

Bittersweet

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Chapter 1

Diabetes is a terrible thing.

Rainbow Dash slammed through Pinkie Pie's window, knocking the cookie from her friend's mouth. "Pinkie! You can't! You know what the doctors said! Just one more binge could kill you!"

Pinkie looked up at her friend. Smiling with tears in her eyes, she gave a weak laugh. "It's... it's okay, Rainbow Dash. I'm... I'm not afraid." Rainbow Dash settled down to the floor, blinking at a crunching noise beneath her hooves. She looked down, a look of horror spreading over her face at all the crumbs. "And... it's... not like one cookie would make much difference now anyways."

"Pinkie! Wh... what have you done!" Rainbow Dash sped to turn the room apart, looking for that needle thing the doctors gave Pinkie.

"I already used that yesterday. I... It was torture Rainbow Dash... terrible. Haha... can you imagine it? What if you suddenly weren't able to fly anymore? What if Applejack suddenly became lame? Haha... ha... I couldn't help myself Rainbow... I... haha..."

"It's going to be okay, Pinkie! You're gonna be okay. We'll get you to the doctor. They can fix this. We can make you better."

Pinkie looked at the floor, mane hiding her eyes, laughs starting to sound more like sobs. "Can... can you do me a favor, Dash? ...can... can you hold me a bit? I... I keep laughing... but... it's not working as well as it used to... haha... ha... ha..."

Rainbow Dash took a hold of Pinkie Pie. "Don't worry Pinkie Pie, I'll get you to the doctor as fast as I can, just—just stop talking okay! Save your strength, please!"

"Aha... ha..." Pinkie Pie let out a weak cough. "Hey... Rainbow Dash...? I... I..."

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It was truly a beautiful day for a party.

They'd spared no expense this time, all the beautiful decorations covering the event. They'd held it outside, of course, and a surprising amount of people had come out for it. Dash could even see the balloons from here. Pinkie Pie always had the best parties, and this was no exception.

Dash usually sped into Pinkie Pie's parties with great enthusiasm, ready to play pranks on whatever unsuspecting pony that happened to walk into them. However, today was different. Instead of gliding excitedly towards the partygrounds, Dash proceeded with a slow trot. A tight knot wound itself in Rainbow Dash's stomach, making Dash feel slightly sick as she made her way towards the party.

"Thanks for coming, Dash!" Pinkie said, trotting alongside her friend as soon as she saw her. "I know you didn't want to come, which is kinda weird since you always loved to come to my parties, ready to play a prank on somepony, like the hot sauce in the punch prank! I always loved that one, it's always so funny, and you're always so funny Rainbow Dash! Even when you're kinda a grump like right now, which is fine since anypony can be grumpy sometimes, except for me, because if I was a grump I wouldn't be able to throw these super-duper fantastic fantabulishous parties all the time! And look!" Pinkie said, bouncing in her step. "You got all dressed up!"

Rainbow Dash laughed to herself. She didn't like to get dressed up, it wasn't her kind of thing. But today, she'd done it for Pinkie. "Yeah, well... I guess it's the least I can do for you."

Pinkie just smiled at her in response. But very suddenly, her expression changed to one of worry. "... listen, Dash... There's something I need you to do for me."

"Sure thing Pinkie!" Dash said as they stopped in place, surprised at Pinkie's uncharacteristically mellow response. "What do you need? I'll get it done super quick!"

"You need to forgive yourself for what happened the other day." Pinkie tilted her neck down so that she could look up at Dash, smiling at her sadly.

“Dash... you’ve always been my bestest best best friend, and I know you tried your hardest. So... no more frownie frown face, okay?”

“Pinkie Pie...” Dash just laughed again in response, shaking her head from side to side in disbelief. “You are so... random.”

“Yeah yup yuh-huh!” Pinkie said, still smiling. “So you’ll try? For me?”

“Yeah, yeah... fine.” Was the only thing Dash could muster, smiling back, if only so it would shut her up.

