

# Lost in the Crowd

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# Prologue

“DJ Pone-three? Huh?”

“No, silly! The three is pronounced as an 'e'! DJ Pone-ee!”

“Oh... oh! I get it! That's clever.”

The pink party pony was bouncing up and down off of the floor of the Ponyville Library with glee, as Twilight Sparkle read the little advertisement pamphlet Pinkie Pie had handed her.

“So what's this supposed to be, anyways? A party of some kind?”

“Yeah! DJ PON-3 is coming to Ponyville, and everypony knows that her parties are super-duper awesome! You gotta come, you gotta gotta gotta!”

“Uh, um... I don't know what this is, though.”

“WELL,” began Pinkie Pie, her eyes growing wide with glee. “I've always wanted to go to a party like this one and take my awesomest friends to it! This is going to be one of the most amazingest things in the whole entire world! Even better than the Grand Galloping Gala! Although, you know, it wouldn't take THAT much to be better than that stuffy old boring party where nopony knows how to have fun, but you know what I mean!” Pinkie seemingly teleported beside Twilight and wrapped her hoof around Twilight's shoulder, grinning like a maniac.

“I... guess?,” Twilight replied, a nervous grin coming across her face.

“Yay!!,” exclaimed Pinkie Pie, nearly hurting Twilight's ears.

“Right, okay,” sighed Twilight, getting fairly exasperated. “What exactly is this, anyways? You haven't really explained anything to me aside from the fact it's a party. What kind of party is it?”

“Oh!,” replied Pinkie, now back in the middle of the floor, striking random poses. How did she manage to stand on two legs like that? “It's a DJ PON-3 party! She's currently the BIGGEST DJ sensation in all of

Equestria! She a hard-core disk-spinning one-pony-party machine!” Pinkie began scratching a phantom record on a phantom record player. “And! I've always wanted to go a party like this one! But you can't do it without your bestest friends in the whole wide world, now can you?!”

“N-no, I guess not, haha.” Twilight lowered her head, her eyes still fixed on Pinkie. Twilight felt completely at the mercy of the excitable pink pony, until Rainbow Dash conveniently flew through the doorway, landing with a soft thud on the floor.

“Oh, hey Twilight,” she said nonchalantly, brushing off her shoulder and folding her wings back.

“H-hey! Rainbow Dash, what brings you here?”

“Pinkie told me you might need convincing to go to the party, so I'm here to help!,” replied Dash, with a triumphant look on her face.

“W-wait, what?!,” said Twilight, horrified, her dreams of a swift rescue and evacuation from the situation shattered. “I don't even know what I'm agreeing to, though! I can't keep up with Pinkie Pie.”

Rainbow Dash looked a little taken aback and confused, and stared at Twilight. “Are you serious? You've never heard of DJ PON-3, the biggest DJ sensation in all of Eques--”

“Okay, okay, I get that she's a good DJ. But what's this party like? Where's it going to be?”

“Read the flier, silly!,” replied Pinkie, bouncing up and down. Twilight then remembered the flier she had been holding in her hoof the entire time. She looked down at it, the large-print holofoil text popping out at her.

*'Summer Surprise in Ponyville ~ Dusk Til Dawn! DJ PON-3 – KittenSpins – B1G M4C...'*

“Wait, Big Mac? Applejack's brother?”

“No no, different Big Mac. I asked already. It's just their stage name,” replied Rainbow Dash. Twilight continued reading.

*'One Night Only – Free drinks and refreshments – Tickets Available at Ponyville Post Office'*

"O...kay then," spoke Twilight, slowly and nervously. "So... it's a concert of some kind."

"No, silly!," yelled Pinkie Pie, who was bouncing. "It's a DANCE PARTY. There'll be lots of dancing and tasty sweets and music and noise and it'll be amazing! You gotta come Twilight!!"

"I-I don't know, Pinkie," replied Twilight. Dancing? Oh Celestia. "This doesn't really seem like my kind of party..."

"Pfft, come on Twilight, you can't just hole up in this library all the time. It's summer! You gotta get out there and do stuff!," exclaimed Rainbow Dash, unfurling her wings and getting into an aggressive stance as if to demonstrate 'doing things.'

While flipping the advertisement back and forth, re-reading both sides of the paper in her hoof, Twilight couldn't help but be reminded of the parties back in Canterlot that Princess Celestia would insist Twilight go to. Celestia would go on and on about her mental health and how it wasn't healthy to be alone all the time, but Twilight couldn't be bothered. She eyeballed the pair of mares in her library, and then the paper again.

"You think it's really all that healthy to stay up all night like that? Ever heard of physical exhaustion?"

"You pull all-nighters all the time with your *girlfriend*," replied Dash, rolling her eyes. "And besides, it's not like a little exercise hurt anypony."

Twilight tried desperately to think of another excuse, but she knew most of them would be shot down instantly. Rainbow Dash was too sharp. Twilight just sighed. "Okay, girls, I know everypony is still worried about me being here all the time, especially since I've been spending so much time with Luna, but it's not like I'm a shut-in. I do tons of stuff with everypony, don't I?" Rainbow Dash and Pinkie Pie gave each other a confused look, as Twilight continued on. "I've improved a lot since moving to Ponyville. You don't have to be so worried about me, okay?"

"Um, Twilight? We're not inviting you because we're worried about you or anything. We're inviting everypony to this, silly!," replied Pinkie Pie, who began bouncing yet again.

“Oh... wait, even Rarity?,” said Twilight with an incredulous look on her face.

“Yep! She even agreed to go!,” exclaimed Pinkie.

“What?!”

“Yep!!”

“What about Fluttershy? I honestly can’t see her going to something like this.”

“She’s going too. Something about needing to ‘make sure everypony is safe and doesn’t get hurt.’ You know how she is. Oh, and before you ask, the ‘Free Refreshments’ on that flier are going to be supplied by Applejack,” replied Rainbow Dash.

“See?! Everypony will be there, so you gotta go, Twilight!,” continued Pinkie.

Twilight sighed again, looking at the ad one last time. She was cornered. If there was anything she hated more, it was not being included in something that could be potentially, in some small way, exciting or interesting – especially if everypony else was going to be doing it without her. The thought of that annoyed her to no end. “Alright, alright, I’ll go. On one condition.”

“What is it?!,” the pair of them asked in unison.

“... can Luna come?”

“Well, DUH!,” replied Pinkie Pie. “You think we wouldn’t let her go to a party during the night with tons of ponies dancing all night long?! It’ll be the perfect place for her! She’ll have the time of her life and make tons of friends, I guarantee it!”

“... Alright then. I’ll go.”

“Awesome!,” the pair of them yelled out in unison, bumping their hooves together. “We’re going to a rave!” Twilight could only cringe from the sympathetic embarrassment, and lowered her head. This was going to turn into another ‘adventure,’ wasn’t it?



# Chapter 1

“Dear me, how did I *ever* agree to go to this thing?,” said Rarity.

It was late evening in Ponyville. Rarity and Fluttershy were walking towards the large tented venue that had appeared on the hillside seemingly overnight. The pair of them were eyeballing some of the outfits random ponies were wearing for the party. A small scattering of ponies were walking with them, and a small handful had also dressed up for it, in everything from what looked like old disco-styled wear to gothic, lacy clothing with chains and ribbons hanging off of the sides. The sights of decades-old fashion and alternative wear was a horrifying sight and experience to the fashion-conscious pony.

“Uhm... maybe you thought it might be fun?,” replied Fluttershy, walking alongside her, smiling meekly.

“*Hardly*, darling. But this being the largest social event around here in quite a while, I can't simply *refuse* to attend, now can I?”

“Oh, well, I suppose not...,” replied Fluttershy, not actually understanding her point but not wanting to question her friend's logic either.

“I just hope that at least *some* of the participants will show a more refined taste in fashion. I mean, look at that filly walking ahead of us. Black cotton vest with multicoloured accessories? And just look at her hair! Oh Celestia, the shades and colours clash in such a *grotesque* manner, I can hardly look.”

“Oh, that's not a very nice thing to say Rarity. Not everypony dresses like you do, but that doesn't mean it's bad...”

“I suppose you're right, Fluttershy. That's wasn't very nice of me to say. But this is *definitely* not my scene. I honestly wonder if this isn't just another prank those two have trapped me in.”

“I really don't think so, Rarity. This isn't really, um, 'prank' material...”



Rarity simply sighed, in her signature melodramatic way. "I suppose I'll just have to grin and bear it, as usual."

"I'm sure it'll be lots of fun, Rarity. It won't be so bad," replied Fluttershy, smiling again. Fluttershy then noticed a familiar orange-coloured mare ahead of them. "Oh, it's Applejack!" The pair of them trotted a little faster to catch up, Fluttershy calling after her. Applejack was pulling medium-sized wooden cart behind her which had a large piece of fabric covering it.

"Oh, howdy. How are y'all doin' tonight? Are y'all excited?"

Rarity looked off to the side, as if just thinking about what was about to happen mildly annoyed her.

"O-oh yes, we're both very excited about tonight. I've never been to a party this big. I wonder what it'll be like," replied Fluttershy, trying to cover for her friend's casual rudeness.

"Me neither! Although ah gotta say that ah'm not too sure what all the excitement is about. Ah mean, it's jus' another party, right? Even if the main attraction IS all famous-like."

"There were parties like this in Cloudsdale – I mean, I never went to them or anything, I was too scared to go, of course – but some of my friends talked about them a lot. They're really popular in the big cities... Um..." trailed off Fluttershy, as she tried to remember everything she had heard from her few friends in Cloudsdale.

"Ah well, ah'm just gonna be behind the bar most of the night. Ah suppose dancin' and hollerin' might be fun 'n all to some ponies, but..." Applejack paused as the trio eyed a pegasus colt who had thick, multicoloured eyeliner, spiked blue hair and black, chained armbands on both forehooves as he trotted by. "...this seems a little too intense for, uh, y'know, a simple farmin' filly like myself, if you get m'drift."

"Oh, *completely*, darling," replied Rarity, her eyes wide as they followed the colt up the street. Fluttershy felt a little shocked, realizing this was the first time she had heard Rarity and Applejack agree on anything so decisively.

As the trio got closer to their destination, the large, octagonal tent could finally be seen. It had thick, dark brown fabric and seemed to block out most of the sound and light coming from within its confines. The loud speakers boomed erratically within as the sound crew did their checks, and an odd, violet light poured out of the front door. Two well-built, but friendly-looking ponies – a mare and a colt – stood in front of the line, ready to accept tickets once the party had started. The sun had just started to dip into the horizon, the orange sunset fading gently into a darker blue sky above. Rarity, Fluttershy and Applejack had all arrived a little early. They stopped in front of the entrance to see Applejack off.

“Well girls, ah'm off to go set up my wares inside. You two be safe, y'hear?”

“Oh please, I'm sure I can handle myself at silly little party like this. It's hardly a high-class event,” replied Rarity with a hint of indignation in her voice.

“Uhm, we'll be safe Applejack. Promise,” continued Fluttershy, trying to cover for Rarity's mild rudeness yet again.

“Well at least one of ya seems to know what yer doin'. Just don't get carried away, y'know how these parties tend to go.”

“H-how they tend to go...?”

“Yes yes, I'm sure we'll manage, Applejack. You needn't worry about us,” retorted Rarity, cutting off her friend and waving her hoof dismissively.

Applejack just sighed and started moving towards the entrance, pulling her cart behind her. “See y'all on the inside, then!” Applejack pulled up to one of the bouncers, who smiled and quickly let her through. The pair of them watched Applejack disappear into the dark violet light of the entrance, as a voice called for them from behind in the line.

“Fluttershy! Rarity! Over here!” The pair swung around to look, and saw Twilight and Princess Luna standing in line. Twilight was waving her hoof in the air to get their attention, as Luna smiled beside her.

“Hello, sweethearts. Nice to see you two tonight,” said Rarity as she greeted them warmly and stepped into line behind them.

"G-greetings Miss Rarity, Miss Fluttershy," said Luna, nervously bowing her head towards the pair of them.

"I-It's so nice to see you again, your highn-- I mean, Princ-- um, Luna," replied Fluttershy, instinctively lowering herself to bow before the royal alicorn. Rarity gave her a quick nudge to the side prevent Fluttershy from finishing her curtsey, and she stood up straight again, blushing.

"Y-yes, you too. I hope this event will be fun and exciting. There was nothing like this when I was... erm, younger." Luna fidgeted a little, smiling meekly. "Ponies never danced throughout the night simply for personal enjoyment back in my time... I think it'll be interesting and fun to see what it's like."

"Oh yes, definitely," said Fluttershy enthusiastically. By this point, Rarity was already distracted, observing and recoiling in horror at the various 'fashion crimes' in the line with her.

"Well, I just hope there's place to cool down every so often. I'm also not really that great of a dancer, so I'm hoping I don't make too much of a fool of myself," interjected Twilight, laughing nervously.

"It's okay, Twilight... my friends back in Cloudsdale always told me that you didn't need to be a good dancer. No pony judges anypony like that here. It's all about having fun," replied Fluttershy.

"Really? But it's a dance party, isn't it? Why would ponies come to a dance party if they didn't know how to dance?" Twilight had a confused look on her face, as if the concept of it didn't compute.

"Oh, but it's all about expressing yourself, and not being ashamed of who you are... only a small handful of ponies can dance really well, but they don't boast about it or anything. I mean, um, that's what I heard, I think. I'm not too sure..."

"I suppose that makes sense, since you put it that way," replied Twilight, bringing a hoof to her chin and rolling her eyes to the side as she became lost in thought.

"Hey guys!," called out somepony from behind them. It was Rainbow Dash, with Pinkie Pie bouncing happily alongside her. The pair of them looked more psyched then they had ever been.

“What impeccable timing. Now we're all in the same part of the line together,” replied Luna, turning to face the others.

“Yay!,” exclaimed Pinkie Pie, who was bouncing along the ground. “We're all here now! This is gonna be so super awesome I can hardly wait!”

“Yeah, I've been wanting to hear DJ PON-3 live ever since I got one of her albums a while back. She's the best DJ this side of Equestria,” continued Rainbow Dash.

“Yeah!,” said Pinkie Pie, in complete agreement. “She's the best DJ ever!”

Twilight giggled. “Okay guys, you've been gushing about this party every day since you've invited us. I'm sure it'll be great. Just relax a little until we get inside, okay?”

The six of them talked and laughed, as the night began to descend upon Ponyville. The stars gleamed and sparkled above, with a full moon appearing high in the sky, lighting up the tent with its soft blue glow. Luna looked up at the sky and smiled, the line slowly beginning to move as the bouncers began letting groups of ponies in a few at a time. The music began to play inside, adding a rhythmic vibration to the ground beneath everypony, and lights could be seen through the thick fabric of the tent.

In the back of the pack, with the biggest, widest grin on her face, Pinkie Pie was continuously bouncing up and down, the anticipation within her reaching critical levels. She couldn't even hear the voices of her friends around her. There was no other place in Equestria she'd rather be, and she knew it was going to be the best night of her life.

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Pinkie Pie's eyes grew wide the second she laid her eyes upon the rapidly growing crowd of ponies in the middle of the tent floor. Two humongous multi-driver speakers lined the sides of the DJ booth which was set far into the back, opposite of the entrance. Sets of large rotating lights lined the top and bottom with two laser projectors on the top inside corners.

In the middle was the first DJ of the night, B1G M4C. He was an earth pony with straight, medium-length dyed-green hair that was brushed to the side, wearing goggles and frantically moving his hooves from side to side, monitoring the audio on his large headphones. The lights were flashing, the music was pounding and the ponies were dancing. Pinkie Pie looked across all of the dancers, and the wave of excitement had finally crashed, giving way to elation and the purest, rawest energy she had ever felt.

“Whoa! This is intense!” said Twilight. Twilight noticed that a kind of sound-buffering barrier had obviously been erected by a unicorn pony throughout the inner perimeter of the tent, as if it was meant to allow ponies to hear each other talk on the sidelines.

“Oh dear, oh my... this is so much bigger than I expected,” continued Fluttershy, who cowered behind her friends, lowering her head. “No pony told me it would be *this* loud...”

“Oh darling,” began Rarity, stepping beside her scared friend. “Don't worry yourself *too* much. Stick by my side, and you'll do just fine. I've deftly navigated scores of parties in my time, and this one shall be no different I'm sure.”

“Um... okay, th-that might be okay,” replied Fluttershy, quickly trotting behind Rarity who had already begun to walk off to the left of the giant crowd.

“Hey y'all! Over here!” Applejack called to them from the right side of the crowd, waving her hoof as a small group of ponies lined up in front of her drink table.

“Hello, Miss Applejack!” replied Luna, who waved her hoof back. “Perhaps we should go visit her first, Twilight?”

