

The Sacrifice

- >You are once again a guy who lives in a decently sized house out in the country,.
- >Neighbors are a few miles in either direction down the road
- >Aside from the occasional visit from them, and your weekly trip to the nearby town for groceries and stuff you are one. >That's fine by you. The neighbors and townies are nice enough folk, but you're a bit of a recluse.
- >You work from home via Internet, and make enough for a comfortable hermit's living.
- >Because you live in an area with a lot of open plains and scarcely populated forests, wild fluffy pony herds have sprung up. >Mostly harmless little critters that were made artificially in a . by scientists with only the loosest grasp of biotechnological ethics. >They liable in babyspeak aren't very smart, are very fragile, and are kinds cute.
- >wild herds, however, can be an annoyance.
- >Farmers often have to double their barbed wire to keep herds from getting onto their land, ch., everywhere, and eating all the grass and crops. >The shit they don't really mind as it's a very potent fertilizer.
- >B. wild herds always have a leader, called a smarty friend, who rarely !MOWS when to back down from a .eat.
- >They try to claim the lands for themselves.
- >They never keep it
- >Fhify psychology and neurology is an absoMte clusterfu, of biological engineering that looks like the equivalent of a cheap Russian missile's design.
- >Anecdotal evidence suggests that whatever part of the brain stores a fluff's hardwired desire to be loved by and to obey humans gets overwritten after a long enough exposure to the wild and becoming a herd's smarty friend
- >Hard to say With scientific certainty, but it's not like extensive studies on smarty friends have ever really happened
- >Usually farmers will just kill a smarty friend and chase the rest of the herd off their land_
- >If they're not that generous, they'll just slaughter the whole herd sometimes saving the smarty friend for last if they're feeling mean.
- >Your neighbors have farms, and they just shoot frulfies on sight.
- >You have naught but a home garde, so you can afford to be more patient with herds Hutt end up on your property.
- >Sometimes herds Will mill around your backyard, eat some grass, drop some deuces, take some naps, then be on their way by the next day.
- >You kinds respect fluffy herds that manage to survive out in the wilderness. Considering they were designed to be absolutely helpless with°. a responsible human caring for them in a house, fluffes surviving with the hand they've been dealt (or hardwired will[]) is pretty impressive.
- >So if a herd doesn't stick around you don't even go outside until they, left. >You shovel up their droppings and mix them into your garden_
- >Your veggies love it
- >The herds that stay can be a problem_
- >A few months ago, you made an especially bnital example of a smarty .end who was a complete coward putting every fluffy but himself in danger: then hiding behind pregnant dams when his commanded attack failed
- >Tore off most of his fluff; dragged him through gravel .11 he had rocks embedded in his back, then sent the rest of the herd away with the warning to never go near your house again.
- >The fluffy who had taken over for the coward seemed to show more leadership material, so you let them leave without further .eat. You even made some oatmeal for the clams before they were rolled away. >You're a softy, but it didn't sit tight to put stress on dams who were innocent
- >The herd was as good as its word and they never came around again.
- >They might have spread the word around to other herds, because you've been seeing a lot fewer herds around lately
- .
- >Even the ones who do appear are a lot less willing to pick a fight.
- >Two months back, you told the smarty friend to take his herd and leave after they'd overstayed their welcome.
- >To your surprise, the smarty friend backed don, and his herd left. >Didn't expect that, but you didn't complain.
- >Still had to deal with the occasional smarty friend who was too dumb to take a >Dealt with them effect,* enough that the rest of the herd took off.
- >Too bad that ambition is the main at.b.e of a smarty friend rather than intelligence.
- >By now, it's the middle of.
- >Leaves are falling, grass is yellowing, winds are blowing. >Fudc yes pumpkin pie and hot chocolate weather.
- >You're sitting on your back porch, enjoying exactly that when you see a small herd off in the distance on a low hill
- >Their bright and diverse colors make them easy to count. >Seems to be about 7 by your count.
- >Hardly a herd more hice a duster.

- >Your house is at the top of a hill, so you estimate that the herd is four or five miles away.
- >One of the thiffies is larger than the others, and being pushed >A dam.
- >They seem to be slowly heading in your direction.
- >You pay it little mind as you finish your delicious pie and go inside.
- >If they want to use your yard as shelter from the wind, they're welcome to it.
- >Winter is coming, and it's practically a death sentence for feral herds.
- >Their fluff was meant to maintain their body temperature in a house climate, not the extremes of nature.
- >Most fluffy herds freeze to death when winter comes. >Nature is a bitch_

The next day

- >The next morning, you wake up, go through your morning routine, then head downstairs.
- >Considering you work at home and are by yourself 99% of the time, you could probably abandon all of your hygiene habits and work in your boxers.
- >Fuck that, you're not Bache. Frog. You have more self-respect than that.
- >It's a pretty warm morning, despite it being the middle of fall.
- >Thank God for small favors. You hate the cold You spend most winters all but hibernating, only setting foot outside when you absolutely have to.
- >You hear a faint tapping.
- >You look out of your sliding glass door into your backyard and you see the little herd outside. >They look like they're resting from a long hike.
- >They didn't take all night to get here, did they? Fluffies are pretty slow, but they're not that slow.
- >They probably took refuge in the forest overnight. That dam can't move on her own, she probably slowed them down_
- >You can see from here that the herd's not in the best of shape.
- >Trees . into fall most of the grass is dying, and the wild animals are storing food for winter. >Resources for the fluffies are scarce, and many of the herd look gaunt even through their fluff. >Oddly, none of them are eating the grass under their feet, despite obviously being hungry.
- >They're probably fluffier who had a home at one point and aren't smart enough to know that they can eat grass.
- >You see two stallions, one little mare, one mother with a foal on her back, and a dam who's pretty . along in her pregnancy.
- >There's one blue earth stallion tapping on the glass and trying to look inside.
- >Not going to work, your glass is treated so you can look out but nothing can look in. >Do they want to get inside?
- >Fuck that noise, their .t smells bad enough when it's in your garden. No way you're going to deal with that indoors.
- >You go into the kitchen and pour some cereal
- >You take the bowl over to the table, where you can still see the herd outside.
- >That one fluffy is still try* to look inside. Every few minutes he turns around to say something to the rest of the herd that you can't hear.
- >Must be the smarty friend
- >Really not feeling like dealing with another uppity, little ball of . today.
- >You ignore them and continue eating your breakfast.
- >The fluffy, starts tapping on the glass again.
- >If they're hoping to get adopted they're shit out of luck
- >If they're trying to make sure that nobody is home before they start trying to squat in your yard then fine. You'll chase them off later.

>TaP tap tap.

>Keep tapping all you want, dude, it's not happening.

Later that day

- >A few hours later and you're finishing up some work on your computer.
- >The tapping has been on and off the entire time.
- >At first you tried drowning it out with some music, but you could still hear it
- >Now it's starting to get on your nerves.
- >That smarty friend is either very determined, or too dumb to quit.
- >Probably the latter.
- >You occasionally glanced outside, and the herd was still milling around looking at the grass With hungry eyes.
- >You saw one stallion try, to grab a quick bite of it but the smarty friend quickly ran over and smacked the stallion on the snout.

