



# Happily Ever After

By Vanner

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# Chapter 1

Behind the marble counter stood the serene face of a master. A white bandana held back the mass of downy mane that coifed the head of the pony. Around him floated the razor sharp steel of a dozen knives, each chopping, hacking, and slicing with the precision of sewing machine. A bead of sweat rolled into the bandana and wicked away as he moved not a muscle. Carrots and green beans were scooped from their chopping blocks and tossed into the rolling boil of sauce pans with only a tilt of his horn. The chopping of knives and the gurgle of sauces were the only sounds that echoed from the kitchen. The blue unicorn worked in silence as slips of paper floated past. With nary a look, another plate filled with food floated to the counter. The dinner rush was on, but Pokey was waiting for something much bigger.

An earth pony moved in silence as he took away plates ladned with food to the two dozen ponies that stood in anticipation of that evening's meal. At a corner table nearest to the kitchen, a teal unicorn and a cream earth pony sat, enjoying the other's company with a silent smile and a happy stare, as if the world around them didn't matter. The two lovers ignored the earth pony that delivered their food and stayed lost in each other's eyes. A clatter of dishes from the kitchen broke their stare. With a small giggle, they turned at last to their meal.

Pokey turned to peer out from the kitchen window and, for the tiniest second, caught the teal unicorn's eye. With a silent, nearly unnoticed nod, Pokey allowed his knives to clatter to their blocks and a bottle fine of champagne rose from the refrigerator to replace them. With a flip of his horn, the cork popped and two fine stemmed flutes rose to meet the flowing bubbly. Flutes held aloft by the twinkle of magic, Pokey strode from the kitchen into his dining hall.

The two ponies returned to staring into each other's eyes and the world again disappeared around them. The restaurant went silent as the blue unicorn strode across the floor of his restaurant. No pony had ever seen him leave the kitchen for anything during the dinner rush. A dozen pairs of eyes followed the blue unicorn, but two sets stayed lost in each other. Lyra

caught him from the corner of her eye and turned to face her friend. Bon-Bon looked up at Pokey; the grim visage of a pony harried by work stared back.

“We didn’t order champagne,” said Bon-Bon.

“On the house,” said Pokey. Murmurs filled the room. Pokey was known to be generous, but champagne? This time of the year? They watched as the chef smiled at the Bon-Bon, then nodded to Lyra. Lyra stood up on her back legs and lifted the glass of champagne from the table with a wave of her horn.

“Fillies and gentlecolts,” she said. “Many of you have seen love in your life and many of you have found that one special pony that makes you happy beyond measure. For me, that is my Bon-Bon.” She gestured to Bon-Bon with a wave of her hoof. “Bon-Bon is the most amazing mare I have ever met. She took me in when I was cold and alone on the streets of Ponyville. In sickness, she cared for me, and in health, she has loved me. To her, the eccentricities of who I am and that which I aspire to be are what she loves about me. Her heart is that of gold and her eyes are infinite aquamarine to lose yourself in. She has been my everything for these few years and for that, I want to spend the rest of my life with her.” Lyra turned to the mare of dreams and got down on one knee. From her purse floated a necklace.

As it caught the light of a dozen candles, the sparkle of a single majestic diamond filled the room. Bon-Bon drew a hoof to her mouth in a gasp. As Lyra clasped the necklace around Bon-Bon’s neck, she took her hoof, and stared into her eyes.

“Bon-Bon, will you marry me?”

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Despite the late hour, the echoing raps of hooves on wood summoned the proprietor of Carousel Boutique to the front door. With a smile, Rarity welcomed Pokey into her shop and her home. The smile across his own face told her everything she needed to know.

“I haven’t designed wedding dresses for months!” said Rarity in a giddy squeal. “And two for the same wedding! I haven’t been this excited in... well

I don't even remember! I can only hope I'm not too flush with the excitement of it all. A real noble wedding, right here here in my little town of Ponyville. I simply cannot wait!"

"It might be in Canterlot," said Pokey. "Lyra does have some expectations to meet, even if she is on the lowest tiers of the aristocracy." Rarity dismissed the notion with a wave of her hoof.

"Oh, that's nonsense," said Rarity. "With Princess Luna back on the throne, the nobility has gotten itself in a tizzy about how they're finally coming back into favor. We have our princesses and our mayors. We don't need more government, especially not from those types. " A pounding from upstairs filled the lull in the conversation and demanded attention. Rarity's sapphire eyes rolled to the ceiling with a weighty sigh. "Was it really necessary to tie her up?"

"You saw how she reacted to that necklace," said Pokey. "We couldn't have her spoiling the surprise."

Their hooves gently tapped upon the stairs as they trotted up and into Rarity's living quarters. On the floor, bound hoof and snout with lavender ribbon, was Pinkie Pie. She bounced from the rug toward the two unicorns, mumbling something incomprehensible. Pokey leaned down, and with a flick of his horn, sent the ribbons to the ground in tatters.

"Now what'd you go and do that for?" demanded Pinkie as she bounded to her hooves. "I can keep a secret better than any of you. What about all those surprise parties, Pokey? What about how jealous you were of Fluttershy, Rarity? It's like you ponies don't trust me or something!"

"We trust you just fine, dearie," said Rarity. "But when you went charging for the restaurant with a bag of streamers, something just had to be done." Pinkie raised a hoof to defend herself against these accusations, but found herself speechless. She lowered her hoof, and looked up at the two unicorns.

"You mean, they didn't want a surprise party?" she asked. "But everypony loves my surprise parties!"

"That was supposed to be a romantic surprise," said Pokey. "That's a bit

different than your normal party. Plus, Lyra asked me to make sure you didn't interfere."

"Awh," moaned Pinkie. "I bet I could have made it ten times as romantic! I've got heart streamers, heart balloons, and we could have had a band and..."

"On the other hand," said Rarity. "Lyra did mention that she needed a wedding planner." Pinkie's eyes lit up again and a million watt smile filled her face.

"You think she'd let me plan their wedding?" she asked. "It'll be the biggest party Ponyville's ever seen!" With that, Pinkie shot down the stairs and through the door of Carousel boutique in a streak of pink. The ponies exchanged a shrug before Pokey turned to leave the store.

"Do you think she's up to it?" asked Rarity.

"Pinkie?" asked Pokey. "That mare's got more go than a sack of coffee beans. If anyone can pull off the wedding of the century, it's her." He smiled, and with a chuckle, looked to the home of his friends. "And no two ponies deserve a happily ever after more than those two."

A pink blur filled the streets of Ponyville as Pinkie homed in on her target. As the home of the newly engaged couple came into view, Pinkie slammed on the brakes. With a spray of dirt, the Pinkie skidded to a halt in front of a small thatched cottage. Lyra answered the rapping of hooves a moment later to find Pinkie practically vibrating with excitement.

"I just heard the great news!" said Pinkie. "I mean, I knew about it earlier, but Pokey tied me up in Rarity's store so I couldn't go to his restaurant and spoil the surprise, but it wouldn't have been spoiled because it would have been better with the balloons and streamers and six piece band and clowns and..." She paused to inhale, then leaned against the door frame with a smug smile. "So I hear you need a wedding planner."

Lyra blinked in amazement as Pinkie stood there grinning. She'd been engaged less than two hours and already ponies were lining up to help her. She was sure that tomorrow every pony in Ponyville would turn up to offer a helping hoof. It would be a nice change from all the stuffy weddings of

Canterlot and, even if it all proved to be a giant Pinkie-powered fiasco, it would still be the best wedding that Ponyville had to offer.

“Pinkie, dear,” said Lyra. “I appreciate the offer, but we haven’t even set a date yet. We just got home from the restaurant and we were going to celebrate our engagement together.”

“Well that’s great!” said Pinkie. “It’s kind of late but I can definitely put together a party on short notice. I’ll run home and grab the streamers, you get the punch and...”

“I meant alone,” said Lyra.

“Ooooooh, a party for two,” said Pinkie. She popped a party hat over Lyra’s horn and stuffed a noise maker into her mouth. Lyra responded with a confused “fweee.”

“I love parties for two!” said Pinkie. “They’re so much fun. You know a pony is having a good time when you get to have a party with them. I’ll come come see you first thing tomorrow!” Pinkie bounced away from Bon-Bon’s cottage humming a tune that sounded suspiciously like the Can-Can.

Lyra stood dumbfounded at her door for a moment before turning back into the house. As she walked through her living room, the quiet sounds of a string quartet came in over the radio. Inspired by the melody, Lyra stood on her back hooves and danced through her living room. She plucked a rose from the vase atop the coffee table and waltzed into the kitchen to find Bon-Bon scratching pencil to parchment. Bon-Bon looked up to see Lyra leaning against the door frame, a rose held in her smile.

“So, my little confection,” said Lyra. “How you doin’?”

“Where did you get a party hat?” asked Bon-Bon.

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When Lyra emerged from Bon-Bon’s cottage the next morning, she gathered up her morning paper to discover the headline blared the announcement of her engagement. She lowered the paper to find a mob of two dozen ponies waiting at her doorstep with eager smiles. From the back

of the crowd, a streak of pink bowled through herd.

“Hi!” said Pinkie. “It’s tomorrow! I told every pony in Ponyville about your engagement, and I had Snappy Scoops change the headline from something boring about climate change to your announcement because he owed me a favor from his mom’s birthday party. Then I gathered up every pony who could do anything for weddings and brought them all here so we could help with your wedding, because this is going to be the biggest party that Ponyville has ever seen!” Pinkie paused a moment. “Hey, how did your two-pony celebration go last night?”

Lyra took a step back from Pinkie’s exuberant grin. Lyra often wondered how Pinkie stayed so “up” all the time. Standing this close to her she could smell the chocolate and coffee on her breath. It was an answer, sure, but it wasn’t to a question that needed to be asked at the moment. From the staircase came the clopping hooves of Bon-Bon, hair still in curlers and wrapped in a dressing gown. She looked at Pinkie for a moment, then to the gathered herd of Ponyville’s florists, bakers, and caterers. Bon-Bon glanced at Lyra for an explanation, to which Lyra only shrugged in confusion.

“Pinkie,” said Lyra. “We haven’t even set a date yet. We just got engaged yesterday. It’s not like we’re going to...”

“Oh, I know that silly,” said Pinkie. “We’re not here to plan just yet. I brought everypony here so we could do this!” Pinkie Pie dashed into the bush outside Bon-Bon’s cottage and emerged a moment later, clothed in a tux, spats, and top hat. The gathered herd behind her joined in a can-can routine in as Pinkie began to sing.

*“Weee’re here today to celebrate  
The best couple to ever date  
Here in Equestria!  
Tooo bring about this wedding day  
All your ideas we put in play  
so you can have a good time!  
Aaand there will be wedding cake  
And baskets for guests to take  
And pies and cakes and punch...”*



Pinkie's song went on for a few more verses as the ponies behind her kicked up their hooves in a chorus line. Giant feather fans accompanied the routine, as did a choreographed routine involving fireworks and a pegasus fly over toward the end. Lyra and Bon-Bon stood stunned on their doorstep as Pinkie skidded on her knees in front the couple. Her hooves were held wide as the song and danced finished behind her.

"So," she panted. "Can I plan your wedding?" Lyra and Bon Bon took a step back into their home and slammed the door. Pinkie put a hoof to her mouth and yelled into the door. "So, that's a maybe?"

"We can't let that insane pony plan our wedding!" said Bon-Bon. "What would your parents think if she puts on a spectacle like that?" Bon-Bon paused a moment. "You should write them a letter. We can go to Canterlot to meet them for lunch, and we can look at dresses while we're there! I'll finally get to meet your parents! I can't believe I've never met them before."

"And you never will," said Lyra. Bon-Bon took a step back.

"What?" she asked. "Why not?"

"Because they hate the idea of me dating a commoner," said Lyra. "I love them dearly, but their ideas that commoners and nobility, such as myself, shouldn't date is about as antiquated as the idea that two mares shouldn't marry. "

"That's absurd!" said Bon-Bon. "Family is the most important thing in the world and I refuse to believe that a pony as sweet as you came from hateful stock."

"Doubt it all you want," said Lyra. "I'll send them a letter. If they don't approve, then they're not invited. It's as simple as that." She wrapped her hooves around Bon-Bon and kissed her cheek. "You are all the family a pony could ever need."

"You are so good to me," said Bon-Bon. She lost herself in Lyra's eyes for a moment before a thought occurred to her. "So, what do we do now that we're engaged?"

"I guess we start planning," said Lyra.

“Let me help!” bellowed a voice from the fireplace. “Hey, it’s slippery up here. Whoa, AGH!” Thumping and crashing echoed from inside the fireplace as a rolling cloud of soot overtook the living room. As the dust settled amid the coughing of the two residents, a sooty Pinkie pie stood from the fireplace. “You should really have your chimney cleaned at least once a year. I know a great pony who does it cheap.” The happy couple looked at each other with distress.

“You’re not going to leave us alone until we agree to use you as our wedding planner, are you?” asked Bon-Bon.

“Nope,” smiled Pinkie. Lyra put a hoof to her face, and with a weary sigh, dropped her head.

“Fine,” she said. “How much do you charge?” Pinkie put a hoof to chin in contemplation.

“You mean you’ll pay me to plan the biggest party in Ponyville history?” she asked. She tapped her hoof a few times with the other, as if counting on imaginary fingers. She paused, scribbled a few figures in the air, then erased them with a wave of her tail. “How does ten bits sound and I’ll plan everything?”

“How about a hundred and you’ll do what we ask?” said Bon-Bon

“Fifty and I’ll take your ideas into consideration,” countered Pinkie.

“Seventy five and you can have one surprise,” said Bon-Bon. “Final offer.”

“Done!” said Pinkie. The two mares shook on it. Pinkie left hoof prints of soot on her way out. Bon-Bon looked at the hoof prints with a weary sigh.

“I’ll clean it up,” said Lyra. “I don’t have a performance today and you need to get ready for work.” She kissed Bon-Bon’s forehead and patted her flank to get her moving. As Bon-Bon walked up the stairs, Lyra stood on her back hooves, and put her front hooves to her hip. “Ha ha! Now I shall use a broom like a human!”

“Clean it up the normal way!” called a voice from upstairs.

“With the vacuum then!” said Lyra with a boisterous yell. Then, in a whisper, “Like a human.”

Further down the street from Bon-Bon’s cottage, Pinkie Pie bounced through the back door of Sugar Cube Corner. With a toss of her mane, she landed her top hat on the coat rack. Mrs. Cake looked at Pinkie’s tux a moment before turning back to her frosting. There was a clattering from upstairs before Pinkie trotted back down wearing her apron.

“Did you have a good time dear?” asked Mrs. Cake.

“Well,” said Pinkie. “Twinkle was off rhythm for half the performance, and Medley clearly didn’t memorize the song. I mean, she forgot her verse and she had a whole two hours to learn it? I just assumed we didn’t need practice, but noooo. I thought with all the musical numbers we have around here, ponies would be good at them by now!”

“That’s nice, dear,” said Mrs. Cake. She ignored Pinkie’s prattling about drill team precision for spontaneous musical numbers as she continued frosting the cupcakes. When she finished, Mrs. Cake tied a ribbon around the stack, and pushed it at Pinkie.

“I’ve got a delivery for the Balloons Cafe,” said Mrs. Cake. “If you see Pokey, give him this invoice too.” Pinkie’s face lit up. She hadn’t seen her friend in... well hours now, and Pokey was always happy to see her. She slapped the invoice on top of the box of cakes and wheeled the cart out into Ponyville.

As the streets churned beneath her hooves, Pinkie considered her role as a professional wedding planner. She was actually getting paid to plan a party to the specifications of a customer. While that did limit the type of party she could throw, it would prove to be an excellent exercise in restraint and elegant planning. Pinkie looked to the sky to see a clear new day emerging before her. Perhaps it was time for her parties to grow up a bit from their usual raucous extravaganza. Perhaps it was time to grow up a little bit.

“Nah,” she said to herself with a giggle. The cart eventually came to a halt behind the single story restaurant where Pokey levitated trash bags into the dumpster. “Hi!”

“Morning, Pinkie,” said Pokey. “I heard your routine went pretty well.”

“You’d be surprised how fast you can gather up two dozen ponies if you offer them donuts,” said Pinkie. “Where were you this morning?” Instead of speaking, Pokey floated the Ponyville Gazette in front of Pinkie’s face.

“Is this your doing?” asked Pokey. She looked at the paper a moment, and scanned the articles.

“Oh wow!” she said. “Two for one and Quills and Sofas! Davenport is such a genius!”

“Not that... wait two for one?” The paper flipped as Pokey scanned it. “Ooh, I could use a new sofa... No, not that. The headline and the article. Why did you tell the paper everything I told you? Lyra’s going to be mad at me for telling their life story. Why did you even ask me?”

“Because Carrot Top and Derpy were busy,” said Pinkie.

“And I wasn’t?” asked Pokey. “You tied me up with streamers and tickled my hooves till I told you what you wanted to know. They were paper! And I couldn’t cut them! Where do you buy streamers like that?”

“I did it because you weren’t talking!” said Pinkie as if it were the most obvious thing in the world. “I can’t let a simple thing like ticklish hooves stand in the way of the wedding of the century! I need to know things to make the best parties, and if I need to know it, I need to know it now!”

Pokey placed a hoof to his face and took a deep, patient breath. The Ponyville Gazette floated to the recycling bin only to be replaced with the Equestria Daily. The paper shuffled with a twinkle to reveal the “Life” section. Sure enough, on the front page was a photo of Lyra and Bon-Bon with their engagement announcement.

“That’s great!” said Pinkie. “I didn’t even plan that! That’s going to save so much money for Lyra and Bon-Bon. Free publicity! I’m the best wedding planner ever!”

“Pinkie,” said Pokey, “You can’t even imagine how much of a problem this

is going to cause.”