“Sure! Why not? Standing in line for so long made me thirsty,” she replied, smiling. The pair then began immediately walking off to Applejack's table, all the while admiring the crowd that had come in before them.

“Yo, Pinkie Pie! The others are already heading in. You look like an entranced magpie right now,” said Rainbow Dash suddenly, pointing off to her friends who had already begun to disappear into the gaggle of dancers and party-goers in front of them.

“... *‘entranced magpie’*? Really, Dashie?,” retorted Pinkie.

“It... was the only thing I could think of. But hey, come on, let's--” Dash couldn't finish her sentence before she felt something yank her arm hard, immediately pulling her into the crowd. Pinkie Pie hadn't wasted any time, or even taken a moment to wait for Dash's response. The energy inside of her refused to wait even a second longer. Pinkie gently wiggled her way through the crowd of ponies until they found a small opening, surrounded by sound, lights and pure, unadulterated energy. “W-whoa!”

“Let's dance, Dashie!!,” exclaimed Pinkie, beginning to bounce up and down in time with the rapid beat. Dash said nothing and just shot Pinkie a wide grin, following her lead and starting to move with the beat. The pair of them swayed from side to side, closing their eyes and getting lost in their raw movements, music filling their ears and instantly entrancing them. The songs continued to change and the party continued ever onwards, the lights filling the otherwise pitch-black tent with their radiance. The pair of them connected their hooves, laughing as another track came on, their dancing becoming more erratic as the music progressively more and more intense. The two of them, as far as they could tell, were having the time of their lives, and so was everypony else around them. A few more tracks played, weaving in together in a giant blur of music and lights. Neither of them were sure how much time had passed since they had started dancing. The night had begun with a bang. Dash wondered how this could get any better. This little slice of Equestria was pure and beautiful.

“Wow, this is awesome!,” said Rainbow Dash loudly, trying to force her voice to be heard over the music. She opened her eyes and looked at her pink companion - only, she wasn't there, and she found herself surrounded by the horde of ponies that had come to this event. “Pinkie?!,” she yelled into the crowd. But the pink party pony was nowhere to be seen. Rainbow Dash flapped her wings and poked her head above the crowd, trying to see if she could spot her with the same result. She did, however, see Rarity and Fluttershy talking with Cheerilee off to the side. After making one last inquisitive look around the dance floor for her friend, and deciding that Pinkie couldn't get into TOO much trouble on her own, she went to go see what her other friends were up to. The crowd was thick but forgiving, and it wasn't very long before she found herself in her friend's company.

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Pinkie Pie slumped against the wall, breathing heavily. She was in a side-chamber of the large party tent that acted as a kind of 'cool off' area where ponies could sit down. She continued to breathe heavily, sweating profusely, her chest heaving up and down with every breath. 'Gee, I guess I overdid it,' she thought to herself, sighing. She disliked how out-of-shape she was, despite being so energetic. All that cake and chocolate was finally catching up with her, and at a party, no less. She hoped Rainbow Dash had heard her when she said she needed to sit down, but was sure Dash would find her eventually regardless.

"Are you okay, dear?," said somepony above her.

"Oh! I'm fine! I just overdid it a little, I think!," replied Pinkie, looking up at them, still a bit dreary-eyed and her hair a complete mess. It was a pegasus mare, with a long black mane, deep blue eyes and off-white fur. Pinkie Pie noticed that she was wearing a brightly coloured yellow shirt that read 'STAFF' in large black letters, and had a bag hanging off of her side.

"You look a little dehydrated. Is there anything I can get you?," replied the mare.

"Oh! Um, some water, maybe? That'd be super!"

"Of course," she replied, reaching into her bag and pulling out a single-use pouch of water, opening it and then giving it to Pinkie.

"Yay! Thank you!" Pinkie Pie immediately began gulping it down, immediately feeling refreshed and re-energized.

"My name is Misty Storm. I'm actually the on-site medic for this party. Please come find me if you need anything else," replied Misty, smiling and waving her hoof as she began to move on.

Pinkie just smiled and waved as the other mare walked off and began talking to and checking on other ponies. Pinkie, starting to feel a bit better, looked around the room, observing the party-goers around her. Lamps set up at the four corners of the small space lit up everything with a dull, soft yellow glow, which still shrouded most of the room in a subtle darkness.

There were already many ponies in this little side-room, the music still audible but muffled as everypony talked amongst themselves. Many of others in the room were sitting down and resting, although most looked like they were simply meeting up with friends so they could start dancing. Everypony was hugging, laughing, smiling, talking and being friendly. The entire scene filled Pinkie Pie with enthusiasm, since she always loved seeing everypony being happy at a party. She couldn't wait to go back out there and find her friends.

"Hey Pinkie!," said a familiar voice from the side. It was Twilight, with Luna alongside her. The pair of them were walking towards her, trying to avoid the steady stream of ponies entering and exiting the small space.

"Hey girls!," greeted Pinkie, standing back up and waving her hoof towards them.

"Are you having fun, Miss Pinkie? This party is very exciting, isn't it?," replied Luna, smiling brightly.

"It is!!," said Pinkie, starting to bounce up and down, her energy seemingly restored to maximum. "I got so into it and danced so hard that I had to sit down! Can you imagine a party that makes even makes me have to take a break?! Pretty wild, huh?!"

Twilight just giggled. "You know, I've always told you that you should make your diet a little healthier. Are you going to start listening now?"

"Nope!," said Pinkie, continuing to bounce. "Just means I have to be even more energetic to burn it all off! Besides, how can I organize ALL of the parties at Sugar Cube Corner if I don't taste test absolutely every little thing that I make to make sure it tastes absolutely perfect every single time?! My reputation is at stake, you know!"

"You're a very silly pony, Miss Pinkie," replied Luna, smiling. "But I really do like how energetic you are."

"Thanks, Princess! Pinkie Pie's gonna party for the rest of her life! No pony can stop her! Oh, have you gone out to dance yet?! The music is A-MAZ-ING!"



"No, not yet," replied Twilight. "We were just getting used to the whole experience first. We were thinking of trying it out now, though." Twilight looked at Luna, who nodded at her, smiling.

Pinkie then bounded over them, clearing their heads in a single motion, and began bouncing towards the crowd, stopping for a moment to wave her hoof towards them. "Well, what are you waiting for then?! Let's go!!" Pinkie just smiled brightly and ran back into the crowd. Luna and Twilight looked at each other, smiled, and then proceeded to follow the hyperactive pink pony into the noise.

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It was on the very edge of the noisy crowd that Rainbow Dash finally found Rarity, Fluttershy and Cheerilee all talking amongst themselves and laughing. Dash smiled as she approached them, glad to see that everypony, even Rarity, seemed to be having a good time.

"Why hello Rainbow Dash," greeted Rarity, turning to meet her friend.

"Hey all, what's up? Having fun? Oh, and have any of you seen Pinkie Pie?"

"Pinkie Pie? Oh, she could be anywhere by now," replied Rarity, rolling her eyes and waving her hoof. "If there's anypony that can handle herself in a party like this, it'd be her. I wouldn't worry yourself too much. Regardless of that, I was just talking to Miss Cheerilee here about the old 'disco' scene. I have to say, it sounds simply *marvellous*."

"Oh really?," replied Rainbow Dash, an slight tinge of skepticism in her voice.

"Well yes, just *LOOK* at Cheerilee's outfit. Isn't it *wonderful*? So retro and posh and hip and-- oh my, like a breath of fresh air compared to the stuffy, contemporary fashion scene we all find ourselves *drenched* in. You never see such attire anymore, and it's such a shame, really. They had a good thing going back then, don't you think?," replied Rarity. Dash looked at Cheerilee, who had styled her hair in a crazy, kinky-wave pattern. She

was wearing brightly coloured jewelry through her hair and a checkered scarf around her neck. She really did look like she hadn't aged a day in fifteen years.

"Back then, it was pretty much exactly like this. Loud music, bright lights and crazy outfits. But here, it's like everything has just been so amplified! It's great! I feel like a young filly again!" Cheerilee laughed, smiled and clapped her hooves together. "Oh, how I've wanted to party like this for so long!"

"I honestly can't believe I had second thoughts about coming to this event. I mean, perhaps I was a little judgemental, but you've really shown me what this scene is all about, Miss Cheerilee," replied Rarity, with wide eyes and a huge smile. Rainbow Dash just looked at her strangely, not sure how to react to Rarity's lack of constant whining and bemoaning of everything that was going on.

"Please, call me Cheers!," replied Cheerilee, laughing. "It was my old nickname! Everypony would always say goodbye to me by saying, 'Cheers, Cheers!' or 'Cheers for Cheers!' if it was my birthday. Hehe!"

"That's so *adorable*...! Are any of your old party friends still around?," replied Fluttershy, with subtle enthusiasm written across her face, rocking up and down as if she was doing a very subdued version of Pinkie Pie's signature bouncing.

"Of course! Some are even at this party! Do you want to go meet them in a little while?"

"I'd love to!," exclaimed Fluttershy. "I love meeting new friends."

"That'd be simply marvellous, Cheers," replied Rarity, having already caught onto her nickname. The pair of her friends were starting to confuse Dash. Just how long had it been since the party had started? It seemed like Cheerilee, Fluttershy and Rarity had been talking for hours, judging from her friend's change in attitudes and the informality they shared, but she couldn't tell. She also had no time to think about it, either.

"You *simply* must come with us, Dashie, darling," said Rarity, now firmly in Rainbow Dash's personal space, looking her straight in the eye. Dash became worried that those big eyes were going to suck her in.

“U-u-uh sure! Okay! Why not? Maybe it'll be neat,” replied Dash, trying to deflect the request. No... wait, she hadn't deflected that at all. What was she saying?!

Fluttershy tackled Rainbow Dash from the side and hugged her tightly. “Yay,” she said appreciatively, quietly snuggling close to her rainbow-maned friend. “It would be so *wonderful* if you'd stay here with us...!”

“Whoa! Y-yeah! I'm sticking around, I-I guess,” replied Dash, feeling the full weight of the other mare press into her side.

“That's wonderful...!,” exclaimed Fluttershy in a happy, warm voice, as she squeezed her friend close to her, nuzzling her face against her neck. Rainbow Dash looked at her formerly-shy friend with a look of amazement and a touch of fear, and couldn't do, think or say much of anything before Rarity interjected yet again.

“Cheers, darling, I was wondering,” said Rarity, pointing at Cheerilee's bracelets, of which there were many. “I've seen quite a few ponies with those particular accessories tonight. But, I've also seen them trading them amongst each other as well. It's a little confusing, so you'll have to explain. Are they a fashion statement, or something along those lines?”

“Oh, these old things?,” replied Cheerilee, holding her hoof up into the light. Cheerilee looked at and admired the bracelets warmly, fond memories returning to her. “They're gifts that you share and pass around to other ponies that you think are fun, nice, interesting or whatever! They're not supposed to be flashy or expensive, since that's not really the point. It's spirit of sharing and togetherness makes everypony have a better time, that's all! It's a tradition!”

“A community-based fashion trend that involves selfless sharing and generosity, just for the sake of it?”

“Yeah! It's all a part of the community vibe!”

“Oh, I've never heard of anything like it! It sounds so wonderful!,” exclaimed Rarity. “You really must show me how it works with somepony tonight. You will, wont you?”

Cheerilee smiled warmly and brought her hoof to her mouth, pulling off one of her bracelets slowly, to ensure she wouldn't break it. It was a small bracelet with violet-coloured gemstones lining it, held together with a thick string. It looked very worn, but also well-loved, as if it had seen more than its fair share of parties. Cheerilee then brought it to Rarity and hoofed it to her in an insistent manner. "Well, would you like to try it yourself?"

Rarity just looked down at the small bracelet in Cheerilee's hoof, apparently flustered and humbled by the offer. "O-oh no, I couldn't! Somepony gave it to you because they liked you, and I simply couldn't take their gift away from you. And I've never even *been* to a party such as this, would it even be proper form?"

"Of course it's proper form! You're supposed to give them to somepony you think is nice or interesting, and I think you're both, so here! Consider this your initiation! I'd be honoured if you'd have it," replied Cheerilee, still smiling. Rarity eyed the bracelet and slowly extended her hoof forward, taking it from Cheerilee and placing it over her own wrist very slowly, being sure not to break or damage it any way. "See? That's all there is to it!"

"I simply cannot express enough gratitude, my dear Cheers," replied Rarity, admiring the cheaply-made bracelet as if it were made of solid gold – but not quite. In fact, she almost looked like she had just been given the most priceless gift in the world. After a few moments, Rarity lightly hugged Cheerilee, and then stepped back again to admire the gift she was just given.

"Think nothing of it! It's your first time here! Just don't lose it, okay?"

"Of course not! Never!," replied Rarity, in a forceful but kind emotion, holding the bracelet close to her wrist with her other hoof. Could Dash almost see a tear coming to Rarity's eyes? "I will treasure your gift for as long as I live."

Cheerilee just giggled. "This is just like the good old days! I love it! ... Oh! Speaking of losing things, that reminds me. I'd love to introduce you to some of my friends now!"

"Losing things...?," replied Fluttershy, who was somehow, after all this time, still hugging Dash.

“You all know Caramel, yeah? He's one of my old party-buddies! Let's go find him before he loses himself, hmm?”

“I'd love to!,” replied Rarity, who then looked over at Rainbow Dash. “Shall we?”

It was at this point that Rainbow Dash realized that she had just been standing there with a dumb look on her face ever since Fluttershy tackled her. She didn't know what to say about the situation that was unfolding in front of her. Rarity not being a stuck-up fashionista? Fluttershy not being shy? Everypony hugging each other and being all touchy-feely? What was going on?

“Dashie?,” continued Fluttershy, still clinging to her side. “Are you alright?”

“O-oh! Yeah! U-Uhm, I think I'm feeling a bit out of it! M-Mind if I go get a drink and catch up with you all in a little bit?,” replied Dash reflexively, now fully aware of how silly she was looking.

“Sure! We'll just be over there, okay?,” replied Cheerilee, waving her hoof in the general direction of the adjacent wall, not being terribly specific.

“O-Okay! See you all in a bit!,” replied Dash, smiling nervously, and beginning to turn away.

Fluttershy let go and waved to her happily. “Okay! Please come back, though...”

“You be sure to come back, darling!,” shouted Rarity over the crowd, waving her bracelet-clad hoof as well as Dash wandered off into the crowd.

There was something completely uncanny about what Rainbow Dash had just witnessed, but she couldn't put her finger on it. Why were they acting so happy? Nothing made a bit of sense, and Fluttershy being so close to her freaked her out a little. She decided that she'd better find Pinkie or Twilight.

~

Pinkie Pie, Twilight and Luna were all panting together along the sidelines of the crowd, trying to suck in as much oxygen as they could, filling their lungs with the stuffy air around them. It was amazing how warm the place had gotten on such a cool night. Pinkie Pie felt the sweat drop from her forehead to the floor as she breathed heavily, while Luna, who apparently was in better shape than the pair of them, patted her partner on the back, as Twilight sat down and gasped for air.

"You... callin' me... out of shape?," said Pinkie Pie, with a grin on her face.

"I... guess you... have a point...," replied Twilight.

"Are you sure you're both okay? Do you need me to get anything?," asked Luna, with a hint of concern in her voice.

"No... no I should be... okay," continued Twilight.

"Yeah! It's just... a bit of a workout is all!" Pinkie Pie sat down as well, finally able to catch her breath. "Wow! Isn't this amazing?! Did you see all the other ponies around us? I've never seen anypony dress like that! Especially that one mare with the blue hair and the spiked armbands?! You know, the one you were dancing with, Twilight!"

"Wait, I was dancing with another mare?"

"Yeah!! Don't you remember?"

A deep red blush formed on Twilight's cheeks as Luna continued to pat her on the back softly, combined with a look of pure dread.

"What's wrong, Twilight?," asked Pinkie, wondering what was getting to her friend.

"I-I-I'm sorry Luna! I didn't mean to, it was by accident!," pleaded Twilight, looking at Luna with a look of pure guilt in her eyes.

"W-what do you--?," replied Luna, a bit of shock in her voice, but none the less unable to complete her sentence.

"D-dancing with another mare! I promise, it was nothing! Promise!" Twilight looked as if she might have just broken Luna's heart, but Luna

continued to simply have a look of pure disbelief in her face, as if she didn't understand.

"I... don't mind if you dance with or hug other mares. Why would you think I'd take that to heart? I don't get jealous over such things so easily," replied Luna, smiling at Twilight, who seemed to calm down immediately upon hearing those words. Pinkie could almost see her heart rate going down.