>The stallion spat out the grass and started to cry.
>Words were exchanged, and no more grass was eaten.
>Olcay, so they know that grass is food but the smarty friend still won't let them . it
>Curious.
>A smaller 'y, barely past being a foal starts to squat down, and the smarty friend runs over to her.
>No smacking this time, but he gestures back towards the forest while shouting.
>You get up to get a better look_
>The little mare waddles down the . a distance from your house, then squats over and poops.
>She slowly makes the trip back up the hill
>Even though your hill is a gentle slope, the herd is clearly exhausted and malnourished
>And yet the smarty friend still makes them go away before pooping.
>Curiouser.
>You've dealt with dozens of fluffy herds, and absohtely none of them have acted tike this.
>They're clearly starving, yet the smarty friend won't let them eat grass.
>They try to poop, he makes them go . away from the herd to do it, even if they're clearly tired and weak_
>And he won't stop fucking tapping on your glass door.
>Olcay, enough is enough
>You don't W. to have to play white knight to every herd with a shitty smarty friend that tresspasses on your propert
y, but if you don't deal with this now, you won't have any peace and quiet the rest of the day.
>You put on your boots in case you have to step on a skull or two, then open the glass door and step outside.
>The smarty friend is right underneath you and slowly backs away, back towards his herd
>The herd gathers behind him, looking at you with pleading but fearful eyes.
>TEs isn't the first time they've encountered people who weren't happy to see them.
>You bet their herd used to be a lot bigger.
>The smarty, friend is now standing directly in front of the red pregnant mare, his little knees bent and ready to mov
e.
>At least this one is defending her, not hiding behind her. >You still remember that smarty friend_
>You can still see what's left of his skeleton down the road
,Listen up, fluffiest"
>You don't need to get their attention, they're already all ears.
,You can't stay here. You need to leave my land now." >You hear groaning from a few of the flEfies.
>Their smarty, friend wouldn't let them eat the grass, and now they have to keep moving?
>Most of the grassland around your house is turning yellow.
>According to research, fhifies don't lace eating the dead grass except as a last resort, as it tastes bad and gives them
a lot of stomach pain.
>Because you keep your grass well watered and fertilized (thanks in some part to fluffy herd feces), it's shill green a
nd . A vendable SmOrgisbord for a herd on the edge of starvation.
>The smarty friend takes a few steps forward_ >Oh boy, here we go.
>Any second now he's going to puffup his cheeks, stomp the ground avlth his little fuzzy hoof, and claim the grass f
or-
>"Pwease, hoomah he•d haf nowhewe else to go. Need gwass ntmmuies. Pwease wet stay?"
>...
>Okay, didn't see that coming.
>You consider it for a moment
>This is the first time a smarty friend has asked nicely. Hell, ifs the . time a smarty friend has asked at at
>Still, if you relent so easily, they'll just be more resistant to leave later.
>•I'm sorry, but no. You have to leave."
>The smarty friend takes another step forward
,Pwease no make weave! Bwown weaves time aw•eady heave! Big white time coming! Hewd no haf safe pwace fwo
m COW,
>Brown leaves time? Big white time?
>0).thhhhhh he means . and winter.
>Smarty friend just said that winter is coming. >That'd be firmier if you actually watched that show.
>This smarty friend has already survived winter once. He must know that it's the ultimate culling of feral herds.
>You feel bad for making them leave, since it's practically as good as sentencing them to a slow and painful death.

>"If you stayed here, I'd have to deal With you. That would be a big pain for me, and I don't w. that."
>"Nuut Hewd no be pain fo• hooman! No . gwasses whewe you say no . gwasses! No make poopies on hooman wan . Hewd no botha hooman! Fwigfies be quiet hooman not know fwuffies hewer >Suddenly, it clicks.
>So that's why he didn't let his herd eat your grass. That's why he made them go so . away to poop.
>He wasn't being cruel, he was showing discipline so you wouldn't get an, at them.
>He was tapping on your glass all clay to get you to come out so he could ask for permission before trying to live in your yard.
>He didn't even try to use force, he's dearly smart enough to know how well that would work.
>You're genuinely impressed Here you have a smarty friend that's actually smart.
>Still, smart or not, you don't want to be responsible for a fluffy herd
>Besides, if he's this smart, he's smart enough to find a place for his herd to bunker down for the winter.
,No. Now leave my land You can find grass somewhere else."
>You don't know where they could hope to find it this late in the year, but that's not your problem.
>The smarty friend isn't giving up.
>"No otha pwace has emir rummies fow hew. P•easer
>Can't blame the guy for being persistent. Sounds Ike he wagered everything on you taking pity on them.
>Maybe a different approach would drive them off...
>You could just crush the smarty friend under your boot That would definitely scare the rest of them off.
>Still, it would be a big waste to . an actually smart smarty friend_ mayyymbe I could let you stay here..."
>The whole herd perks up at your words. The smarty friend stays reserved, but looks hopeful
>"...but first you would have to give me something in exchange..."
>The herd looks corthised at this. Most fluffies area smart enough to really grasp the concept of quid pro quo.
>"Gif what, hooman? Gif buggies?"
>Hugs. They're pretty much the only thing of value fluffier have to offer. Well that and their fertilizing feces, but the y would never think of
>"No, I don't want huggies. Va. I NVant iS...that mare!"
>You point to the red pregnant mare, who starts wiggling her legs frantically. Not that it helps, she's already too big t o move on her OW11.
>Who the fuck thought that was a good design idea when they were creating fluffy ponies?
>Or did they just stop giving a.. when it came to their reproduction?
>The smarty friend bends his knees down back into his defensive position. "Wha wan fivuffy for
>Time to scare them off.
>I'm going to . her!"
>The lewd gasps and rushes to hug the dam in a protective fluffy shell
>They start bleating and shouting.
,Pwease no hunt! Fwuffy be mamma soon!" ,Twulffy haf babebs! No hunt!"
,You no howl fivully mamma! Gif owies!"
>You see a young stallion charge towards you and start kicking With all the strength his little body can muster.
>Which is not much at all
>You breifly contemptate stepping on the dude defender, but you instead opt to pushing him back towards his herd
>You're not about to . a little ldd for defending his herd
>The stallion rolls back onto his hooves and tries to run back for another attack, but the smarty friend blocks him.
>lewd be quiet! Smanty fwend taw!!"
>The herd's panicked babbling quickly dies down. ,You take mamma, lewd can stay?"
>You nod
,That's the de.. Either you let that fluffy and her babies die, or you leave my land now. You choose."
>The rest of the herd starts muttering to itself >"No wan mamma die. Baybebs soon!" >Twuffy wan gwass...so hung wy..."
,Twaffy no wet meant' hooman huwt mum. Gif mo. owies!"
,Pwease smawty fwend, no can walk no mo..."
>The smarty friend says nothing for a few minutes, letting the herd argue amongst itself. Then he walks towards you , a look of determination on his face.
,Smawty fivend no wan wet lewd weave."
>You're disappointed in the smarty friend for making that choice, but I guess you can only expect so much from-

>13but no wan mamma die. You Iciw smawty fivend instead."

>"What?"

,Hooran wan fivuffy, hooman take smawty fwend Wet lewd wive on wand, no Idw mamma "

>Now that you did not see coming. >This is unprecedented

>The smarty friend is offering to sacrifice himself so his herd can have a place to live through the winter.

>You're so stoned that you don't even respond for a minute.

>"Dis okay, hoomanT

>Tm...y-yes, yes, that is okay. Listen up, fluffiest"

>The herd ceases their debate and look at you.

>You pick up the smarty friend and hold him out to his herd

,Your smarty friend has agreed to go instead of that mare. In exchange for his death, I Will let you live here, as long as you follow my rules. Understand?"

>Absohae silence as the herd processes this new development.

>Then a tonent of tears and cries as the herd realizes what is about to happen.

>You tom to the smarty friend >"Are you sure you want to do this?" >They noels his head

,Sraawty fwend not wet lewd get owies if smawty fwend can get owies instead. Can smawty fwend say goodbye?"