“Why is two ponies getting married a problem, Pokey?” Pinkie gasped and backed away from her friend. “Are you jealous that you’re not getting to plan the wedding? Did you think I wouldn’t ask to you to cater it? You’re one of the best chefs in Ponyville!”

“What?” asked Pokey. “I mean... no, that’s not it at all. Lyra’s a noble and a unicorn. Bon-Bon isn’t either of those things.”

“So?” asked Pinkie. “That’s what makes it a great party! It’s a party, but somepony else is paying for it!” Pokey only sighed and looked back to his kitchen. Orders were starting to pile up as ponies came in for lunch. The cake cart jerked back as Pokey’s magic grabbed the handle.

“I’ll explain later,” said Pokey, as he wheeled the baked goods into the shop. “But don’t be surprised if you start running into problems planning this wedding sooner rather than later. Not everypony is going to be happy for them.” Pinkie dismissed Pokey’s concerns with a wave.

“You’re such a kidder!” said Pinkie. “Every pony is going to be super excited for this wedding, I just know it!”

As Pinkie bounced her way through the streets of Ponyville, she passed Bon-Bon’s Bon-Bons in a state of such bliss that she didn’t notice two dapper unicorns entering the candy shop. As the tinkle of the shop bell sounded behind them, the green and white unicorns paused a moment to take in the marvels of confection that surrounded them.

Inside the shop, the air was heavy with the scent of caramel and taffy. Hints of peppermint fluttered on the breeze as the heavy scent of chocolate wrapped around the noses of the unicorns. The walls were covered in bins filled with cellophane wrapped treats of all varieties. Chocolates, taffies, and hard candies of every stripe tempted the unicorns from every angle.

“My goodness,” said the white unicorn stallion. “Have you ever seen so much candy?”

“Never in my life, Star” said green unicorn mare. “I always knew our little Lyra had a sweet tooth. I guess it should make sense that she’d pursue a

candy maker.”

“Coming, coming!” called Bon-Bon from the back room. Her cream face had been masked white with powdered sugar and her white apron stained dark with splotches of chocolate. She trotted from the kitchen behind the counter to greet her guests. “I don’t believe I’ve seen you in town before,” she said with a smile. “Welcome to Bon-Bon’s Bon-Bons, Ponyville’s finest candy shop for three generations. I’m Bon-Bon, and these...” she gestured to the galaxy of confections before her, “are my bon-bons. Since you’re new in town, please, have a sample of anything you like.”

As the two unicorns each sampled a sugary treat, Bon-Bon caught a glimpse of familiar features in her new customers. As they sniffed around, she realized that she had, in fact, seen them before. Not in person, but in photographs. Were these ponies famous? From the way they were dressed, they looked as if they were nobility. Nobility. Her eyes went wide as it dawned on her just who had come into her shop. Her cheerful smile faded to a grin of fear as the white unicorn approached her with a bag of peppermints.

“Hello Miss Bon-Bon,” said the unicorn. He looked down at her necklace, then back to her. “My name is Star Dream, and this is my wife Strawberry Lime. We’re Lyra’s parents.”

“Ah...” Bon-Bon stammered. “It’s... ah... so nice to finally meet you,” she said.

“I hear tell that a certain unicorn asked you a question last night,” said Strawberry Lime as she pushed a few bits to Bon-Bon.

“How... how did you know?” asked Bon-Bon. “Derpy just got the mail a few hours ago, I can’t imagine that Lyra’s letter got to you that quickly.”

From Strawberry’s saddlebag floated a copy of Equestria Daily’s life section. It was the picture of her and Lyra sitting on a bench together that grabbed her attention. The headline read “Baroness Lyra to marry candy maker from Ponyville.” Bon-Bon noticed they spelled her name wrong.

“As members of the nobility,” said Star Dream. “We are required by custom to ask you to break your engagement with our daughter because of your

non-noble heritage.” Bon-Bon blinked in amazement at the statement. “It’s simply a formality, you see and...”

“Star!” scolded Strawberry Lime.

“I’m sorry,” asked Bon-Bon. “Are you asking me not to marry Lyra?”

“Well, yes,” said Star. “But...”

“You came all the way from your gilded towers in Canterlot to ask me that?” Her voice was flat and calm, concealing the sort of apolexic rage that would have given a lesser pony a stroke. The tiny swinging door that separated the shop from the counter snapped off the hinges as she shoved it out the way. “And then you come into *my* store, to ask me, a pony you’ve never met before, to give up the mare of my dreams?” She prodded Star Dream in the chest with a hoof to punctuate the sentence. The two unicorns nodded as they backed away in terror.

“So that’s a no?” asked Star Dream.

“GET OUT OF MY STORE!” shrieked Bon-Bon. The two unicorns bolted for the exit in a tangle of hooves and candy wrappers. Bon-Bon stood seething for a moment as the unicorns fled through the streets of Ponyville. As she lost sight of them, she stumbled to the wall and steadied herself with a hoof. As the tears of anger washed the sugar from her face, an orange maned pony burst through the front entrance.

“What was that?” asked Carrot Top. “Who were those ponies? Why were you screaming at them? What’s wrong?” Bon-Bon wrapped her arms around her friend and began sobbing into her mane. Carrot Top helped Bon-Bon to her feet, and helped her into the back room where the candy mixers churned in quiet contentment. Bon-Bon sat on the floor in a sobbing heap as Carrot top stroked her hair. “Come on now sweetie. Talk to me. It can’t be that bad.”

“That... was... Lyra’s... parents,” sobbed Bon-Bon. “They want me to break my engagement. I’ve been engaged less than a day and already ponies are coming after me. I just want my Lyra. Why can’t I have my Lyra?”

“Her parents?” asked Carrot Top. “Those lousy...” She muttered something

else that sounded suspiciously like profanity. "Sweetie, go home. I'll take care of your shop. Then, I'll take care of this, alright? Don't you worry about a thing. Carrot Top's going to make it all better."

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"YOU SAID WHAT?" demanded Lyra. The entire restaurant turned to face the family of unicorns that sat inside the cafe. "Are you insane? Do you really hate me that much?"

"She didn't let us finish!" said Star Dream. "Custom dictates that if a noble is engaged to a commoner then..."

"I asked her, you idiot!" Lyra shouted. "Yesterday! Not even sixteen hours ago! At THIS TABLE!" She pointed to the picture of herself and Bon-Bon that someone had tacked to the wall. It was a picture of Lyra on bent knee just after she had clasped the necklace. "What in Celestia's Equestria is wrong with you two?"

"There a problem here?" asked Pokey. He had descended upon the table with the silence of a jaguar and stood glaring at Lyra's parents with the menacing presence of a mantichore. "I don't know who you are, but I won't have you upsetting my friends."

"It's okay Pokey," said Lyra. "These two idiots are my parents and they were just explaining how big of idiots they really are." Pokey nodded and made his way back to the kitchen.

"I was about to tell you," continued Star Dream, "that custom dictates if a noble is engaged to a commoner, then the noble family must ask the commoner to reconsider the engagement. BUT," he said raising a hoof to interrupt his daughter, "if she had let me finish, she would heard how much I don't care for that tradition anyway." He put his hoof down. "Times are changing, Lyra. We may come from old money, but we didn't keep it this long because we're stupid. Even with the noble titles, we still have to make our own sound decisions. Despite your refusal to bring Bon-Bon to meet us, we've done some checking up on her."

From a coat pocket floated a book of pictures and notes that scattered across the table. Lyra fluttered through the pictures a moment and poured



over the documents. It was an entire history of the candy maker, from her birth to a family of candy makers up through her tax records from the last year. There was even her one arrest for attempted assault when she accidentally served her cinnamon-ginger fireballs to a visiting noble. Lyra threw down the papers in disgust.

“You’ve been spying on us?” said Lyra. “I could have told you anything you wanted. I already know all this. I know her parents and her sisters. She’s the love of my life. Don’t you think I’ve paid attention to these things? She’s not after our money.”

“We know that dear,” said Strawberry. “And we just wanted to make sure. I mean, look at these photographs.” She pointed to the pictures of the mares standing together on a bridge in the sunset and to another of Bon-Bon watching Lyra on stage. “Just because we haven’t met her doesn’t mean we haven’t been watching you two. We do attend your concerts when you’re in Canterlot, and we’ve seen the way she looks at you. It’s...” She paused a moment to come up with the perfect word. “She looks at you as if you’re her entire world. Love like that doesn’t come but once in a lifetime. Even your father and I never had that.”

“Your marriage was arranged,” said Lyra. “And you’ve been so deep in all that nobility nonsense, that I just figured you’d hate Bon-Bon for being common.”

“You never even gave us a chance to meet her,” said Star Dream. “And I’m afraid our first impression wasn’t what we were hoping it would be. Would you explain it to her and see if she’ll give us another chance?” Lyra buried her head in her hooves with an exasperated grumble.

“Why did you go to see Bon-Bon without coming to see me first?” asked Lyra.

“Because of your father’s sweet-tooth,” said Strawberry Lime. “We just had to stop and get some peppermint sticks. And now because some pony couldn’t keep their mouth shut...” Strawberry glared at her husband. “We had planned to come to your house and ask you to invite Bon-Bon’s parents to dinner. The six of us having a nice, quiet meal to get to know each other. But, since your father decided to torpedo our first impression, maybe we’ll come back another time.”

Lyra simply shook her head. "I'll go talk to Bon-Bon and see if her parents are free this evening," said Lyra. "You can... I dunno, walk around town. Go to the library. Take in a show. Go to Sugar Cube Corner and meet the wedding planner."

'You have a wedding planner already?' asked Star Dream.

"She kinda forced herself on us," said Lyra. "Don't worry. Pinkie Pie is harmless." A chuckle floated from the kitchen at Lyra's remark. She put a hoof to the side of her mouth and yelled into the kitchen. "Shut up, Pokey. No pony asked you." Maniacal laughter echoed from the kitchen in response; Lyra only grumbled something uncouth.

Further down the street from Balloons Cafe, a magenta mare stumbled through the door of Bon-Bon's Bon-Bons. With a moan, the mare flopped her head onto the counter and gurgled something unintelligible. Carrot Top came from the kitchen a moment later to find Berry Punch snoring on Bon-Bon's counter.

"Are you drunk again?" asked Carrot Top.

"So tired," whined Berry. "Pinchy's had a fever for a week and she keeps waking up in tears every night. I haven't slept in three nights." She looked up at Carrot Top from the counter. "You're not Bon-Bon." Carrot Top only lowered an eyebrow at the remark.

"What are you doing here anyway?" asked Carrot Top. "This isn't the liquor store."

"Hey, I haven't even had a drink in a week," protested Berry Punch. "When Pinchy's sick, that's all that matters. I don't need you judging me for being a bad parent; I get enough of that from Foal Protective Services. Bunch of nosey, rotten...lousy..." Her rant faded off into a snore as she laid her head back on the counter. She snapped awake again a moment later, and darted her head around the candy shop. "So where's Bon-Bon anyway? We were supposed to have lunch today."

"Lyra's parents came into to town," said Carrot Top. "They said some things that upset her and she went home. I don't think she's feeling up to

company right now.”

“I’ll cut em!” snapped Berry. “I need a bottle. Go get me one of those bottles marked liqueur. Bottom shelf. Right side of the kitchen.” Carrot Top only shook her head.

“Go home,” said Carrot Top. “I’ve got all this taken care of. After I close up, I’m going to go find those snotty unicorns and give them what for.” She punched one hoof into another.

“Beat downs are my thing,” said Berry. “I’ve already got a record; you don’t want to go getting yourself busted for something like that. Leave it to the professionals.”

“Are you saying you’re a hit-pony?” asked Carrot Top. “What happened to being the school’s janitor?”

“It’s kind of the same thing,” said Berry Punch. “They both involve taking out the trash and sweet kung-fu moves.” Berry struck a pose that left Carrot Top positively tepid.

“Are you sure you’re not drunk?”

Berry Punch would have argued the point if the door hadn’t opened behind her with the tinkle of bells. The two mares turned to greet the customers, only to find that it was Lyra and two unicorns that had come in. Carrot Top pointed a hoof.

“That’s them!” said Carrot Top. The yellow mare dove over the counter with a growl. Berry Punch grabbed up the nearest bottle she could find, which was a wax bottle filled with a colorful sugar solution. She went to shatter it, only to find that the wax bottle wouldn’t break against the counter. Carrot Top stood confused a moment before turning her attention back to the unicorns.

“What in the name of Celestia are you two doing?” asked Lyra.

“Revenaging!” said Berry Punch. “None shall sully the honor of Bon-Bon while we live! Oh, shoot, this bottle’s leaking.” She tossed the wax bottle aside before licking the syrup off her face. “Hey these are really good.

Carrot, you gotta try this.”

“Are you drunk?” asked Lyra. She shook her head. “Look, you’re not going to be revenging anything. These are my parents, and yes they upset Bon-Bon, but they’re here to apologize. Where is she?”

“She went home,” said Carrot Top. “She was crying and miserable after talking to *those* two,” she glared at the two unicorns, “so I said I’d watch the store for her. I’d suggest treading lightly, Mr. and Mrs. Lyra’s Parents. Everypony in Ponyville loves Bon-Bon, and if you have plans to mess up her wedding, then I think you’d better just leave town before things get ugly.” Berry Punch growled to emphasize Carrot’s point. Lyra just put hoof to face, and took a deep, exasperated breath.

“I’ll explain everything later,” said Lyra. “For right now, would you two please go tell Bon-Bon’s parents to meet us tonight at eight? Everything will be better by then, I promise.”

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When Lyra made her way home, she found Bon-Bon sobbing on the couch and shoveling candy into her mouth. Bon-Bon was wreck. Her face was covered in smears of chocolate and fresh tears. Lyra sat on the couch beside her and put her hooves around her.

“It’s okay, Sweetheart,” said Lyra.

“It’s not okay,” blubbered Bon-Bon. “Why do your parents hate me? We’ve never even met before and they hate me!” She whimpered, unwrapping another chocolate.

“They don’t hate you,” said Lyra. “Dad’s just kind of dumb. He sticks his hoof in his mouth more often than I do, and that’s saying something. He wants us to get married, but he’s a stickler for tradition.” Bon-Bon sniffed and looked up at Lyra. Lyra looked to the ceiling as she tried to remember the story her father had told her all those years ago.

“Once upon a time, back when nobility really mattered, commoners and nobles were forbidden to be together because the nobles kept abusing their power. One day, Celestia saw a duke secreting a meeting with a scullery

maid. Celestia figured that he was just using her and she dropped in to admonish him for lording his power over a commoner. The duke stood up to Celestia and told her that the maid was to be his wife. Celestia then asked the maid if she would break the engagement.

“Of course, she refused,” continued Lyra. “Celestia then stripped the duke of his title, and banished him from the kingdom with his maid. When he came to her office to return the trappings of nobility, a wedding officiated by the princess herself was waiting for the two ponies. She decreed that true love was more important than titles, and that everywhere that love bloomed was a place to be held sacred.” Lyra smiled at her Bon-Bon, and nuzzled her head. “It’s a test, you see. The parents of a noble will always tell a commoner to break the engagement. If they agree because they’re afraid of the parents, then it’s not true love and it’s not meant to be. You, my darling Bon-Bon,” she said with a kiss, “terrified two nobles out of your store and nearly got my father stomped by Pokey for upsetting me. So you win.”

Bon-Bon sniffed again before smiling. “So you mean they really want us to get married?”

“Absolutely,” said Lyra. “In fact, they’re waiting outside as we speak.” She wiped a smear of chocolate off Bon-Bon’s face. “Might want to go get cleaned up first. You don’t want to meet your future in-laws covered in dark chocolate.”

A few minutes later, Bon-Bon emerged from her cottage to be greeted by the awkward smiles of Star Dream and Strawberry Lime. Star Dream stepped forward and doffed his top hat.

“Uh, Bon-Bon, I just wanted to... apologize for earlier,” he stammered. “And... I wanted to let you know that you were...”

“It’s okay,” smiled Bon-Bon. “We commoners have a tradition too. It’s called ‘forgive and forget.’ I shouldn’t have snapped at you like that, but when I thought you were going to take away my Lyra, I just lost it. I’m sorry, I should have heard you out.” Bon-Bon extended a hoof. “Friends?” Strawberry Lime and Star Dream shook hooves with her and, after a few more minutes of talking, the four ponies set off into the town to meet Bon-Bon’s parents.

A pair of eyes narrowed from across the street as a ponies walked away from Bon-Bon's cottage. The pony scribbled something down on a sheet of parchment, and dropped it in a nearby mailbox. With a disgusted huff, the pony walked away from the mailbox.

"We'll just see about that."

# Chapter 2

Throughout spring, Ponyville had become a hub of hustle and bustle for out-of-towners on their way to or from Canterlot. Despite the short walk to the capital, ponies came from miles around to spend the night in Ponyville. As the spring faded into summer, the visitors from out of town began to wane, and Ponyville again became the sleepy village that it had always been. The business owners of Ponyville were sad to see the ponies and their bits go, but they were thankful that the work had returned to a normal pace. It was about a week after everypony had left that the mail orders began rolling in to again fill the registers of Ponyville with business.

Flush with bits, Bon-Bon opted to expand her candy shop by adding a new wrapping machine. In doing so, she found that she cut her finish time by a quarter. By lowering her prices she made even more by selling sweets at a discount than she had at full price. Sure, she was busier than ever, and maybe she had overextended herself a hair, but, if her math was right, it would all be worth it.

Lyra too had become unusually busy in the past few month, with demands for her performances coming in from all over Equestria. While she was happy to be performing in so many new places and in front so many new ponies, she was forced to leave Bon-Bon behind to travel to far off places. After all, there was a candy shop to run and a home to maintain. The past few months had left them strangers passing in the night, but much like a treat delayed, it made the time they spent together that much sweeter.

“Miss Bon-Bon?” called a lispy voice from the kitchen. Bon-Bon snapped from her thoughts and turned to face the curly haired filly. “Your taffy is burning.”