Unable to think of anything else they could say to each other, they simply stood there for awhile, sharing a moment together. But before too long it was interrupted by the sound of footsteps coming up behind them. Embarrassed to be caught in such a way, Dash lifted her head back up, smiling at her best friend Pinkie Pie. “So... aren’t you going to go get started?”

“On what?” Twilight Sparkle’s voice asked, from somewhere close behind her.

“On the party!” Dash turned around, grinning.” Y’know, chowing down, singing songs, playing pranks, bouncing around making sure everyone’s having a good time. The whole routine!”

For a moment, Twilight looked at Dash with concern. “... where do you think we are?”

Dash’s smile faded as she looked at the purple pony. The way her mane was combed so neat today. The way she was all dressed up in formal wear, just like Dash was. Slowly, Rainbow Dash turned around to look at the party. At all the people who had gathered there today. The beautiful decorations, all centered around the casket, with the three balloons tied to one of its handles.

It was truly a beautiful day for a party. Only one thing was missing.

Pinkie Pie was gone.

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Rainbow Dash was lounging around on a cloud, blankly staring into space. The funeral ended sometime ago, and Dash fled the scene before anypony could see her cry. After all, she was Rainbow Dash, the toughest, fastest flier in Equestria, and if other ponies saw her cry it would destroy her reputation! Rainbow Dash did what she could to hold back her tears during the funeral, but she was unable to stand it when they lowered Pinkie's casket into the ground, causing her to hide away in this cloud ever since.

"You're so stupid Rainbow Dash..." the pony said, muttering to herself. "You're Pinkie Pie's best friend, you should've caught her sickness before it got so bad..."

With all the sweets Pinkie Pie ate on a regular basis, it shouldn't have been a surprise to anypony that she contracted diabetes. Ponies usually could handle their sugar, and it seemed that Pinkie Pie quickly burned through all the sugar with her randomness. Pinkie and sweets together just seemed normal, just like Twilight Sparkle with her books or Fluttershy with her animals. No pony thought they needed to stage an intervention for Pinkie, and it was that mindset that caused this tragedy to happen.

By the time Rainbow Dash and the other ponies found out Pinkie had diabetes, it was already too late to heal the disease with magic. Pinkie had long past the point where she could be easily cured, hiding her illness the entire time to not make anypony worry about her.

Rainbow Dash shook the thoughts of Pinkie out of her head. What's the point in worrying over what happened in the past anyways? What happens, happens, right? It just totally wasn't in her style to dwell on the past, she was Rainbow Dash! Speeding forward into the Wonderbolts and into the future! Not letting anything or anypony slow her down!

Giving this pep-talk to herself, Rainbow Dash sped out of her cloud to do some exercises. If she spent all day moping around, her spot in the Wonderbolts would disappear! Dash flew up into the air over Equestria, reached her peak height, and then performed a nosedive straight to the ground.

"C'mon Rainbow Dash... just like always, show Equestria who's the greatest flier around here!" She prepared her wings to maneuver around

the clouds to spin them around, when suddenly, the image of Pinkie Pie's frail smile came back into her mind.

"I keep laughing... but... it's not working as well as it used to..."

Dash shook her head to get rid of the voice in her head, but by the time she did she plunged headfirst into the cloud, breaking her momentum. Rainbow Dash tumbled clumsily out of the cloud and roughly planted her face into another cloud right below her. And another. And another. Before she knew it, she already hit the ground.

"Argh... what's wrong with me?" Dash muttered, throwing herself back into the sky. "If I can't pull off a simple maneuver like that, I'll never get into the Wonderbolts!" Frenetically, Rainbow Dash flew through the skies again, attempting to skillfully weave around a row of clouds.

"Can... can you do me a favor, Dash? ...can... can you hold me a bit?"

Rainbow Dash repeated her previous maneuver, crashing through a series of clouds before painfully landing back on the ground.

"AAARGH! Why can't I do this!?" Rainbow Dash cried out angrily. "Alright, one more time!!"