>It's the least you can do.

,You have ten minutes."

>You set him down and go inside.

>Fluffies have very little concept of time, and you doubt any of them know what a minute is.

>Still, he knows enough that he doesn't have much time.

>You look around the house for a suitable instrument of exectuion.

>You're not interested in torturing the guy, you want to make this as quick and painless as possible.

>All the while, you conscience is nagging you.

>Spare him, let him stay with his herd

>I already gave them the offer, and he agreed to it HeLL he offered himself instead of anyone else.

>Spare him, let them leave you in peace.

>Thaf s not a kindness. They'll .1 starve if I do that, probably before winter even arrives.

>Spare him, let him live inside with you.

>Hal You Ike being alone. Having some obnoxious Effie pet would just drive you nuts.

>But, he is smart. And he's shown enough respect that he'd be quiet and obedient if you told Em to be.

>And winter ahvays makes you feel depressed and isolated

>Maybe it wouldn't be so-

>No. He made his choice, and you're going to follow through with it.

>Rummaging through the garage, you find a suitable instrument. A wood axe you keep around to cut firewood in the winter.

, quick test shows it's still sharp.

>Take a moment to sharpen it a bit more on a sharpening stone anyway.

>Fhilly bone is a lot less resistant than wood, but it can't hart to be sure.

5 minutes later

>You step back into the house and over to the sliding glass door.

>You stop and watch the scene outside.

>The entire herd is in tears. Their hunger completely forgotten, they now ad trying to give hugs to their smarty friend

>He's hugging them one at a time, and telling each fly something. You can't hear what it is.

>He spends a long time hugging the pregnant mare, who's trying to hug him back as hard as she can, wltluout successes.

>After he's said something to each member of his herd, they rush back in for more hugs.

>Maybe they think if they don't stop saying goodbye, he won't leave.

>You check you nntch. It's been twehe minutes since you came inside.

>You stay where you are.

>This cycle of hugs, tears, and goodbyes continues for two more rounds before the smarry, friend stops and walks over to the glass door and starts tapping on it again_

>His face is stained with tears. His or his herd's, you can't tell. He looks sad, b.. the same time at peace.

>You open the sliding door. "Are you ready?" >He says nothing: only slowly nodding his head_ >You pi, him up an

d carry him inside.

>One of the fluffy's pleas to let him live is cut off as you slide the door shut.

>You take him into the garage, where you set him down on an old bedside table you always forget to get rid of

>Taldng a length of rope, you tie him down onto it

>You kneel down and stroke his fur. >is that too tight?"

,Nu, no fee• tight."

>13o you want me to get you anything? Some water? Maybe some food?"

>You're delaying the execution as much as you can_ Now that ifs actually happening, you're afraid to go through with it.

,Pwease hooman, jug do it now."

>You nod and scratch him behind his ears.

>I just want you to know that you are a very good fluffy for doing this. I've never seen a smarty friend as smart as you. Your herd will be safe.-

>"No wet lewd die? Keep lewd wawm fivom big white time? No wet numstas howl f•affiesr , promise."

,Pwease no wet baybehs be hunt. No wan speciaw fivend be sad"

>Oh God That clam was his mate.

>He's about to sacrifice himself for the sake of. wife and =born children.

>It's too much, you feel tears forming. >1 p-promise. I won't let them be sad" >Tank yoo, hooman _."

>You remember the last smarty friend who said that.

>You pickup the axe and push his head forward a bit so you have a good view of the neck.

>You aim the axe, and raise it above your head.

>The smarty friend closes his eyes, a serene look on his face.

5 minutes later

>You open the glass door and see the herd looking at you with expect. eyes. You look back at them with red eyes.

>They're all shaking, with fear and uncertainty. >You sigh.

,You can all stay here. You'll stay in the yard, and you can eat the grass. If you need to poop, do it here."

>You point to a bare patch right next to your very well fenced garden area.

>F.:6es aren't the only .eat to vegetation around these parts.

,When it starts getting cold, I'd make a place for you to stay so you can be warm. Any questions?"

>The stallion who attacked you earlier takes a hesitant step forward

s s mawty f f f-fivend d d d dead?" >You ghimly nod "Yes, he's dead."

>You walk inside as the herd begins their crying anew.

>Through their tears, they start eating the grass as .t as they can, filling their bellies for the first time in a long while.

>Everyone cries and eats except for the dam She just lays there and sobs, her head in her hooves.

>You shut the door and lie down next to it, watching the herd eat and mourn.

>This is only going to mean more work for you.

>You'll have to monitor them to make sure they don't get into trouble.

>You'll have to build them a place to sleep in during the winter so they don't freeze to death.

>You'll have to feed them once the grass runs out >You could probably just drive them offnow. >If s not tike anyone would care about breaking a promise made to a fluffy pony.

>But you're not going to do that

>You were raised to always honor a promise, no matter how trivial it may seem, not matter how easy it can be to bre ak it.

>You've lived your life by that standard. It's how you were able to get a job that lets you work from home in the middle of nowhere and still have financial security neighbors and most of the townsfolk.

>You made the promise to take care of this herd, and you're going to do it.

>"They'll be safe. I won't let anything else happen to them."

, blue stallion walks over from the other end of the glass door and sits with you, watching the herd

>Wank yoo, hooman."

4 minutes eather

>You bring the axe down.

>Right next to the fluffy's head.

>You can't do it

>The smarty, friend opens his eyes. He's confused, Tuffy... dead

>You cut the rope tying him down to the table. >"No, no you're not dead"

>"Why smawty friend no dead? Hooman make lewd weaver

>He looks worried.

,No, I •on't make your herd leave. B. you can't go bade to them."

>You pick him up and carry him out of the garage.

,You'll have to live in here with me. You can't go outside. You can't talk to your herd, or ever let your herd know you're here. If you do: I'll make them leave. Even if it's big white time, I'll make them leave, even if I have to show them o.. Would you rather stay here forever, or die now?"

>Another choice. You feel bad enough for the first choice he had to make.

>The smarty friend thinks for a few minutes, then asks, "Can smawty friend watch lewd? Use waww."

,Yes, you can watch them through the glass door.. you can't .c to them. And no tapping the glass either."

>You set the fluffy down and he nms over to the door. He softly puts a hoof on the glass and looks out to his herd_ T hey're all watching the door, waiting for you to come out and tell them if they can stay or not >His gaze settles on the e pregnant mare, his mate.

>He looks like he's about to cry, but turns around before he can.

>"Hewd can stay if smawty friend stay inside?" ,Yes."

>Tien smawty stay."

15 minutes later

>The herd has stopped crying, and some of them have stopped eating, already . of grass after so much starvation.

>The mother is muting with her foal and the foal is trying to eat a blade of grass.

>It must be less than two weeks old, because it doesn't seem to have any teeth, and it gums the grass fruitlessly.

>The mother has eaten her fill, but it'll be a little while before her body can create milk for her baby.

>The little mare is bringing grass to the clam, who slowly .s. She's stopped sobbing, but her tears keep running.

>The smarty friend hasn't moved from the glass door since you came inside. >He just sits there and watches his herd

—

>Well, if that's all hell do all day, then having an inside fluffy should be no trouble at ad. >Still, you gotta set up a bed and litterbox for him_

>You have no shortage of free space in your house, so a safe room won't be any incorn•venience. >The pet store in town has fluffy care stuff, and what they don't have can be found online.

>The bigger pain N. be caring for the herd outside.

>You try to do a tide work, but this afternoon's events weigh too heavily on your mind >You put down your laptop and kneel down next to the smarty friend.