“That’s silly Twist,” said Bon-Bon. “I took the taffy off the stove an hour ago, and...”

She looked above Twist to see that her taffy puller vibrated with an alarming grind. The taffy itself was engulfed in flames, scorching the metal frame of the machine. Bon-Bon dashed to the grab the fire extinguisher off

the wall. She turned the canister over a few times in her hooves before pulling the pin. The crackle of freezing taffy and the hiss of frigid gas drowned the shrieking of the smoke detector in the background.

Bon-Bon stared at the machine in disbelief. Her perfect safety record lay ruined by a faulty puller and now an entire day's worth of work lay in a burnt and frozen mess. She slammed the fire extinguisher to the ground and let loose a torrent of profanity.

"What does 'horn-polishing-son-of-a-nag' mean, Miss Bon-Bon?"

Bon-Bon bit her tongue and put a hoof to her mouth. She had forgotten Twist was still standing there. She turned to her assistant with a weak smile.

"Nothing, dear," said Bon-Bon. "Have some sweets and go home. Please don't tell your mother I said that." Twist only shrugged and helped herself to some licorice whips on her way out the door.

Bon-Bon wiped a bead of sweat from her brow and stared at the puller in disbelief. There was no way for it to fail like that, and she hadn't done anything different from the last time she had used it. The puller had been worked on the other day and now it was completely destroyed. She kicked the machine with another burst of obscenities.

This nightmare, combined with the expenses of her minor expansion, meant even less for the wedding fund. Their joint account was already dangerously low on bits because Lyra hadn't gotten paid in two months and they had been living day to day on the candy shop's profits. Bon-Bon only hoped they had enough to cover their mortgage until Lyra got paid.

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"...and then Bon-Bon starts screaming at Mom and Dad, and scares them halfway back to Canterlot," said Lyra.

"My word," said Ceaser. "Your little candy-maker is quite the ball of fire."

"That's why I love her," said Lyra. "I know you don't care for her because she's a commoner, but she makes me happy."



"That's really all that matters," said Caesar.

"I've already gotten quite a few nasty letters from some of the upper castes about the whole thing. One of them even tried to set me up on a date with Blueblood!" She shook her head. "I'm really kind of surprised that you of all ponies aren't up in arms about the whole 'commoner' thing."

Caesar only chuckled. "Oh, I got over that a long time ago," said Caesar. "It really doesn't matter now. Those aristocratic twits are just hanging on to the last vestiges of power before they're swept away into the dust bin of history. At least the younger generations has a choice of who they choose to spend their lives with. Even if your Bon-Bon is commoner and a mare, wherever you find love is just fine with me."

"You sure you don't want an invitation?" asked Lyra. "We'd be honored to have you there."

"No, I'm afraid I really can't," said Caesar, "I'm off as an envoy to the griffin lands for the next few months." He put a hoof to his head and, with a dramatic sigh, looked to the ceiling. "Such are the trappings of the upper echelons of nobility, my dear Lyra. Be glad you're not part of them." He flashed a winning smile and stood to greet the grey earth pony that had come to join them.

"My lord," said the pony. "Princess Celestia requests your presences at the castle this evening."

"Very good," said Caesar. "Would you care to join me, Lyra? I'm sure the Princess Celestia would be more than happy to meet a musician of your caliber."

"I appreciate the offer," said Lyra. "But a friend of mine is waiting for me just a couple blocks away at the Palace Shadow Cafe."

"Very well then," said Caesar. "I'll look into making sure you get paid properly. I haven't any idea why your checks have been getting delayed, and with the wedding, I'm sure you're going to need every last bit."

The two nobles walked through the majestic halls of Caesar's manner

among the staring eyes of a hundred pony portraits. Lyra felt as if they were all watching her and judging with their painted stares. She turned away from their unmoving gaze, and tried to ignore them as they approached the foyer.

"No matter what, don't let the nobles get you down," said Caesar. "Look at these portraits. They're all miserable because they had arranged marriages to ponies they hated. What you have is true love, and that is a miracle. Anyone who tries to tell you otherwise is an unhappy fool with an axe to grind."

Lyra walked from Caesars estate, happier than she had been in weeks. The pep talk from had left her with a clear head and a warm smile. Of all the ponies she could have asked for advice in dealing with nobility, Caesar was the one she knew would give her the straightest answers.

After a short walk, Lyra came to a small café along the streets of Canterlot. Soups and sandwiches floated in the air as unicorns snacked on their mid day meals. A grey earth pony sat near the kitchen, trying to grab the attention of any waiter to no avail. They simply walked by her, their platters of sandwiches floating on trays before them.

Lyra trotted over to the pony and stood at her table. "Hi, 'Tavi."

"Thank Celestia you're here," said Octavia. "I've been waiting for a half an hour and I haven't even seen a waiter so much as slow down." She shook a hoof at a passing waiter. "I've got money too, you jerks! My bits spend the same as anypony else's!

"You just don't know how to flag someone down in this joint," said Lyra. "Allow me."

Lyra stuck her hoof out from beneath the table to catch the leg of a passing waiter. The waiter flailed, trying to keep his balance. The tray wobbled in the air and clattered to the mare's table. Octavia raised a brow at Lyra, who had already started eating.

"What?" asked Lyra with a mouthful of sandwich. "It's legit." She turned to the waiter, who had started to pick himself off the ground. "Two glasses of tea for us, thanks." She turned back to Octavia. "Anyway, I asked you here

to give you your invitation.”

Lyra floated a heart-shaped piece of dark chocolate from her bag. The wrapper was cleverly embossed with hearts and underneath, imprinted on the candy, was the date of the wedding and all the relevant information that a pony would need to attend. Octavia looked at the invitation, then back to Lyra.

“You’re kidding me,” said Octavia. “It’s an adorable idea, but how am I supposed to not eat this?”

“Well, the wrapper is also an invitation,” said Lyra. “So unless you eat that too...”

“You two are the most nauseatingly adorable couple in Equestria,” said Octavia. “Why can’t I meet a nice young stallion who will sweep me off my feet and shower me with candy?”

“Because the ratio of mares to stallions is something like eight to one,” said Lyra. “Don’t worry, ‘Tavi. Your soul mate is out there. Maybe if you got out of the house more often, you’d find him. Or her.” Lyra affixed a sly grin. “Maybe you’ll meet somepony at the wedding. After you’re done performing, of course.”

“You want my ensemble to perform at your wedding?” asked Octavia. “I’m so honored that you’d consider us.”

“I just figured you’d do it on the cheap,” said Lyra.

Octavia answered by throwing a roll at her friend.

“So that’s a yes?”

“Of course,” said Octavia. “I know you’ve been having money troubles recently, so consider it a wedding gift.”

Lyra looked down at her sandwich with an embarrassed blush. “I didn’t think anypony knew about that,” she said.

“We all know about it,” said Octavia. “I know you got stiffed for your last six

concerts. That's got everypony worried that they're not going to get paid either." Octavia looked over her shoulder, then back to Lyra. "If you need money..."

"I can't borrow anything from you," said Lyra. "That's the fastest way to lose a friend."

"FOREVER!" shouted Pinkie Pie.

Lyra nearly flipped backward over her cushion at the sudden appearance of her wedding planner. She sat wheezing on the floor as Pinkie's thousand watt smile beamed down upon her like a spotlight of maniacal hope.

"Where did you come from?" asked Octavia.

"Well, when a mommy pony and a daddy pony love each other very much..." Pinkie started. Octavia only sighed as she helped Lyra back to her feet. "I was making a delivery in Canterlot and then I was going to go to some of the wedding shops here to get some more ideas. Then I saw you two in the window and..."

"I can't believe she hired you," said Octavia.

"Well, duh," said Pinkie. She tousled Octavia's ebony mane. "I'm the best at parties. Why wouldn't she hire me?"

"You could start by not scaring the living daylights out of me," muttered Lyra. "I was getting ready to head back to Ponyville. Would you care to walk with me?"

"That sounds like super fun!" said Pinkie. "I can tell you all these great ideas I've been having about your wedding. You should invite more people. Why not everypony here?" She stood on her back hooves and bellowed to the restaurant. "Hey everypony! Who wants to come to a wedding?"

Lyra grabbed Pinkie by the scruff of her neck and forced her onto a nearby cushion. Pinkie opened her mouth to protest, but was met with a hoofful of bread. Despite the mouthful of bread, she continued to try to expound on the virtues of attending the biggest wedding in Ponyville history.

“I’m sure all these classy ponies wouldn’t want anything to do with a little old Ponyville wedding,’ said Lyra. “So let’s not bother them and head home instead, shall we?”

The message seemed to dawn on Pinkie Pie as the crowd stared at the two ponies. She nodded and swallowed her bread.

“I’ll see you later ‘Tavi,” said Lyra. “Say goodbye, Pinkie Pie.”

“Goodbye, Pinkie Pie!”

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“That’s funny,” said Pokey. The reservations that had arrived in the mail earlier that day floated to the schedule book he kept on the back wall. Pokey scanned between the two. He grumbled a bit, and tossed the papers to the side.

A knock on the back door distracted him from the book. The door opened to reveal Carrot Top, all smiles and curls, wheeling a crate full of carrots. Pokey floated the reservations up to her face.

“Does this say what I think it does?” asked Pokey. Carrot Top looked at the slips for a moment, then over them at Pokey.

“You really should really learn to read better one of these days,” said Carrot Top. “But it appears that you’ve overbooked yourself for the third weekend of August. According to these reservations, you’ve got six catering contracts for that day, not including Lyra’s wedding.”

“Look at these numbers,” said Pokey. “They’re offering me triple what I normally charge.” The reservations floated back down to the scheduling book. “I’d be stomping my own hoof if I turned down one of these for Lyra’s wedding, and it’s not as if she actually booked me for that day. I mean, she hasn’t put a deposit down and she did say they might have to make payments...” He looked over his books again. “Carrot Top, what should I do?”

“Seriously?” asked Carrot Top. “You can’t be considering canceling on their wedding. Think of how disappointed Lyra will be if her favorite chef isn’t

there with all their favorite dishes. Think about how disappointed she'll be if you're not there to see her and Bon-Bon get married. There's no way you should let a little thing like money get in the way of a friendship."

Pokey hoofed at the ground with a guilty cough. "Well, that's just it," said Pokey. "I kind of need the money..."

"Not her again," groaned Carrot Top. "You've got to stop loaning Trixie money! I know she's your sister and all, but she never pays you back. Heck, even when she was in town a couple weeks ago, what did she do? She ate at your restaurant, she parked her wagon on your lawn, and then she left the remains of it for you to clean up." Carrot Top hefted the crate of carrots to her back and came inside. "Look, I've got a deadbeat uncle who does the same thing. Breezes into town, eats all my food, and leaves a mess for me to clean up. I mean, Derpy does that already. It's not like she needs the help."

She threw open the walk-in refrigerator to find a grey pegasus standing behind the door. With a shriek, the crate crashed from Carrot Top's back, spilling carrots all over the floor. Carrot Top pinned herself to the wall, clutching her chest. Derpy's saddle bags overflowed with vegetables and sauce containers. She pointed to the empty shelving.

"I emptied your fridge," she said.

"Why in the name of Equestria is Derpy in your refrigerator?" demanded Carrot Top.

"She's delivering leftovers to the school," said Pokey. "Thanks Derpy. Be sure to take some muffins for yourself and Dinky." The carrots floated from the floor and to the sink with a wave of Pokey's horn. "Look, Trixie is family," continued Pokey. "And where I come from, you don't abandon your family."

Carrot Top only moaned in aggravation. "Talking to you is like pounding your head into a wall," said Carrot Top. "You are the most bull-headed stallion I've ever met. You never give up on anything, even if it's a lost cause. Your sister, your job, your various failed relationships..."

"Did you need something else or are you just going to berate me for my life

choices?” asked Pokey.

Carrot Top paused a moment. “Actually, there was something else,” said Carrot Top. “Pinkie wanted us all to meet this evening around eleven to discuss plans for the wedding. Something about reservations. Berry will bring the wine, if you’ll be so kind as to bring snacks.”

“Got it,” said Pokey. “Anything else?”

Carrot looked around a moment. She started to say something, but stopped herself. She shook her head and held a hoof to her lips.

“I’ll tell you later,” she mumbled. “Remember: eleven o’clock. Sugar Cube corner.”

As Carrot Top’s cart rolled away from Balloon’s Cafe, she paused to glance inside the majesty that was Carousel Boutique. Inside, Rarity hummed to herself, while Sweetie Bell scribbled something on a scroll. Surrounding the sisters were a pile of orders and finished garments that had poured in over the past few weeks. The last of the dresses floated to its box.

“And done,” said Rarity. A handkerchief floated to dab a drop of glistening sweat from her brow. “Are you finished with those numbers Sweetie Belle?”

“Almost,” said Sweetie Belle. She tapped a pencil against her chin for a moment before turning back to her sister. “I give up. What’s a four letter word for a baby horse?” The handkerchief fell to the ground and Rarity looked down at the scroll her little sister was writing on. The crossword puzzle was mostly filled in, though most of the simpler words had been left blank. Rarity simply shook her head and trotted to her register.

“Never mind then,” said Rarity. She looked over a few receipts as they floated from the register. “That was the last of the paid orders; now I can get started on the unpaid ones. Now if I could just find Lyra’s order...”

“Oh, Miss Bon-Bon stopped by earlier today and asked if she could have some more time to pay for their dresses,” said Sweetie Belle. “She said something about a taffy puller and she was covered in soot.” Rarity stared at her sister for a moment, trying to decide whether or not to believe her.

“I’m going to run down to Bon-Bon’s,” she said after a moment. “Look after any customers for me, would you?” Sweetie Belle only nodded as she continued with her crossword.

The sun beat down upon the streets of Ponyville, bringing with it the familiar warmth of summer and a glister to Rarity’s mane. She walked through the city center, and toward the candy shop. Bon-Bon wasn’t known for being tardy with payments and although she rarely purchased anything from Carousel Boutique, her good credit had been widely accepted all over town.

Rarity rounded the alley to find Bon-Bon dragging a scorched piece of machinery from her kitchen. The machine flipped end over end into the alleyway just ahead of Rarity’s hooves. Bon-Bon dented the machine’s cover with a swift kick before unleashing a verbal tirade that left Rarity’s jaw slack in horror. Bon-Bon reared back to kick the machine again when she noticed Rarity standing there in shock. Bon-Bon dropped back to her hooves.

“Didn’t see you there,” said Bon-Bon with a weak smile. “Um... wonderful afternoon we’re having isn’t it?” Rarity’s eyes glanced at the battered machine, then back to Bon-Bon. “Can I get you something? Peppermint stick? Lemon drop? I’m afraid fresh taffy is out of the question because this,” she kicked the machine again, “bucking thing is broken.”

Rarity took a step back from the mare. Bon-Bon was known for her sweet nature but relatively short fuse and it appeared that whatever that thing was that she was kicking had set her off. Bon-Bon’s mane, normally curled and elegant despite her long hours in the kitchen, now resembled a pink and indigo rat’s nest of tangles and taffy.

“I can see this isn’t a good time,” said Rarity. “I’ll just come back...”

“No, no, please come in,” said Bon-Bon. “Let me get you some coffee and a sweet. My coffee maker still works.” She glared into the kitchen with eyes twitching. “At least, it had better be working.”

The gurgle of brewing coffee was the only healthy sound coming from the kitchen as the two mares entered. Half of the electrical appliances were sparking like some sort of vicious telsa coil, while the other half were



smoking craters of wires and enamel. A pile of discarded fire extinguishers littered the kitchen floor and several large wrenches hung from the pipes along the ceiling. With a shaking hoof, Bon-Bon poured cups of coffee for herself and Rarity.

“Had some trouble here today,” she said. “Seems like everything gone on the fritz all at once.” She giggled with a sort of nervous laughter as she spooned sugar into her mug. “When the stove started shooting flames at the ceiling, I figured it was probably a good idea to call it quits for the day.” She continued to spoon sugar as she talked. “But other than that, it’s been great. I mean, I have to basically replace every piece of equipment I have, and I’m going to be closed for a few days for repairs, but I can handle it. I’ll be fine.” Her cup overflowed with sugar. “Just fine. Sugar for your coffee?”

“Um, none, thank you,” said Rarity, eyeing Bon-Bon’s sugar filled mug. “I came to ask about your dress, but I think...”

“Ah, yes,” said Bon-Bon, taking a sip. “I’ll, um...” She looked down at her mug, then back at Rarity as tears filled her eyes.

“I’m so sorry, Rarity,” sobbed Bon-Bon. “I’ll get your bits as soon as I can. It’s just... I sank everything I had into expanding because we were doing so well. Bits were rolling in and I thought we had enough for it all. But Lyra hasn’t gotten paid in months despite all the shows that she’s been putting on, and to top it off, all my new equipment has been breaking down on me, and...” Her face froze in horror as the realization dawned on her. “Oh goddess, I can’t even afford to book the preacher! Rarity, I can’t afford to get married! What am I going to do?”

“Bon-Bon, calm yourself,” said Rarity. “I’m sure that it’s not that bad. Even if you can’t afford the trappings of a Pinkie-planned party, you can still get married in the park by the Mayor.”

“That’s just it!” wailed Bon-Bon. “The park is booked solid for the next three months! Every chapel within a hundred miles is full up for weeks. Our wonderful Mayor got called away to Canterlot, and no one has seen her in a week. I can’t even find a real priest to marry us.” Bon-Bon slumped to a sit amid sobs of defeat.

“Uh...” Rarity searched for the right words, unsure of what say. “I’ll go talk

to... somepony, and I'll see if they have any ideas. Don't worry about the dresses, dear. We'll work something out." Rarity fled from the smoking remains of Bon-Bon's kitchen, leaving the confectioner weeping on her floor.