She sped back up in the air, even higher than she did previously, the harsh wind stinging her eyes. She was going to do it. She was going to perform a sonic rainboom. As soon as she hit the highest a pony could possibly go, she dived right down towards Equestria. Rainbow Dash sped as fast as she could, pushing her wings to the absolute limit until she could feel the sound barrier giving way to her speed.

"Hey... Rainbow Dash... I... I..."

The sound barrier suddenly ricocheted Rainbow Dash away from the ground, launching her straight into a faraway cloud with its force.

"DARN IT!" Rainbow Dash hoofed angrily at the clouds she landed on. "Why can't I do my normal tricks?! Why can't I do a sonic rainboom anymore?! Why... why..."

A steady stream of rain started falling down from the cloud she was on.

“Why did the party have to end, Pinkie Pie?”

Chapter 2

It had already been a week since the funeral, and life in Ponyville had seemingly gone back to normal. Derpy Hooves delivered the mail every day, Bon-Bon and Lyra could be seen chatting in front of the bakery, and all in all everything seemed perfectly fine. However, if somepony looked closer at the scene, they would notice less spring in Derpy's step, a more hushed conversation from Bon-Bon and Lyra, and a much more solemn atmosphere overall. The loss of Ponyville's party pony struck deep in the hearts of everypony in Ponyville, even in the ponies that barely came in contact with Pinkie Pie. But it was the ponies closest to Pinkie Pie that felt the most loss...

"Where's that cotton-pickin' stripey-maned pegasus?! Ah thought there was s'posed to be a rainstorm t'day! Mah crops need waterin'!" Applejack stormed down the street in town, stopping each pony as she passed. "Y'all seen Rainbow Dash 'round here? How 'bout you over there? You three? No?" She stamped her hoof in frustration, moving over toward the Library. "Twilight! Spike? Either o' y'all home?"

The door opened and a tired looking purple unicorn stepped out. "Applejack? What's up?"

"Ya seen Rainbow Dash? It was s'posed to rain t'day, and ah ain't even seen a drop!"

Twilight sighed, shaking her head. "...I haven't seen her since... you know. She's seemed a bit... distracted since then." Applejack's expression softened. "I'll go talk to Fluttershy, AJ. She can go check on Rainbow Dash, and it'll give her something to do. She was pretty broken up, but is taking it well. I guess her time with animals has shown her how to deal with such things..."

Applejack nodded. "Thanks, sugarcube. Listen... ah... gotta go back to the farm. Ah've got lots o' waterin' to do, so ah'll see ya 'round, right?" Twilight nodded, waving a hoof as Applejack wandered off. On her way back, the farm pony paused to look at Mr. and Mrs. Cake's bakery, black ribbon

hanging across the door. With a sigh, Applejack shook her head and continued home.

As soon as Applejack left her sight, Twilight Sparkle sighed and stepped back into the library to stick a bookmark inside the book she had been reading. Ever since the funeral, Twilight shut herself off from the rest of pony society, occupying her mind with studying textbooks. It's already been a week since the funeral, but Twilight could still picture the funeral as if it only happened a couple hours ago.

"How many more books are you going to read until you go outside, Twilight?" Spike asked as he picked up some of the stray books Twilight left strewn across the floor. "I know it's tough, but you gotta lighten up a little, y'know? It's already been a week after all, and Princess Celestia wouldn't want to see her favorite student moping around."

"Spike! I..." Twilight stopped herself before she said anything venomous to Spike. Because he was a dragon, albeit a baby one, he was built with tougher stuff than the average everyday pony. Besides... he wouldn't throw away his dragon pride to openly mope around like Twilight Sparkle and the other ponies.

Twilight sighed. "Yeah... you're right Spike. But you have to understand that these things take time to get over, and not everypony can be as tough as you."

"Well... Princess Celestia didn't send you to Ponyville to hide away all day. You should be outside with your friends!"