>You start petting his head

>The smarty friend doesn't look away from his herd, but he leans into your hand and rubs his head against it. >Hes so soft., even though he's been in the wild for who !mows how long.

>Maybe having some company around won't be so bad after all.

The Sacrifice 2 - The Runt

>You are a guy with a nice house in the middle of nowhere.

>Okay, you all know the spiel, so I'll skip ahead to the new part.

>Recently, a small herd of fluffy ponies arrived at your house.

>This is hardly newsworthy, you deal With herds faiiy often_ You chase them off if they don't remove themselves. > But this herd had an especially smart smarty friend_

>He asked permission to stay, instead of demanding your land in some vain fluffy conquest.

>His herd was starving, winter was coming, and he knew it was either you showing kindness, or him and his herd dying.

>You really weren't keen on having to deal with fluffy ponies, so you tried to turn him away with a catch-22 offer the herd's pregnant mare would be killed, or they would leave.

>Your plan had been to either let them leave intact, or angrily chase off the smarty friend for trying to let one of his herd be sacrificed for his well being.

>B. the smarty friend asked to be taken in the dam's place in exchange for you taking care of his herd >Caught off guard you agree to the deal without thinking about it.

>B. you couldn't bring yourself to kffi a fluffy that displayed such intelligence and nobility.

>You gave him the choice to either die now, or live inside with you for the rest of his life, unable to rejoin his herd

>He agreed to stay inside, and now watches his herd through your back sliding glass door that is reflective from the outside. >He can see out, b.. herd can't see in.

>All caught up? Then let's continue.

>Ifs been a week since the smarty friend moved in with you.

>Wak that's not the right way to p. it.

>It's been a week since you separated the smarty friend from his herd in exchange for not letting the herd starve to d eath as winter comes.

>Well that version makes you sound like a di,.

>You did kinds give the guy a shitty deal >Fair enough, you are kind of a dick. >B. hey, you're not used to compan y. >B. you gotta admit, it's not too bad_ >It helps that the herd is pretty well behaved, and have managed to not get a nyone Idled despite losing their smarty friend

>You told them he was dead so they wouldn't try to find him.

>It broke his mate's heart.

>She's ready to give birth any day now. It could even be this afternoon.

>The prospect of dd.irth has lifted her spirits somewhat.

>Most days she'd just lie there like a partially deflated basketball, occasionally munching on some grass and crying q uietly.

>The herd has noticed, and has tried their best to cheer her up.

>Tons of hugs, lots of reminders that her babies are corning.

>They miss their smarty friend too, but even thiffies can develop a sense of compassion beyond what has been hard wired.

>Ezekiel just sits there, watching his herd as they eat, play, hug, poop, sleep, and run around

>That's the name you've given to the smarty friend who is now your pet/roommate.

>You had asked him if he had a name besides smarty friend, since that's the only thing you ever heard his herd call h im.

>He looked away from his herd and turned to you.

,Hooman wan gif smawty fivend name?.

>I was going to name you Ezekiel if you didn't have a name. Do you have one?.

>The smarty friend looked down at the floor for a few seconds.

>=Smawty fwend haf name, but wike Zekiew bet,'

>Odd_ Maybe his old name was something stupid like Huggles or some other inane name a fluffy would give a baby.

>Whatever the case. Ezekiel seems to like or at least tolerate his new name.

>If s hard to tell With the little guy.

>Riffles tend to be an open book. They wear their thoughts on their sleeve, simplistic and stunted though their thoug hts may be.

>But Ezekiel is a cypher. He's the quietest fluffy you've ever come across, and you know he's not just sitting there bl ankly when he watches his herd

>He's probably uneasy being around you.

>Not that you blame him, considering you tried to dive away his dying herd threatened his mate, and condemned hi m to a lite separated from all of the ones he loves by a thin sheet of glass on pain of exile.

>If fluffies weren't so completely physically incompetent you'd consider getting a lo, for your bedroom door.

>Then again, Ezekiel is pretty smart. He could get creative.

>While you work on your laptop, you open a tab to look up prices on door locks.

>You set up a bed, litterbox, and some old Duplo blocks in an empty room for Zeke.

>Not that you've ever seen him play with the blocks.

>Nope, if he's not eating, sleeping, or pooping, he's right there at the window.

>You've asked him to come over and sit with you on the couch a few times, and he always waddles over without a f oss.

>You get the feeling he'd rather be back at the window, even if you are giving him tummy rubs.

>He doesn't complain about anything.. doesn't ask you for food or attention. He eats when you serve it, and he does what you ask hill to do, and most of the times he doesn't even speak except for a very polite 'Tank yoo. when you giv e him his meals.

>You couldn't ask for a more chill pet.

>So why do you feel kind of disappointed?
>It's the next day, and you're pretty sure that dam is going to pop today.
>Not Ifterally, you hope.
>You've done some online research to learn how to safely deliver a dam to a normal b._
>The bits about a special diet and plenty of attention can be skipped.
>It managed to last this long m.out hardy any food, and her friends have been giving her tons of attention and hugs.
>You put a towel, a damp washcloth and a soft blanket on the table next to the sliding glass door.
>Zeke watches you set up everything. "Baybehs today?".
>I think so..
•Yuu hewp speshaw fwend?.,
,Yes, I'm going to make sure your babies Will be fine."
>.Fank yoo, hooraan..
>He goes bads to watching his herd.
>You go through your mental cheddst of everything you'll need to have and do to help the dam.
>You alr.cly 'killed her mate, you're not keen on letting her babies die too.
>You see the dam start wriggling frantically, and it looks like she's shouting loudly.
>Ali of the herd has rushed to her side. >Show time.
>You grab all of the birthing stuff and open the sliding glass door.
>Zeke moves to the other side of the door so he isn't seen.
>Closing the door behind you, the herd turns their attention to you.
>The young stallion who has always been quids to treat you as the enemy steps forward and puffs out his cheeks.
>"Yuu no take momma too! She haf baybehs soon!".
>I know, dude. She's having them right now. I'm here to help her..
>He softens his stance a little, but he's no less ready to attack if you show hostility.
>=Yuu no huwt mumma ow Simon gif biggest owwies!.
>Well, he certainly earns that name. You wonder if he likes digging.
,Dude, if I mess this up, you can give me all the owies you want..
,Name not dude, name Simon., ,Whatever..
>You walk past him and kaleel in front of the dam who's shouting about big poopies..
,Those area poppies, those are babies, little lady..
>She freaks out a bit when she sees you. ,Hoornan! Pwease no take baybehs!. >7'm not going to take your babies, ho ney. I'm going to help you make sure the babies are okay..
>She probably doesn't waant to believe you, but fhffies are hardwired to trust and depend on humans.
>You lay the towel out on the ground and gently lay the dam on it on her bade.
>She looks like she swallowed a volleyball
>Her fide legs are wiggling up in the air. You've never been around for a birth, fitly or otherwise, but it never looks Bice a fin experience for the mother. Still, she's not screaming like she's in a huge amount of pain, so it can't be too bad
>You slowly stroke her mane and lightly press on her distended belly to help the birthing process move faster.
>A min.e later, you see a little purple head poke out of the dam's backside. You can see a little tuft of lighter purple on its head.
>You grab it very lightly With your thumb and forefinger to help pull k o..
>You didn't shave her back-fluff because she'd freak out from the noise and sensation, and she'd get very cold at nig ht So now you make sure the baby doesn't get snagged by the fluff.
>If s so tiny, not even six inches long.. eyes are shut tight, and its itty bitty Me hooves are blindly reaching o.. Its tiny mouth opens and closes, but makes no sound save for a meek chirp.
,Baybeh?! Whewe baybeh? Gif baybeh!"
>You put the baby by the mother's head She's sniffs it a few times, then starts licking the birth fluid off of it.
>Gross. B. touching at the same time.
>Once the fluffy has been licked clean, the mother pulls the baby away from you and hugs it close.
>.Wuv baybeh."
>Awwwww.
>She slides the fluffy down to her teats. You pull the fluff back so the baby can latch on.
>Once it finds the teat, it begins suckling, holding on to its mother and tightly as it can