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It was late that evening when Pinkie and Lyra arrived back in Ponyville. Along the way, Lyra had shot down nearly every single idea that Pinkie had about the wedding. When she questioned Pinkie about the reservations, Pinkie only said that she was working on something "Super special and so awesome it'll make you lose your mind." Lyra tried to remind Pinkie of their budget several times, conveniently leaving out any mentions of their current state of finance.

"Oh don't be silly," said Pinkie. "I mean, I know that parties are expensive, but a super-duper party doesn't cost that much more than a regular party, and this is going to be the most super-duper party Ponyville's ever seen!"

"Pinkie, what makes you think we want all that?" asked Lyra. "We're both pretty simple ponies, Bon-Bon and I. I know you love your parties but this is a wedding. It's completely different from your normal affairs."

"I know that," said Pinkie. "Don't worry! I got you covered like frosting!" As Lyra tried to process the idiom, they came to a halt in front of Bon-Bon's Bon Bons.

"Ooh!" said Pinkie. "I want some gummi bears."

Pinkie bounced inside the candy shop through the thin haze of blue smoke that hung in the air. From inside the kitchen, soft sounds of fretting and sweeping filtered out into the shop before the clatter of a broom and the trotting of hooves came to greet them.

"I'm sorry," said Bon-Bon. "We're close... Oh, hello Pinkie."

"What's wrong?" asked Lyra. She looked past Bon-Bon, into the sparking and smoldering ruins of her kitchen. "What in the name of Luna happened here?"

“I don’t know,” sniffed Bon-Bon. “One minute everything was fine. The next, everything starts self-destructing around me.” She looked up at Pinkie. “Can I have a minute alone with Lyra?”

“Okie dokie,” said Pinkie Pie with a smile. “I’ve got things to do , so I’ll come back tomorrow with all sorts of new ideas.” As the door slammed behind Pinkie, the shop bell snapped off the frame and clattered to the ground below.

Lyra wrapped her arms around Bon-Bon, and softly kissed her head. Her horn twinkled, closing shutters and locking the doors with a simple nod. Without a word, the light switches twinkled and the shop went dark. Alone at last, Bon-Bon fell sobbing in Lyra’s arms.

Pinkie watched as the shop closed up behind her. She couldn’t help but feel sorry for Bon-Bon and her destroyed shop. She put a hoof to her chin for a moment before her eyes narrowed. With a snarl, Pinkie galloped across the city toward Sugar Cube Corner. She was moving so quickly that she blew past Pokey and Haute Cuisine closing Balloon’s for the evening.

“Goodness,” said the mustachioed stallion. “I wonder where Miss Pie is headed in such a hurry.”

“She’s late for a meeting,” said Pokey. “Anyway, what do you think I should do?”

“Well, if I were the owner of your establishment, I’d only cater to the paying customers,” said Haute. “I do realize that Lyra is your friend and a regular customer, but she hasn’t even put down a deposit yet.”

“Lyra’s not just a friend,” said Pokey. “She’s the first friend I had in Ponyville after I moved here. When I think back to all the things she’s done for me...”

“And what has she done for you, sir?” asked Haute. “Or Bon-Bon for that matter? What have they done for you?”

Pokey paused to consider. Lyra hadn’t really done anything in particular for him. She played for the restaurant on special occasions but she’d always been paid for that. She was there for him after his disastrous pursuit of

Pinkie Pie and numerous other failed relationships. Pokey shook his head.

“Friends don’t have to do anything for you, Haute,” said Pokey at last. “Just being there is enough and Lyra’s always been there for me.”

“I’m just suggesting that you mind the business side of the business,” said Haute. “I’d hate to see you go under because you can’t keep your occupation and personal life separate.”

“You worry about your job and I’ll worry about mine,” said Pokey. He glanced over at a wall clock. “Look, I gotta go. I’m already late. There’s a new wine for you in the kitchen next to the calendar. Let me know what you think of it and if we should put it on the menu.” Haute nodded and shuttered the restaurant’s blinds.

Pokey walked back through his darkened restaurant, thinking about what his waiter told him. Sure, Lyra hadn’t paid him, but she was always good for it and she’d never given anypony reason to doubt her word. Still, the rumors that were starting to surface about Bon-Bon and Lyra were reaching a fever pitch. It was as if somepony had flipped a switch in Ponyville to turn all the mares into cackling hens. Everything about those two seemed tainted recently, even to those who had known them forever.

He wasn’t sure what to make of it. Even with all the rumors and conjecture surrounding the couple, Pokey knew it was truly love, and that the nagging of a few busy-bodies would do nothing to stop Ponyville’s happiest couple from their big day.

As the streets passed beneath his hooves, Pokey looked up to the sky to see the moon rising behind Sugar Cube Corner. The silhouette of a few ponies hung in the window as somepony, probably Pinkie, set the table in her apartment. It was a few minutes before Pokey found his way upstairs to a motley assembly of Pinkie’s closest party ponies. Pinkie was inexplicably wearing reading glasses.

“Gentlecolts,” she said. “We must stop the Batmane.” The sea of confused expressions prompted Pinkie to look down at her notes again. With a nervous giggle, she slipped the top page off her notes, and passed it to Gummy. The alligator scuttled away into the closet and the clatter of a filing cabinet could be heard before he returned to the table. “We’re here about

Lyra and Bon-Bon's wedding," said Pinkie.

"Go back to that Batmane thing," said Berry Punch. Pinkie ignored her and continued.

"Pokey, if you'd get the lights, Carrot Top has short presentation." The apartment lights dimmed, and Carrot Top stood to address the ponies as the projector flickered to life. The slide showed a chart correlating months with increasing profits. She cleared her throat before starting to read her notes.

"One cup flour, one egg, two thirds..." Carrot Top looked down at the card again, paused, and shuffled it to the rear of her stack. "Around the time that Lyra and Bon-Bon got engaged," Carrot Top continued, "business in Ponyville started booming. Bits were coming in from everywhere and every baker, florist, farmer, and shop owner seemed to be doing really well for themselves. The biggest change that we've seen thus far is in the service industry. Next slide."

The next slide was a picture of Lyra and Bon-Bon sitting in a row boat. Lyra was serenading Bon-Bon with her lyre as the two floated on the lake beneath the setting sun.

"Lyra, as we all know, is nobility, and her engagement to a commoner has provoked ire among the nobles." The projector shuttered again to reveal a diagram of Equestria's political system. "The nobility, while not having any real power anymore, still control a great deal of Equestria's wealth. They come from old money and they use that money as influence in events all over Equestria." Carrot Top turned away from the slide to face the assembled ponies. "Rarity, if you will?"

"As I'm sure Pokey will tell you," said Rarity, "business for all of us has been absolutely astounding. Ponies from all over Equestria have been coming to our little town to do business with us. I only wish I could say it was our style and class that brought them here, but unfortunately, I have reason to suspect it's something else entirely." The projector shuttered again to reveal a picture of Pokey laying on a bed of petals with a rose clenched in his teeth. It shuttered again to reveal another chart.

"Whoa, wait," said Berry. "Go back one. That was way more interesting."

“Where the hell did you get that picture?” demanded Pokey.

“Remember who your friends are, ponies,” said Carrot Top. “And keep in mind that sometimes what seems like a blessing can actually be a curse. It’s really convenient that the whole town’s been booming for the past couple weeks. Everyone’s paying full price and it seems like a lot of goods are headed out of town. I suspect that the nobility is trying to get us to forget about our friends with the promise of money.”

“I know Lyra hasn’t paid any of you yet,” continued Carrot Top. “From what Rarity has told us, Lyra hasn’t gotten paid in three weeks, and there’s been some sort of huge catastrophe at Bon-Bon’s.”

“Sorry what?” asked Pokey. “What do you mean?”

“All her equipment was broken,” said Pinkie. “I saw all her mixers and pullers and candy makers when I dropped off Lyra. They were all ruined.”

“That’s odd,” said Carrot Top. “She just had maintenance from Canterlot come in the other day after she...” The table went quiet as the word came to them.

“Sabotage,” said Pokey.

“It all makes sense now,” said Berry Punch. “Lyra’s getting cheated out of paychecks while they drain Bon-Bon’s finances. They keep all of you distracted with bits so when it comes time for those two to pay, they can’t.” Berry Punch punched one hoof to another. “That’s pretty insidious. Now I wanna find someone to bite for this.”

“What I don’t understand is how they would even know about such a thing,” said Rarity. “Lyra is the only nobility in town, and I’m certain our Mayor wouldn’t be a toadie for some noble. Unless somepony like Twilight Sparkle was behind this, and I can’t imagine she would be, I haven’t the slightest idea of who could be feeding the nobility information.”

“That’s not the most important thing either,” said Pinkie. “The important part is that they’re not going to be able to get married if they can’t afford their wedding!”

As the group talked about raising money for the couple, Rarity looked out of the window into Ponyville. She spotted Lyra and Bon-Bon on the streets, walking slowly toward Sugar Cube Corner. Rarity turned away from the window to find Pinkie drawing an elaborate scheme on a flip chart.

“And then we all place bets on Rainbow Dash to win, and...”

They were interrupted by a loud knock at the door. The group turned to stare as it swung open, revealing the tear stained faces of Lyra and Bon Bon.

“Pinkie told me you were meeting here,” said Lyra in a near whisper. “And, uh, I wanted to thank all of you for what you’ve done for us already...” She swallowed hard as she forced the next sentence. “But I don’t think that we’re going to be able to get married any time soon.”

“What?” asked Pinkie. “Oh, no, no, no! You can’t not get married! This should be the easiest thing you’ve ever done!”

“With everything that’s happened in the past few days, we just can’t afford any of you,” said Bon-Bon. “We have so little at the moment that we wouldn’t even be able to pay the mayor to marry us at city hall.” She wiped away a tear. “So, maybe next year, when things are better...”

“You must be joking,” said Rarity. “As if I’d let such a thing like money get in the way of a love like yours. I’ll do your dresses for free. Consider them a wedding gift.”

Pokey nodded in agreement. “Lyra, you and Bon-Bon are the most perfect couple I’ve ever seen. A love like yours comes along once in a lifetime and if you think we’re going to let you stay apart for one day longer than you need to, then you’ve got another thing coming.” Pokey stood from the table. “Not only will I cater your wedding, but I’ll pay for the priest too.”

“I’ll handle the flowers,” said Carrot Top.

“I’ll handle the booze,” Berry hiccupped. “My private stash even.”

“And I’ll make the cake!” said Pinkie. “Plus I’ve still got that surprise!”

“We couldn’t possibly ask you for that,” said Bon-Bon. “Rarity, your dresses alone are worth...”

“Not another word!” said Rarity. “I won’t take no for an answer, nor will any of us.” The ponies all nodded in agreement. “Even as the lions circle, we will take care of you.”

“What do you mean, lions?” asked Lyra.

“How did you guess that a circus was the surprise?” asked Pinkie. “Shoot! Now I’m going to have to come up with something else.”

“Don’t worry about it,” said Carrot Top. “The important thing is that you two get married in spite of it all.”

Lyra could only smile as tears formed in her eyes.

“We couldn’t ask for better friends than you,” she said. “I... I don’t even know what to say.”

“You don’t have to say anything,” said Rarity. “We’ll make sure that you get your happily ever after.”

---

It was two weeks after Pinkie’s meeting when the Ponyville Chamber of Commerce had its monthly gathering. Every small business owner in town was in attendance to discuss the recent boom in Ponyville’s economy and the rumor was that things were only going to get better as the Grand Galloping Gala drew near. Pokey and Rarity stood discussing some of the aspects of the wedding as the Mayor came out to greet her citizens.

“Business owners of Ponyville, I want to congratulate you all on a fantastic second quarter,” she said. “Increased traffic through town has contributed to the resounding success of all of our businesses in the past few months. The increased traffic is coming from none other than the nobles who have decided our quaint village is the perfect place to rest.” The audience responded with polite stomping and clopping of hooves. “Joining us today from Canterlot to discuss the recent uptick in business is the Duke of



Everfree Providence, Duke Afferio.”

A blue earth stallion with a tightly curled orange mane took the stage amid the polite applause of Ponyville’s business owners. He nodded to the mayor, then to the crowd.

“My fellow business ponies,” he began. “On behalf of the nobility, I’d like to express my gratitude for the fantastic accommodations and charming atmosphere that your town has to offer. Because of your delightful boutiques and quaint restaurants, Ponyville has earned a place in the hearts of the nobility as somewhere they can go to be pampered and appreciated for their hard work.” He paused to allow for more polite stomping and clopping of hooves.

“However, I must caution you that your nobility tends to be fickle in their favors. While we enjoy the pleasantries of your city, we must caution you that any business that provokes one noble will inevitably find themselves being blacklisted by the rest.” A murmur of confusion ran through the crowd as the ponies tried to figure out what he was hinting at. “Now, I’m sure that won’t happen to any of your fine establishments, so long as you remember that the nobility has its own traditions and formalities to uphold. Our long lines of heritage exist as an example of good grace and respectability to the common pony everywhere. I, for one, am glad that Ponyville has become such a wonderful place to spend my time and bits. I look forward to telling every noble to come and enjoy all that your wonderful city has to offer.”

Despite the confusion, the ponies stomped and clopped politely as Duke Afferio left the stage. Pokey and Rarity turned over the statement in their heads for a moment before turning to each other.

“Did he mean what I think he did?” asked Pokey.

“Yes, I heard it too,” said Rarity. “Any business that caters to Lyra and Bon-Bon’s wedding is going to be boycotted by the nobility.”

# Chapter 3

The Party Project, as Pinkie Pie proudly proclaimed the ponies, met at Balloons Cafe, this time without the charts or projectors that had failed so spectacularly during the previous meeting. Rarity paced the floor of the kitchen as the ponies waited for her to speak.

"I'm sorry to drag you away from your jobs in the middle of the day like this," said Rarity, "but if the message we got from the Chamber of Commerce was correct, any business that caters to Lyra and Bon-Bon's wedding is going to be boycotted by the nobility. I truly want them to be happy, but I cater a great deal to nobles and I can't afford to have that happen. I can't sell them their dresses at any price."

Pokey pounded a hoof to the counter. "The nobles can suck my left..." he paused a moment to consider the company, "hoof. If they think for one second that I'm going to let a bunch of stuck-up blue bloods tell me how to run my business, they've got another thing coming."

"Bon-Bon isn't going to let any of us risk our flanks for her," said Carrot Top.

"This is bigger than just those two now," said Berry Punch. "We're not living in the dark ages. The common ponies have more money than the nobles. Why do they think they're better than us?"

"They just don't want things to change," said Pokey. "It used to be that the nobles reigned over ponies with impunity. Now that the nobility is irrelevant, they're clinging to power every way they can. For some reason, that means harassing Lyra and Bon-Bon."

"What's with that, anyway?" asked Carrot Top.

"There's got to be a way we can help them!" said Pinkie. "If the nobles are going to be all mean to ponies that help Lyra and Bon-Bon, then we have to find some business they can't hurt."

"They probably couldn't affect me, but I'm in wholesale," said Carrot Top. "I mean, I don't sell directly to the nobility, but if they start boycotting Ponyville's farms, that could spell trouble for everyone. You don't own Sugar Cube Corner, Pinkie, so you can't do anything to help either."

"I'll do it," said Pokey.

"No, you won't," said Rarity. "We can't let any one of our businesses fail just because we're feeling selfless. We need another idea."

"We could buy everything off the nobles!"

"Like they'll sell anything to us."

"How about we throw them a party of their own?"

"What would that accomplish?"

"Let's just have a drink."

"That's your solution to everything."

"You shut your mouth!"

"You want to take this outside, fluffy?"

"You callin' me fat?"

"I'm callin' your hair stupid!"

Just as the two were ready to throw down, Pinkie Pie interrupted the fight with an air horn. The entire restaurant turned to stare into the kitchen at Pinkie.

"All this fighting is getting us nowhere," said Pinkie. "This is going to be the biggest party in Ponyville history. Big parties require big thinking."

"Fine," grumbled Pokey. "Let's see your pink flank come up with something."

“We need a business that’s isn’t going to be bothered by nobles not using it, right?” Pinkie asked. The ponies all nodded in agreement, trying to follow the logic train that Pinkie was pulling. “Then we start a new business!”

Carrot Top put a hoof to her forehead with a groan. “Why did it take Pinkie to think of that?” she asked.

“Because outside the box is where Pinkie spend most of her time,” said Rarity. “Still, I wouldn’t have expected such an elegant solution from her.”

“Well, duh,” said Pinkie. “I mean, it’s not like anypony else was coming up with anything.”

“There’s still the problem of the preacher,” said Carrot Top. “Ponyville only has one and he’s somewhere in Bridleburg for the next few weeks.”

“Then one of us should become one!” said Pinkie. The ponies exchanged confused glances for a moment as the idea sunk in.

“That’s brilliant,” said Pokey. “Why didn’t we think of this before? Now we just need somepony who has nothing to do for the next couple weeks, and...” The pop of an opening cork demanded their attention and every eye in the room turned to Berry Punch.

“What?” she asked.

“School’s out for summer, right?” asked Carrot Top.

“Oh, crap.”

---

It was about a week later when Pinkie Pie dragged Pokey out of his apartment in the middle of the night. Once they arrived at the edge of town, Pokey stared, blinking at the nightmarish structure that stood before them. It was the sort of structure that one read stories about in the paper. Things like “Illegal sugar lab found in basement of abandoned dance hall.”

“You paid how much for this?” asked Pokey.

“Nothing!” said Pinkie Pie. “I found it!”

Pokey put a hoof to his head and tried to process what Pinkie Pie had just told him. She “found” a building on the edge of the city, managed to acquire the deed for it, and secure a business license all in the span of a day. As the night sky illuminated the rickety framework, Pokey stared in through the gaping holes, wondering just how Pinkie had done it. Sure, it was run down. Sure, it was covered in graffiti that looked suspiciously like the Cutie Mark Crusader’s capes. Sure there was a massive hole in the wall. Despite all that, the building was now the future site of Hearts and Hooves Wedding Chapel.