Suddenly, from the stage, a large booming voice overtook the music, drowning it out as it got amplified by the loudspeakers. A unicorn colt had taken to the stage with the microphone, his bright red mane stuck to his face by sweat. "ALRIGHT EVERYPONY! THANK YOU TO BIG MAC FOR HIS AMAZING PERFORMANCE!" he yelled out into the crowd, as the crowd screamed almost ear-piercing cheer. "A big thank you goes out to him for getting this party started! And now, everypony, it's time for who you've all been waiting for. It's time for the Equestria-wide DJ sensation, the queen of beats, MISS VINYL SCRATCH, *BETTER KNOWN TO YOU ALL AS... DJ PON-Y!!*" Another world-shaking cheer was heard, as Vinyl Scratch took to the stage, waving her hooves in the air. She was adorned in her trademark sunglasses, her hair spiked and mangled. Everypony stomped, cheered, bounced and waved to the stage as she stepped into the middle of the DJ booth, a huge smile across her face.

Twilight's eyes just grew wide.

"Yay!!!," screamed out Pinkie Pie, bouncing up and down very rapidly, waving her arm towards the stage.

"Thank you everypony! Are you all havin' fun tonight!?", bellowed out Vinyl Scratch into the crowd. The crowd responded with a thunderous roar. "ALL-RIGHT THEN. LET'S DO IT!" She magically grabbed two records from a stack to the side, and within half a second, another track started playing, the beat machine starting up again and the crowd beginning to dance once more, like it hadn't even skipped a beat. She was already moving from side to side as quickly as she could, nodding her head in time with the beat. The energy in the room became more amplified with her presence, as if the world itself had become a brighter place in this tiny little tent.

"Oh... oh Celestia," said Twilight finally, bring her hoof to her mouth.

"What is it, my dear?," replied Luna, smiling and bobbing her head to the music.

"I... I danced... with her?!", exclaimed Twilight, pointing up at the DJ booth.

Now it was Pinkie Pie's time for shocked, dumbstruck look on her face, as she realized that the pony Twilight had been dancing with did look exactly like her. "OHMYGOSH, YOU'RE RIGHT!! That looks EXACTLY like the pony you were dancing with! ... OHMYGOSH YOU DANCED WITH *VINYL SCRATCH*!! Oh man, I've gotta tell Dashie about this!! She'll totally flip out!!"

"You seem to have a knack for attracting famous mares to your presence," continued Luna, giggling to herself. "What's your secret?"

"S-secret?! I don't have any secret! It just keeps happening!"

"You're *TOTALLY* skilled at this, Twilight! WHOA!!," exclaimed Pinkie, her eyes wide as dinner-plates from the excitement.

"Miss Vinyl Scratch is quite a skilled artist, isn't she? I already like her," said Luna suddenly, nodding her head in tune with the music. "Say, Twilight, why don't we let Pinkie Pie go and gossip about you and Vinyl Scratch, while we go out there and dance together, just the two of us?" Luna winked at Pinkie kindly.

"Ooooh, okay! Awesome idea, Princess! I'll be back before you know it!," replied Pinkie, saluting Luna quickly as if she was tasked with some sort of super-secret royal duty, and immediately began bouncing along the side of the crowd to see if she could find anypony else.

"G-gossip?!", replied Twilight. "B-but I didn't do anything!!"

Luna just giggled, and whispered into her ear. "I love it when you're embarrassed." She dragged Twilight by the hoof into the crowd, laughing.

~



Rainbow Dash's attempts to find her pink friend were seemingly in vain, as she scanned the crowd high and low for where she might be. She could barely see anypony she recognized, period, and wondered where in the hay could everypony be. Eventually, she looked off to the far corner near the entrance, and saw the drink table, where Applejack was serving up beverages. Applejack continued about her duties as a young, dark-maned mare talked to her about something, laughing as if she were telling a funny story. Rainbow Dash decided that she'd better just head over there and wait until one of her friends got thirsty, since mulling around the crowd was getting her nowhere.

"Ow!," said somepony from the side suddenly. Rainbow Dash looked down as she felt something under her hoof. She had managed to step on the other pony's tail. She quickly hopped off.

"Sorry!," said Dash, whipping her head around, trying to see who exactly she stepped on.

"Whoa! *It's you!*," said somepony again. Before Dash knew it, she was staring into the eyes of a young unicorn filly with large violet eyes, a light brown mane, and a cream-coloured body. She had a look in her eyes like she had just found a long-lost lover. "It's you it's you! I remember seeing a giant rainbow coming out of Cloudsdale one day when I was walking out of the park, and all my pegasus friends were like, 'It was this rainbow-maned and blue-bodied pegasus pony named Rainbow Dash!', so that's gotta be you, right?! I mean, who else has those kinds of colours!!"

"Uh-Uh yeah! Rainbow Dash, that's me!," replied Dash, regaining her composure and standing up a bit taller with a grin on her face.

"The one who won the Young Fliers Competition, and the one that was featured on the cover of Clouds Daily?!"

"Yep-- wait, I was featured on the cover of Clouds Daily?!", replied Dash, feeling an intense shock roll through her mind. She was famous and didn't even know it?

"Yeah! They said you saved the Wonderbolts, another competitor AND manage to pull off that wicked 'Sonic Rainboom' signature move!! My pegasus friends couldn't shut up about you for MONTHS! You're like, awesome!!"

“Heck yeah that was me! I never knew I was famous, though! Thanks!”

“Whooooaaaa.” The young mare’s eyes grew wider and became transfixed on Dash’s mane. “That’s *real*, then?! I mean, the rainbow colours?!”

“Well yeah, of course it is! I’m one-hundred percent legit! I don’t fake anything!,” replied Dash, intense pride starting to overtake her, as the two of them became crammed between the horde of dancing ponies, barely able to hear each other.

The other mare reached out slowly towards Dash, before stopping and asking, “M-mind if I touch it?! Just a little?!”

“U-uh, okay! Just a little, alright?,” replied Dash. She was too full of pride at this point to feel embarrassed. What was the worst that could happen? Just as she thought that, the young mare moved forward and ran a hoof through Rainbow Dash’s colourful mane, apparently entranced by its texture. Dash’s senses became acutely aware of just how gentle the other mare was being with her, as if she was caressing a newborn foal. No pony had been this gentle with her in her entire life. A blush began to form on Dash’s cheeks as she realized just how little distance there was between herself and the one who was touching her so intimately, but couldn’t bring herself to protest for whatever reason. She just stood there, looking at the other mare, her mouth slowly becoming agape.

“It’s so beautiful...,” she said quietly, to the point where Dash could barely hear what she was saying. Dash felt her heart skip a beat, her breathing becoming irregular as she felt the individual strands of her multicoloured mane fall back down and brush her cheek. Dash became almost entranced by the sensations, before the mare exclaimed, “Anywho! You have an awesome time tonight, okay Rainbow Dash?! *PAR-TAY!! WOOHOO!!*” The other mare smiled brightly, waved her hoof and then bounded off into the crowd again, laughing loudly, before Dash even knew what had happened. She just stood there, dumbstruck for what seemed like an hour, before shaking her head and coming to her senses.

“What the heck was that?,” Dash asked herself, a deep blush still drawn across her face. She then noticed her wings were fully extended, and she quickly retracted them, becoming even more embarrassed at such

a display. Before she could even take in the sensations she had just felt, she remembered the young mare, and yelled into the crowd, "WAIT! What the heck was that?! I never even got your name!!" But she was long, long gone, and nowhere to be seen. Dash just shook her head, her heart still beating a little quickly, before walking off towards Applejack's drink table.

~

"That... w-was awesome!," said Pinkie, adorned in a thick layer of sweat and gasping for air.

"Thanks for dancing with us, Pinkie Pie!," replied Bon-Bon.

"Yeah! That was so nice of you!," continued Lyra.

"No problem! You girls are great! I have to run now, but you two have fun, okay?!" Pinkie continued panting heavily, her mane sticking to her face.

"Are you sure you're alright, dear? You look like you're about to fall over. Wanna sit down for a bit?" Bon-Bon looked at her with a concerned look in her eyes.

"Oh no, I'll be okay! Don't worry, I can take care of myself! Thanks for asking though!"

"Well, that's good! This is the best party *EVER*, isn't it?! We'll see you around!," replied Lyra, waving goodbye as the pair of them turned to walk towards the drink table together.

Pinkie Pie began feeling her legs and hooves ache as she began searching for her friends along the right wall of the tent. It was at this point that she noticed how fatigued she felt, and wasn't sure what was causing it. After all, this was the best party she had ever been to in her life. She couldn't help but feel, however, like every bounce or every explosion of energy was starting to take a toll on her. But she decided to ignore it - she had to be there for her friends and make sure everypony was having an awesome time! How would she live up to her reputation of 'The Party Pony'?

otherwise?! She shook her head and breathed in deeply, hanging out near the side of the crowd.

“Come on Pinkie, just breathe, just breathe,” she said to herself, closing her eyes.

“Hey there, are you okay, Miss Pinkie Pie?,” said somepony from the side. Pinkie Pie was a little startled, but not by much. She looked over to the side, to see Caramel greeting her with a smile on his face. He was dressed up with a cheap bow-tie, bracelets on his hooves, and what looked like some kind of gel strewn through his mane to make it keep its shape.

“Oh, hey there Caramel! I'm doing awesome! Just needed to catch my breath a little is all! Are you having fun?!,” replied Pinkie.

“Definitely! Heck, I used'ta come to these parties way back in the day when I was just a youngin'. Oh! That reminds me, some of your friends were lookin' for ya just over there with Cheers. I was just talkin' to them. They seem like nice folk!”

“Of course! They're my bestest friends ever in the whole wide world! ... wait, 'Cheers'?”

“Ah yeah, that's just Miss Cheerilee's old party-name. Force'a'habit.”

“Aw, that's so cute! Anyways, I really oughta go check up on them! It's my responsibility as their friend to ensure their safety and a good time!,” she replied, standing erect and saluting again.

“Sure thing. You take care of yourself now!”

“Thanks for checking up on me, Caramel!,” replied Pinkie, beginning to bounce again, the pain in her legs be damned.

“Think nothin' of it!,” replied Caramel, happily. “Uh, would y'like a hug?”

“Sure!” Pinkie laughed and hugged Caramel lightly. Pinkie Pie began bouncing off around the side towards where Caramel had pointed before, calling out behind her. “Have fun!”

“You too, Miss Pinkie!”

~

Rainbow Dash finally made it to Applejack's drink table. A small horde of ponies were gathered around and Applejack looked like she was completely overwhelmed by the sudden rush. She could keep her cool in a situation like that, though. She was serving up drinks faster than Rainbow Dash could believe.

"Ere y'go, have fun now!," said Applejack, handing a young colt his order of water.

"Thanks!"

"Hey! Applejack! Hey! Over here!," yelled Rainbow Dash over the crowd. Applejack, however, had too many ponies giving her orders all at once to hear her friend.

"And that'll be what now?"

"Oh, uh, like, half cola, half apple juice?"

"What? Well alright, if y'all will drink it," she said, quickly serving it up.

"HEY! APPLEJACK!" Still no response. Rainbow Dash sighed and tried to move up closer into the line, pushing past the other party-goers.

"Hey! Not cool! Don't butt in line, man!," said another random colt waiting at the bar.

"Sorry," replied Dash, taking a step back, being stuck on the edge of the crowd, just beyond the earshot of her friend. She sighed and hung her head. How was she going to find any of her friends in this mess?

"Hey! Dashie! Nice to see you again!," said a familiar voice. Rainbow Dash could instantly recognize that voice as Twilight Sparkle.

"Oh, hey girls. I'm glad I found you two. I didn't think I'd find anypony in this mess," replied Dash. "Doing alright?"

"Yeah! We're doing great," replied Twilight, snuggling close to Luna, who was smiling just as brightly as her partner. The 'PDAs' usually grossed out Rainbow Dash a little, but tonight she was a bit distracted.

"Having fun?"

"Yeah!," the pair of them said in unison.

"Well, that's good. Anyways, have either of you--"

"Gone dancing yet? Heck yes! It's great! I was really worried that I wouldn't fit in here because it's a, you know, giant social event, but then I realized that this whole place is just so... *magical!*," blurted out Twilight, who's eyes were so wide Dash could swear they were about to pop out of her head.

"Magical?," replied Dash, furling her brow.

"Yeah! Everypony's just so nice and friendly to each other! It's magic!"

"Magic."

"Yeah! This is WAY better than studying. Sometimes you just have to have some hooves-on experience, you know!"

"Hooves-on experience," replied Dash a deadpan, dreary tone. Oh Celestia, they've gotten to her, too.

"Yeah! And we've been talking to tons of ponies all night, too! And we've been dancing and cheering and all sorts of stuff! It's totally wild! Isn't that right, Luna?"

"Yes, dear, we have. However, I think Miss Rainbow Dash was going to ask a question," replied Luna, giggling.

"O-oh! R-right, sorry Dashie."

"I-it's alright." Dash blushed at that nickname. Why was EVERYPONY calling her that tonight? "I was gonna ask, have you seen Pinkie Pie? She totally disappeared and I'm kinda lost without her."

"Aw, that's so cute!," replied Twilight.

"Cute?!," retorted Dash.

“Yeah! You and Pinkie together. Although, I suppose it makes sense. You two are the best of friends and hang out together all the time, so I suppose it's only-- hey!” Twilight was cut off by Luna nudging her on the side. Luna just smiled.

“I'm terribly sorry, Miss Rainbow Dash. I think Twilight is getting carried away. We did see Miss Pinkie Pie before, although she went off to go find you, funnily enough.”

Dash just sighed. “Oh well, she's probably found the others by now. Mind if I stick with you two for a bit? I mean, I don't wanna get in your way or anything. I just kinda... can't handle the crowd on my own right now...” Dash just looked out into the crowd, vividly remembering her experience with the violet-eyed mare.

“Sure! We've love to have you with us, Dashie! Right, Luna?,” replied Twilight, ultra-enthusiastically.

“Of course.”

“Okay. Just... none of that me-and-Pinkie talk, alright? I mean, I'm not prejudiced or anything, but seriously, it's just friends.”

“Aw,” replied Twilight, with faux-disappointment. “I was only kidding. Don't worry.”

“I wonder with you sometimes,” replied Dash, laughing. She already felt a little more relaxed, even though Twilight was still acting strange. At least she was... mostly normal? Luna seemed the same as always, but that's a goddess for you.

“It seems Applejack is a bit busy at the moment, Miss Rainbow Dash. Would we like to go dancing in the meantime?”

“Oh... yeah,” replied Dash, looking at the table which by now was completely swarmed. “I was waiting for her, but she looks a bit busy. But since you two are here now, uh, sure, let's go!”

~

Pinkie felt the pain reverberate through her hooves with every bounce. Her legs felt wobbly and her flanks were tired. But tonight was no night to be acting like a worn out old mare! She had to check up on them and show them how it was done! How could she be sad on a night like tonight, with all of her friends having the time of their lives? Wait, sad? When had she ever been sad? She just shook her head and kept moving forwards. Her thoughts felt scattered and a bit melancholic, but she knew she'd be able to figure them out once she found her friends. It wasn't too long, of course, before she found Cheerilee, Rarity and Fluttershy laughing and giggling amongst themselves. The sight of her friends made her feel a bit better, and she felt another rush of energy surge through her body.

"Oh Pinkie Pie, how lovely to see you...!", exclaimed Fluttershy, who instantly ran off and hugged her friend tightly.

"Whoa, hi Fluttershy!", replied Pinkie, giggling and laughing as she wrapped a hoof around her enthusiastic friend. "You look like you're having an super-fun-awesome time!"

"Oh yes, it's wonderful," replied Fluttershy with star-filled eyes and a wide smile. Fluttershy snuggled herself against her pink friend, giggling softly. "Thank you so much for inviting us all. This is the best night I've ever had...!"

"It *is* wonderful! Cheers has been showing us so many new things! It's such a lovely scene, isn't it? It's all so new and fresh, I love it!," continued Rarity, clapping her hooves together enthusiastically.

"Yay!! I knew everypony would love it here! OH! Speaking of which, I was just with Twilight and Luna and you'll never guess what happened!! And have any of you seen Rainbow Dash?!"

"Actually, she was just here looking for you, darling," replied Rarity. "But she ran off after only a few minutes. You know how she's always so eager to keep moving."

"Aw, drat. Well, that's okay. Has everypony been out dancing yet?!"

"Oh yes, I was even dancing with somepony too, in front of everyone," said Fluttershy, who was still latched onto Pinkie, as a light blush appeared on her cheeks. "He seemed really nice, and I wasn't afraid at all...!"



“Whoa, for real?! That's so awesome!!,” replied Pinkie, smiling brightly. Pinkie noticed that Fluttershy's eyes were filled with stars and hope, but there wasn't a single ounce of regret or fear to be seen in them. Pinkie couldn't help but think that she was the cutest she had ever seen her friend. As Pinkie's eyes were drawn downwards, she then noticed that Rarity had a couple of jewelled bracelets adorning her wrists as well.