"Yeah... I guess." Twilight magically inserted a bookmark onto the page she was on, and then promptly shut it closed. "I was going to head out right now anyways to see how Fluttershy's doing, so you clean up all this mess, okay Spike?"

Spike grumbled. "Yeah, yeah..." Twilight let off a small giggle. It was good to see some normalcy despite the somber atmosphere that hung about the Library. Twilight Sparkle took a deep breath before going off on her way towards Fluttershy's house.

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“C’mon... git down ya stupid apple!” Applejack yelled, repeatedly smacking the apple tree with her hind hooves. “Why ya gotta be so darn stubborn?!”

“You’ve been workin’ awful hard the past few days, AJ. Shouldn’t you take it a bit easier?” asked Big Mac, switching the piece of hay he was chewing on to the other side of his mouth. “Won’t do anypony no good to burn yerself out.”

“Who asked you, anyways?!” snapped Applejack, finally knocking down that single apple. “Ah’m just fine! Now where’s that waterin’ can? Ah’ve got work t’do! Get outta mah way!” She stomped off, barely missing bumping into Applebloom. “Somepony’s got ta make sure this farm keeps goin’!”

“Big Mac? What’s wrong with sis?” Applebloom asked timidly. “She’s yellin’ all the time these days...”

Big Mac gently patted the young filly’s head with one of his hooves. “Nothin’ to worry yer little head about, she’s just got a lot on her mind.”

“Does it have anything ta do with Pinkie Pie’s vacation the other day?”

Big Mac smiled nervously. He told Applebloom that Pinkie Pie was just going on a vacation a while, not wanting Applebloom to deal with the harsh reality of death just yet. He chewed slowly on his piece of hay, debating whether to tell Applebloom the truth or not, when finally...

“Eeeyup. AJ’s just kinda worried ‘bout Pinkie Pie. Ah’m sure she’ll be back to her normal self in no time. Now why don’t you go play with yer friends a while and let AJ work?”

Applebloom nodded and trotted away to go play with the other Cutie Mark Crusaders. As Big Mac saw her off, his heart tightened at the thought of breaking the news to a little filly like Applebloom. He knew he couldn’t hide the truth from her forever, but once he started lying about Pinkie Pie, it became harder and harder to bring himself to tell Applebloom the truth.

Big Mac sighed. “It can’t be helped ah guess. Ah’ll just have ta find the right moment to tell l’il Applebloom...”

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Twilight Sparkle took her time trotting over to Fluttershy's house, taking in the fresh air of Ponyville. It *has* been a while since she last stepped out of the library, and the fresh air *did* improve her mood just a bit. Although the large black ribbon tied around the Cake's bakery painfully reminded Twilight of Pinkie's absence.

"The greetings is to the muffins!" Everypony's favorite mailpony suddenly came crashing down in front of Twilight Sparkle, causing Twilight to recoil in surprise. "The muffin stuck on tree falls down to the grass!"

"Oh, uhm... hi, Derpy..." Twilight said nervously. She didn't really interact with Derpy Hooves that much, considering Spike handled most of her mail. But she did know that Derpy was a really kind mailpony with an unfortunate disability and a strange manner of speaking. Not that those things ever got in the way of her job of course, Derpy was as diligent as a mailpony could get.

"Salutations is to the muffins! The sun and moon fly away many, but rainy sprinkles hail down on sparkles!"

"Uh... sure Derpy." Twilight could never really make heads or tails of what this mailpony was saying, and it gave her a headache to even try. "Listen Derpy, I'd love to chat with you for a moment, but I really have to go someplace, so if you have something important to say—"

"Important is the rainy skies! Fly away sprinkles with the sun and moon! Party over, but heart goes on! Muffins to the good feelings!"

"Party... are you talking about Pi-Pinkie Pie?" It's been so long since she said Pinkie's name that Twilight stumbled over her words.