>You look around for other teats.
>This could get bad if she doesn't have enough for all of her babies.
>You find four.
>Should be plenty.
>The dam starts struggling again, and another baby comes out, easier this time, with dark red fluff and a blue mane.
>She's starting to get smaller.
>The same ritual as before happens again.
>She smells the baby, licks it clean, gives it hugs and tell it that she loves the babies, then slides it down to her teats so it can start nursing.
>Birth. It's pretty fudcing disgusting when you're watching it.
>You look at the mother and her babies, a sole on her face for the first time you, se, cooing and sighing and repeating that she loves her babies, that they're good babies, that they'll be good fluffies, and that she has plenty of milk for them.
>Birth It's pretty fucking beautiful when you're a part of it.
>Is that some dust in your eye?
>Your adoring reverie is cut off when the mother starts flailing again.
>Guess she's got one more in her. >Took its sweet time coming o.. >It comes out you pi, it up, you present it to its mother.
,Baybeh! Wuv baybeh."
>It has cobalt fluff and a sky blue mane. >You hold it to her face and she sniffs it. >Her expression changes from motherly bliss to looking like she just drank vinegar.
>Mummy baybeh! No wan'..
>You feared this might happen.
>She gave birth to a runt.
>Rtmts are instinctively rejected by their mothers. Something about saving milk and hugs for the babies that have a better chance of survival
>Which is understandable in the wild, albeit callous. It doesn't seem to be a conscious decision on the mother's part, either. Just a nearly irreversible instinct. Domestic dams do it too.
>Still you have to try.
>it's your baby, don't you want it?" >You offer the fluffy again.
>The mother pushes it away roughly. -Nuu! Dummy baby no haf good baybeh miwk!"
>The runt starts chirping and feeling around for its mother.
>That's not good
>You look at the rest of the herd >Simon's still shooting daggers at you. >You wonder if he'll blame you for this. >Probably.
>You offer the runt to the mother with her tiny foal She also pushes it away.
>"Onwy haf miwk fo malt baybehs, no wan' bad baybeh."
>The runt is chirping nonstop by now. Its eyes are still dosed, it's covered in birthing fluid, and if it doesn't get milk soon, it will die, either from starvation or the cold.
>Neither mother want it, and nobody in the herd seems willing to stand up for it
>If s up to you.
>You place the runt on the washcloth and carry it inside.
>Ezeldel nos to your side as soon as you close the door. ,Wha happen,"
>He's pretty upset. I guess if one of your Idds got rejected by its mother, you would be too.
>" the last baby was a Want The momma doesn't W. it."
>You place the Want down on the floor in the washcloth. Zeke looks down at it mournfully.
,Hooman, pwease no wet baybeh die!"
>•'m working on it, Zeke. You're the father, tell me What I need to do..
,Baybeh need miwk need dry fivalf..
>You stand up. "I'll get some milk and warm it up. You stay there and make sure it stays on the cloth.
>Zeke looks confused -Hooraan haf fwaffy miwk?. >Oh yeah, he's probably never lived in a house before. >"No, ifs cow milk. I drink it.
>"Wha cow?"
,Not now, Zeke. I need to get some warm .k and figure out how to feed it to the not without it drowning."
,What,"

>Zeke flinches a bit from your raised voice. -Hoorman say Zeldew no can wet lewd see Zekiew....
,Don't worry about it, Zeke. Its eyes are closed, it's probably not going to remember this anyway. Now let me try to save your baby already,- >You power walk over to the Idchen and get out the milk.
>Zeke looks over his baby, moving its little hooves in every which way and chirping.
>He slowly raises his front hoof over the baby's head..
>The baby gurgles, coughs, and mewls softly.
>Zeke shakes his head, as if coming out of a trance, and puts his hoof down next to the baby.
>You don't know how much fat, if any, is in fliffy milk, so you hope 1, Will suffice. >You're akeady taking enough risks as it is.
>There isn't a lot of information online about how to save a runt. Plenty of info on why they get rejected, but most owners either let the runt starve, or abandon kill the mother out of anger at her behavior. Either way, the rums dies.
>airy formula is sold in some pet stores, but you don't have any here, and the nearest town is a . hour's dive.
>Could you make it bade in time?
>You don't know how long the rums will last, so you can't risk it. >It's the 1% or nothing.
>You pour about a quarter of a cup into a glass and put it in the microwave. >While that's warming up, you have to figure out how to get the milk into the baby.
>A spoon? No, too wide. And the baby could hurt its toothless gums accidentally biting down on it.
>A turkey baster? Could work, but you don't have one.
, baby bottle? Don't have one either, obviously.
>A saline bottle? Not a bad idea, but yours isn't the kind you can open. >Fu,. Maybe Ezekiel has an idea.
>You exit the kitchen and walk over to where you . Zeke and his baby. >=Zeke, I need some way to feed it the milk, do you have any id. how-.... >...Well, you didn't expect .t....
>Zeke is holding the baby close and licking the birth fluid oft'. >He's softly whispering to the baby, too. You lean in to hear. >....nice baybeh, good baybeh, daddy wows baybeh.... >He alternates between licking the baby and whispering to it, all while holding it close.
>The baby is still dirping, nuzzling into its father's fhilf looking for a teat.
,Sowwy baybeh, daddy no haf miwk. Baybeh be stwong, be bwave. Hooman get miwk fo baybeh, jus be bwave....
>You are going to save this baby or de trying.
>Come on, think!
>Olcay, it's cow milk. Baby cows drink straight from the udders. Maybe the baby fluffy could do the same.
>B. you don't have udders, or anything that could substitute for it.
>Wait a second, maybe you do!
>You head towards the closet.
>Grabbing the first aid kid you set it down on the table and open it up. >Gauze, Neosporin, band aids, alcoholic wipe s, tape, aim,
>Latex gloves.
>You grab one and take it back into the kitchen.
>You rim it under the sink to wash off that powder they put inside of gloves to absorb sweat.
>You knot up all the fogeys except for the pinkie. >The microwave beeps and you take out the glass.
>Way too hot, that shit would scald the little thing's mouth
>You stir it a bit with an ice cube. That'll help water it down, too.
>You've never seen fluffy mill, but if it's anything him human breast milk, it's not as thick as cow milk
>Once the ice cube has melted it's just warm enough to serve. >You carefully pour the mink into the glove.
>You tie off the top, take a safety pin out of a drawer and return to the father and Mild_
>By now, Zeke has licked the baby clean, and its fluff is starting to stick o..
>It's still mewling, a.. eyes are closed >"Zeke, scoot over a bit, I think I got it." >Zeke slowly obliges, positioning the not with his hooves so that it's facing up.
>You poke a small hole in the glove with the pin, and lower the tip of the pinkie finger into the baby's mouth.
>The chirping stops for a moment.
>Both you and Zeke wait nervously for any sign of movement.
>After a few seconds, you see the baby's mouth make suckling motions and little bubbles rise to the top of the glove.

>A collective sigh of relief is had by you and the father.
>The baby keeps suckling: and Zeke goes back to cuddling the baby.