“Wow!! Somepony already gave you a couple of those?! See, I knew you'd fit right in! Still gonna doubt ol' Pinkie Pie when it comes to this kinda stuff?!”

“Certainly not, darling. I stand corrected.” Rarity bowed slightly, humbly and happily.

“I'm glad you convinced them all to come, Pinkie Pie,” said Cheerilee. “This is turning out to be an amazing night! Brings me waaaaay back!”

“So amazing...!”

“Simply amazing!”

*(They're happy. Too happy.)*

Pinkie Pie felt like her senses had been temporarily halted for a moment, before snapping back to reality just as quickly. She recomposed herself and sputtered out, “... y-yeah! It's the best night ever, isn't it? Hey! Does everypony wanna go dancing again?!” There was an ever so slight tinge of reluctance in her voice.

“Sure!,” yelled her friends in unison.

*(You've never seen them like this at one of your parties...)*

Everypony in the group immediately began walking towards the dance floor. Pinkie tackle-hugged Fluttershy as Rarity and Cheerilee ran off

ahead into the dance itself, laughing to each other. Pinkie Pie tried her best to suppress the bad thoughts that she felt coming on. They were familiar, and she knew what could happen if they festered too long, but she was determined to have a good time. She'd just have to try harder.

"Pinkie?," asked Fluttershy, concerned. Pinkie Pie realized she had a bit of a scowl written on her face for some reason. "Is everything alright? We can take a break and just sit together if you'd like to."

"No no! It's okay! I was just thinking about something, is all! Let's go have some fun!," replied Pinkie Pie.

Fluttershy smiled and nodded, snuggling closer to her friend. "Just remember to take a break when you have to, okay?"

"Sure thing! I would never do anything *that* silly!" Pinkie forced a grin onto her face and felt herself lost herself in the crowd once more. She'd just have to try harder. She wasn't going to let anything ruin the night for her friends. Nothing nothing nothing. Nothing at all. Just shut up already.

Pinkie Pie began dancing with Fluttershy. Her friend looked so free and so open compared to the shy, demure pony she knew before tonight. The sight made Pinkie Pie smile, and even though her hooves protested and demanded a bit of rest, she continued onwards. Pinkie Pie swayed to-and-fro, feeling herself become more and more lost in the music, even though her body's movements became more erratic. This was what she was here for! No time to stop! But even with all of the enthusiasm she was trying to muster up, eventually, her body betrayed her, and gave out.

"Ouch!," she yelled, as she fumbled and fell down. She tried to get up, but felt way too dizzy, her head spinning in circles. She tried to get up, but slipped again, falling to her back and staring up into the light-filled ceiling.

"P-Pinkie Pie, are you okay?!" Fluttershy rushed to her side and tried to help her up. "Here, let's get you over to the side..."

"O-okay... yeah... that would be good..." Pinkie Pie laughed defeatedly, and held her head down, trying to make the spinning stop. Fluttershy just continued through the edge of the crowd, passing through the barrier of other ponies, and sat her friend down on the crowd past the sound barrier. She gave a concerned look to Pinkie Pie as they sat down.

"A-are you okay, Pinkie Pie? You look like you're hurt..."

"O-oh, yeah... I think... I overdid it, haha," replied Pinkie Pie. She was thoroughly exhausted now, and her entire body was in pain. Every joint ached, especially the ones on her legs.

"Here, take this." Fluttershy took a small pouch of juice out of her bag and hooved it over to her friend. "Please drink it?"

"I'm doing... okay Fluttershy, just need to catch... my breath," replied Pinkie, looking up at the ceiling as it swirled around.

"Pinkie... please drink this."

"I'm--"

"Pinkie," said Fluttershy in a firm voice. Pinkie looked over at her friend, and was met with a set of sturdy, peering eyes that commanded respect and would take none of her excuses. It was The Stare. Pinkie had to obey, and she knew now just how much of a silly foal she had been if she had forced Fluttershy to use *that* on her.

"O-okay." Pinkie took the drink and began gulping it down again. It was subtly sweet, not like a juice at all. "W-whoa, what is this?"

"Oh, it's a 'sports drink.' I'm not sure what that is, but the medic, Miss Misty, gave it to me in case of an emergency. I wanted to make sure I could look after my friends," continued Fluttershy, smiling brightly.

"Thanks, Fluttershy. I guess I pushed myself too hard! Haha!"

"It's alright... I'll stay with you, and then we can go dancing again when you feel better. Does that sound okay?"

"No no, you go out there and enjoy yourself! I'll be okay after a few minutes!," retorted Pinkie, waving her hoof dismissively.

"I'd rather not, especially after that fall of yours... you can never be too careful," replied Fluttershy, that signature care and concern making Pinkie Pie smile softly.

Pinkie raised herself up and continued drinking down the beverage in large gulps until it was completely gone, and then began bouncing on her

hind legs, cheering loudly. "See?! I'm okay!! Don't worry, I'll be sure to rest for a bit before dancing. I'm not that silly. You go have fun!"

Fluttershy just smiled meekly. "That's what you said last time. I'd feel really bad about leaving you like this..."

"Nonsense! See? I'm back to health now! That drink sure was powerful!" Her legs ached. She hoped Fluttershy would go before they gave out again.

"Okay, I trust you... But I'm going to go find the medic again before that. I won't have any of my friends getting hurt!" replied Fluttershy, in a passionate, forcefully emotional tone. Pinkie Pie wasn't sure what exactly had made Fluttershy so expressive and passionate, but she wasn't in a position to argue with her, either.

"O-okay!," Pinkie replied, grinning nervously.

"This is still the best night ever, Pinkie," said Fluttershy, smiling. "Don't worry, you know I love helping other ponies. You haven't ruined anything for me... just stay here until I go find the medic, okay?" She smiled, hugged her pink friend and started running along the edge of the crowd. Pinkie Pie immediately slumped back down to the floor the second Fluttershy was out of sight. She had overdone it, and nearly ruined the night for her friends. She felt so stupid making her most sensitive friend worry about her and not have any fun, when she was doing so well at opening up.

*(Does she ever open up at your parties?)*

The thoughts starting haunting her again. She knew that train of thought too well, and being alone made it even worse. She was always grouchy when she was exhausted, and right then, she was the most exhausted she had ever felt in her life. She knew what would happen next and she needed to find Rainbow Dash. Her confidence always made her feel better. More to the point she needed to find somepony, anypony she knew. Oh no, why had she sent Fluttershy off like that?

*(Best night ever, huh? Better than any of your parties?)*

Now the noise of the crowd was starting to grate on her, and she wanted to tune it out completely. They were all the ponies she had ever invited to her parties, and they were the happiest they had ever been. When HAD anypony been this energetic at one of her parties? Piece by piece she could feel those familiar, old feelings pop into place. It was happening too quickly. She felt the beginnings of tears coming on.

She slowly looked out into the crowd, just see all of her friends and everypony else that she knew having the time of their lives at a party. For the moment, it made her feel better. She knew everypony being happy was nothing to be sad about. She knew it was a great party. Pinkie didn't want to leave, but she couldn't have her friends seeing her like this, either. The conflicting feelings eventually began to drive her insane. She wanted the noise to end, even just for a second, so she could think, but it wouldn't. The beautiful music kept playing. She knew she loved the music, too. With everything rolling around in her head, she decided, finally, that before these feelings overtook her she'd find one of her friends. She knew she needed to find Rainbow Dash, like she had been trying to all evening. She didn't know why, either. It was going to go from bad to worse if she didn't, and that's all she knew.

~

Fluttershy and the medic, Misty, quickly walked towards the far side of the tent where Fluttershy had left Pinkie. Fluttershy, of course, had a look of deep concern on her face. "I gave her the drink you gave to me, but, oh, I'm just so worried... she fell right over without any warning! I had to come find you. I'm really sorry," said Fluttershy.

"It's alright, don't apologize. That's what I'm here for," replied Misty, behind her. As the pair of them walked towards the far edge of the venue, a

look of distraught overtook Fluttershy's face. Scanning the walls, Fluttershy realized that her energetic pink friend was nowhere to be seen.

"S-she was just here..., " replied Fluttershy, looking around frantically.

"Really? Do you know where she could have gone off to?"

"N-no! She said she'd stay right here for me... oh dear, where could she be...?"

# Chapter 2

Rainbow Dash figured being around Luna and Twilight was about as harmless as it was going to get at a party like this. At least the pair of them weren't violently invading her personal space at every opportunity, and Luna would be able to bail her out if things got way too intense with Twilight yet again. What Luna couldn't prevent, however, was Twilight rambling on like an idiot with eyes as wide as dinner plates.

"A DJ can actually have up to *FOUR* turntables at once, all going at the same time!! But that's only if they're a *really skilled* unicorn DJ! I read up on it before we came tonight, you know!"

"Uh-huh," replied Dash, as nonchalantly as she could.

"Some DJ's can even manage two different rooms at once! Can you imagine that? A pony being able to hold *two parties* at the *same time*?! Like, *WHOA*! Can you imagine the kind of *SKILL* that takes?! Probably just as much as you pulling off a Sonic Rainboom!"

"Yep." Rainbow Dash knew all of this, of course, but she did idly wonder to herself how a bunch of ponies, the vast majority of who weren't athletes like herself, could ever keep up this kind of pace without getting tired. She looked over at Luna and Twilight, as Twilight continued rambling on. Twilight's eyes were transfixed on the crowd and the lighting, while Luna, on the other hand, looked content and happy as if she hadn't changed one bit.

"Can you *IMAGINE* how big these parties must get in the big cities? Oh Celestia, there must only be a couple of hundred ponies here at this party, but in places like Manehattan they must attract tens of thousands! What do you think?!", exclaimed Twilight, as she looked over into Rainbow Dash's eyes, her eyes fulfilling the latter part of her name and her mane, of course, was a complete mess. The only time Twilight had looked happier was after 'that night' back in the Spring, where she ran around telling everypony that she was in love.

“Uh, yeah, I guess. Say, Twilight, weren't you the one who said that this wouldn't be your thing? Kinda funny how that all changed once you got here, huh?,” replied Rainbow Dash.

“Weeeeeell~, you know how I am with big social events like these right? I just figured I'd be too awkward for me, but then I realized when I got here that everypony feels a little awkward at things like this. So I figure, why not just try loosening up, just once!,” replied Twilight, giggling and smiling brightly. “With everypony being so outgoing and caring, how could I be afraid?!”

“Huh. I... guess that makes sense.” Dash looked off to the side. She had to understand just what was happening, but the more she asked, the more she realized that she was understanding less and less. It was like Twilight wasn't even the same pony anymore. Rainbow Dash leaned over to see past Twilight and over at Luna, who just continued to observe the party in her happy, yet passive way, bobbing her head with the music slowly. “... hey, Luna.”

“Yes?,” replied Luna happily, looking over at Dash.

“So what do you think about all this? Pretty crazy, huh?,” said Dash, with that nervous laugh she was using all too often that night.

“To be honest, I think that if everypony is having fun, and nopony is getting hurt, that these sorts of things are wonderful,” she replied, smiling. “I try not to question the good things in life. They come as they come, and are as they are.”

Rainbow Dash thought about it for a moment, and then just slumped back against the tent fabric, sighing.

“Just not... 'feeling it', Miss Dash?”

“Yeah.”

“Maybe you should take a walk outside, and get some fresh air? I promise it's a nice night out tonight,” continued Luna. “I could even accompany you, if you'd wish.”



Rainbow Dash thought about it for a moment, before standing up quickly and stretching her legs and wings. "Actually, Princess, I think I'm gonna take it alone. I mean, not because I don't like you or anything--"

"No, no, it's quite alright. I completely understand. You do what you must, Miss Dash," replied Luna, smiling again.

"Thanks."

"Awwww, you said you were gonna stay with us!" Twilight folded her arms and pouted cutely. "Come back when you can, okay?!"

"A-alright," replied Dash. "See you two later."

The two lovers waved their hooves towards Dash as she skirted the crowd. She sighed and hung her head. Luna's answer had been the most convincing one, and yet, she couldn't believe that it was just good, wholesome fun. Thoughts continued to ramble around endlessly in her head, and there wasn't any point in trying to make sense of it, she figured. She just decided take Luna's advice and headed for the exit.

~

"Hey there Pinkie Pie!," said Cheerilee in her signature 'cheery' fashion.

"Oh, h-hey there Cheers," replied Pinkie Pie, a little startled. She was walking very slowly along the side of the tent, trying to get to the rest-area.

"Hi there!," replied Caramel, standing beside Cheerilee. "Nice to see ya again!"

"I just saw off your friend Rarity, Pinkie Pie. I think we've really gotten her into the scene! Ooooh, I can't wait to see her at the next party!"

"The *next* party?! For real?!", exclaimed Pinkie Pie. That had certainly gotten her attention.

"Yeah, that's what she said! Thanks so much for bringing her, she's such a lovely character to be around," continued Caramel.

"I-I'm really glad! But, I think I'm gonna--" Pinkie Pie was abruptly cut off by Cheerilee, who quickly tackled Caramel from the side.

"This is so, so wonderful! What do you think, Caramel? Do you think this party'll bring back the 'scene' to this small little town, just like all those years ago?!", exclaimed Cheerilee, squeezing her friend tightly.

"U-uh, maybe! Y'never know!," replied Caramel, blushing brightly as his friend tackled him from the side.

"I hope so hope it does! You remember those good ol' days, don't you...?," replied Cheerilee, giggling coyly.

"Yeah! Those good ol' days sure were somethin', huh?" Caramel just looked off to the side, with a deflective, cautious grin. "... oh, Pinkie Pie! Where're you off to?," asked Caramel frantically, as he called out to Pinkie Pie, who by now had very slowly and stealthily began to creep away from the pair of them.

"I-I'm just off to the rest area! I'm really sore and tired right now, s-so I wanna rest! Besides, you two are cute together, so I don't wanna ruin the moment!"

"B-but we aren't together!," called out Caramel.

Cheerilee just giggled and laughed, standing up again and letting Caramel go. "Oh, you're so adorable! How I've wanted to do that for so long! I was just playing around, you know. We used to do that all the time! Don't you remember?"

"We did? ... oh. Oh yeah! I remember now!" Caramel smiled back genuinely. "Wow, those sure were crazy times, huh? I can't believe we were like that back then."

"Totally!," replied Cheerilee. She then blinked and looked around. "Wait, where's Pinkie Pie? Did we scare her off?" Cheerilee frowned as she noticed that Pinkie Pie was nowhere to be seen.

"Aw shucks, I think we did."

“Oh well,” said Cheerilee, sighing. “We should apologize to her later. I think she'll understand...”

~

“Dashie! *Darling!*,” exclaimed Rarity as she ran up to her. Dash stopped in her tracks, gasped and took a step back as Rarity stuck her face an inch away from her's. Rarity's mane was stuck to her forehead with sweat and looked like a complete mess, although she kept on smiling regardless.

“W-whoa! Rarity! Hi!”

“It's simply a *marvellous* night! I've been dancing and talking with so many ponies and having the time of my life! Oh, and look, we even traded bracelets! They're so *precious*, just like memories...”

“Oh, that's great! Seriously!,” replied Dash, grinning cautiously and moving herself ever so slowly back into her own personal space.

“I must say, it was *definitely* the right decision to be here, even if you did *guilt-trip* me into it.”

“G-guilt-trip? B-but...”

“Oh come now darling.” Rarity looked into Dash's eyes with her piercing feminine gaze. “It was a complete and *total* guilt-trip. 'It'll be the *largest* social event in the history of Ponyville. Are you sure you want to miss it when everypony will be talking about it for *ages?*',” continued Rarity, giggling. “However, I *am* glad I took the *obvious* bait. Consider me sold!”

“T-that's great, Rarity! I gotta...”

“Got to what, darling?,” asked Rarity, with an inquisitive look on her face.

“Oh, uh...” Dash really didn't know what to say. Rarity had been so intense and sudden that her brain was having problems keeping up with itself. “Uh, go outside, yeah!”

“Go outside? Listen, darling, if you simply need time alone to dance with a certain *special* somepony, you needn't make such *silly* excuses.”

“W-what?!”

“Dear, you're nervous and avoidant at a party like *this*, so *clearly* you're hiding something. What else could it be? Don't worry, your secret is safe with me, I swear it!”

“O-okay! Thanks for keeping my secret, Rarity!,” replied Dash, becoming increasingly frantic. She just wanted to get out the door, for Celestia's sake!

“Oh, and how about you take one of these, to give to your *special somepony*. I'm *positive* they'll be suitable,” said Rarity, raising her hoof and magically gripping one of her bracelets.

“Uh, how about you give it to me later! You know me, right?! I'll probably just break it!,” replied Dash, her laugh now indistinguishable from a cry for help.