“I find it a little hard to believe that you ‘found’ a building,” said Pokey. “If I knew the truth, would it drive me mad?”

“Why would you be mad about a free building?” asked Pinkie. “Applejack and Rainbow Dash said they’d help fix it up tomorrow afternoon. So we’ll have the wedding here, Berry Punch marries them, you bring the food, Rarity makes the dresses, and I’ll bring the cake! It’s fool proof. No pony can stop us!” Pokey nodded in agreement. Everything the nobles had done to get in their way had fallen to Pinkie’s igneous circumventions.

Berry Punch was a few days away from her clergy license. They had a building to hold the wedding in, and business to sell everything from the dresses to the catering. When the nobles tried to boycott it or shut it down, they’d find that it had already folded. Lyra and Bon-Bon would be happily married by then, and there was nothing anypony could do about it.

They walked into the building and were greeted by the massive hole in the wall. Because of its size and shape, it was the perfect for a stained glass window. Pokey imagined putting in something classy, like a stained glass heart or Celestia raising the sun.

“Alright then,” said Pinkie. “Fluttershy should be here any minute to help.”

“Pinkie, you know we can’t go telling other ponies about this sort of thing,” said Pokey. “I still haven’t figured out who’s feeding the nobles information. What do we need Fluttershy for?”

“She’s going to take care of the raccoons, silly!”

“What raccoo...”

Pokey thought himself a brave pony. A lifetime of adventures had steeled his nerve against the horrors of the world, but when a dozen sets of glowing eyes attached to a hissing mass of fur came into view, it made him scream like a filly. Pokey galloped into the night, chased by carpet of angry raccoons.

Pinkie Pie stood in the gutted remains of the building. Her smile was enough to light up the building as Pokey ran past the door again, this time covered in a mass of biting animals.

“This is gonna be great!” she said.

---

After the kitchen disaster a few weeks ago, Bon-Bon called in a local maintenance pony to repair her equipment rather than sending out to Canterlot for a specialist. With the possibility of further sabotage, she had decided to seek out local sources for everything, rather than try to order by mail or have Lyra bring home from Canterlot anything she'd needed.

Bon-Bon sighed as she fed chocolates into the wrapping machine. Lyra, Lyra, Lyra. Perhaps she kept running across her mind because they hadn't seen each other in three days. She said something about her hooves hurting from all the walking and that she was going to stay with her parents until the weekend. Maybe it was good for them to spend a few days apart. Absence always makes the heart grow fonder, after all.

Still, with the wedding only two days away, everything had reached a fever pitch. Letters poured in from the nobles, offering them huge sums of cash to just forget the whole thing. Business owners, save for Pinkie's marauding band of party planners, shunned the mares simply for fear of what the nobles would do for even associating with them. Still, it hadn't affected business much. Ponies still loved their sweets, and Bon-Bon's Bon Bons was the best in town.

The ringing shop bell summoned Bon-Bon from her kitchen. She emerged to greet two dapper young stallions she'd never seen before. One was

brown and the other grey. They didn't look like the candy type, but she put on her best smile anyway.

"Welcome to Bon-Bon's Bon Bons," she said. "I'm Bon-Bon, and these are my Bon Bons. Welcome to Ponyville. Help yourself to a sample of candy."

She continued to smile as the two ponies lumbered around the store, bumping into things and sending her displays teetering. Bon-Bon cringed through her smile as the grey stallion finally approached the counter. The way his eyes lingered on her flanks and hips set her on edge, and judging by the way he put his hooves on the counter, she could tell he wasn't here for candy.

"You Bon-Bon?" he asked.

"That's me," said Bon-Bon. She pushed a jar of her cinnamon ginger fireballs toward him "Candy?"

The stallion knocked the jar of candy off the counter with a swat of his hoof. It tumbled and shattered against the counter, spraying the fiery sweets across the store. The other stallion moved past the counter and shoved Bon-Bon against the wall.

"You stay away from Lyra, you hear me?" he said. "You set a hoof in your friend's chapel and it'll be the last thing you ever do."

Instead of cowering like a filly like they had expected, she swept a hoof-full of candies off the counter and shoved them into the brown stallion's mouth. As he choked and sputtered on the spicy sweets, Bon-Bon snatched up a copper pot from the wall and clocked the grey stallion upside the head. The ponies skittered to the a tangle of legs, trying to avoid Bon-Bon's swinging pot as she chased them out of the store.

"And if I see you either of you again, it'll be the last thing you ever do!" she screamed. The ponies on the street stared at Bon-Bon for a moment before she walked back inside. Bon-Bon simply tossed her copper pot back on the counter before sweeping up the display that the hoodlums wrecked.

*That's the last straw, thought Bon-Bon. I'm just going to put an end to this nonsense once and for all.*

---

Berry sat slumped over the counter when the clatter of the shop bell woke her wine-addled brain from its nap. She blinked a few times, trying to remember where she was or what she was doing there. Two ponies, a green pegasus mare and a white earth pony stallion, stood in front of the counter with the sorts of smiles that Berry Punch had almost forgot were ever possible. She hiccuped and blinked again.

“Can I help you?” she asked.

“We’d like to get married,” said the stallion. Berry Punch squinted at the couple, trying to make sure these ponies weren’t hallucinations. They stood there, still beaming, still real. Berry reached under the counter and pulled out a scroll .

“Well that’s fantastic,” said Berry with a smile. “What are we looking for? Traditional ceremony? New age hippy wedding? Married in a hurry? Shotgun Special?”

“What’s a shotgun?” asked the mare.

Berry Punch put a hoof to her chin, pondering the question. “No idea,” she said. “Are you pregnant?”

The mare’s eyes darted about the room. “Uh, no,” she said. “Why would you think that? Oh goddess, am I showing already?”

“Then that one’s not for you,” said Berry, stamping the scrolll. “How about the “Married in a Hurry” package deal. All the paperwork, a ceremony, and a bottle of champagne. Only twenty five bits.” The stallion dropped a pouch full of coins onto the counter. She swept the coins into her register and passed him the scroll. “Fill this out, then we’ll do the ceremony. There’s a quill right here. Do you want to rent a wedding dress or a tux?”

“No thanks,” said the mare. “How long is this going to take?”

“About ten minutes once you get the paperwork filled out,” said Berry. “And that won’t even take that long. Just walk up the aisle when you’re ready. I’ll



meet you at the altar.” As she wandered away from the counter into the chapel beyond, she paused to marvel at just how beautiful this place really was. Up until a week ago, it didn’t exist. Besides the courthouse or the park, there was no real place for ponies to get married in Ponyville. With the mayor tied up in legal nonsense for weeks on end and the one preacher that lived in Ponyville tied up in Bridleburg, there wasn’t a single pony able to marry ponies in the village. Now, with her shiny new clergy certification, Berry Punch stood as the only available purveyor of weddings in Ponyville.

The sun poured in through the stain-glass window, casting a perfect red heart on the two ponies that walked up the aisle to meet Berry. Berry looked down at the two and smiled. Maybe it was just the wine, but she found herself fondly recalling her own wedding day all those years ago. She cleared her throat, and began to read the scroll the ponies had filled out.

“Let’s see,” she said, adjusting her glasses. “Your writing is terrible.” She looked over her glasses at the couple. “Alright, looks like you’re... Sand Paper? And you’re Cherry Clouds? Are you taking each other’s names?”

“Can we do that?” asked the mare. “I could be Cherry Paper?”

“Or he could be Sand Clouds,” said Berry Punch. “Really, it doesn’t matter to me. I’ll just stamp your papers after we’re done.”

Sand Paper glanced over his shoulder with a nervous twitch. “Can we get going?”

“Oh, right,” said Berry. “Dearly beloved, we are here today gathered in the sight of our goddesses Celestia and Luna to witness the sacrament of marriage between these two ponies. If anyone should object to this union...”

“I object!” yelled a voice from the back of the chapel. They looked up to see a white earth pony charging up the aisle.

“Oh, crap,” said Berry. She flipped through her book in a panic before slamming it shut. “Looks like you get the super short version. Sand Paper, Do you?”

“Uh, yes,” he sputtered.

“Cherry Cloud, do you?”

“Yes!”

“Kiss then!”

Cherry Cloud threw herself at Sand Paper in a passionate kiss that left Berry speechless. The charging pony tripped on a bit of carpeting and rolled to a stop in front of the altar. Berry Punch looked down at him and shrugged.

“Too late, Pops,” she said, picking up the champagne bottle from the altar. “By the power vested in me by the land of Equestria, I declare you two crazy kids married.” She popped open the bottle with her teeth. “Mazel tov.”

“I’ll have your license!” shrieked the intruding pony. He tried to drag the pegasus mare off his son. “Get off of him, you hussy!”

“That’s Mrs. Hussy to you!” said Cherry Cloud.

Despite the protests, threats, and other unkind words hurled in Berry’s direction, Sand Paper and Cherry Clouds were legally married now in the eyes of Equestria. Berry wished them a happy life together and sat consoling Sand’s father with a drink.

“You gotta be happy for your kid, Tack,” said Berry, taking a swig. She passed the bottle to Tack “They gotta grow up some time and he’s doin’ right by that filly.”

“I suppose you’re right,” said Tack, taking a drink of his own.. “I mean, who am I to stop true love? That’d make me as bad as those thugs who were wandering around town trying to scare people.”

Berry’s ears perked up. “Whaddya mean?”

“You didn’t hear?” asked Tack. “There’s a couple of ponies that came into town this morning and started harassing ponies that were helping Lyra and

Bon-Bon.”

“How would they even know who was helping them?” asked Berry.

“Who knows?” sighed Tack. “Thanks for talking me down, Berry. You’re doing good work here.”

With that, Tack stood and left the chapel, passing two stallions standing in the doorway. The pair of stallions looked around a moment, confused at the accommodations provided by Hearts and Hooves Wedding Chapel. Berry stood from where she was sitting, and walked towards the counter with a half smile.

“Welcome to Hearts and Hooves Wedding Chapel,” said Berry. “You two look like you want to get married.”

“Uh, what?” asked the brown stallion. He was still well dressed, though his face was smeared with what looked like red candy.

“Married!” said Berry. “Greatest thing you could ever do. It’s so rare to see two stallions together. I’m so happy you’ve found each other.”

“Wait, what?” asked the grey stallion. He rubbed the knot on his head, trying to understand Berry.

“Awh, don’t be shy,” said Berry, pushing a scroll at them. “Just fill this out and we’ll get you two young lovebirds on your way. I’m in the marrying mood, so just ten bits for the service.”

“We’re not...”

“Not perfect for each other?” asked Berry, taking back the scroll. “That’s okay, neither were my husband and I. But that’s okay! Things don’t always have to be perfect.” She looked down at the scroll. “Don’t know how to write, eh? No problem. What’s your names?”

“Uh, Barbell,” said the grey pony. “And he’s Plow. But...”

“With a ‘w’ or ‘ough?’” asked Berry, scribbling on the scroll. “W, right? Perfect. Now, raise your right hoof.” The ponies looked to each other, and

both raised their left hoof. "Close enough. Do you, Barbell?"

"Do I what?" asked the grey pony. Berry leaned in to the pony.

"You're supposed to say yes," she whispered.

"Uh, I guess," said Barbell.

"Do you, Plow?" asked Berry.

"Sure," he said, looking around the chapel.

"Then by the power vested in me by Equestria, I declare you to crazy kids to be married." She stamped the paper with loud thump and passed it to the two ponies. "Congratulations."

"Wait, what just happened?" asked Plow.

"You're married!" said Berry Punch. "Happiest day of your life or at least it should be. There's a lovely bed and breakfast down the road if you want a nice quiet spot to celebrate." Berry Punch eyed them with a wistful sigh. "It's always the pretty ones that like colts. Figures."

The two stallions walked in a daze from the chapel, still unsure as to what exactly had happened. Plow looked at the scroll, then back to Barbell.

"Dude, I think we just got married," said Plow.

"No way, colt," said Barbell. "I'm not gay." He coughed and looked around a moment. "I mean, not that there's anything wrong with that."

"Uh, totally," said Plow. "Me neither. Yeah, there's nothing wrong with being gay."

The two stallions looks at each other for a moment. As the sun passed over head, Plow saw a look he never hoped to find those deep brown eyes. Barbell had seen it too, and a moment later, the two ponies were locked in a passionate kiss that sent them tumbling down the stairs of the chapel.

---

It was strange walking through the streets of Ponyville these days for Bon-Bon. Ponies stopped and whispered to one another about her when she passed, while others shook their heads. She had gotten more business from ponies wandering in to ask her when she was due than she cared to admit and more than once a pony came in to offer their advice on what to do to with her cheating mare-friend. She instead consoled herself from the rumors by snacking on her wares. She had put on a few extra pounds from all the stress and candy, which probably didn't help matters all that much.

Bon-Bon arrived at her cottage to find Lyra sleeping on the couch in her usual way: on her rump, head hanging off the back cushion, and snoring along to the radio. She couldn't help but smile at her unicorn. Even with her strange ways of sitting and her bizarre hobbies, she was still the most beautiful mare in the world. Bon-Bon kissed Lyra's head. Lyra's yellow eyes fluttered open, smiling with soft warmth.

"Well, hello, beautiful," said Lyra. "Shouldn't you be at your candy shop?"

"We need to talk," said Bon-Bon. Lyra turned right-side up to face Bon-Bon.

"I have a better idea," said Lyra. "Why don't we have some lunch, then go upstairs and fold laundry?"

"We don't have any laundry," said Bon-Bon. Lyra only grinned. "Oh! Um... we'll see, but lunch sounds like a great idea."

Bon-Bon disappeared into the kitchen as Lyra closed her eyes again. She hadn't gotten much sleep with all her recent travel. For whatever reason, she could never sleep on trains, and the walk to and from Canterlot at least twice a week was starting to wear on her hooves. The time away from Bon-Bon was getting to her, but it was all for a good cause. The smell of French toast wafted in from the kitchen, snapping Lyra's eyes wide awake.

French toast. Her favorite food. It wasn't hard for a kitchen goddess like Bon-Bon's to make, but for whatever reason she only made it when they had a fight. It was her way of apologizing to Lyra, but they hadn't fought in months. Granted, they hadn't spent much time together recently. Lyra trotted to the kitchen to investigate.

A single fresh rose adorned the vase next to heaping stacks of French toast and cups of tea. Bon-Bon stood at the table, apron still tied about her waist. She motioned for Lyra to join her.

“What’s the occasion?” asked Lyra.

“Oh, nothing,” said Bon-Bon. “I just know how much you love French toast, and we had some bread that I left out, and...” Her voice trailed off as she stared at the floor. Lyra pushed aside the plate.

“What’s wrong?” asked Lyra.

“I...”

“Are we out of money again?” asked Lyra. “I can get my parents to give me a loan. They know what’s going on. They know we’re good for it.”

“That’s not it,” said Bon-Bon. She took a deep breath, and closed her eyes as she forced herself to speak. “I don’t think we should get married right now. With the nobility so up in arms about the whole thing and money the way it is...”

Lyra slammed a hoof on the kitchen table. Bon-Bon flinched backward in fear.

“No!”

“But...” Bon-Bon protested.

“No buts!” yelled Lyra. “I thought we were going to spend our life together. Through thick and thin, for richer or poorer, in sickness and health?”

“We haven’t made those vow...”

“I realize we haven’t made our vows yet,” snapped Lyra. “But that’s what they are. Are you saying that’s not what you want now? Are you saying you don’t want to spend the rest of your life with me?”

“That’s not it at all!” said Bon-Bon. “It’s just that we don’t have the money! If

my parents hadn't loaned us those bits, we'd be out on the street right now!"

Lyra grabbed a basket full of chocolate invitations off the counter and dumped it on the table. The candy hearts knocked over the vase and spilled a cup of tea Bon-Bon had set out.

"Did you forget about these?" asked Lyra. "We gave these out to our friends, our families. You made these because you wanted to get married on the day we met. This wedding is happening here, in Ponyville, on the date that we put on our invitations. I don't care if Celestia herself comes down from Canterlot and tells us not get married. This is happening and no third-rate Duke is going to tell us otherwise."

"Lyra, you're starting to scare me," said Bon-Bon as she backed away from the table. "I've never seen you this angry before."

"And why shouldn't I be angry?" demanded Lyra. "I've been working every day I could, trying to get us money for this wedding. It's not just the performances that have been keeping me in Canterlot, Bon-Bon."

She picked up a lyre case and dumped the contents onto the table. Gold bits, silver bits, gems, and all other manners of small currency rolled across the table among the candy. Bon-Bon looked at the pile of money, then back to Lyra. Her mouth hung open in an upset shock.

"You... lied to me," said Bon-Bon.

"What?" asked Lyra. "No, I told you I was working. I've been playing on street corners and doing odd jobs for..."

"You lied to me!"

"I didn't lie to you!" Lyra shouted. "I would never lie to you! I was working! I've been working my tail off for months for our wedding! For your candy shop! For us!" Lyra slammed the empty case to the floor. "All I wanted was for us to be happy!" screamed Lyra. "I wanted a fairy tale wedding for the mare I loved, and I can't even have that because some inbred ass thinks I should marry my cousin!"

“You didn’t have to...”

“But I did!” Lyra yelled. “I did it for you! Everything for you! I’ve worked so hard to make things easy for you because you deserve it! You deserve everything!” Lyra stomped away from the table tears streaming from her eyes. “And I can’t even give you the day you’ve always wanted.”

Lyra’s glowing horn snatched up her lyre case as she walked for the door.

“Where are you going?” asked Bon-Bon.

“The wedding is off,” sobbed Lyra. “I’m sick of fighting everypony and their brother. Now if you’ll excuse me, I’m going to go try to act like a noble since that’s what everypony expects of me.”