,Good baybeh. Dwink roots of miwk, be stwong baby, gwow up, be stwong firrtify..
>It amazes you that he hasn't shown any signs of rejection that the rest of his herd has.
>Is it because he's the father?
>Well, his mother sure wasn't this accepting. >You can worry about that later, though >Right now, it's important that the baby gets enough milk to survive.
>After ten minutes of suckling: and almost emptying the glove, the baby lets go. >Making sure it won't start up again, you wait a minute, holding the glove up. >The baby gurgles a bit, makes baby noises (you know what I mean), then curls up into its daddy's fluff and falls asleep.
>There's that dust in your eye again.
>You get up and let Zeke spend time With his baby.
>Even if you can keep a runt alive for the first few hours after birth, they rarely survive without their mother's care.
>Somethilng about the bond between a mother and her foals helps them develop properly. >You need to figure out how to get the mother to accept her runt.
>You know from online research that physical coercion isn't going to work. >Mothers Wili .ways reject their babies no matter what you threaten them with. >Even if you I. their other babies, the mother will still reject a runt
>Besides, you promised to keep the herd safe.
>Bnitalizing a mother just for following instinct would be awffil.
>Think back to the birth
>When the baby first came out she was just as excited as before.
>She didn't turn the baby away until...
>CH,.
>The smell!
>You come back into the room. The baby is still napping, and Zeke is smiling and muting at the baby's mane.
>"Zeke.... You whisper as softly as you can.
,Zeke, I think I figured out how we can get your special friend to take care of the baby..
>Zeke looks skeptical, but hopeful "...how do Bat?"
,Give the baby a good whiff.. ,Wha wiff?
>Right. Smart as Zeke is, he's still not going to have that big of a vocabulary.
,Smell it What does it smell lice?" >Zeke obliges. -Smetvw •ilce...baybeh..
>.But you can tell by the smell that it's a runt, right?
>Zeke smells it again. -Yes...
>I have an idea but I'm going to need to take the baby away for a little bit. Is that alright?
>Zeke looks apprehensive. "Why do wif baybeh?
>I'm going to try to make it so it doesn't smell Bice a not. The baby is...d.itely not going to tike it, but if it works, the mother will accept it..
>"No am sure. No wan baybeh get owwies....
>I know .t., Zeke, and neither do I. But if we don't do something, it'll die. I need you to trust me here. Can you do that?"
>Zeke looks you in the eyes. It almost feels film he's looking past you, trying to detect any sort of falsehood_
>After a few moments, Zeke lets go of the baby. -Zeldew twust hooman. Pwease, no wet baybeh die..
>You carefully pickup the baby, who keeps sleeping, curled up in a *fluffy ball chest slowly rising and falling.
>I promise..
>You carry the baby into the bathroom and set it on a towel It wiggles it hooves a bit but keeps on napping.
>You can't resist recording it for a few minutes on your phone.
>It's just so cute. You'd never guess it was in danger of dying naught but fifteen minutes ago
>Ba, to the task at hand_
>You rifle through your cabinets for various odor blockers and sprays. >You put bade any that warn about direct skin contact.
>If it's dangerous for human slcin, it'd probably .t right through fluffy skin. >You settle on an old spray bottle of Jum pin Jene Odor Eater.
>No warnings about skin or hair. Perfect.
>You open up the bottle and take a whiff.
>Smells like slightly off ocean mist Probably why you've never used it. >You pour it into a larger spray bottle, and add an equal amount of water. >You grab a small comb and start bushing up the baby's fluff so the spray can reach all the way to the skin.

>As you comb, you see a barely visible penis.
>Ala, so it's a boy.
>It was getting annoying just calling him an 'it'
>The little guy wakes up from your combing, and starts dirping again. >Must be hungry again_ Babies need lots of nourishment.
,Sit tight, kiddo. If this goes as planned you'll be feeding off your momma in no time. >He just chirps some more, reaching around for something to grab.
>To placate him while you finish combing, you let him hold your finger.
>It's like being grabbed by a soft hair dip. You feel his little tongue lipping you. >Your heart is about to melt from the sheer adorablaaess of it all
>Too bad he's about to hate you.
>You pickup the bottle and start spraying him all over, malting sure that the spray reaches under the fluff.
>Understandably, the baby doesn't like this, and tries to squirm away as best as he can, whining as loud as his tiny ho gs allow.
>You ignore it, and flip him over to get to the other side.
>You're glad his eyes still aren't open, because this would sting. >You hold his head still and his mouth shut with your free hand >Being extra careful to avoid his nose, you spray all over his face. >When you're done, the baby is flailing around on the towel soaked from the spray and smelling like ocean mist that's slightly off.
>Old Spice Guy he isn't but it should get the job done.
>You get out your old hair dryer and set it to the lowest warm setting it can. >You gently blow dry the baby until its fluff is back to sticking o..
>Time to test your idea out
>You walk out of the bathroom, and Ezekiel is sitting right outside the door, looking up at you nervously.
>"Heawd baybeh cwy. Baybeh okay?."
>7 sure hope so. Smell him again. Zeke..
>You bring the baby down to Zeke's level and he takes a sniff. He furrows his eyebrows, then sniffs again.
,Smeww, funny."
,Yeah, I don't like it either. It's like if ocean mist could go bad.. >"Wha osshin mist?."
,Not important. Does he smell like a runt anymore?."
>Zeke sniffs one more time and his eyebrows perk up. -No smeww wike bad baybeh!"
>Then his eyebrows just even higher when he realizes what you just said -Baybeh is boy baybeh?!
,Yep. It's a boy. And now that he doesn't smell like a runt anymore, his mother should accept him, right?."
>Zeke looks at his son. -No know, nevah rivy befo'..." ,Only one way to find out.
>You carry the baby to the glass door and walk outside. >Zeke watches from behind the glass door nervously.
>The mother is resting happily with her babies on her belly, nursing again.
>You can hear her mumbling -Nice baybehs, good baybehs, mummy wv malt baybehs..
>The herd is watching with adoring eyes, the other mother's foal sitting on her back so she can see her new friends.
>It's do or de time. Literally.
>You W. over and the herd notices you.
>Simon once again steps up between you and the mother.
,What are you, the bouncer?. >"Wha bouncer?"
>.Nevermind Step off slugger."
>•Mah name no swugga! Is Simon!
>New way to rangy the little jerk unlocked
>You step over him and kneel down next to the mother, who looks up at you hesitantly, hugging her babies close.
,You forgot one of your babies.-
>"No wan baybeh! Is bad baybeh, dummy baybeh! St.w miwk fwom good baybehs!"
>I think you made a mistake. You should check again_ I don't think this baby is a bad baby at
>The mother shakes her head
>"No make mistake. No gif bad baybeh miwl, no gif huggies!"
>.But what if you did make a mistake? You wouldn't W. a good baby to die because you were wrong, do you?."
>The mother's obstinate attitude pauses, and the little gears in her head are turning.
,He's been crying for his momma the whole time. Don't you love your good babies?"
>The guilt trip worked_
,Mumma troy one mo' time..