“Sigh. You *really* don't know how to impress a filly, now do you? Well, you shouldn't keep her waiting now, so move along!”

“W-wait, 'her'?! When did I ever say I was into-- hey!” Rarity had begun pushing her quite forcefully with her forehead.

“Go on now! There's nothing worse than keeping your date waiting! ‘*Hell hath no fury like a filly scorned,*’ after all!”

“Okay, okay!”

“Oh, and you really must come to my boutique for a little *filly talk* tomorrow. I want to hear *all* about it! You will, wont you?”

“Y-yeah! Sure! Hey, uh, gotta run!,” exclaimed Dash, frantically breaking out into a short sprint. Rarity simply waved to her friend as Dash began to disappear around the bend.

“I'm so glad for her. What a *wonderful* night!,” exclaimed Rarity, running back into the crowd to catch the next song.

~

“Shut up,” said Pinkie in a quiet, yet very angry tone to herself. She was now bordering on pure exhaustion as she limped slowly along the side. She sat down once again, breathing heavily, trying to give her hooves a rest. Now that she was out of sight of everypony, she kept repeating the same words over and over to herself. “Shut up, shut up, *shut up!*” Pinkie Pie brought her hoof to her head. She was starting to get a headache which reverberated through her skull in time with the music, and she wished the party would stop even just for a second, so she could tell these bad thoughts to go away.

*(I'm not going to shut up! You shut up! And I'm not going away!)*

“Why won't you just leave me alone?!” Pinkie whined, tears forming in her eyes. “I just want my friends to be happy... to make them happy...”

*(They're not happy because of you, you stupid, silly filly. They're happy because of this party, which isn't even yours!)*

“That's not true... I've been here for everypony the whole night!”

*(Yeah, and so what? Now they'll just compare your parties to THIS party. You can never bring them THIS kind of happiness by yourself, and they'll never want anything less ever again! You're USELESS to them now!)*

“Hey, are you doing alright?,” asked a violet-eyed mare from the side. “Are you... crying?”

“Shut up...”

*(Nopony cares. Nopony cares! NOPONY CARES ABOUT YOU!)*

"What was that?," asked the mare.

"Shut up shut up shut up," said Pinkie softly to herself.

"Dear, are you okay?"

"SHUT THE HAY UP AND GO AWAY!," exclaimed Pinkie, a look of pure rage adorning her face as she screamed it into the air above her. The violet eyed mare just hopped backwards, wide-eyed and afraid.

"Whoa! S-sorry!," replied the mare, now visibly afraid. "I-I'll leave you alone, okay?"

Pinkie Pie looked over at the other pony with a look of confusion in her eyes. She hadn't even noticed her until now, and in the few moments she had left, realized that she had just accidentally screamed at her. Before Pinkie Pie could even react, the mare had begun to turn tail and trot quickly back onto the dance floor. "N-no, wait! I didn't mean that! I wasn't talking to you! Please come back!" But it was too late, and the mare disappeared into the crowd.

*(Great. Now you've ruined somepony's night. Way to go, stupie-head.)*

Pinkie Pie just cried softly, leaning against the tent wall, which didn't provide much support. She was completely wrecked now, and just wanted the pain to go away, the music to stop, and the night to end. This was the worst night ever, and it had been all her fault. Her friends were happy and she was more miserable than she had been in a long time. It felt like the party was taunting her, with all of the smiling faces of her friends and acquaintances adorning the dancing crowd. She knew that everypony she saw would never, ever want to come to one of her parties ever again.

They'd probably never even be her friends again, either. What was the point of her even being there?

*(Exactly. Just leave! Your stupid 'friends' will have the time of their lives with or without you, so just save yourself the trouble!)*

At this point, Pinkie Pie couldn't agree more. She stood up tall, and began walking around the crowd again, desperately trying to ignore the music and the incessant noises. She didn't even feel the pain in her hooves anymore. She felt nothing but anger.

~

As Dash approached the exit, her thoughts got interrupted as she saw a distraught Fluttershy talking to another mare near Applejack's drink table. Dash turned and began walking towards the pair, wondering what the hay was going on.

"... and her cutie mark is three yellow and blue balloons. Please promise you'll look out for her?"

"Of course I will. I suggest you tell anypony who knows her to watch out for her, too. She might just be dancing again and we can't see her, after all."

"O-oh, but she seemed so worn out and hurt when I saw her... just please promise?"

"I promise, Fluttershy," said the other mare, as she hugged Fluttershy closely. They smiled at each other sweetly, and the other mare began walking off towards the attached room to the side.

"Oh, hey Fluttershy. Who was that? Is something-- whoa!" Before Dash could finish her sentence, Fluttershy had instantly tackled her and wrapped her arms around her very tightly.

“Oh Dashie, I was with Pinkie Pie but she looked really really tired and I asked her to sit down but she said no and then we were dancing and she fell over and I told her to stay put as I went to find Misty who I was just talking to so she could get help but then when I came back she was gone and I'm so so so so worried about her Dashie!” Fluttershy blurted it all out as tears came to her eyes, nuzzling her face into her friend's neck comfortingly.

“Whoa! Pinkie Pie was hurt? What happened? Just, please, slow down a little.”

“Oh, sorry...,” replied Fluttershy, lowering her head as she continued to hug Dash. “I think... Pinkie Pie was having problems pacing herself. She seemed so set on doing everything all at once, and I asked her to slow down, but...”

Rainbow Dash just sighed. She knew she should've kept looking for her. “I think she'll be okay. The worst that ever happens to Pinkie Pie when she gets super tired is she just eats candy and falls asleep.”

“But... she looked *hurt*, and *scared*, and *sad*... and I just can't help but think I failed her... I-like she's hurt and scared somewhere a-all alone and I-I'm not there to help her!” Tears began to form in Fluttershy's eyes as she clung to Dash tightly. Rainbow Dash hugged her back just as tight, and tried desperately to calm her down.

“It'll be okay, Fluttershy. I'll look for her as well, okay? We'll find her.”

“D-do you promise...?”

“Of course I do!”

“O-okay,” replied Fluttershy, her soft sobbing starting to cease as she wiped the tears off of her face with her hoof. “L-let's go look for her, okay?”

Dash sighed and looked down at her friend. She looked like a mess now, with her sobbing and fear for Pinkie's well-being. Dash couldn't stand the sight of somepony being all miserable like that, especially not Fluttershy. It just wasn't right. “You know what, Fluttershy? How about you go back and have fun with everypony, and I'll look for Pinkie?”



“O-oh, I couldn't do that! Not with Pinkie out there all alone and scared and--...”

“Fluttershy... trust me, I know Pinkie Pie. She'll be alright. There's NO WAY she could be sad or scared at a party like this, and she knows her limits. I know her better than anypony else.”

“Y-you really think so?”

“We'll probably just find her sleeping in a corner somewhere wrapped around a bag of cotton candy.”

“I-I... trust you, Dashie...,” replied Fluttershy, looking at the ground. “A-and I did promise a colt and a mare that I met earlier that I'd dance with them both tonight... oh no, I hope they aren't upset that I've taken so long...!”

“U-Uh... well, why don't you go find them then? I mean, I'm sure they'll understand, if you were looking out for a friend,” replied Dash. ‘Outgoing Fluttershy’ still seemed earth-shatteringly uncanny.

“You're right... they seemed really nice. I'm sure they'll understand. Thank you so much, Dashie...,” said Fluttershy, the tears finally leaving her eyes, looking up at her friend happily.

“N-no problem. Just don't get yourself into too much trouble, okay?”

Fluttershy just smiled brightly, quickly hugged Dash once again and ran off towards the crowd, leaving Dash with a dumb look on her face. Dash just looked across the raving crowd, her eyes following the formerly-shy pony as she disappeared almost instantly into the visual noise. Everypony was jumping up and down, bobbing their heads to the pounding baseline that DJ PON-3 was whipping out. The lasers above streamed across the foggy, muggy air that hung below the ceiling, creating a trail of multicoloured lights that lingered in Dash's eyes. The matrix of bright projectors behind the DJ booth pulsed with every beat, and there was sweat, tears, smiles, hugging, laughing, and excitement everywhere around her. She had never seen Ponyville so alive than tonight under this tent, and the feeling was infectious. Dash could feel her heart start to race at the sight of it all, the feelings of intense happiness around her beginning to creep into her soul. She couldn't help but be drawn towards the crowd, the urge to let loose and dance building inside her to the point where she

couldn't ignore it anymore. Just wanted to run in, to join the crowd, to not give a hay anymore. But the waves of desire clashed too harshly with the fear she was feeling. What was she afraid of?

"I need a drink," she said to herself, turning away from the crowd and walking in the general direction of Applejack's refreshment bar. There weren't many ponies obstructing her way there, and within a few moments she passed through the sound barrier and arrived at the bar, sighing heavily and looking down at the grass-laden ground. It was now, finally, that she had a moment to herself, but she wasn't terrible sure what to do with it. The feelings of happiness had passed, and oddly enough, Dash was happy in that alone.

"What can ah do ya for, darlin'?", said Applejack suddenly.

"Oh, hey Applejack," said Dash, slightly startled, still trying to catch her breath. "Uh, I dunno. What have you got?"

"Well, ah've got apple soda, ginger ale, caffeine-free cola, fruit punch, some sorta sports-drink thingy ah imported from outta town, and plain good ol'-fashioned water."

"Uh... give me some water please. I don't like that sugary stuff."

"Y'got it, sugarcube," replied Applejack, taking a glass from the side of the table and filling it with ice-cold water from a large jug in front of her. "Say, anythin' on your mind? Y'seem kinda down."

"Oh... nah, not really. I'm not feeling sad or anything, I promise."

"Well, if y'say so," replied Applejack, as she placed the cup of water in front of Rainbow Dash. Rainbow Dash looked at it for a moment, the slightly-muffled music still playing in the background which caused ripples to form on the surface of the liquid. As she heard the music and the laughter behind her, she felt sucked into the crowd again like a magnetic force was pulling at her eyes, and turned to look once more, unable to resist.

Across the crowd, she spotted some familiar faces. Lyra and Bon-Bon were off in a corner talking to a group of random ponies – presumably their friends - while smiling brightly. Near the ceiling, she could see Fluttershy dancing with the pegasus colt she had talked about, laughing as

the pair embraced in a friendly hug in the air. Off in the right corner of the tent, with an almost clear line of sight, she could see Princess Luna and Twilight snuggled up against each other, with soft words being whispered into each other's ears in their own little world. Twilight raised a hoof to Luna's face, to brush Luna's hair behind her ear, and wipe a tear that was slowly streaming down Luna's face. Luna just smiled softly, staring into her lover's eyes. They looked so happy, so calm, and so perfect together. Dash couldn't believe she had ever made fun of them, even in jest. She could feel the love and the passion between them, sucked into their private scene like an innocent eavesdropper, unable to pull herself away from it. At that point, Dash couldn't even hear the music anymore.

"A fruit punch, no ice, please, Miss... err..."

"Applejack. Just Applejack, if y'don't mind."

"Ah yes, Trixie remembers you. Trixie must apologize for our previous encounter."

"Think nothin' of it, sugarcube."

Rainbow Dash's ears popped up and her mane stood on end almost immediately, finally having snapped back to reality. "T-Trixie?!" She looked to the side and saw the familiar blue-coloured mare sitting beside her, waiting for her drink to be prepared. She was completely absent of her normal cape-and-hat, with her silver mane properly styled and brushed to the side. She looked almost vulnerable without her magician outfit.

"Yes, it is the Gr-- ahem, Trixie," replied Trixie.

"What, not '*Great-And-Powerful*' anymore, huh?," replied Rainbow Dash, the malice nearly dripping from her mouth.

"Not tonight."

"Waddaya mean 'not tonight'? You remember how much damage you caused the first time around?! You nearly got the whole town destroyed!"

"And Trixie apologizes for that incident. Trixie never meant to seriously endanger anypony. It was foolish of Trixie to boast so wildly and to lead those two poor colts on," replied the blue mare bluntly, as Applejack handed her the fruit punch she had ordered, from which she immediately

took a sip. Rainbow Dash stood beside her, mouth agape, at a complete loss for words. "Rainbow Dash, was it?"

"Y-yea-- wait, what?" Dash's brain was starting to misfire at the complete incongruity of Trixie's words. Trixie could only look to the side, grimacing.

"Trixie... is making Rainbow Dash uncomfortable?"

"No, it's not that. I just can't believe that you apologized to me without even asking," replied Dash, her initial shock and anger beginning to rapidly subside.

"Trixie understands. She will be returning to the dance in a moment. She is sorry for dampening your night."

"What do you mean? You haven't even done anything yet."

"Rainbow Dash looks sad. Trixie can only assume it's because of her presence."

Dash was taken aback. Applejack, and now Trixie of all ponies were both saying she looked miserable. "I'm not, okay? I'm really not. And even if I was, you'd have nothing to do with it anyways, so chill, alright?," replied Dash, with a thick layer of agitation present in her voice.

Trixie simply took a sip of her drink, and said nothing, as an awkward silence overtook the bar area, the three mares present not saying a word. Applejack just continued cleaning and keeping things in order, trying in vain to ignore the conversation that was happening right in front of her. After a minute, Rainbow Dash spoke up, the questions that had been building up in the back of her mind finally beginning to get itchy.

"Trixie, why are you here tonight?"

"Trixie isn't here to cause trouble."

"No, I didn't mean it like that. Everypony I know here came because their friends – mainly me – wanted them to come. Now that I'm here, I'm realizing that it isn't at all what I thought it'd be. But you're here on your own, and you're enjoying yourself, right?," continued Rainbow Dash. Trixie simply nodded. "So why are you here tonight? It's like everypony but me

and Applejack here have lost their minds.” Applejack just wrinkled her nose at her non-consensual inclusion to the conversation.

Trixie thought for a moment, looking up at the laser lights streaming overhead, continuing to create trails through the fog hovering below the ceiling. “Because here, Trixie is simply Trixie. Trixie doesn't feel the need to prove herself here. Trixie doesn't to put on a show. Trixie doesn't need to introduce herself as 'Great and Powerful.'”

“But... isn't that what you do? Put on shows, boast a lot, all that sorta stuff? I don't get it,” replied Rainbow Dash.

“Sometimes it's just nice to be liked for who you are, and not because of what you do,” said Trixie, looking down at the bar, smiling to herself in a kind of hopeful yet bitter way, a visible tinge of pain behind her voice. Rainbow Dash looked to the side, not terribly satisfied with the answer she had gotten. But it wasn't that she actually suspected Trixie of pulling anything, oddly enough. She didn't understand what 'being yourself' meant. She was always herself. Or at least, she thought she was. Oh great, self-doubt. Wonderful.

“Trixie can only hope that Rainbow Dash will accept her apology, for what has happened, and what foolish things Trixie will most definitely do in the future,” continued Trixie.

“... maybe. I don't know. I'll have to think about it,” replied Dash, tilting her head and eyes even further to the side, a distinctly defeated look coming across her face.

Trixie finished off the last of her fruit punch before placing the cup back on the table. “Thank you, Applejack.”

“Yer welcome, Trixie,” responded Applejack in a genuine tone, smiling back at her.

“Enjoy yourself, Trixie,” said Dash, suddenly, looking back down at the wood grain of the makeshift bar. Dash couldn't think of anything witty to say, and now she really was starting to feel miserable. Trixie waited for a few moments, before continuing back into the crowd, instantly swallowed up by it.

"Kinda nice, ain't it?," said Applejack, finally, watching as the silver-maned unicorn disappeared into the mass of ponies.

"Nice?"

"Yeah, Trixie ain't actin' like a stuck-up comic book villain tonight, and she's been like this the whole darned time, bein' all friendly 'n polite. So as ah said, it's kinda nice," she continued, placing the cup Trixie had used on top of the stack of dirty ones beside her.

"Yeah, I guess," said Rainbow Dash, with heavy defeat in her voice.

"Aw, now what's wrong there, sugarcube? Yer a'might miserable. Ah figured this kinda thing woulda been right up yer alley."

"Actually, you know what? I'm AM feeling kinda... I dunno. Awkward? Out of place? I don't know," replied Rainbow Dash, looking up at Applejack with pleading eyes.

"Lost in the crowd?," replied Applejack, in a knowing voice.

"Yeah. That."

"Yer the one who wanted us all to come down to this shin-dig, honeybunch. So why are ya feelin' lost?"

"Everypony's just so... happy."

"...happy," replied Applejack, as if she couldn't believe what she was hearing.

"Yeah, happy. Like, not-themselves-at-all happy, and Trixie isn't even the half of it. You know, I just saw Fluttershy a minute ago, and she was going on and on about how many ponies she's talked to and how she loves being social. She's right up there dancing like a maniac with somepony right now!," she said, pointing her hoof over at Fluttershy and her dance partner.