The slamming door rattled Bon-Bon’s cottage to its foundation, knocking a framed picture off the wall. It shattered against the wooden floor, and split into two. Bon-Bon looked down at it; it was a copy of the picture hanging in the restaurant with Lyra down on one knee. The shattered frame had torn apart the picture.

What just happened? Was the wedding really off? Bon-Bon slumped to the floor as she tried to press the photograph back together. She could barely see the pieces for all the tears in her eyes. In that instant, everything became real.

Lyra had left her.



# Chapter 4

Rain poured down in curtains, soaking Lyra's coat to the skin and plastering her mane to her horn. It seemed like a long walk from Bon-Bon's cottage to wherever she was going. A destination didn't seem important anymore. Nothing really did. For the first time, she felt lost in the town that she called home.

The streets were empty as the heavens emptied upon Ponyville. Rain spilled off the rooftops onto the cobblestone walkways; it was the sort of day that one spent at home curled up with a good book and a loved one. Lyra had neither of those luxuries at the moment; she had nothing but her lyre and her tears.

A knock on the restaurant's rear door wasn't something Pokey expected during a downpour like this. Anyone with an ounce of sense would have hidden underneath the overhang or just stay inside. Even Derpy's determined deliveries would wait inside until the worst of it passed. The door swung open, revealing a sopping wet Lyra.

"What in the name of Luna are you doing out here?" asked Pokey.

"May I come in?" she asked.

Lyra walked into the kitchen, a sad, soggy mess of pony. Pokey dug through a drawer for a hoof towel to dry Lyra's neck.

"I thought you were in Canterlot until tomorrow."

"I went home early," said Lyra, allowing Pokey to towel her off. "Thought I'd spend some time with Bon-Bon before the wedding. Maybe make sure our dresses fit. Doesn't really matter though. The wedding's off."

The announcement struck Pokey like a slap to the face. Rather than coming up with an intelligent reply, he shook his head, trying to process the magnitude of what she'd just told him. His jaw flapped for a moment as his mind tried put together a coherent sentence, but came up with nothing. He

finally squeezed his eyes shut and laid his face on the counter in defeat.

“Lyra, don’t take this the wrong way,” he said with a deep sigh, “but we have worked way too hard on this wedding for you to call it quits.” He picked his head off the counter. “If you don’t get your sorry flank home and make this better, I’m going kill you. Then I’m going to have Zecora reanimate what’s left, and make you walk down the aisle anyway.”

“It’s not about everypony else,” said Lyra. “It’s about Bon-Bon. She called me a liar.”

“She just upset—”

“She called me a liar!” Lyra shouted. “I have never lied to anyone in my entire life. Not a single white lie. Not one fib. Everypony expects nobility to be a little bit dishonest, or conveniently forget tell somepony something, but not me. Honesty and music are the only two things I have to be proud of. Nopony calls me a liar, Pokey. Nopony.”

Rather than trying to argue, Pokey instead walked to the pick-up counter. He pointed to a white mare with a cotton candy mane eating a bowl of ice-cream by herself. Lyra tilted her head, trying to see the point.

“What does Nurse Redheart have to do with anything?” she asked.

“She comes in here once a week to eat ice cream and stare out that window. She’s watching the the train station because her soul mate is out there, only a few days away. She decided long ago that it was too difficult to be with him, so, she sits here and thinks ‘Maybe I’ll go back to him someday.’” He turned back to Lyra. “That’s going to be you if you don’t marry Bon-Bon this Sunday.”

"That doesn't even make sense," said Lyra. "Bon-Bon will find me to apologize, then we'll get back together, and—"

"Have you ever met a couple that canceled a wedding?" asked Pokey. "It's the sort of thing leaves a bitter taste in their mouths that never goes away. Always there in the back of your mind, reminding you that the pony you wanted to spend your life with wouldn't commit. It's a seed of doubt that blossoms into a tree of resentment."

"She wanted to call off the wedding, not me," snapped Lyra. "That's why I got angry. That's why I yelled at her. That's why I left."

"Because she impugned your noble honor?" asked Pokey, with a haughty wave of his hoof.

"Oh, like I care about that," snapped Lyra.

"Like it or not, Lyra, you are a noble and you do act like one," said Pokey. "You may not be out there making commoners miserable like the rest of your brethren, but you do push ponies around."

"I don't—"

"Yes, you do," Pokey interrupted. "Your parents, your friends, Bon-Bon. You expect her to apologize for something she probably doesn't realize she did. She's supported you through thick and thin, both financially and emotionally. She loves you, heart and soul, but when's the last time you did something for her?"

Lyra paused to think. All the ideas for their wedding had come from her: the flower arrangements, the food, the music, the dresses. All Lyra. She had approved Pinkie's insane plan for building a wedding chapel in Ponyville when Bon-Bon had suggested they get married in Las Neighgas. Bon-Bon had supported them for months when Lyra hadn't gotten paid, and even as far back as when she first moved to Ponyville, Bon-Bon had given her a place to stay.

"You have to make this right," said Pokey. "I love you like a sister, Lyra. You've been there for me ever since I moved here, and you've treated me better than my own family. Family is the most important thing in the world, and in two days, you're going to get the chance to make Bon-Bon your family."

Lyra slumped to a sit as Pokey went back to preparing his sauces on the stove. She thought back to all the things that had happened in the past few months, from the sabotage to the rumors. Throughout it all, Bon-Bon and Lyra had stood firm together, and yet here Lyra was, ready to end it all over an unintended insult. Lyra put her head between her hooves.

"I can't go home," said Lyra. "You know how Bon-Bon is when she's upset, all crying, and shoveling candy into her adorable, chubby little cheeks." She moaned in defeat. "I really screwed up, Pokey. What am I going to do?"

"You're going to give yourself time to cool off," said Pokey, dropping a plate on the counter. He rang the counter bell with a hoof. "You're going to stay at my place tonight, and, in the morning, you're going to try and fix things. No one needs to know that you canceled the wedding." Pokey turned to the waiter grabbing the plate, and grabbed his hoof. "You didn't hear that, Haute."

"Hear what, sir?" he asked before carrying the plate into the dining room.

Pokey helped Lyra off the floor and nuzzled her wet mane. "I'll help you get through this," said Pokey. "Just because you messed up doesn't mean you can't fix it."

"Thanks, Pokey," said Lyra, nuzzling back. "I'll see you when you get home." Lyra perked her ears at something. "Did you hear a click?"

"Probably the stove," said Pokey, giving it kick. "Things been acting up all week."

"Thanks for everything, Pokey," said Lyra. "Maybe I'll find some way to make it up to you."

"Threesome?" asked Pokey with a hopeful smile. Lyra punched him in the shoulder.

---

The rain had stopped later that evening to let free a beautiful summer dusk. Though the ground was wet, Carrot Top was in her garden pulling weeds and plucking fresh carrots for her customers in Ponyville. In the garden, there was only peace.

And Bon-Bon.

She was standing in the garden like a chubby scarecrow, with eyes staring into the beyond. Carrot Top waved a hoof in front her face, but got no response.

"What are you doing way out here?" asked Carrot Top.

"Lyra left me," Bon-Bon said in a cold and flat tone that her friend barely recognized. "Called off the wedding and just left. I don't really know where she went, so I thought I'd go for a walk." She looked around with the same blank stare. "I guess I wound up here. You have a nice garden."

"Oh, no, no, no," said Carrot Top, dropping her basket. "Sweetie, you can't be serious. Lyra didn't leave you. She couldn't have."

"She did," said Bon-Bon. "Just left. Maybe she'll go back to her parents and live the lifestyle of a noblemare. Maybe she'll meet her Prince Charming."

"What about the wedding?" asked Carrot Top.

"I'll just have to explain the situation to everypony as they come into town," said Bon-Bon. "She could at least had the decency to tell them what she was doing." She turned to look right through Carrot Top. "Typical noble behavior, really. Leave the peasants to do everything."

"That doesn't sound like the Lyra I know," said Carrot Top.

"Well, she wasn't sounding like herself," said Bon-Bon. "Maybe every other pony finally got to her. Maybe she's going to start thinking like a noble now that she's gone. It's time I learned my place anyway." Her eyes focused again as she came back to her new reality. "I should have known that it wouldn't work. We're not living in a fairy tale, after all. I should just find a nice mare to settle down with. Somepony who's kind and sweet with a soul as pure as diamonds. Maybe a musician."

Tears started to fill her eyes again, as she turned away from Carrot Top.

"I'm never going to find anyone else," she sobbed. "Lyra is everything I ever wanted, and now she's gone."

"What happened?" asked Carrot Top.

"She was talking about how she spent all this time in Canterlot playing on the streets," she sniffled. "She's a professional musician, for Celestia's sake. She would never do that sort of thing. What would ponies think if they saw her on the streets playing her lyre for change? So I called her a liar and..."

Her pupils narrowed into pinpricks of panic as she realized what she'd said. "Oh my goddess, what have I done?"

"What?" asked Carrot Top. Bon-Bon galloped through the mud and out of the gardens. "Hey wait! Where are you going? Get back here!"

Bon-Bon plowed through the muddy fields of the garden in a mad dash back to Ponyville. The one thing Lyra prided herself on more than anything was her honesty. The only trait of nobility Lyra ever displayed, aside from her bit of bossiness, was her absolute honesty. To question that was the biggest insult she could think of and Bon-Bon had just tossed it out as a casual insult.

She galloped to the outdoor tables of Balloons Cafe where Pokey was busy turning chairs atop tables and closing up for the night.

"Have you seen Lyra today?" asked Bon-Bon. "Its really important. I really messed up Pokey. Please tell me you've seen her."

"We need to talk," said Pokey. "Lyra's—"

"Whatever it is, it can wait," said Bon-Bon. "If you see Lyra, tell her to come home. Please?"

Pokey only nodded as Bon-Bon trotted off into the falling night. A moment later, Haute Cuisine emerged from the restaurant and tossed the keys to Pokey.

"The back door is locked," said Haute, putting something into his coat. "Sorry to leave you so early, sir."

"Don't worry about it," said Pokey. "See you at the wedding on Sunday."

"Are you certain about that?" asked Haute.

"Oh, I'll get things worked out," said Pokey. "Have faith, my good pony. Pokey Pierce is not a pony who lets the dreams of others fall through his hooves."

"Very well, sir," said Haute. "I will see you Sunday then."

Pokey flipped the last chair atop a table and shuttered the blinds in a twinkle of magic. Despite the fact they'd had a massive storm earlier that afternoon, it start to rain again. Pokey only grumbled as the rain fell upon him and made a mental note to talk to the pegasi about that sort of thing. He trotted away from the restaurant, hoping to make it home before it really started to pour again.

Haute, on the other hoof, had no problems walking through the rain. His expensive raincoat kept him dry in even the worst weather and his dedication to walk through the rainy evening only emphasized the importance of what he had to say. He walked to the door of the cottage and knocked quietly. Bon-Bon opened the door a minute later.

"Haute, what are you doing here?" asked Bon-Bon.

"I'm sorry, Bon-Bon," he said. " I know it's none of my business, but you've always been a great tipper, and I can't stay quiet any more." He pulled photographs from his coat.

The photographs were of Lyra and Pokey, all of them with Pokey either smiling at her or seemingly leering. One had Pokey drying Lyra off with a towel. The last few were of Lyra, drenched to the bone, wearing a smile, and nuzzling Pokey. Bon-Bon dropped the pictures in shock.

"You're... you're lying," said Bon-Bon. "This can't be happening. There's..."

"I didn't want to believe it either," said Haute, "but she came in today, and Pokey couldn't keep his hooves off her. He told her to go back to his place and said he'd be there later. I think that's what he wanted to tell you when you stopped by today. I'm so sorry, Bon-Bon, but I saw it with my own eyes."

Bon-Bon tried to speak, but found her voice silenced by choking sobs. Haute stepped back into the rain and muttered an apology. He walked away in silence, leaving Bon-Bon on the floor of her cottage in a mess of tears.

---

Pokey opened his apartment to find Lyra passed out on his couch. The fact that she was sleeping like one of her imaginary humans didn't really bother him, but she should have known to take the bedroom. After all, it was only polite to let the guest have the bedroom.

He tripped over the beer bottles littering the floor and realized she had cleaned out his refrigerator. Pokey only sighed, and jabbed her with a hoof. Lyra growled like a possum and waved off his intrusion.

"Get up and go to bed," said Pokey. "I just put fresh sheets on my bed so you can sleep there for the night." Lyra again responded in vague mumbles that sounded more like threats than anything else. "Get your flank off my sofa before I throw you in the tub."

"Yer not the bossa me," she grumbled. "I'm the bossa you. Lemme go back to sleep. I'm a noble."

"Sure you are," said Pokey. "and I'm the Duke of Manehattan. Now get up." Lyra squinted and stared defiantly at Pokey.

"Yah know what yer problem is, Pokey?" asked Lyra. "Yer not a noble. Bein' noble means you get to be a jerk to everybody. Just look at all the nonsense they put my Bon-Bon through. You wanna know why they're angry?"

"Less explaining, more getting up," said Pokey. "I don't want you throwing up on my rug. It really ties the place together." Lyra forced herself to her hooves, and draped herself over Pokey in a drunken hug. Pokey responded by lifting her off her hooves and onto his back.

"Nobles are all mad and stuff 'cause they're all betrotted... betrained... be..." She waved a hoof around in a circle, trying to come up with the word she



wanted.

"Betrothed?" asked Pokey.

"That's it!" said Lyra. She shook her hoof a few times. "Why don't I have fingers to snap? Whatever. Anyway, so they're unhappy 'cause they can't get a divorce and they have to stay married to the same pony their whole life. Since most nobles are jerks, they get married to jerks, and that makes them unhappy. They have little jerk foals to continue the cycle."

"That's an interesting philosophy," said Pokey. "So, why didn't you have an arranged marriage?"

"The pony I was supposed to marry was a total colt-cuddler," Lyra mumbled. "Dad said we should get married anyway, to keep up appearances, but Dad is full of bad ideas."

"Right," said Pokey, floating her to bed. "So the fact that you're a filly-fooler had nothing to with you them canceling the wedding?"

"Who told you that?" Lyra demanded, sitting straight up. She pointed an accusatory hoof at Pokey. "I don't like mares." Pokey turned to look at her as if she had three horns.

"What do you mean you don't like mares?" asked Pokey. "You're getting married to one in two days!"

"Bon-Bon's different," mumbled Lyra. "She always smells like ginger and honey. She's kind and loving and soft and sexy. She's always been there for me, no matter how dumb I'm being. When I'm away from her, it feel like I'm missing a part of myself." She laid her head on the pillow. "I love her because of who she is, not because of what she's got under her tail. She could change into a stallion tomorrow and I'd still love her." She giggled a bit as she let her imagination wander. "It'd make things way more interesting in the bedroom too."

"And on that note," said Pokey, turning to the door, "goodnight."

"Hey, Pokey?"

"Yeah, Lyra?"

"Yer a good friend," she said, snuggling with her pillow. "You gotta find yerself a nice mare. Only not Bon-Bon. She's mine."

"You too, Lyra."

Pokey left the door open behind him so he could make sure that Lyra was still okay. He walked back to the mess of bottles in his living room. Most were empty, but a few were still capped and cold. He popped one open on a ridge of his horn and sat down on the couch to have a drink. What Lyra said had given him something to dwell on as he read through the sports page.

Still, Lyra had made a hell of a mess in his apartment and the clinking of bottles rolling across the floor kept breaking his concentration. His magic let go of the paper and started sweeping bottles into a paper bag. Within a few minutes, his apartment was in its usual state of acceptable squalor and he settled in for a quiet night on the couch. Had it not been for the knock on his door, he probably would have just fallen asleep in just a moment.

Behind the door, Bon-Bon stood with a tear-stained face. She looked past him into the bedroom where Lyra lay snoring atop the sheets. Pokey opened his mouth to speak but found himself floored by a sucker punch. While the room spun around him, Pokey marveled at just how hard earth ponies could punch when they were angry. Especially the mares.

Bon-Bon walked past Pokey's crumpled body and into the bedroom. Lyra sat up, recognizing the pink and indigo locks of her partner. She rolled onto her stomach.

"Oh my goddess, is that really you?" she asked. "Listen, I gotta tell you somethin'."

"No, you listen!" said Bon-Bon. "How dare you? I gave you everything I had! A place to live, food to eat, a bed to sleep in, and this is how you repay me? By sleeping with Pokey?"

"Wha?" asked Lyra, shaking off her buzz. "Where'd you get that idea?" She paused to look where she was before turning back to Bon-Bon.

"You're in his apartment! In his bed! All liquored up!" she snarled. "Couldn't wait to celebrate getting rid of me, could you?"

"Why would you think I wanted to get rid of you?" asked Lyra. "I was mad at you 'cause you called me a liar. I'm not a liar."

"Then why are you sleeping with Pokey?" asked Bon-Bon. "Cheating is lying!"

"Why would I sleep with Pokey?" said Lyra. "Dude's all muscly. Nice to look at, but I like my ponies soft, round, and warm." She put on a warm smile. "Just like you."

*"Are you calling me fat?"* shrieked Bon-Bon.

Lyra squinted in thought as she tried to see where this conversation was headed. Continuing on the defensive meant that she would have to quell whatever fears Bon-Bon's fevered imagination had dreamed up, and trying to be apologetic never worked against Bon-Bon's tirades. Lyra decided instead to turn to her goddess-given gift of charm.

Bon-Bon didn't see the kiss coming, but she didn't resist it when Lyra pulled her to the bed. The confusion was enough to break her rage for a moment so that Lyra could get in a word.

"I'm sorry for everything," she said, petting Bon-Bon's sleek curls with one hoof and stroking her soft cheeks with the other. "I've been acting like a jerk. I don't know where you got ideas about Pokey and I, but I have eyes." She kissed her again. "And lips only for you." Lyra nibbled Bon-Bon's ear, still whispering in a hypnotic voice. "If you don't want to get married this weekend, that's up to you. I'll be ready for you whenever you want me. I'm forever yours and no pony in the world will ever keep us apart."