>You gladly hold the baby up one more time to her face. She takes a sniff then another, then another.
 „Baybeh smeww funny."
 >I know. B. does he smell like a bad baby?"
 >The mother sniffs him a few more times. -...no...smeww while baybeh.-
 >"Then is it a good baby?"
 >The emmooththerer btali:essttetobtabersand places it down by her teats. The baby feels around blindly until k finally finds a teat and starts suckling.
 „sowwy, baybeh! Mumma wong, no am bad baybeh, am good baybeh. Mumma gifwots of miwk, roots of huggies!
 Pwease no hate momma!"
 >The baby seems content to let the transgression slide as he continues suckling hungrily. His siblings slowly crawl over and ItIcewise resume suckling. >The momma smiles and tries to control her crying, hugging her babies and best she can.
 >74, aww malt baybehs....
 >You pi, up the mother and place her down on the soft blanket: big enough for her and her babies to sleep comfortably.
 >Your work done, you stand back up.
 >Wallcing past Simon, you say -No owwies for me today, Salmon..
 „Name not Sammon! Mah name-"
 >You shut the door, a smirk on your face. It's the little things.
 „few hours later, you look outside to check on the herd before it gets dark.
 >Looks like the Want is fine. He's hugging his siblings, and his eyes have finally opened
 >The babies and the mother are nuzzling on the blanket, and the herd has settled down around the blanket, forming a little fluffy ring to keep the babies from accidentally wandering off.
 >You wonder if Ezekiel taught them that trice.
 >You teamed a lot about fluffies today. You uploaded your video of the napping baby, along With what you did to make the mother accept the not. Maybe other owners can use it to avoid tragedy. >Satisfied that the herd and the babies are fine, you sit down on your sofa to watch some television.
 >Half•ay through a show, Ezekiel walks over and hops up on the couch.
 >Strange, he's never done that before. He usually will watch his herd until they're all asleep, then walk to his bed.
 >Tan I help you; Zeke?.
 >Zeke looks you in the eyes again, then reaches over and hugs you.
 >Tank yoo, hoornah You save baybeh, get momma to win, baybeh..
 >You're surprised at first by this sudden affection, but you smile and stroke his fir.
 >.I'm just happy nobody had to de today.. >Zeke rubs his head against your arm
 „You nice hooman. No huwt fwalffles, hewp hewd, mice pwomise."
 >You pi, up Ezekiel and place him in your lap and scratch behind his ears.
 >You notice his tail slowly wagging. >You never knew fluffles did that >All in all, today was a rewarding day. >You smell something that is definitely worse than expired ocean mist.
 >You hold up Zeke and smell his side.
 „Jesus, Zeke, you smell like birthing flid. Probably from all that baby cuddling. You need a bad.
 >"Whi. bait?"
 >You cockle.
 >It's Zeke's turn to learn something now.

>LAST TLME ON THE SACRIFICE

„Speshaw fivend pwegna., an hooman is dadded.
 >Random car exploding]
 >Mammit Zeke, if we don't disarm this bomb before the train reaches 70 miles an hour, it will exploder¬,Nutruutru, bwoo wire ow gween
 >ffou and Simon on top of a mountain, crossing swords.]
 >Met this be our final bade, Brian..
 „Whatever..
 >[More random explosions]
 „Brace yourself, Spaghetti is coming....
 >You wake up with a start, realizing you're badc in your room. „What the fudc kind of dream was that....

>Whatever that f.Efy fertilizer did to your chile peppers is pretty potent >You're not eating them so dose to bedtime anymore.

The Sacrifice - Helplessness and Hugs

>You are Ezeldel, smarty friend

>Well, you're not sure if you can call yourself that anymore. You're not in charge of your herd anymore, and you live inside a human's house.

>When you first met him, he wanted your herd's hming-babies friend, your special friend.

>You offered to go instead_

>Your herd was Very Very sad, and everyone cried when they gave you goodbye hugs.

>You Med your best to be strong, telling everyone not to be sad, and to do what the human told them to do so he wouldn't become angry and malce them leave, or worse.

>When the human was going to give you the biggest owies, he changed his mind, and said you codd live inside with him.

>Not sure why he needed a fluffy to die in the first place, but humans are always smarter than fluffies, and they do a lot of things that don't make sense to you, b. they're probably for a good reason.

>At first, you didn't know what to think of the human.

>On the one hanc, he did take care of your he,

>On the other, he wouldn't let you go back to them. You can ody watch them, never being able to tell them you're okay. >He told them you were deact You don't know why.

>But he let them stay in . yard, where they would be safe, so you didn't say anything.

>For a little while, you were happy for your herd, b. sad that you codd never talk to them again.

>You ntised hugs. You missed your special frienct You wished you could be there when her babies came.

>Even though your new bed was warm and soft, you still felt cold and lonely. You were born and raised in a he, EV, day of your life you were surrounded by other flirffies.

>Now you were alone.

>The feeling of isolation was too much.

>Smarty friends must be strong, must not show fear so the herd isn't afraid

>But you couldn't help yourself as you cried yourself to sleep the nig..

>Then one day, the babies came.

>The human helped your special friend Witia the babies, b. the last one was a dummy baby.

>You were so worried That was your baby, Why did it have to be a dummy baby?

>If you were still o. in the wild, you would have had no choice but to leave the dummy baby behind, leaving it to die, cold and alone, before it ever got the chance to love or be loved

>It's not fair. No fittify should have to take the longest sleep witho. any love, witho. a chance.

>B. the human didn't leave it there, He brought it into the house, and told you to take care of it while he tried to fmcl out how to give it milk.

>He said he had milk from something called a cow, b. you didn't !mow what he meant. B. the human was trying to save your baby, so you didn't try to find out.

>While he was in the nummies room, you looked down at your baby.

>It was so small, so weak.

>A smarty friend must always be strong, especially for . he,

>In the past, you've had to be very strong and very brave, even when you were scared

>B. looking at your baby slowly dying, crying o. for a mother who wouldn't even look at it, you never felt so helples s. >It needed milk. You had none.

>You codcln't talk to your special friend, or the human would make you all leave, and then all of your babies would die from the Big White Time.

>You couldn't do anything. Its lite was in the hands of the human, who wasn't even sure he could do anything.

>So you did the only tlting you could think to do.

>You gave the baby hugs.

>Fluffies always think huggies make everythhig better, that they can make owscies go away and make sad feels not feel so sact >You know better. Huggies can make things worse sometirae. Huggies can make a little owie into a big owie. Huggies can sometimes do nothing at all

>B. there, with your dying child, it's all you could do.

>You Were Scared The most scared you had ever been in your short life. Your baby was dying, and you couldn't do anything abo. it.

>You just hoped huggies would help this time.

>Luduly for you, the human came badc With milk, And the baby drank d

>You were so happy. The lumian saved your baby, B. you se felt helpless.

>What codd you do? The mother still wouldn't want the baby, and witho. a mother, the baby would die even with mi lk. >B. the human had an idea. He's so smart, he folmd o. how to stop the baby from smelling Ike a dummy baby.

>And he found o. the baby was a boy, Your son. You felt so proud

>The baby smelled yilck, but your special friend took him back and treated him like her other babies.

>The human put your special friend and your babies on a soft bladcet.

>They cuddled together, with the rest of your herd watching happily.

>There was Simon, the green unicorn. He was young, and always ready to fig. to prove he wasn't a foaL B. he also l oved to play with the foals, nmning around with them while the mothers restect He doesn't hIce the human, b. he lov es . herd_

>Then there was Coal, the dad(bladc earth fluffy. He's not a very smart fhffy, and often forgets what you tell him to do. B. he was loyal to you, and you loved dm for always trying to defend the herd with his life.

>The littlest mare was Goldberry, with her bright yellow fluff and wings and white mane, who was not even old eno ugh to have special hugs. She was always there to help the mothers, getting them food, or rolling them when they go t too big to move. Now she spends her days playing in the grass and finding flowers to give to the mothers. She alwa ys tries to sleep next to Simon, and is constantly nuzzling against . fir.