"Wait, our Fluttershy?" Applejack looked up at the ceiling. She eventually saw what Dash was pointing to, and a look of minor confusion and shock came across her face.

“Yeah! And then I saw Twilight before that, and she was telling me how this is better than reading books or studying! How getting 'hooves-on experience' is the best way to learn! Can you believe that?!”

“Are y'sure they're not just, y'know, caught up in the moment?,” replied Applejack, thick scepticism lingering in her voice.

“Before that, I saw Rarity, and she was going on about how she loves Cheerilee's 'retro' outfit and how the fashion here is a ‘breath of fresh air’! And now she’s even wearing those bracelet thingies! Isn't that evidence enough?”

Applejack just closed her eyes and hummed. “Hmm... evidence of what, exactly?”

“I...” Rainbow Dash just stared blankly at Applejack as her blonde-maned friend continued to clean around the bar.

“Y'don't even know what it's 'evidence' of, do y'now? Yer complaining about your friends bein' happy 'n havin' a good time. Are y'just jealous 'cause yer not?”

“What?!,” replied Rainbow Dash incredulously, her eyes growing wide with disbelief.

“Yeah, jealousy! Everypony is havin' the time of their lives, but you aren't fer some reason. Heck, even I'm just enjoyin' everypony bein' all friendly 'n kind t'each other. There need's t'be more of that in this world,” said Applejack, nodding her head knowingly. Rainbow Dash just hung her head again in defeat. “Ah wouldn't even be here if it weren't for you and Pinkie Pie, and apparently ah'm enjoying it more than both you 'n her combined. And ah ain't even dancin'!”

Rainbow Dash's ears perked up for a moment. Oh Celestia, Pinkie Pie. How could she have forgotten?! “Wait, Pinkie Pie? What do you mean by more than her and I 'combined'?”

“Oh, y'haven't seen her? She came up here just b'fore you and was bein' all... how do they say it... all moody 'n edgy, ah suppose. She looked like somepony had just broken her heart or scorned her somethin' fierce. Ah couldn't read her at all,” replied Applejack, with a concerned look on her face. “Plus, somepony had done somethin' weird to 'er hair.”

“To her hair?”

“Yeah, it was all straight 'n noodley, and not all bouncy 'n bushy like she usually has it. It seemed kinda weird to me, but heck, I ain't one to push somepony if they ain't willin' or wantin' t'talk,” continued Applejack, as she began sorting out the next batch of the various drinks she was to serve, lining up a row of large pitchers. Rainbow Dash's face began to take on an increasingly horrified look, and she could only hide her face in her hooves.

“Oh, Celestia...”

“What's goin' on, Dash? Be straight with me, now.”

“I think Pinkie Pie needs help. Like, right now.”

“Wait, what's this now? Is Pinkie Pie in danger? Is some villain huntin' 'er down or somethin'? Do ah need to go rough somepony up for harmin' our Pinkie Pie?!”

“No, no, nothing like that!,” replied Rainbow Dash, sighing heavily. “I'm going to go find her, before things get really bad. Did you see where she went?”

“As far as ah could tell, she just made a bee-line for the exit. She didn't really say where she was goin', she just kinda left in a huff.”

“Thanks Applejack. You've been a great help.”

“Help shmelp. All ah did was add to yer problems. But y'go find Pinkie Pie now, y'hear?!,” urged Applejack, waving her hoof towards the exit. Rainbow Dash nodded and turned back into the crowd, the noise assaulting her now re-sensitized ears as she passed through the sound barrier. The bass-line shook the ground and the air all around her, and she could feel her own ribcage reverberating to the beat. She didn't have to wade through the crowd very long before she made it to the exit. As she went through the small tented passage to the outside, she could feel the fresh air assault her throat and lungs with its purity and coldness.

Rainbow Dash spread her wings and stretched, looking up at the sky. It was the dead of night, and not a thing could be seen passed the small groupings of trees that surrounded the party tent, and the few lit lights down



in the town itself. The only real sources of light were the sparkling stars and the bright moon which watched overhead high in the sky. The open sky was comforting, compared to how cramped it was inside. Rainbow Dash looked around, attempting to see any possible places that Pinkie Pie may have gone.

“Hey,” said somepony from the side. Rainbow Dash looked over, being greeted by the bouncer-mare. She was tall, had short-cut blue hair and was wearing a black T-Shirt which had the letters 'STAFF' written on it in bright yellow. She looked at Rainbow Dash with a kind of stern, yet friendly look. “Lookin' for somepony?”

“Oh, hey,” replied Dash, looking up at her. “Actually, yeah. I'm looking for a pink pony, about my height. She's got balloons as her cutie mark?”

“Yeah, I saw her. She didn't look so hot coming out of here. She went around the back of the tent, but she never came back.”

“Thanks a lot.”

“No biggie. It's my job to notice these things,” replied the bouncer, who smiled and then headed back inside the entrance. Rainbow Dash quickly began walking around the tent, hearing the laughter and the happiness from within. She could hear DJ PON-3 start to make some sort of announcement, inaudible from the outside, which caused the entire crowd to cheer loudly. She wasn't sure what she was going to find this time. Last time had been fairly horrifying, and if Pinkie was being like this at a party this big, then it was bound to be even worse. Before she could even complete another thought, however, she found what she was looking for at the opposite side of the tent. At the same time, she wish she hadn't.

# Chapter 3

"You STUPID, LITTLE, FILLY!," exclaimed Pinkie Pie loudly, stamping one of her hooves on the ground as her legs shook from weakness and exhaustion. Her ears were folded down, her mane was straight and flat, sticking to the side of her head, and the sound of her voice betrayed an intense sadness that Dash could easily pick up on. "What did you THINK would happen bringing them here?! Now you've gone and ruined EVERYTHING!" Dash cautiously approached Pinkie Pie from behind, keeping her head low as she stepped closer and closer to her enraged friend. "STUPID! STUPID! *STUPID!*" Pinkie screamed her self-hatred into the heavens and began sobbing.

"P-Pinkie Pie, hey, it's me," said Dash, softly as she could to not startle her.

Pinkie's ears shot back up, her sobbing immediately ceasing as she looked behind her with rage- and tear-filled eyes. "What do *YOU* want?!", she asked in a rueful, snappy tone.

"I-I-I'm just coming to see how you are. Applejack said you seemed pretty sad, a-and I was... really worried about you," replied Dash, still slowly walking towards her.

"Why are you worried about me, huh?! I'm always happy, aren't I?! Happy, happy, happy!," retorted Pinkie as she turned around, bitter sarcasm falling from her tongue.

"No, you're not always happy. No pony is ever happy one-hundred percent of the time, not even me!"

"But I am! That's what I do! That's what everypony *expects* of me. I don't want them to think I'm even *CAPABLE* of being sad or I'll just be *USELESS* to them."

"Useless?," retorted Rainbow Dash, feeling a slight flash of anger at seeing her friend tear herself down so harshly. "What do you mean 'useless'? You're not useless! Who's been filling your head with that trash?! Do I need to tell somepony off?!"

Pinkie Pie looked away. "Go back and *enjoy* the party with *everypony else!*," said Pinkie in a sarcastic voice, rolling her eyes. "Just leave me alone!"

"No."

"Yes! Leave, me, alone! Go away!"

"I can't do that, Pinkie."

"Why not, hmm? Worried about me? Don't be," Pinkie retorted angrily. "I'm a big filly, I can take care of myself!"

"Not like this you can't!"

"YES I CAN!"

"NO YOU CANT!"

"YES. I. CAN!"

"FOR CELESTIA'S SAKE, PINKAMINA PIE, STOP PUSHING ME AWAY!"

Pinkie Pie immediately gasped and sat down, a shocked expression creeping into her face slowly. Pinkie's full name had struck a chord within her. She brought a hoof up to her own hair, and felt it softly, as if she was trying to confirm something for herself. After a few moments, she lowered her hoof back to the ground and looked away in shame.

"Listen, I'm the Element of Loyalty, aren't I?! Loyalty means a lot of things, but it especially means not leaving a friend in the ditch when they're having a bad day. You look like you're having a bad day - or night, whatever - so I'm going to help you!," continued Rainbow Dash, trying in vain to lower her voice.

"Why? So I can be the happy, bouncy-wouncy Pinkie Pie that everypony wants again?"

"No, so you can tell somepony what the hay is eating at you. I care about YOU, Pinkie. Forget what everypony else wants, including me, alright?," replied Dash, trying to keep her aggressiveness in check.

"Fine," said Pinkie, standing up and facing Dash, with a look of pure anger in her eyes. She took a step towards Dash and yelled out, "Tell me this isn't the best party ever! I dare you!"

"Uh--"

"You know it is. Admit it! Everypony keeps telling me so, and I couldn't walk four steps in there without seeing it with my own eyes!," she continued, the bitterness in her voice starting to rise again. "It really is the best, party, *ever!*"

"Well--," began Dash, unable to get anything out.

"Just be honest with me, Rainbow Dash! Stop trying to spare my feelings! There is NO WAY I can EVER compete with this!," she continued, waving a hoof towards the tent which was a couple of feet away. "Who is ever going to want to come to one of my boring old parties after coming to this?! Who is ever going to say my parties are awesome or cool after being at a party like this?! What's the point of even holding parties anymore?! Everypony can just come here!"

"You're our friend, Pinkie! Twilight, Rarity, Applejack – all of them! They're still your friends!"

"If I can't throw good parties, they won't be my friends anymore!"

"You mean more to us than that, you know!"

"NO I DON'T!," screamed Pinkie. "It's the ONLY thing that makes me special, the ONLY thing I'm actually *good* at! I may as well just go back to that STUPID rock farm!"

"Listen!," exclaimed Dash, trying as hard as she could to not outright yell at her friend. "I don't think this is the best party ever, okay?"

"Don't lie!"

"I'm not lying, Pinkie! I couldn't stand it in there. I... I don't know why, I just didn't like it at all," replied Dash, looking towards the tent. Pinkie continued to have a confused, hurt look on her face. "It's just... it seemed like everypony I knew was just throwing away everything that made them unique and special. I couldn't take it - I mean, who does that?! Who just throws themselves away over a party?! And I had this mare coming onto

me and stroking my mane, and then Fluttershy was tackling anypony and everypony she could, including me, and--" Dash caught herself in a rant, and decided to stop herself before she completely took over the conversation. "... sorry."

"Sounds like everypony was having lots of awesome fun!" Pinkie folded her arms and looked away, her eyes puffy and red and her cheeks wet from crying. "Oh, and look, you're the popular one, again, *as usual!*"

"What do you mean by that?!", retorted Dash, her competitiveness beginning to flare up into full-fledged rage.

"Just that you're always the centre of attention without even trying, while I bust my flank as hard as I can just to keep the friends I have! You get to be the big-shot while the rest of us are stuck in your shadow!"

"Ugh, that's total crap and you know it!," yelled Dash back, anger now completely filling her heart. "Do you know *WHY* I came to Ponyville in the first place?! I could have *easily* just stayed in Cloudsdale and been the '*big shot*,' but I didn't! Everypony around me either wanted to tear me down or tell me I was the best flier ever, just because I pulled off some silly little stunt! I was *surrounded* by bullies and groupies who *never* cared about me! I wanna be famous one day and be in the Wonderbolts, sure, but I had NO FRIENDS back then! Even Fluttershy was too scared of me! No pony liked me for who... for who I was..." Rainbow Dash's thoughts stopped momentarily as the words exited her mouth, and the rage in her heart died down almost instantaneously. How had she forgotten about that, of all things? How had she forgotten about the complete lack of companionship she faced before coming to Ponyville?

"No friends, huh?," replied Pinkie, interjecting into Dash's thoughts. Pinkie's anger had subsided as well, if the change in the tone of her voice was any indication. "I know what that's like..."

"But... you..."

"I didn't always used to throw parties. I didn't always used to have friends," continued Pinkie Pie. Rainbow Dash just nodded sympathetically. "And everything changed when you came to Ponyville, right?"

“Yeah. Other ponies actually talked to me like I was just... you know... somepony they could talk to, normally, as a friend. It was weird getting used to at first, but... I stayed, because I liked it,” replied Dash.

“Me too.” Pinkie Pie just grumbled and looked off to the side, a scowl still written in her expression.

“So I guess we understand each other, then?” Rainbow Dash smiled meekly, lowering her head, thankful that the heated argument had ended so easily.

Pinkie Pie just grumbled again. “... what's with you, Rainbow Dash?” said Pinkie, suddenly and forcefully. “You're always going on about how everypony should put their chins up and be strong. You NEVER ask how I'm doing. Why do you care so much now?”

Dash couldn't really think of anything rational to say to that. She really hadn't been acting like herself all night. “I guess I've been hanging around you too much, what with all that 'sharing and caring' stuff you talk about constantly,” replied Dash with a nervous smile. Dash immediately felt awkward saying it, and Pinkie Pie just wrinkled her nose. “I'm here because you're my best friend, Pinkie. The last time you were like this, you went over the deep end completely. Remember 'Rocky' and 'Madam Le Fleur’?” Pinkie Pie just tried to hide her face in shame at the mention, as Rainbow Dash continued. “But I was still there for you even then, wasn't I? I never abandoned you because I knew you could get sad and maybe a little crazy sometimes. I never even told anypony what really happened that day, either!”

Pinkie Pie looked at the ground, the tense muscles in her back starting to soften and the fire in her eyes starting to dim a little. She looked back up at Dash as the crowd inside began to cheer again and another track came on. “You promise you never told anypony about that?”

Rainbow Dash sat down, closed her eyes and cleared her throat. She'd have to make this one count. “Cross my heart, hope to... uh, fly, stick a cupcake in my eye,” she said finally, making all the appropriate hoof-motions and trying to remember the exact phrasing.

Pinkie's gaze lowered, as she attempted to hide her face again. “... y-you've never Pinkie-swears before.”

“W-whoa, I haven't?! Even in all the time we've hung out?”

“Nope,” replied Pinkie, shaking her head slowly. “I always wanted to see you do it, but you always said it was too silly. Oh, and *stupid*.”

Rainbow Dash was in shock from the complete change in tone. Did it actually mean that much to her? “Well... I-I'm sorry about that. I can be a pretty big jerk sometimes,” said Dash, rubbing the back of her head with her hoof awkwardly.

“Yeah, 'sometimes.' Just... forget it. It's fine,” replied Pinkie, deadpan and morose. She shifted a bit, now visibly uncomfortable, like she had just been cornered. Pinkie glanced up at Dash occasionally, before averting her gaze once more. She looked deep in thought, although Dash couldn't tell over what. Finally, Pinkie spoke. “... you could've ratted me out to everypony, telling them how crazy I was, but you didn't. Why not?”

“Be...cause I don't pull that kinda crap on my friends?”

“... why not?”

“Because I don't! Geez, do I need a reason to *not* be a bully? Why are you *so convinced* that everypony hates you?,” replied Dash, becoming completely exasperated and worn out.

“... sorry.”

Rainbow Dash just sighed again. “It's alright.”

“No... I mean, for the whole fight we just had. I don't like fighting. I really don't.” Pinkie looked up at Dash, with misery filling her entire complexion. A long silence overtook the conversation, and the pair sat across from each other, neither of them able to think of what to say next. Dash just breathed slowly and deeply, trying to let the adrenaline pass through her. After a minute or two, Pinkie continued, finally. “... you know I grew up on a rock farm, right?”

Rainbow Dash simply nodded her head, a little confused at the change of topic.

“Rock farming is horrible. It's dirty and hard and nopony has any fun doing it. Ever since I was a little filly and able to push a small rock, my family had me working out in the fields. There was always too much work to

do and not enough time to do it. Every day at school, I was too tired from pushing rocks at home to talk to any of the other fillies. I had no friends.”

Rainbow Dash slowly walked over to the other mare, until she was so close that she was practically touching her. Pinkie Pie lowered her head and continued talking as softly as she could, as if she trusted nopony else with what she was about to say.

“Back then, I was a tired, grouchy filly. Everypony would try to talk to me, because the rest of my family was liked, but I'd just push them away. I felt useless to them. I mean, what was I going to talk about? Rock farming? Refining rocks? Rock mineral and gem prices? They'd just laugh at me, or feel sorry for me, and I didn't want that.” Pinkie Pie raised her head, looking up at the starry sky. “Then one day, I was pushing rocks around the field as usual, and I saw your wonderful Sonic Rainboom. It filled the entire sky, and I couldn't help but feel my heart fill with joy. All I wanted to do was just share that new feeling in my heart with everypony, and ever since then, I threw parties, hoping to share a little piece of it every time. My parents wanted me to have better than just rock farming my whole life, so they let me move to Ponyville on my own. Then you and the girls became my friends, and I was so, so happy. It was beyond my wildest dreams to have such amazing friends, and the one thing I was good at brought everypony together. But now... no matter what I do, or how close you all are to me, or any of the things we go through together, or how many of my parties you all attend, I always feel like if I don't throw another good party... then what good am I? I'll just be that grouchy old Pinkamina again, with nothing to do, nothing to talk about, and nothing that makes me special. Nopony will want to be my friend again, and I'll be completely alone, just like back then.”