Derpy nodded enthusiastically in response. "Sprinkles fly away, but sugar still in heart! Good feelings to the muffins!" Derpy reached into her mailbag and pulled out a muffin. "Farewell to the sprinkles with sun and moon, but helium stay with the muffins!" She placed the muffin in Twilight's hooves and flew away as suddenly as she came. "Salutations is to the muffins!"

Twilight Sparkle had absolutely no idea what just happened, but looking at the blueberry muffin in her hooves... she thought Derpy just tried to comfort her. Tears welled up in Twilight's eyes, thinking about how Derpy comforted her regardless of the fact that they barely talked to each other. "She's... a really kind mailpony." Twilight said to herself as she nibbled on her muffin.

"*There* you are darling!" called a familiar, sophisticated voice. "You're just the pony I was looking for! Uh... is that a *muffin* you're holding there in your hoof?"

Wiping the tears from her eyes, Twilight Sparkle turned around and smiled meekly at Rarity. "Uhm... yeah." Twilight quickly downed the rest of the blueberry muffin Derpy handed her. "What's going on, Rarity?"

"Well, I do believe I've found a way to clear up all this *dreadful* dreariness around here. Of course, it would take a fashion genius such as *moi* to come up with such an *elegant* way to cheer everypony up."

That's great to hear, Rarity!" Twilight perked up, looking hopeful. "What's the idea?"

Looking at one of her hooves, Rarity let out a slight laugh. "It's laughably simple, really. I can barely even take credit for this thing. Who is the best at cheering other ponies up, I asked myself? Oh how I *thought* on this. And the answer came to me as I was looking to a shipment of fabrics I had obtained! Who is more cheerful than *Pinkie Pie*, I said to myself."

Twilight's smile drooped slightly. "... but Rarity... Pinkie is—"

"Yesyesyes," Rarity interrupted, "But what if you could *fix* that? Come now, Twilight Sparkle, I'm willing to pay anything you might want, and I'll go get you anything you need to do so.

"Rarity? ...what are you saying?"

Letting out another haughty laugh, Rarity looked Twilight in the eyes. "It's simple, really darling. I'd like for you to bring Pinkie back to us."

Twilight's smile faded to nothingness as she shook her head.

Rarity's smile cracked just a bit. "C-come now, Twilight Sparkle... Let us not be selfish here. I'm willing to do whatever it takes. You're the most powerful pony in Ponyville after all. *Surely* with your magic you'd be able to—"

Twilight cut her off. "I'm sorry Rarity... but... it's not possible. I may be good with magic, but even magic has its limits. I'd like to see Pinkie again as much as the next pony, but..."

"Well, what about Princess Celestia? You're on good terms with her, darling, *surely* you can write a letter to her and—"

Another shake of Twilight's head. "If it were possible, don't you think I would have tried that already? Do you know how many ponies try to ask Celestia to bring somepony back? Even with how powerful she is... it's beyond her ability. As much as it breaks my heart to say this... ponies should be left to rest."

Rarity shook her head, then huffed and tossed her mane out of her eyes. "Hmph! Well, now we see who Pinkie's *real* friends are, hm?"

"Rarity, I—"

"No, no, it's fine! Keep your little secrets, Twilight Sparkle. You may have given up, but I'm certain there is a way. I just have to find it. And if you won't help, I'll just have to find a way myself. Good day!" Turning and lifting her nose to the air, Rarity trotted away.

Twilight Sparkle looked after the purple and white unicorn, debating whether to follow her or not. Shaking her head and wiping the tears forming in her eyes, she refrained from following the other unicorn. Bringing back the dead was something everypony thinks of doing one day, but given enough time, they'll realize it's best to let sleeping ponies lie. Rarity just needs some time to accept the fact is all.

Twilight Sparkle let out a sad sigh and continued on her way to Fluttershy's. Hopefully she won't be too depressed...