>Maybe when she's older she could be . mate. B. he knows she's not old enough yet for special hugs. You taught him not to be a meanie and to not give spedal hugs if the mare said no or that it hurt.

>The other momma fhffy was Lavender, a very gentle pegasus c,di a pale pmples ftuff and a green mane. She's the m ost delicate member of your herd, and when her mate was killed, it broke her heart.

>You remember Scooter. You miss dm_ He was a good friend_ His baby Wila never know him. That makes you sad He would have been a good daddy.

>The unicom foal is still getting its teeth, and rig. now Lavender is teaching her to eat grass.

>When her teeth are done growing and she doesn't need her momma's milk anymore, she'll be old enough to get a na me. >And then there's your special friend, Holly. The prettiest mare you ever saw. She's feeding her babies rig. now.

>Your duldren.

>The thought makes you smile.

>You're a daddy.

>You watch them drinking their mi. and hugging their momma, and you hope they all sun'. long enough to get name s. >If it hadn't been for the human: one of them wouldn't have.

>He could have left it to die, b. he didn't

>He promised you he would take care of your herd, and he did.

>You've seen many imm.n, who would step on a fluffy imti its head burst and think nothing of it

>B. this human is different Vvben you were weak, he was strong.

>He used his human smartyness to save your littlest baby.

>He feeds your herd and gives them a safe place to live, witho. having to be afraid of monsters and not having enoug h mmimies. >He's a good human.

>You're going to tell him that.

>Huggies are the ody thing you can give him to show your gratitude.

>You just hope huggies will be enough this time.

>No.

>Human is not a good human.

>Bad human. Meanie human.

>Gave you what he called a 'bath.' >Too much water, lots of scrubbing. >You didn't like it

>But you do smell a lot better now...

>No, that's not acceptable. Meanie human.

>You sit yourself back down at the Nvindow to watch your herd as they drift off to sleep.

>Your special friend is in the middle of a fhify ring, laying on the soft blanket with her babies.

>All of her babies.

>You can see the littlest one is the one that's nuzzling With her the most.

>...

>Olcay, the human isn't all bad.

>But you hope you don't get any more baths.

>You are a human who has taken up the responsibility of taking care of a fluffy herd.

>It's been three days since Ezeldel's babies were born, and Ezeldel seems to be opening up to you more.

>You guess the whole nmt incident proved you could be trusted

>You think you almost lost all that goodwill when you gave him a bath, though.

>He didn't say a word the entire time you were washing him_

>Granted, he's normally silent, just watching . herd through the sliding glass door.

>But this was a differe. kind of silence.

>The 'I'm not saying anything because if I did, it would involve comments abo. your mother' kind of silence.

>B. you really couldn't have avoided it. Dude smelled like birthing &lid mixed with whatever else he tramped throu gh o. in the wild_ You weren't abo. to put up v,di that smell in the house.

>You tried to be positive abo. it -Look Zeke, you're all clean now,.

>He just shot you a look that said "Clean dese fluffy nuts."

>His mood improved a bit after more window-watching of . herd sleeping.

>The nmt seems to be doing fine. The mother hasn't shown any signs of rejection.

>Just to be safe, you took the baby inside again earlier today and resprayed him, rauch to . and his mother's chagrin.

>Simon tried to headbutt you when you brought the baby back.

>Considering he probably hurt himself more than he hurt you, you ignored it.

>Because the baby's eyes were open this time, Zeke dd behind your couch until you brought the nmt badc outside.

>With his siblings next to dm for comparison, you can see that the nmt is a little bit smaller than most babies. Not by a lo, b. enough that it's noticeable.

>He's also a lot dingier, muting imo . mother's fluff even when his siblings are playing.

>Given that he spent an hour being denied the motherly affection that babies need, you understand . reluctance to lea ve it now that he has it.

>The rest of the herd is doing fine.

>They ate all of the good grass awhile ago, and you've been providing them with food ever since.

>With instruction from Zeke, you feed them in the morning and at dinnertime.

>Breakfast for them is usually warm oatmeal with a few pieces of fruit mixed in.

>They love it. You don't p. any milk or sugar in it, but they enjoy it all the same.

>You suspect that fiuffies have very few taste buds.

>That and this has to be leaps and bounds above what they'd have to .t in the wild.

>Even without their smarty friend, they're consdentious enough to not bicker over the &lit pieces.

>In fact, Simon usually makes sure every fluffy gets a fair arammt.

>The mothers get a little extra, so they can get enough sugar inside them for milk.

>Or maybe they can detect Zeke watching them all, time, like a fluffy Eye of Sauron.

>In the evening, it's rice and veggies for them.

>You give them plenty of vegetables to .t at night.

>If s only fair, considering their feces is helping your garden grow.

>And grow it has. You've never seen your plants like this.

>That thify shit really works wonders in large amounts.

>You even bought a comainer to store excess poop for winter. At the rate that fluffies poop (wdch is a lot): you're set to have one motherfucker of a boimtifill harvest.

>So .r they. been very good abo. pooping ody in the spot you told them to poop in_ Aside from a few accidents and t he babies.. hey, nobody's perfect Especially fluffies.

>With such a healthy die, the herd no longer loolcs disheveled and stalling. Rather, they're much more energetic, and spend a lot of time playing and hugging.

>When the mothers want some time to themselves, Simon always takes care of the babies, playing and nmning arou nd with them. >He's not so bad a guy, he just hates your guts. If the herd tomorrow, he wodd doubtless be the new s martyr frienct

>Another unicorn smarty fiend_ Lilce the world really needs more of those.

>Well, die alternative would be the other stallion in the group, a jet bladc fluffy with a grey mane. Ezeldel told you . name was Coat

>He's big for fluffy, even an earth &iffy such as himself. He wouldn't be smart enough to be a good smarty friend_ He's not stupid, he's just an average fluffy. Protective, though. Occasionally you catch him walking along the part of the Withila sig. of the bacicyard, looking for any threats.

>Aside from the mothers, stallions, and babies, the only rmi.ining member of the herd is a young little mare, whose

name is apparently Goldbeny

>She has a bright yellow coat of fluff with a white mane. She spends most of her time either helping the mothers or wandering

around looking for interesting things.

>With winter approaching, that mostly leaves the occasional dandelions that shows up in your yard

>She picks them and presents them to the mothers, who squeal with joy at the -pewetty fwowar

>Goldberry takes payment in praise and hugs.

>Adorable. P. it keeps your yard weed-free.

>She seems to have a crush on Simon, too. She's always trying to nuzzle with him, and always lays down next to him for naps or nighttime sleep.

>Simon seems happy for the attention, b. it surprises you he hasn't tried to mate with her yet. Fluffies don't have a prolonged

mating ritual, they just get down to it with Very little hesitation.

>She's probably not old enough yet. Fluffies reach sexual maturity around 4 months of age, wch by your guess is still another month away.

>Fhify jailbait.

>Right now the other mother is trying to teach her foal how to eat grass With her slowly developing teeth.

>It's a slow process. It's the beginning of winter, and most of your grass is either dying or already eaten by the herd

>Well, then learn. Maybe she could start with something softer. They'll get their dinner in a few hours.

>You make a mental note to cook the rice a tide longer tonight so it's extra soft.

>All things considered, ymire a lot happier for adopting the herct They give you a sense of responsibility: and though they're still a lide apprehensive arotmd you, they always make sure to thank you for feeding them.

>Goldberry will sometimes hug your leg when you bring meals.

>Simon definitely doesn't like that.

>So you raake sure to give her a hug back, along Wilil a generous belly rub.

>Oh roan, the look on . face... >Sometimes, hugs are all it takes.