“But, Pinkie, you...”

Pinkie stopped for a moment, to look into Dash's eyes, their gaze betraying her abject fear. “I don't want to be grouchy old Pinkamina anymore. I don't want to be THIS anymore. I want to be the Pinkie Pie everypony knows and loves. But how can I do that now? How can I do that if nopony likes me or my parties?”

Dash took a few moments to think over her words, before finally responding. “... everypony will still be your friend after tonight, you know. I know I will. And your parties don't suck, not by a long-shot.”



Pinkie Pie just looked at the ground once again, sniffing. "... you really think so?"

"I guarantee it. You've got me right here, don't you? I'd never mess around with something like that. I'll always be your friend, Pinkie, and that's all there is to it."

"... you'll always be my friend?"

"Always."

"Really?"

"Yes."

"... okay," replied Pinkie, softly. "... I believe you. And I'm sorry. I'm really, really sorry for doubting you, Dashie. I'm sorry for the fighting. I'm sorry for everything. Of course you like me for who I am. Of course you'd be my friend. Why am I being such a silly, silly filly?!" Pinkie just hugged Rainbow Dash tightly, burying her face in Dash's neck, instantly breaking out into a torrent of tears and sobs. Rainbow Dash said nothing, and leaned back against her, holding her friend closely as she cried. The loud beats continued to pound through the tent walls as Pinkie Pie's heart unleashed all the pain and fear it had been holding in for so long, as all of the tension held inside her finally released. After a little while, Pinkie eventually calmed down, her sobbing becoming quieter and quieter, and the flow of tears slowing to a drip.

'For who I am.' Those words rattled around in Rainbow Dash's brain, now that she finally, after all this time, had a real moment to think. She had wondered what 'being yourself' meant anymore in a place like this, especially after what Trixie had told her, but now a small part of her actually understood. Maybe everypony in the party had parts of themselves they felt nopony else could see, and a place like this was the only place they could show them off? But that didn't explain why her friends were acting so weird. It made sense and it didn't. She knew what they were doing and yet it was completely alien to her. Now she was stuck in intellectual limbo, and wasn't sure if she wanted to even think about it anymore.

"... D-Dashie, do you want to stay out here for a little bit? I just... I don't know."

"Whatever you need, Pinkie. There's no rush, right?"

"No rush?," replied Pinkie, smiling a little bit brighter, looking up at Dash. "That's funny, you're always the one *rushing* everywhere."

Dash chuckled. "Yeah, well.... if everypony is gonna act all weird, can't I, even just a little?"

"Of course. Just be yourself, okay?" Pinkie's smile brightened, even if her voice was still very weak.

"Be yourself', huh?," retorted Dash.

"You know what I mean," laughed Pinkie Pie.

"Speaking of 'being yourself'... you told me last time that you call yourself 'Pinkamina' when you're like this, right? I dunno... it's kinda weird. I mean, not in a bad way or anything, but, are you the same Pinkie Pie that I know? I don't get this stuff at all."

Pinkie shivered a bit at the mention, looking back down at the ground and bit her lip. "Yeah, I am... I mean, I think I am. I'm still the same pony, just... well, you see, right?" Pinkie simply pointed a hoof towards her hair.

"I... guess I understand? Just, learn how to trust your friends, okay? Last time, you thought everypony hated you, just like this time. Unless you like, murder somepony, we're not going anywhere," replied Dash with a small smile.

"*Murder* somepony?! Why in the *hay* would I ever do that?!", exclaimed Pinkie Pie, putting her hooves on her sides, glaring indignantly.

"I-I was just saying!"

"... yeah, yeah. I know." Pinkie just sighed and frowned. "I... didn't mean to ruin tonight for you, Dashie. I'm really sorry."

"Listen, Pinkie, you didn't ruin--... ugh, okay, okay. On second thought, I think you need to come back in there with me right now."

"B-b-back in there?! Are you crazy?!", replied Pinkie in utter disbelief. "I'm still like this, I totally acted like a foal, and now they all hate--" Pinkie stopped herself and then sighed. "... s-sorry. It's just... well, I'm really tired,

Dashie. I don't know if I can be happy-bouncy-wouncy Pinkie Pie right now... so wont they be afraid of me if I'm like this?"

"Afraid? I didn't say a single thing about last time to them, so there's no reason for them to be afraid. Besides, if they're as *open-minded* and *happy* as they seem to be, I'm sure they wont mind you being a little bit moody like this, Pinkie," replied Dash. "Try to have a little more confidence in yourself."

"... wow, you're really nice right now, you know. It's like I don't even know you. Geez," replied Pinkie, her voice thick with faux-sarcasm.

"Yeah, kinda like that," replied Dash, laughing. Dash then turned away and broke out into a short sprint towards the entrance. "Come on!"

"W-wait! I can't run! My hooves hurt too much," replied Pinkie, holding one of her hooves up. "Can't we walk slowly, just this once?"

"Ugh, fine," replied Dash, rolling her eyes.

"There's the Dashie I know. Yay!!"

"Don't push it! This is a one-off, you know!"

Pinkie Pie just giggled.

~

"Pinkie Pie, darling! Where have you *been?*! Fluttershy has been running around all worried and flustered about you! I must say, however, that the change in hairstyle is *quite* refreshing! Did somepony at the party style it for you?"

"O-oh no, it's just really wet from all the sweat, so it's weighed down... you actually think it looks good?," replied Pinkie, gently touching her flat hair with her hoof again. "Thanks though, Rarity."

"Oh Pinkie Pie, Rarity's right! I was so worried!," said Fluttershy, already clinging to her pink friend. "Don't run off like that again, okay...?"

"I-I promise I won't, Fluttershy... I'm really sorry you worried about me so much."

"Are you sure you're okay, Pinkie Pie? You look really exhausted! Then again, we're exhausted, too!," exclaimed Twilight, giggling while slumped against the tent wall. Everypony was in the rest area, away from the music and the dancing. Pinkie Pie sat down in front of her friends, who were all huddled together against the wall.

"I'm sure I'm okay, Twilight. I was just outside to, you know, get some fresh air," replied Pinkie, breathing in and out deeply as if to demonstrate. "I'm refreshed now! Promise!"

"Well that's certainly a good thing, darling. We were wondering just how this would be a proper Ponyville party without you around." Rarity, who by now had at least half a dozen bracelets on both of her hooves, placed a hoof over Pinkie Pie's.

"R-really? B-but... this isn't even my party....," replied Pinkie, smiling weakly up at her friend.

"Well, no, it isn't. But I think I speak for everypony here when I say that a party just isn't a party without you, Pinkie Pie!," said Twilight. Fluttershy and Rarity simply nodded quickly in approval.

Pinkie Pie smiled and looked at the floor, trying to fight off tears.

"P-Pinkie Pie, are you okay...?," asked Fluttershy, looking up into Pinkie's eyes from below.

"... you girls... you girls are the best... you know that?!", exclaimed Pinkie, pulling her three friends into a huge group hug, crying as she laughed. The three of them returned the embrace, laughing along with Pinkie as they were squeezed together.

"Thanks Pinkie! You are too!," replied Twilight, wrapping her hooves around the group of her friends in kind.

Rainbow Dash stood behind her pink friend, smiling at the sight of her best friend being happy once again. By now her legs were shaking from all of the anxiety and stress of the night. She just sighed happily, letting the adrenaline leave her body. She had half-expected an explosion of some

kind upon bringing the straight-haired Pinkamina back into the party. It was almost too easy, but by this point, 'easy' would do just fine.

“Just play along,” said a very quiet, yet familiar voice to Dash from the side. It was Princess Luna, who had apparently snuck up beside Dash when she wasn't paying attention. “Ladies, Miss Rainbow Dash here seems to be in need of refreshment. Would you mind if I took her to the drink table for a moment?” Rarity, Fluttershy and Twilight simply nodded in approval. Pinkie looked behind her and stared at Rainbow Dash with glistening eyes and a wide smile across her face, as if giving her approval as well.

“U-uh yeah, we'll be back in a little bit! I just need a drink, haha,” continued Dash, not exactly sure what she was 'playing along' with.

Luna turned to Dash. “Let's proceed, then,” she said, cheerfully.

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“Thanks,” said Dash, sitting against the far wall from the rest area. “I kinda needed a break from those four. I mean, they're my friends, but...”

“Too much for one night?”

“Yeah, definitely,” said Dash, as Luna magically placed a cup of water between Dash's hooves. “I was all worked up over nothing, I guess. I figure now that maybe I shouldn't be freaked out when my friends are happy. ... Wow, that sounds kinda weird, now that I think about it.”

“But looking out for your friends, even when they are happy, is true loyalty. And that *is* your Element, correct?” said Luna as she sat down beside Rainbow Dash. “I presumed you would need some calm after tonight's events, especially with everything that's occurred.”

“Yeah, totally. Thanks again. Oh Celestia, what a crazy night...”

Luna simply sipped her own drink as the pair of them watched the crowd. It was as lively and energetic as ever, as if it hadn't missed a beat all night. DJ PON-3 was still on the stage, her mane a complete and total

mess, with strands of hair flying off in every direction. Even her signature sunglasses seemed to be sweating. Her horn glowed immensely bright as she changed one of the turntable's records.

"Miss Pinkie Pie... did something happen to her? She doesn't seem to be the same pony as the one who walked in tonight," inquired Luna suddenly.

Dash choked on her water and shot it out of her nose, coughing and wheezing as she tried to spit out the liquid that had gone down the wrong pipe. "W-what?! No, no, she's the same, same as always!"

Luna just smiled. "So there *is* something different about her..."

"I..." Rainbow Dash sighed. Her heart sank through the floor, realizing she had just totally blown Pinkie Pie's secret without meaning to.

"I could tell. I'm very perceptive, Miss Dash. You needn't worry, her secret is quite safe," continued Luna, looking into Dash's eyes.

"Yeah... she's... she's different. She wore herself out tonight, and then, well... she ended up 'changing' once she got into one of her 'moods,'" continued Dash, grimacing a little. "I... can't say more than that. Sorry."

"It's quite alright, you needn't say another word. Strangely enough, I know exactly what that's like..."

"You do?," said Dash, looking over at Luna. It didn't take very long, however, before it finally clicked as to what exactly Luna was talking about. "O-oh, y-you mean..."

"Yes, I'm referring to Nightmare Moon. You needn't worry, my dear. It doesn't bother me," replied Luna, smiling softly.

Dash just slumped back against the tent wall. "So does this mean... Pinkamina's going to... you know... become all nasty someday?"

"Not if she's surrounded by her friends, who obviously care for and love her so deeply. You've seen just what a few short months with Twilight have done for my... problem," continued Luna. "Miss 'Pinkamina' will be just fine. I'm sure of it."

“... you think we can actually get through her thick head and help her like that?,” asked Dash.

“Definitely.”

“And everything will be alright in the end?”

“Of course.”

Rainbow Dash sighed again, and looked up at the ceiling, beginning to feel better about everything that was happening. The lasers continued to shoot wildly before her eyes, creating long trails in the steam and smoke above her. “... thanks, Luna. You're totally awesome, you know. And I'm sorry I ever made fun of you and Twi.”

“It's quite alright. I knew you meant nothing by it.”

Rainbow Dash tilted her head towards Luna, and the pair simply smiled at each other. It was the first time since the very beginning of the night that Dash actually felt confident and calm. But, like clockwork, lingering doubts continued to gnaw at the back of her head. She decided to not waste any time, and to just get them out once and for all. “Oh, and Luna?”

“Yes?”

“Why do you suppose Twilight and our friends are acting so weird tonight?”

“Weird?,” replied Luna, blinking as if she were confused.

“Yeah. Rarity liking cheap fashion, Twilight and Fluttershy being all outgoing and stuff... I just don't get it.” Dash took a sip from her cup. “... it doesn't matter as much now, since helping Pinkie. I'm just glad they're happy. It's still weird though.”

“Would you like to discuss it? I may have some answers,” replied Luna.

“Well... since you're a goddess and all, sure, why not? I mean, if you don't know what's up, then who does, right?” Dash just chuckled to herself.

"Alright," replied Luna, chuckling as well. "Miss Rarity, then. By 'cheap fashion' you meant the bracelets, correct?"

"Yeah. They don't fit her at all! Ever since I've known her, she's *never* settled for less. It's not like her to wear cheap stuff like that so... willingly."

"What does one do with the bracelets?"

"Well... Cheerilee said you're supposed to pass them around as keepsakes to other people at a party or something like that."

"So... it's a form of selfless gift-giving? Has she ever done that before?"

"... yeah, she has. When you... err, Nightmare Moon took that dragon's moustache, she cut off her own tail just to make him a new one," continued Dash.

"That was very generous of her," replied Luna.

"Yea-- ... oh."

"Does it make sense now?" Luna giggled quietly. "A pony is not defined by the clothes on their back, but by the feelings in their heart. Just because Rarity isn't obsessed with high fashion at the moment, doesn't mean she's not being true to herself. She's still has the spirit of giving and being generous."

"You're right. Gosh, why didn't I see that?! That's so obvious!," Dash said aloud, smacking herself lightly in the forehead with a hoof. "Okay... what about Fluttershy?"

"Miss Fluttershy? ...hmm. She runs an animal hospital, yes?"

"Yeah, she takes care of sick animals. That's pretty much her job, but honestly, it's really her life-long *passion*. I'd say she's into it about as much as I am into athletics."

"And you're concerned, because normally she's quite reserved and withdrawn from social situations, and yet, she's being social and outgoing tonight?"



“Yeah,” replied Dash. “It’s a total one-eighty of the Fluttershy I’ve known ever since we were little fillies in Flight School. She was terrified of even looking in another pony’s eyes up until she moved here, and even after that she wasn’t that much better.”

“But she’s still very sweet and affectionate, yes? Only this time, to other ponies.”

“Well, yeah, bu-- ... okay, I see where this is going. Kindness.”

Luna just smiled. “She is still a kind soul to the very core of her being. That much hasn’t changed. Only now, she’s sharing that kindness with everypony she can.”

Rainbow Dash relaxed a little. “And what about *your girlfriend?*,” quipped Dash, playfully.

“Oh, her? She’s just crazy,” replied Luna, waving her hoof dismissively while smiling and laughing. “But in all seriousness, I wasn’t too sure myself, until she pointed out an interesting fact to me earlier tonight.”

“What was that?,” asked Dash, tilting her head further.

“That this party is magical.”

“Magical?”

“Yes. The congregation of ponies from all walks of life into a single place at a single point of time, to celebrate peace of mind, togetherness, respect for one-another, and communal love. When I say ‘magic,’ I’m not referring to simple tricks of the mind, such as unicorns or us alicorns perform.” Luna stood up and stretched her arm out to the crowd, gazing upon the party-goers and their boundless energy. “It’s in a place like this, that *true* magic and *true* wonder can blossom, that the world itself transforms into something beautiful. It’s not just here that it can happen, of course. Anywhere where ponies are gathered together in harmony and love, can this *true magic* be brought to life.”

Rainbow Dash stood up and moved beside Luna, looking outwards with the goddess to see if she could understand what she was talking about. The familiar, smiling faces of the various ponies she knew, even if only in passing, quickly flashed in her vision as they kept in pace with the

beat. The lights and the sound pulsated outwards, washing over the crowd in waves, and Dash could almost feel her heart begin to soften at the sight of it all, that feeling of earlier returning, but to a less intense, more manageable level.

"It's wonderful, isn't it?," continued Luna. "I wish such things had existed in my time, as I would have attended each and every one of them. But for now, tonight is enough." Luna looked over at Rainbow Dash, whose eyes were still locked onto the sights before her.

"It seems kinda... neat, yeah," said Dash, the sadness she had felt before returning to her voice.

Luna looked at Dash's expression, attempting to read her without much success. "What's wrong, my dear?"

"There wasn't any place like this where 'being myself' was even possible when I was growing up. I never had any real friends either, and even the friends I thought I had, like Gilda, a griffin I knew, ended up just being groupies who didn't care about me. And now I'm wondering, looking at all of this... that if I had found a place like this when I was a younger filly, where I could 'be myself' and not get hounded by bullies or groupies, would I still be the closed-off jerk I am today? Would I have come out differently, or would it have mattered at all?"