"I'm..."

"No apologies," said Lyra. "Today never happened. Just lay back and let me take care of you."

Pokey found enough strength to peel himself off the floor. His most

pressing concern at the moment was to make sure that Bon-Bon didn't murder Lyra. He staggered to his bedroom to find the two mares engaged in rigorous, non-murdering activities. With a shake of his head, he closed the door.

He was definitely going to have to wash those sheets.

---

*It's morning.*

The thought passed through Pokey's mind as a statement rather than an acknowledgement of its existence. Whatever time it was, it was just way too early. More importantly, whatever was in the kitchen making all the noise that work him up was going to receive a swift kick in the tail. Pokey stumbled into the other room to find Bon-Bon happily humming in front of his stove.

"Good morning!" she said with a smile. "How do you take your eggs?"

"Fried," mumbled Pokey, walking to his table. "I'm glad to see you two back together."

"Oh, well, yes," said Bon-Bon, with a small embarrassed cough. "Misunderstandings happen all the time. It's just part of relationships I guess. Did you sleep well?"

"You whinny like a banshee and I have paper thin walls," said Pokey. "So, no."

Bon-Bon nearly dropped her spatula as her cheeks flushed near purple. She stammered, trying to say something, only to squeak out what might have been an apology. Pokey laid his head on the table and closed his eyes.

"Good morning!" chirped Lyra.

"Please shut up," Pokey begged. "Why aren't you hung over?"

"I have a proud noble lineage of drunkards," Lyra answered. "In other news, I had a revelation last night."

Pokey was far too tired to offer a snarky comment about what sort of revelations she could have had. He instead kept his eyes closed and head on the table.

"I figured I've been going about this whole thing all wrong," continued Lyra. "As Bon-Bon proved last night, going on the offensive is, by far, the best way to deal with any problem. We've been running around like a bunch of foals trying to dodge rumors and sneak around. No more! Today, we take the fight to them! Announcements in all the papers! On billboards! Pegasus skywriting if we have to!" She reared back, and put her hooves on her hips. "We will invite everyone we can to this wedding, because come hell or high water, this wedding is happening tomorrow! We will not be silenced by those who would oppress us! Where's a radio? I need some patriotic music behind me for this kind of speech."

"Your wedding is tomorrow," said Pokey, opening one eye at Lyra. "Plus, you're both broke."

"Oh, yeah," said Lyra, dropping back down to all four hooves. "Eh, I'm sure we'll be fine. Over-easy, please, Bon-Bon. Hey, where'd you get those sheets, Pokey? They're really nice."

The two mares left Pokey's apartment soon after breakfast, leaving Pokey with a mess of dishes. In true bachelor style, he promptly ignored them and flopped on the couch instead. He began to drift off to sleep when an incessant pounding on his door demanded his attention. Pokey opened the door to Carrot Top, who smacked him in the face with a rolled up tabloid.

"You rotten jerk!" screamed Carrot Top. "How could you do this after everything we've done for them?"

"What are you talking about?" demanded Pokey. "I swear if one more mare hits me..."

"This!" shouted Carrot Top, pointing at the tabloid. A grainy photograph of Lyra nuzzling Pokey in the restaurant's kitchen stared back at him. It certainly looked incriminating and the headline of "Noble in Scandalous

Affair With Local Chef!" didn't help. Pokey put a hoof to his head and started laughing.

"This isn't funny Pokey! This is serious! Why are you canoodling with Lyra? Are you three in some kind of sick, kinky triangle? What are you laughing at?"

"Do me a favor?" asked Pokey as he wiped away tears of laughter. "There's a sack full of bits under my bed. Bring them to the courthouse this afternoon so you can bail me out of jail."

"What?" asked Carrot Top. "You're not making any sense, Pokey."

"I know who the leak is now," he said.

"What leak?" asked Carrot Top. "What are you talking about?"

"And I'm going to go kick them in the teeth," said Pokey, still off on his own conversation.

"Who? No, wait," said Carrot Top, shaking her head in confusion. "How does an article tell you anything? You mean you're not sleeping with Lyra?"

"Of course not," said Pokey. "Lyra and Bon-Bon are soul mates and getting in the way of that is seriously bad karma. No, this photo tells me everything I need to know about our leak. Now I can kill them."

"That's a bit extreme," said Carrot Top. "Look, why don't you bring it up with everypony else? I'm sure we can think of a peaceful solution to all this."

"Fine," said Pokey. "We're probably late for our meeting with the rest of them anyway."

A short walk later, the pair found themselves at the door of the chapel. Lit by the sunlight filtering through the massive stain-glass window, Pinkie's Party Ponies stood awaiting the arrival of Carrot Top and Pokey. The moment Carrot Top and Pokey walked into the chapel, Berry Punch eagerly demonstrated why her last name was Punch: a double-hooved uppercut sent Pokey crashing mane over tail into the pews. Carrot Top stepped in the path of the charging minister as Pokey picked himself off the

floor.

"Pokey is most definitely not sleeping with Lyra!" said Carrot Top. Berry Punch paused to hear Carrot Top out before resuming her assault on Pokey. "It's all just another piece of the plot against those two. Pokey says he knows who's been causing all these problems." Berry put down her hooves, and waited for an explanation

Pokey pushed himself to his hooves and steadied himself on a pew. He dipped out of Ponyville and into unconsciousness for a moment, but he managed to hang on long enough to deliver an explanation. He focused on Rarity and Pinkie a moment, waiting for them stop spinning around the room.

"I know where and when this photograph was taken," said Pokey, rubbing his jaw. "There's only one pony who could have done it: Snappy Scoops. I can't believe I didn't think about that before. Lyra and I heard a click that I thought was my oven. She was standing in the dining room and I just looked right past her."

"What?" asked Rarity. "Oh my, are you sure? She always seemed like such a fantastic fellow. I never imagined her to be a mole for the nobility."

"Wait a second," said Berry. "Isn't she the photographer for the wedding?"

"Well, not anymore," said Carrot Top. "When I find her..."

"I'll handle her," growled Pinkie. "I have something special I do for mean ponies." Her normally poofy mane hung flat against her head over one of her eyes.

"Pinkie, did you change your mane?" asked Pokey.

"Flat iron!" she said, running a hoof down the length. "What do you think? I tried a regular iron but I kept burning my head. Don't you worry; I'll make sure she's never mean to anypony again." Pinkie bolted from the chapel in a pink blur that left the door flapping in the breeze.

"I suddenly feel very sorry for Snappy," said Pokey, "but there's one other thing we have to worry about. It says in the article that Duke Afferio himself

is coming into town tomorrow to put a stop to this embarrassment."

"Psh, good luck with that," said Berry. "I've done sixteen weddings this week, including one that surprised both the participants. I have found my calling and if this Duke thinks he can stop Berry Punch from marrying people, I'm going to shove that orange mane of his straight up his—"

"About that," Rarity interrupted. "Pinkie Pie and I were discussing that very issue just last night, and I might have a solution. It's divine in its simplicity."

"Let's hear it," said Carrot Top.

"Well, I'll explain it later," said Rarity. "The happy couple are on their way to the shop already, and your tardiness means I haven't a moment to spare. I'll need to see you and Pokey at Carousel Boutique this evening. Ta ta!"

With a flounce of her mane and tail, Rarity trotted through the doors of the chapel and out into the streets of Ponyville. The ponies stood there, trying to parse an explanation from Rarity's cryptic wording. They shrugged in unison. The plan was probably something Pinkie came up with, meaning it was so insane that it just might work.



# Chapter 5

"I still say it's the dumbest thing I've ever heard," said Pokey as they wandered out of Carousel Boutique. "It's never going to work. And what did Pinkie mean by flopping ears?"

"Just make sure you don't do anything official, Berry," said Carrot Top. "I know where you live."

Berry stood on her rear hooves and made a cross over her belly. "Cross my heart and hope to fly."

"That's your liver."

"I trust that more than my heart," said Berry. "Speaking of livers, which one of you is taking Lyra out on the town tonight?"

Carrot Top and Pokey looked at each other for a moment before turning back to Berry.

"You can't seriously be suggesting a bachelorette party," said Pokey. "That's just inviting a disaster. I just want to go a day without being punched by mares, attacked by raccoons, or Luna knows what else." Pokey turned to walk away, with his head held high in a haughty huff. "I will be a slapstick punchline no longer!"

Pokey turned and immediately fell into a ditch with a burst of profanity that rattled nearby windows. Pushing himself to his hooves, he looked up to see Berry Punch and Carrot Top barely containing their laughter. With all the dignity a muddy pony could muster, Pokey climbed from the ditch and walked away in silence.

"So, seriously," said Berry, wiping away tears. "I'll take Lyra out if you take Bon-Bon."

"I doubt they would even want to go out," said Carrot Top. "Lyra said something about locking themselves in their house until the wedding

tomorrow, and I'm inclined to agree with them."

"You sure?" asked Berry with a waggle of her eyebrows. "I know a great country club. Lots of tall, handsome stallions, all muscle and sweat from days on the farm."

"What does that have to do with Lyra and Bon-Bon?" Carrot Top asked. "They're getting married. To each other." Berry stared blankly at Carrot Top. "They're both mares?"

"Not following your point."

"Pokey was right," said Carrot Top with a sigh. "This plan is insane, and everyone involved with it is too. Maybe you're right, I could use a drink after all."

"Now you're speaking my language," said Berry. "I'm sure your mother won't mind looking after the girls for another hour or two. Let's go get tanked!"

"See, it's things like this that run you into problems with the law," Carrot Top sighed. "One glass, then we go home."

"Agreed," said Berry. "Let's go to the Amber Rose. They've got really big glasses."

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The twang of a fiddle and steel guitar floated on the evening breeze, inviting ponies into the barn turned nightclub. The doors hung open, letting through a gentle breeze to cool the warm summer night over the packed crowd of ponies. Inside the club, Haute sat hunched over a bar stool, nursing a cocktail on the rocks while a terrible band sang in the corner. Sitting next to him was the grey newsmare, Snappy Scoops in her trademark hat. She put an arm around him, and gave him a friendly shake.

"What are you so bummed about, Haute?" asked Snappy. "You stopped that sham of a marriage and you made a boatload of cash for it. It's a good

thing you were here to—”

“It was not a good thing at all!” snapped Haute, throwing her arm off his shoulder. “And how dare you publish my suspicions as fact! You’ve brought shame and disgrace to the private matters of a noble family with your salacious stories. I’m sorry I even asked for your help.”

“Ah, get over it,” said Snappy. “We both got what we wanted.”

“This isn’t what I wanted at all!” wailed Haute. “You got a headline and a scandal! You got your precious inches in the paper at the expense of a noble’s dignity! I just wanted Lyra to stop carousing with Pokey and stay loyal to her mare.”

“Scandals sell,” said Snappy. “And it’s not like you turned down that check from Duke Afferio.”

“Don’t remind me,” groaned Haute, slumping back to his drink. “Hopefully, he’ll put in a good word with one of the noble houses, because Pokey’s going to fire me when he finds out what I’ve done.”

“And what have you done?” asked Berry.

Snappy and Haute spun on their stools to find Berry and Carrot Top standing before them with murder in their eyes. Berry set down a wine glass the size of a fish bowl and cracked her hooves.

“Well, hello, ladies,” said Snappy, pushing her hat from her eyes. “You’re looking radiant this evening. Can I buy you a drink? Or a bottle? Please don’t kill me.”

“Not the face!” begged Haute, cowering behind his hooves.

“Why in the name of Celestia would Berry hit you?” asked Carrot Top. “You didn’t do anything. You on the other hand,” she said, pointing a hoof at Snappy. “I’m glad Pinkie hasn’t found you yet, because that means I get the first crack at you.”

“Hey, now,” said Snappy, putting up her hooves defensively. “Haute’s just as guilty as I am. He’s the one who tipped me off to Pokey and Lyra’s

sordid little affair. I just took the pictures and published the story.”

“You did what?” Berry shrieked. “You little fink!” She downed the rest of her drink in a single massive gulp and let loose a bar-rattling belch. “Have at you!”

“Are you challenging me to a duel?” asked Haute, lowering his hooves. “I refuse to strike a mare, and furthermore—”

Haute was rudely interrupted by a hoof to the jaw that sent him sprawling across the bar. He slammed into another patron, spilling his drink over another pony, who retaliated with a hoof of his own. The club exploded in a frenzy of hoof-fights and swearing as the fight spread like wildfire from the bar to the surrounding tables. Carrot Top didn’t even have time to take a swing at Snappy before she ducked under a table and scurried toward the door.

As the bar exploded into chaos, Berry wove through the crowd with the focus of a master, throwing kicks and chops that laid flat anypony that dared come near her. Carrot Top ducked under thrown bottles and bar stools before retaliating with her own style of farm brawling. With the bar engaged in full melee, no one saw Pinkie Pie following Snappy out of the club.

It only took a few minutes for the police to arrive at the scene of Berry and Carrot Top standing back to back, surrounded by a pile of pulverized ponies. Rather than running, they stood to revel in their victory and then found themselves forced to the ground by the magic of Ponyville’s police unicorns. Carrot Top and Berry struggled against the blanket of magic until cuffs were clamped across their fetlocks.

“I wanna lawyer!” shouted Berry.

“Me too!” shouted Carrot Top.

“My brother’s a judge!” Berry protested, as the unicorns dragged them toward the wagon.

“I thought you only had a little sister?” Carrot Top asked.

“Well they don’t know that,” said Berry. “I mean, they do now, but—”

“You have the right to remain silent,” said the officer, levitating Berry and Carrot Top into the wagon. “I suggest you exercise that right. It’s bad enough that you’re our most frequent customer, now you’re dragging Carrot Top into your lifestyle?”

“I regret nothing!” Berry shouted as the wagon door slammed shut.

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A door pounded in Pokey’s dream long enough to convince him that someone was actually pounding on his door. The light of dawn poured in through window as the impatient pounding continued. Pokey rolled from his bed and toward the door in a half-asleep stumble that closer resembled the walking dead than a conscious pony. Behind door was the wall-eyed face of Derpy.

“I brought you a letter!” she said with a smile. “There’s postage due, though.”

Pokey floated a few bits off his night stand and into Derpy’s waiting hooves. She responded by sticking the note to his horn and fluttering off into the early morning sun. Pokey wandered back to the siren call of his bed, only to catch glimpse of the note in his mirror. The writing was near illegible, and the reflection didn’t aid comprehension at all.

“I can’t read this,” said Pokey to no pony in particular. “Who would send me a backwards letter?” He looked up again at his horn, then pulled the note off with an exasperated sigh. There wasn’t enough sleep in the world to deal with this sort of aggravation.

Come bail us out of jail.

Love, Carrot Top and Berry Punch.

Someone once told Pokey that laughter was the best medicine. Whether or not this was true was up for debate, but as his giggling slowly transformed in cackles of madness, the tiny piece of Pokey that was still clinging to reality found the idea a bit hard to believe. A pounding on the wall –

followed by his neighbor's cries of frustration – snapped him from his hysterics.

Grabbing his sack of bail money, Pokey trotted through the streets of Ponyville on a simple mission: get everypony to the church on time. It seemed like such a simple task. Everypony shows up at one place around the same time. So why couldn't a bunch of adults do a simple thing like not get arrested? How hard was it to obey the law? Pokey mulled over the thoughts as he found his way into the basement of City Hall.

The basement holding cells sparkled in the early morning sun as Carrot Top and Berry Punch scrubbed the floors under the watchful eye of Officer Magnum. The clatter of a door chime caught his attention, and he walked behind his desk. Pokey trotted down the stairs a moment later.

"I'm here for Berry and Carrot Top," said Pokey.

"Well, that's enough community service for those two," said the officer. "I hope they learned their lesson to not start fights."

"I'm sure they have," said Pokey, dropping the sack of bits on the desk. "I'll take these two home. Got a wedding to get to in a few hours."

"Oh, I'm afraid Ms. Punch won't be attending that," said the police pony. "Mr. Cuisine is dead set on pressin' charges, so she's gotta stay in lock up for a few more days."

"You've got to be kidding me," said Pokey. "Berry's the minister. We literally can not perform this wedding without her."

"Well then you'll have to talk to Mr. Cuisine to see if he'll drop the charges," said Magnum. "He's at the clinic."

In an instant, Pokey was out the door and running through the streets of Ponyville in a panicked gallop. Hopefully, Pokey could get him to see reason without threatening his job or his life, but given his luck recently, that didn't seem likely.

Pokey burst through the clinic doors, startling Nurse Redheart out of her chair. Redheart popped up from behind her desk with a scowl as she

straightened her hat.

“What in the name of Celestia is wrong with you bursting in here like that?” she demanded.

“Sorry, dear,” said Pokey. “Where’s Haute?”

“The Pony Privacy Act prevents me from...”

“I’ll pay his bill if you tell me where he is,” said Pokey.

“Equestria pays for everypony’s medical care,” said Redheart.

“I’ll give you ten bits. Where is he?”

“Dentist’s office,” said Redheart, pointing a hoof. “Dr. Colgate should be done putting his teeth back in by now.”

Pokey trotted down the hall, until he came at last to an open door. A blue unicorn was busy washing her hooves while Haute stood from the dentist’s chair. A nasty hoof shaped bruise graced his cheek. Pokey approached, smiling with all the saccharine sincerity he could muster.

“Haute, my good pony!” said Pokey. “I heard about your run in with Berry last night. Terrible thing, really. Say, when was the last time you got a raise?”

“I’m not dropping the charges,” said Haute. “And I quit. I refuse to work for you, you philandering whelp. Why, if I hadn’t just gotten my teeth repaired, I’d challenge you to a duel for Bon-Bon’s honor.”

Pokey blinked in confusion as he tried to understand what the heck Haute was trying to say. He pointed a hoof at Haute to accuse him of something, but no words came to mind. He instead stood there for a moment before shaking his head.

