently down at the infant dragon. "I suppose, if anything, I saved it."

"But if that's true, then no dragon is going to want it now," Wizenbach said. "Delivering him back to Carcosa would be to hand him to his death."

"Much as we should care about the infant's welfare," Starcatcher said, "we must think of Equestria's welfare as well. Never mind whether the dragon will be

wanted or not- what's Ancalagon going to think when we reveal that we've been keeping a dragon egg all this time? To say nothing of a **purple** infant dragon."

"Heh, we could cast a spell and change the color of his scales," the yellow unicorn mage said with some levity.

"It wouldn't hide his true color when he started to grow," the gray unicorn mage replied.

"Any dragon in pony hooves is going to be a problem when Ancalagon hears of it," Starcatcher said. "Relations between Equestria and Carcosa have never been friendly. This will just make it worse."

"What are you talking about?" a small voice interrupted the talk. Celestia and the older unicorns turned to see the young lavender unicorn standing just outside the circle. Her purple eyes flitted from their faces to the infant dragon, who had fallen asleep. "Are you talking about the baby?"

Celestia smiled. "Yes we are, Twilight Sparkle. I'm afraid this baby dragon has been in his egg for a very long time, and we have no idea where his parents are. We are not sure what to do with him. We may try to send him back to Carcosa, the dragon homeland."

"But if he doesn't have a mom and dad, who's going to take care of him?" Twilight asked.

The princess blinked her magenta eyes gently. "We will certainly try to find him a foster family..."

"But..." Twilight looked between the princess' legs at the sleeping baby. "Aren't dragons mean? Especially to strangers?"

"Only if they're taught to be," Celestia said gently. "A dragon is no different from a pony when it comes to who they are. If they are loved, they can love in turn."

"Then why can't he stay here?" the little lavender unicorn asked.

The Regent of the Sun sighed. "It would be very difficult for a pony to raise a dragon, little Twilight."

"I don't think so!" Twilight exclaimed. "I bet I could look after him!"

"That's quite a bit more responsibility than you can handle, dearie," the yellow unicorn mage said.

"But... I don't want him to not have a family," Twilight Sparkle said. "And I... I hatched him! Isn't he already my responsibility?"

"It's not a burden you are prepared to bear, young one," the gray unicorn mage said.

"Yes I can! I know I can!"

"Hmmm," the dark green unicorn murmured.

"A thought?" Starcatcher leaned his head toward her.

"It occurs to me that keeping the baby might not be a bad idea," Wizenbach said. "What Ancalagon doesn't know won't hurt him. It's as you said, Your Highness- a dragon shown love can be loving. I don't see why he would be violent or cruel if he were not raised to be. By the time he's old enough to be noticeable, we can just say he's one of the regular dragons in Equestria."

"It would save his life, as well," Celestia said. She turned back to the baby dragon. She smiled. "I did enough harm to this one's family, however necessary it was. With this, perhaps I can make amends." She glanced back at the little lavender unicorn. "Twilight Sparkle, you said you would be willing to look after this young dragon. Did you mean it?"

"Oh, yes, Princess!" Twilight exclaimed, bowing low.

"You must understand, Twilight, that a baby is not like a pet. He will need more than food and shelter and care. He will need somepony to teach him, somepony to help him grow strong, but also to grow kind. He will need somepony to be the most important pony in his life. Can you do that?"

"I know I can, Your Highness! I promise!" Twilight cried.

"My Princess," Starcatcher trotted close and whispered. "Surely it would be better to find an older pony- better yet, a married couple that has experience raising children."

"No, good sir Starcatcher," Celestia said with a smile, "it would not." Twilight had trotted past both of them, and was now sitting on the ground before the sleeping baby dragon, gently stroking him with her hoof. "Nopony could love him like this one."

"Mother..." Twilight whispered again. Why didn't I see it before? She had raised him from infancy. Her mother and father had helped when help had been

needed, but she had tried to do as much as she could herself. She had fed him and bathed him and taught him. He had been her assistant for years now, but only because she had prepared him to be. *I already **am** a mother*, she thought. All her desires to plan and organize and study on the subject were irrelevant. She couldn't prepare for it, because it was happening right now. Maybe that's how being a parent worked. Maybe you weren't supposed to know how to do it before it happened. Maybe... maybe... you were supposed to learn and grow as much as your child. *As much as my son*.

Twilight used her magic to levitate the horn ring. She slipped it onto her horn, where it proved to be a perfect fit. Climbing the stairs, she trotted down the hallway and pushed open the door to her room. Spike was lying in his basket, the covers pulled tightly over him. A surging tightness filled her chest when she saw him. Spike had recognized the love between them for what it was, even when she had not. Had he learned that perceptiveness from her, or was it something he was born with? All she knew was that to have such a wonderfully smart, kind, and loving young dragon claim her as his filled her with pride and love. "My beautiful boy..." she whispered. She walked quietly over to him and kissed him softly on the forehead. Things would never be the same between them now.

Pulling back the covers of her bed, Twilight wriggled beneath them. Slipping off the horn ring, she gave it one last, happy glance, and set it on her bedside table. No, things would never be the same. Too much had been said, too many new feelings had been unleashed. Perhaps, however, the changes wouldn't be bad. No, she knew they wouldn't. Things had changed for the better.

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The End of A Day for Spike and Twilight

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