Before Rainbow Dash could get an answer, the song that was playing began to wind down, and the lights from the stage-area began to glow brighter and brighter, in order to light up the stage. As the song finally ended, DJ PON-3 took off her headphones, and began talking into a microphone she magically held to her mouth, the crowd still shrouded in darkness. "HOW'S IT GOIN', YOU WONDERFUL CITIZENS OF BEAUTIFUL PONYVILLE?!", she bellowed into the mike, raising her forehooves into the air. The crowd cheered with a thunderous roar, which shook the floor, the walls and everypony inside. "THAT'S WHAT I LIKE TO HEAR!! ARE Y'ALL READY FOR MY LAST TRACK OF THE NIGHT?!" The same response was given, and it felt like the ground itself would split from the sheer amount of hoof-stomping and cheering. "ALRIGHT! THANK YOU PONYVILLE!! LET'S DO THIIIIIS!!" Without warning, the next and final track of her set began, and the lights dimmed once more, and the crowd began to dance once again.

Luna looked up at the ceiling, and sighed contently. “‘Jerk’ is being a little harsh on yourself, in my opinion. Who knows? Hindsight is a double-edged sword that promises everything and delivers nothing. I once read in a very ancient book, *‘Dare to be what you are, and learn to resign with a good grace all that you are not and to believe in your own individuality.’*” Luna leaned over to look into Dash’s eyes again. “Be proud of who you are, and don’t worry about what you are not.”

Dash thought over Luna’s words, trying to figure out their exact meaning without much success. “... I’ve been acting weird as well, haven’t I?”

“A little sombre compared to your usual enthusiasm, yes, but I see nothing to worry about.”

“...will it hurt?,” asked Dash suddenly.

“...pardon?,” replied Luna.

“Will it hurt, if I let go and be like them, in there?”

“Do I look to be suffering at the moment, Miss Dash?,” replied Luna, smiling brightly. Rainbow Dash just shook her head. “Then no, I don’t believe so. There is, of course, only one way of finding out, but it is entirely your decision.”

Dash looked out once more, and tried, just this once, to let the layers of fear peel away. As it overtook her, all she felt was calm and content, not the overwhelming happiness she thought she’d feel. The fears she’d had before were slowly fading away, and the world seemed a little bit brighter, even in this dark, musky place. She felt drawn towards the crowd again, but this time, wasn’t sure if she wanted to fight back.

“If you are in fact interested... would you like to dance, Miss Dash?,” continued Luna, extending a hoof towards Dash.

“Well... it’s not every day - or night - that I get to dance with a Princess, so why not? Twilight won’t get mad though, will she?”

“Hmmm... no, I don’t believe so. She ‘owes me one,’ so to speak,” replied Luna, giggling.

Without any further coaching, Rainbow Dash and Princess Luna made their way to the center of the large dance floor, and within moments they were swallowed up by the energy and movements of the other ponies around them. Dash remained calm; even if she never came here again, she wanted, just once, to experience it in its entirety, to say she was there. Then she could say she tried, to the fullest possible extent, and that alone would be good enough for her. Rainbow Dash thought of it no more, and joined hooves with the Princess of the Night. They smiled at each other warmly, and proceeded to let the reverberation of the air, the ground and the other ponies around them overtake their movements. She could hear the subtle tones of laughter and feel the collective heat around her, as she began to sweat. The darkness around her became a comforting shroud of protection, and within a few short moments, she knew why the ponies around her danced so voraciously, so intensely through long, black nights such as this. It was freeing, and liberating, to not care, to simply express for the sake of expressing with nothing to hide, even if there were no secrets to begin with. Rainbow Dash looked over at Luna, who had tears of happiness streaming down her face and an ecstatic smile as wide as could be, as she twisted and stretched her body in tune with the melody. Dash felt something deeply sad in the movements of the Princess, and yet, it was as if this was Luna's celebration of the night itself, her own private release and public appreciation of the ponies celebrating the darkness along with her. Dash now knew that it wasn't about throwing yourself away, or betraying who you were anymore. It was knowing that nothing would go wrong if she just let go for a single night. Dash could do nothing except stare in awe, feeling a tear come to her own eye, as she finally understood what it was all about, and what Luna had meant by *true magic*. Dash could feel her body begin to move in ways she never felt before, swaying to and fro, her muscles and soul approaching a harmony she had rarely, if ever, felt. Her mind went blank and she felt no regrets, the lights, music and her body the only things she could focus on, as she became lost in the crowd.

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"W-wow, are they...?," asked Rainbow Dash.

“Yes, I do believe they are. Amazing...,” replied Luna, with a kind of wonder in her voice.

Rainbow Dash and Luna walked up towards their four friends, which they had left only a short while ago. They were huddled together in a group hug of sorts, soundly asleep, even as the music from DJ KittenSpins played in the background. Oddly, Pinkie Pie still retained her straight hair, and from how peaceful she looked at that moment, Dash couldn’t believe that it was the same pony she had been in a screaming match with only a short while before. They looked content and happy, but also completely exhausted, all of their manes and coats messy, dirty and unkempt. They also looked inseparable.

“I believe we should wake them, and then make our way to the the Library. It looks they’ve had enough for tonight,” said Luna.

“Yeah... I think I’m done for tonight too.”

~

“Wow, y’all look like you’ve been runnin’ a marathon!,” said Applejack, pulling her cart, as they walked down the dirt road away from the tent. It was the dead of night, and only the faint sounds of crickets could be heard in the background. Applejack was, of course, the only one among the group who still looked well-kempt. “Did y’all have fun at least? Boy howdy, ah sure met a lot of interestin’ characters tonight. Ne’er seen a filly dress like a colt b’fore! They were all real nice t’me, too, and kept complimentin’ m’hat!”

Pinkie Pie groaned loudly as she slowly walked alongside her friends, her head held down and her straight hair covering her forehead. “Haha, yeah, I’m *totally* partied out... ughhh...” Her hooves still ached to an incredible amount, and every step took a colossal effort.

“This was a *superb* event, Applejack. It’s a such a shame you didn’t join us when you had the chance! You would’ve fit in perfectly, I’m sure!,” exclaimed Rarity, who by now looked as if she hadn’t brushed her hair for days.

“Really now? Huh.” Applejack cocked an eyebrow, and whispered into Rainbow Dash’s ear, “Wow, now ah see what y’meant.” Rainbow Dash just smirked in response.

“Did you have fun, Luna?,” asked Twilight, who leaned against her partner happily as they walked together. “This was an amazing night. Do you think Princess Celestia would be interested in a letter about it?”

“Mmm, perhaps,” said Luna, smiling. “I’m certainly not letting you write anything tonight, however. You’re to get some much-needed rest. And yes, I had great fun. Thank you so much for inviting me.”

“Of course, dear,” replied Twilight, leaning in a little closer, closing her eyes and sighing happily. “I really do just want to get some shut-eye, to be honest.”

An exceptionally loud squeak could be heard from behind the group of them. All of them turned to stare at Fluttershy, who had the brightest, reddest blush on her cheeks that any of them had ever seen. She had her hooves over her face and was shivering slightly.

“W-whoa, Fluttershy, you okay?,” asked Rainbow Dash, walking over towards her.

“...oh dear oh gosh oh my oh no oh dear oh gosh...”

“Fluttershy, talk t’us honey, what’s wrong?,” asked Applejack.

“...I-I-I-I was d-d-dancing w-with s-so m-many ponies... o-oh dear... d-did I *really do t-that?!,*” she replied, her face still completely hidden underneath her pink mane and behind her hooves.

“Quite, darling. You seemed to be completely enthralled with your new-found sociability! Good on you, I say,” replied Rarity, smiling brightly and enthusiastically. “I’ve been waiting for so long for you to break out of your shell! It was so lovely to see you expressing yourself!” Fluttershy could only respond by squeaking even louder and falling over, her legs and wings completely locked.

“Oh, horse-feathers,” said Applejack, as she pulled over beside Fluttershy. “Fluttershy, it’s alright. No pony’s gonna judge yeh or anythin’. Why are y’all so scared? Didn’t y’have fun?” Fluttershy just squeaked

quietly in response, her muscles becoming tighter. "Ah deary me... Rainbow, could y'help me load 'er onto the cart? We can't just leave 'er here and ah really oughta be back home by now," said Applejack.

"Hmmm... give me a second, alright?," replied Dash, lowering her head closer to Fluttershy's ear. "Hey, Fluttershy? You remember all those ponies you hugged tonight?" Fluttershy only squeaked and nodded quickly. "Right. You remember how nice it felt, hugging them? Well, they felt that nice too. You probably made them really happy, just like how you make all the animals at your place feel happy when you hug them."

Fluttershy just peered from behind her hooves slowly, looking at Dash timidly. "Y-y-you r-really think so...?"

"Well, yeah. They were smiling when they hugged you, right?," replied Dash.

"Y-y-yeah..."

"So don't feel embarassed! You helped them have a good night."

Fluttershy just nodded, and slowly stood up, still blushing profusely. "I-I guess if you p-put it that way..."

Dash just smiled with a wide grin, and continued walking on. "Come on, everypony. Let's just crash at Twilight's place." Fluttershy continued to blush bright red despite Rainbow Dash's reassuring words, and the seven of them continued on into the black night, the path lit up only by Luna's moon, as they walked into Ponyville and left the crazy party behind.

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"AH-CHOO!"

"Oh dear..."

"AHHH--AHHHH--AH-CHOOOOO!!"

“Oh dear oh dear... you’ve caught a really bad cold, Pinkie Pie...,” said Fluttershy, holding a hoof to Pinkie’s forehead to check her temperature.

“Bwut hwow?!,” responded Pinkie, her nose and eyes puffy and red.

“Uhm... physical exhaustion can make your body more vulnerable like this... ooooh, I told you not to push yourself so hard, Pinkie Pie, you silly filly. Here, drink this. It’ll clear out your sinuses and make you feel a bit better...,” replied Fluttershy, handing her a warm cup of heavily-brewed tea. “Now, you have to drink it all, or it wont work, okay? Even if it tastes bad...”

“Ywes Fwuttershwuy,” responded Pinkie Pie, taking the mug between her hooves and sipping on it, a little annoyed at herself. “Ooooh, Mwinty!”

Fluttershy just smiled softly and moved to her ‘doctors bag,’ packing up the various things she had brought with her. Almost three days had passed since DJ PON-3’s dance party, and life had all but returned to normal in Ponyville. The day after the party, the town itself had been mysteriously quiet, and not much if anything had happened. The large venue that had held the party had been torn down, all of the garbage collected, and the music equipment packed up, as if it had never been there at all.

“Now you get lots of rest, okay? I don’t want to even hear about you getting out of bed for at least two days... you need all the rest you can get! Don’t make me have to come back and use *the stare* on you again...,” said Fluttershy, folding her forehooves.

“Ywes Fwuttershwuy,” replied Pinkie Pie again, sighing and looking up at her meekly.

“I have to go check up on Cheers-- um, Cheerilee, now... she ended up getting sick as well. Nurse Redheart wanted me to help as well with the checkups, since so many ponies ended up catching a cold,” continued Fluttershy, sighing.

Pinkie Pie just nodded and continued to drink down the herbal remedy that Fluttershy had prepared for her. Her pink mane had restored to its natural bouncy state, and with it, her sunny disposition - save for the fact she was sick, of course.



"Please send someone to fetch me if you need anything else," said Fluttershy finally, smiling as she put her bag over her neck and began to head for the window. Pinkie Pie smiled and waved as she continued to gulp down the tea. It was just then that Rainbow Dash flew in through the window and landed softly on the floor, folding her wings in together quickly.

"Oh, hey Fluttershy! How's it going? Taking care of Pinkie Pie?," asked Rainbow Dash happily.

"Oh yes, she should be well in a couple of days," replied Fluttershy, smiling back. "Just make sure she stays in bed until she's at least mostly over it, okay...?"

"Sure thing," replied Dash. Pinkie Pie just wrinkled her nose in disappointment, frowning.

"I really must go now... see you later, Pinkie, Dashie-- erm, Rainbow Dash..." continued Fluttershy, lightly hugging Pinkie and then Rainbow Dash, before stepping out onto the ledge and taking off out the window to the next patient on her list. The pair of them looked on as their friend disappeared into the distance.

"I can only stay for a few minutes since I'm on Weather Duty today, but how are you holding up there, Pinkie Pie? You look really out of it," said Dash, turning towards Pinkie Pie.

"Nah, I've had way worse! I mean, you remember when I had Poison Joke all over my tongue?! I couldn't even talk! You have ANY idea how AWFUL that was?! And WHOA! That stuff Fluttershy gave me worked really fast!! YAY!!," exclaimed Pinkie Pie, bouncing up and down underneath her sheets.

Rainbow Dash just laughed. "Pinkie Pie, settle down, okay? You gotta rest until you're better."

"Sigh, *fine~*," she replied, folding her forehooves and sitting back down.

"I'm just glad you're back to normal, Pinkie," replied Dash. "It was... kinda scary, that night."

"Yeah...", replied Pinkie, lowering her head. "I'm sorry I went all crazy like that. It really wasn't like me. I... I don't even know why I felt so bad about everything."

"You were scared, Pinkie. It's okay. Everypony gets scared sometimes."

"Yeah, but... I just laugh at whatever makes me scared. That's my Element, right? I don't know what happened...", replied Pinkie, looking away.

"Hey, don't be all sad *now*, okay? No pony is perfect, and everything is okay, right? Don't sweat it." Dash happily smiled.

"Okay!," exclaimed Pinkie, smiling back brightly. "So what did you think of the party, huh?! It was really cool!! DJ PON-3 was totally on the top of her game that night! Did you SEE how much she was sweating?!"

"It was... interesting, I guess. I really got into it near the end, when we came back in together."

"Whoa, really?! Awww, and I totally missed it!! I wanted to dance with Dashie again!," replied Pinkie, pouting cutely.

Dash just laughed. "It was nice, that's for sure, but... I don't really think it's my *thing*."

"Aw, why not though?! You said you got into it, right?"

"Well, yeah... but honestly, it felt like one of those 'only do it once' kinda things for me. I learned a lot, almost too much for one night, and... I just wanna figure out what it all means, before I even *think* about trying it again. Even when I *was* into it, I just... I don't even know what I felt. I think it's just too much for me, to be really honest," replied Dash, looking out the window.

"You promise it wasn't because of me?," asked Pinkie, meekly.

"Promise. You helped me figure out a lot about myself Pinkie, even if we did fight that night. It was nice, but... too much, y'know?"

"Okay... I believe you Dashie!," replied Pinkie, smiling brightly.

"I... should probably go back to work now. The others are waiting for me. I'll come back later to check on you, alright? Oh, and y'know, if you wanna work out with me sometimes, so you don't get all exhausted and depressed like that again, I'd be glad to have you along! A good exercise routine can help that a lot, you know," said Dash.

Pinkie Pie just giggled. "You know, you're still really nice, just like that night! I like this new and improved Dashie!!"

Rainbow Dash just blushed and looked off to the side, scratching behind her head. "Hey, don't tease me like that! I'm just trying to be a good friend, okay?!"

Pinkie Pie just giggled louder in response. "Well, when I get better, I'd love to! Tell me when and where and Pinkie Pie will be there!!"

"Great! How about sometime next week?"

"That'd be GREAT!!," exclaimed Pinkie, subtly bouncing again. Rainbow Dash smiled and began moving towards the window.

"Awesome! Well... see you around, Pinkie Pie."

"O-oh, and Dashie?!"

"Yea--?" Dash was cut off by Pinkie Pie quickly and forcefully hugging her. Dash said nothing, and just happily returned the hug.

"Thank you... so so so so much for helping me," said Pinkie, smiling up at Dash.

"No problem. I mean, I gotta look out for my friends, right?"

"Of course! That's why you're the best!!"

Dash smiled, and broke away from the hug, exiting the window. "See ya later!" She flapped her powerful, agile wings and flew up into the sky, meeting a group of other local pegasus ponies in the sky as they began organizing into groups, seemingly at Dash's command. After a few moments, they began flying off in different directions, tackling different cloud groups above Ponyville. Pinkie Pie sat down in front of the window atop of Sugar Cube Corner, looking out into the sky with the blanket still wrapped around her shoulders.

*(Rainbow Dash really is nice, isn't she?)*

"Yep!," said Pinkie Pie aloud, as she looked out the window, admiring her friend working in the clouds above. "She's totally awesome!"

*(We like her a lot, don't we?)*

"Of course! She's our bestest friend ever in the whole wide world, isn't she?"

*(... we... love her... don't we?)*

Pinkie Pie paused and looked down, smiling to herself as she held the blanket over her shoulders a little closer, before staring back up into the blue sky above. "Probably... but you know what, Pinkamina? I wouldn't trade the friendship we have for anything in the world, not even love! Because I know she'll always be there for me, and she'll always be my friend. And that's all I've ever wanted in the whole wide world..."

**--THE END--**