“What in the name of Luna are you talking about?” asked Pokey.

“Don’t act like you don’t know,” snarled Haute. “You and Lyra? Carrying on in the kitchen like that? She is a noble, sir! And how dare you get between

her and Bon-Bon? Were I a few years younger, I'd give you a sound thrashing you'd never forget!"

"Hey!" Colgate scolded. "Take your lover's quarrel outside. I don't need you two breaking my equipment."

"Sorry, Dr. Colgate," said Pokey. Pokey grabbed Haute, and drug him into the hallway.

"Haute, are you out of your bucking mind?" asked Pokey. "What would give you the idea that Lyra and I were an item?"

"You couldn't keep your hooves off her when she came in from the rain the other day," said Haute. "I've seen how you look at her. It's the same look that you give all the mares you're interested in. Miss Pie, Miss Daisy, Miss R—"

"Think real hard before finishing that sentence," Pokey snapped. "Lyra's my friend. She's been my friend for a long time and the only thing I want for her is to get married to Bon-Bon. Today. At the time she put on all her invitations. I may be dedicated to lost causes, but do you really think I would have been driving myself up a wall for the past few months if I didn't want them to get married?"

"Mr. Cuisine," said Dr. Colgate, popping out from the office. "I have instructions once you're done fighting. Don't get punched in the mouth."

"Thank you, doctor," replied Haute. He turned back to Pokey, and jabbed him in the chest with a hoof. "Look, I'll drop the charges so the wedding can commence, but if I see you anywhere near Lyra, I will have their marriage annulled so fast that it will make your head spin."

"What kind of threat is that?" asked Pokey. "You're not a judge or a noble."

"You're a real dunce, Pokey," Haute huffed. "Of course I'm not, but I know plenty of ponies who are. Who do you think has been sending information to Duke Afferio?"

Pokey stood dumbfounded a moment, trying to piece together what Haute had just told him.



“You... did what?” he asked. “You’re... the leak? You... I... thought...” He stammered for a moment more as Haute walked back into the dentist’s office.

“I never cared that Bon-Bon isn’t a noble,” said Haute. “I just didn’t want her getting hurt because of you.”

Pokey clenched his teeth so hard that cracking echoed through the hall. Were it possible for a unicorn’s head to catch fire, Pokey would have become a wailing pyre of hate that moment. Instead of becoming a harbinger of destruction, Pokey only turned and walked out of the building as if he were a marionette. When he got outside, he walked toward the Everfree Forest, where he could adequately express his feelings on the matter. Ten minutes later, the loudest and longest string of swearing ever heard in Ponyville echoed from the woods and into the town like some sort of profane church bell of hatred.

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Because of the reams of paperwork involved, it was almost noon before Carrot Top and Berry Punch were released from the Ponyville Police Department. Pokey had long since gone off to prepare food for the reception while the other ponies waited in awkward conversation for the mare of honor and the minister to arrive. Octavia’s ensemble played a few pieces as the minutes until the wedding ticked by with no sign of the two.

A gathered crowd of a hundred ponies turned to face the opening doors as two mares burst into the chapel. From the sea of faces came a few whispered murmurs of relief as the two walked toward the front of the chapel. A pair of fillies trotted up them as soon as they walked around the pews.

“Mom!” said the pink unicorn filly. “You’re late! Everypony’s been looking for you. Where have you been?”

“Mommy spent the night with Uncle Magnum,” said Berry.

“Another night in the drunk tank, Mom?” sighed Ruby Pinch. “And you dragged Miss Carrot Top along, too?”

“Hey, it was a bar fight and we won,” said Carrot Top. “Are you and Noi ready ready to be flower girls?”

“Ready!” said the yellow filly. “Mom’s really mad at you, by the way.”

“She’ll get over it,” said Carrot Top. “Alright, you two get your flowers, and we’ll see you in a bit.”

Berry and Carrot Top trotted away from the fillies and through the aisles of waiting ponies. Despite the effort of the nobles, it seemed like everypony in town was here. Doctors, lawyers, bakers, and farmers all stood shoulder to shoulder with smiles as they waited for the the happy couple to walk up the aisle.

Carrot Top and Berry ducked into the back room of the chapel where Rarity stood waiting for them. She dropped her tape measure on the desk and stamped a hoof.

“Where have you been?” Rarity demanded. “The girls have been waiting forever for you!”

“Minor problem with getting arrested,” said Berry, digging through the desk for her collar.

“What do you mean, arrested?” asked Rarity. “How did... Why...”

“Don’t worry,” said Berry. She pushed back her mane to snap on her clergy collar. “We’re good to go.”

“All this aggravation and lunacy will all be worth it if this day just goes as planned,” said Carrot Top as she pulled on her dress. “Let’s do this thing.”

“Well, I do hope it all goes as planned,” said Rarity. “Speaking of which, have either of you seen Pinkie Pie? I haven’t talked to her since yesterday.”

“I haven’t seen her, either,” said Berry. “I’m sure she’s doing last minute preparations. Don’t worry about her. If everypony is ready, I’ll go strike up

the band.”

Berry walked up the stairs and into the chapel, where the noon sun illuminated the faces of the ponies gathered to see Lyra and Bon-Bon joined at last. Berry nodded to Octavia, and the ensemble of ponies filled the chapel with the sound of music.

The soft and dulcet tones of the piano and cello mingled in the air above the crowd as the two fillies started their slow procession up the aisle. As they laid a sea of rose petals at the hooves of the unicorn behind them, every eye turned to stare in amazement at the veiled bride.

The dress was nothing short of spectacular. Gossamer laces trimmed in beadwork covered her from head to tail in the purest of white, finishing in hooped ruffles that fell around her legs in a cascade of lace. Only a teal horn and striped mane hung above the thick veil. But as beautiful as she was, the crowd could only gasp as the second bride entered the church.

She too concealed her face behind a thick veil, though all eyes were on her dress. The dress fell in pools of satin around her hips and flanks and covered her legs to the ground. She floated through the aisle of rose petals to the altar, her indigo and pink locks bouncing along with each step. The two brides stood quietly for a moment, before turning at last to Berry Punch.

“Friends, family, visitors from all of Equestria,” she began, “today, we join these two souls together in the unbreakable bonds of matrimony. To those who oppose this marriage, let them speak now or forever hold their peace.”

“I object!”

A murmur ran through the crowd as every face turned to the blue earth pony at the rear of the chapel. There stood Duke Afferio, mane blazing orange as the sun, flanked on both sides by his personal guards.

“I cannot permit this sham of a marriage to go forth!” he said. “I will not stand by as a noble throws her life away to some commoner. By the power granted to me by Princess Celestia herself, I forbid this marriage from taking place.”

Lyra's father charged into the aisle, only to be blocked by the duke's bodyguards.

"You gelding!" yelled Star Dream. He reached between the guards, trying to wrap his hooves around Afferio's neck. "How dare you ruin my daughter's wedding! I should have known you were behind this, you rotten coward!"

"You forget yourself, just as your daughter does," snapped Duke Afferio. "I am your duke, and you are but a baron. I have the authority to cancel this marriage here and now, and I shall do so."

"Well, there's nothing I can do about that," chimed in Berry. "Sorry kids, looks like you ain't getting married after all."

"What?" demanded Strawberry Lime. "After all that hard work? After everything, you're just not going to marry them?"

"Isn't that what the duke said?" asked Berry. "Sorry. Rules are rules. I will not marry these two and Celestia help anyone who does!"

"Just like that?" asked Duke Afferio. "I'm not going to have to have you jailed or anything?"

"Bud, this is my job," said Berry. "I'm not going to lose it over these two."

"Oh, well..." The Duke paused, clearly at a loss for words. "Well, that was easier than I thought it would be. Ponyville will continue to reap the benefits of the nobles, I suppose. Guards, with me."

The chapel erupted in outrage as the Duke marched out the door. Berry stood at the alter, quietly waiting for the mob to allow the Duke out. As the door slammed behind the duke, the two guards breathed a sigh of relief.

"That wasn't so bad," said the unicorn guard, walking away from the chapel. The three trotted away from the chapel as the sounds of a hundred angry ponies followed them.

"I was expecting a riot," said the pegasus guard, looking back at the chapel. "May I suggest we leave town while we can?"

“Well,” said Duke Afferio. “It’s good of the subjects to know their place. Still, it seems too easy. Perhaps we should go back in and clarify things...”

“Hi, Mister Duke!” chirped a voice from behind the trio. They slowly turned around to the grinning face of Pinkie Pie. “Do you like cupcakes?”

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Duke Afferio wasn’t a pony who knew fear. He had served with distinction in Equestria’s military for years, facing down natural disasters and threats of beasts for years before taking his rightful place as Duke of the Everfree providence. Nothing he had ever encountered scared him as much as that pink pony patiently pacing along the cold stone floor. They were in some kind of cellar or basement, devoid of windows with only a single stark light-bulb casting light on Pinkie Pie.

“You’re a big bully, buddy” said Pinkie as her hoof-falls echoed along the stone floor. “Paying ponies to be prickly? Having Haute in hot water? Shanghaing Snappy Scoop’s stories? You’re a mean pony, Mister Duke.”

“Who are you?” demanded Duke Afferio with as much courage as he could muster. “I demand that you release me!”

“Oh, silly, I’m Pinkie Pie, and I threw this party just for you!” She gestured to the wonderland of shadowed decorations behind her. Balloons and streamers decorated the cellar in waves of purple and trails of glitter tracked behind an ominous wooden door. Low thumping, like the kick of some industrial machine, filtered from underneath it.

“W... what’s behind that door?” asked Duke.

“It’s just for you!” said Pinkie, with a grin. Her mane hung flat across her face like a fuchsia mask. “You hit your head on the way down here, so I waited for you to wake up just so I could show you. It’s too bad you weren’t nicer; there’s a much bigger party going on later. I guess this one will have to do.”

Pinkie picked up a large knife from the table and walked toward the Duke. He skittered backwards, pinning himself against the door. Pinkie kept walking toward him with her thousand watt smile as his hooves fumbled

with the door handle.

“Yes, let’s join your other friends!” said Pinkie. “They’re just behind that door. All the other mean ponies in Ponyville who tried to ruin the wedding are there too. Mister Haute, Snappy Scoops, and your guards. Some of the meanie nobles too,” said Pinkie.

The door finally snapped open and the Duke spilled into the room beyond. Pinkie stepped through the doorway, knife held high above the Duke.

“Because you know what we do to mean ponies?” asked Pinkie.

“No, Celestia, help!” he cried, throwing his hooves over his face. “Please!”

“We throw them,” she brought the knife down into an ornate cake. “A PARTY!”

Duke Afferio looked from between his fetlocks to see glittery room filled with nobles enjoying thumping music and a wide variety of desserts. The two guards danced along with the music as Pinkie passed out cake to her guests. Duke Afferio sat stunned for a moment, as Snappy and Haute approached.

“Hey Duke!” said Snappy. “Glad you could join us. Have some cake!”

“But... what...”

“Yeah, Pinkie’s party are really the best,” said Snappy.

“But...”

“I wouldn’t worry about it,” said Haute. “Miss Pie is throwing a private party for the nobles. It appears she thought the nobility was jealous for not getting an invite.”

“That’s not what this was about at all!” said Duke Afferio. “It’s about tradition and bloodlines. It’s dignity!”

“I forgot your party hat!” said Pinke, snapping a paper cone on his head. “Have some pie!”

Duke Afferio hung his head in defeat and took the slice of pie.

---

The crowd had simmered into a dull mumbling of outrage as the two brides stood at the altar. Berry flipped her notes back to beginning and stretched out her hooves in a yawn.

“Well, sorry I didn’t marry you two,” said Berry.

“I’m not,” said Pokey, taking off the veil. His horn and mane had been powdered a light teal. “Sorry, Carrot Top, you’re not really my type.”

Carrot Top took off her veil as well and shook out her dyed mane.

“Pity,” said Carrot Top. “This is such a wonderful dress. Now, let’s get this wedding started for real.” Pokey and Carrot Top stood to the side, and turned to the back of the chapel. The band looked to each other with a shrug before starting from the top.

The soft tones of cello and piano were accompanied by the procession of spring flowers from the two flower fillies as they waltzed up the aisle. Following behind them was Lyra, dolled up in a white linen toga. Across her neck was a gold band adorned with a small wrapped candy, a perfect depiction of Bon-Bon’s cutie mark. The golden shoes that adorned her hooves accented the white linen of her dress as it trailed behind her. The guests could only stare as she walked down the aisle, mane pulled back in a golden barrette of a lyre. As Lyra arrived at the altar, she bowed to Pokey, still in his dress. Pokey bowed back and turned to watch as Bon-Bon entered the chapel.

A great bustle of pink and indigo trailed over her shoulders and into a flowing train behind her as she walked toward the altar. Gracing her ear was small earring in the shape of a lyre. She paused at the altar to marvel at what her friends had accomplished and tears of joy began to gather in the corners of her eyes as she turned back to Berry Punch.

“See before you, the joy in the hearts of those who will not be defeated by the world,” said Berry. “Through the times and trials of the past few months,

Lyra and Bon-Bon have endured what no pony should be expected to suffer through. Hate, jealousy, and dishonesty from the world around them have shaken them, but their love has remained firm. Let the light of that love be a blessing to you all.”

Berry took a step back to let her words linger in the crowd. The quiet reflection of the moment almost brought a tear to her eye. There would plenty of time for happiness later; right now, there was only the wedding.

“The brides have prepared their vows,” said Berry at last.

Bon-Bon nodded, and cleared her throat. “I knew from the day I first met you, that you were the one for me,” said Bon-Bon. “All those years ago when we were just silly fillies playing without a care in the world along the streets of Ponyville, I couldn’t help but think about how much I wanted to be your friend forever. I remember our first kiss, when we were just little girls. We didn’t think it meant anything then, and you moved away soon after. I knew I’d never forget you, but I often wondered if you would remember me. Years later, you came back to Ponyville. Whether you were looking for me, or work, or something else, you came back and found me.” She wiped away a tear. “I thought that you wouldn’t remember me, but you gave me that same kiss when I saw you again. It wasn’t the innocent kiss of a filly this time. It was a reminder that you and I were meant for each other. It was a kiss that brought me back to you forever. You said the other day that we hadn’t made our vows yet, but I knew from the beginning that I would love you forever. In sickness and in health, for rich or for poor. Till this world ends and the end of the next, I will love you forever, and I will always be by your side.”

The crowd applauded with a stomping of hooves as the two mares stared longingly at each other. As the sounds of a hundred pairs of hooves dwindled to a silence, Lyra’s lyre floated to her waiting hooves. The strings of the instrument filled the chapel with a haunting tune as Lyra’s voice carried over the crowd of ponies.

“I once had a dream that I had everything in the world that I could ever want: money, fame, power, a castle in the sky. But when I searched my castle and found that you weren’t in it, I realized it wasn’t a dream, but a nightmare instead. That’s what life is without you: a never-ending nightmare. Part of me wants nothing more than to take you away from here



to live in the quiet luxury of nobility, so that nothing can ever come between us again. But if the past few months have taught me anything, it's that love is like music. Neither can be seen, but they can both be felt. They follow you no matter where you go, and the melodies can't be broken, no matter how hard you try. It's hard work to get it perfect, but when you get it right, it brightens the world around everyone it touches. Even if I were to never play another note, the music of you will always lead right back home."

The soft music faded as Lyra set down her instrument.

"You are my music, Bon-Bon."

The crowd behind sat in silence as Berry stepped up to the altar.

"Lyra Heartstrings, do you take Bon-Bon to be your wife?"

"I do."

"Bon-Bon, do you take Lyra to be your wife?"

"I do."

"Then by the power vested in me by Equestria, I now pronounce you wife and wife. What our goddess has put together, let no pony tear asunder." She smiled at the couple. "You may kiss your bride."

Lyra stood on her back hooves, and swept Bon-Bon into her arms. The crowd behind them erupted in applause as Lyra and Bon-Bon shared their first kiss as a married couple. Through the noise and cheering, everything faded around the couple. Even surrounded by family and friends, the two mares were alone together in that moment. Whatever hardships and nightmares they had endured were over now as they started a brand new life as one. Lyra broke their kiss only for a moment to whisper to Bon-Bon.

"And we lived happily ever after."

# Epilogue

True to their promises to each other, Lyra and Bon-Bon did live happily ever after. They both realized that marriage and love were hard work with tremendous rewards. Things may not have always been perfect, but their dedication to happiness in each other kept them joyous all their lives. It wasn't long before they added to their family and brought a new generation of happiness into Equestria.

Berry Punch continued as a part-time minister to supplement her janitorial salary. She found her summers filled with couples flocking to Ponyville for quick marriage without the hassle of prying eyes or tutting parents.

Carrot Top found herself in the role of an adopted aunt after Lyra and Bon-Bon's first foal. As Ponyville's economy continued to grow, so did the demand for her carrots. Soon, her farm was supplying ponies from Phillydelphia to Manehattan with all the carrots that they could need.

Pokey eventually left Ponyville after being drafted for a quest by the princess. He still visits occasionally for Pinkie's parties and Bon-Bon's confections.

Duke Afferio eventually gave up his quest to keep the noble lineage pure when he learned that his own family had ascended from common stock. He eventually learned an important lesson in love and tolerance when he meet his distant relatives, a simple family of rock farmers from Bridleburg.

Haute found another job in Ponyville after he quit at The Balloons Cafe. He never followed through with his threat, and to this day, he still hides in every time he sees Lyra or Bon-Bon for fear of reprisal.

Despite her blatant lack of journalistic integrity, Snappy Scoops continued publishing stories in the Ponyville tabloids. She eventually won a Pullet Surprise for her article about Fluttershy's chickens.

Plow and Barbell bought a farm outside Phillydelphia and adopted six foals. They now raise prize pumpkins and despite the odd circumstances

surrounding their relationship, they too lived happily ever after.

And Pinkie continued to be Pinkie.