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"That Twilight Sparkle," Rarity said to herself in a huff, "I can't *believe* she didn't even consider my idea. Honestly, you'd think a pony like her would do *anything* to help out one of her friends..." Rarity sighed. "...maybe I was asking too much of her. After all, Twilight Sparkle's really *is* the type who would do anything to help out one of her friends. The dearie probably *wasn't* lying about not knowing a spell to revive Pinkie. But still! I can't *believe* she wouldn't even try to look up a spell for that!"

Rarity hoofed at the ground in frustration. Pinkie Pie's absence had an abnormal effect on Rarity's business. Rarity always complained that Pinkie Pie kept her from getting any work done, and that without Pinkie around her business would go ten times more smoothly. But... there was just something... *off* when Pinkie wasn't around to interrupt her hard work. Every piece Rarity tried to design since her funeral was absolute tripe! A lack of inspiration, a lack of motivation, Rarity just didn't know *what* was causing her creativity to run dry!

"Ahh, it's just so *frustrating* having something missing from somepony's life!" Rarity lamented to herself. "Oh, woe is me, woe is Ponyville now that Pinkie's departed! But no worries, Rarity's on the case, she'll find a way to bring normalcy back into little ol' Ponyville!"

She said that, but honestly she had no idea where to even start. She was sure Twilight Sparkle would have the answer to Ponyville's problem. She *always* seemed to have it after all!

Rarity continued wandering aimlessly around Ponyville, pondering whatever in the world she's supposed to do next. "I haven't seen Sweetie Belle in a while..." Rarity said to herself, "Oh, I *do* hope she's not too distraught over these recent happenings. Oh well, I'm *sure* everything will go back to normal as soon as I bring back Pinkie Pie, oh yesyesyes!" Suddenly, another dash of inspiration hit Rarity as soon as she thought of Sweetie Belle.

"Sweetie Belle... the Cutie Mark Crusaders... Applebloom... that's *it*!! Zecora! I'm sure that zebra has a trick or two to bring Pinkie Pie back! I'm *sure* of it!!"

Rarity pranced excitedly towards the Everfree Forest, but as soon as she reached its outskirts, her wave of enthusiasm deteriorated. "Oh... it sure is drabby in there... maybe I should bring somepony else to assist me... oh!" Rarity smacked her front hooves together. "Rainbow Dash! She'll escort me through the Everfree Forest! And there's absolutely positively no way she'll refuse! But... where is that pony anyways? I haven't seen her since the funeral..."

Rarity hoofed at the ground again, pondering over where to find Rainbow Dash. But little did Rarity and the other ponies know, Rainbow Dash was dealing with problems of her own...

Chapter 3

“C’mon Rainbow Dash, pick up the pace!!”

The blue pegasus pony zoomed over the ground, swerving around the trees that stood in her way. Once or twice a branch clipped off a feather or two from Rainbow Dash’s wings, but Dash just kept on flying despite the recklessness with which she flew. After swerving through the trees, she quickly shifted her weight so her hind-hooves kicked off a wall, propelling her into a cloud up in the air.

“Is that all you got Dash? Seriously? Thought ‘Equestria’s greatest young flier’ would have more skill than a little newborn filly!!”

Rainbow Dash scowled. “I’d like to see you do better, Gilda!”

Gilda the Griffon grinned wildly at the pegasus pony. “Oh Dash, you *know* I can do better. Check it, you and me to that cloud up there. Think you can out-fly me with that speed of yours Dash?”

Rainbow Dash grinned bitterly. “Who do you think I am, Gil? I’m Rainbow Dash! The greatest flier in all of Equestria!!”

“Oh yeah? Prove it!” Gilda quickly lifted off, leaving Rainbow Dash back in the dust.

“Hey! No fair Gilda!!” Rainbow Dash chased after her.

The two fliers sped through the sky, Gilda in the lead with Rainbow Dash trying to keep on her tail. They both hit the cloud at the same time, although Rainbow Dash had a bit of trouble braking.

“Haha! I beat you there Rainbow Dash!” Gilda boasted.

“Yeah right, anypony could see that I *clearly* beat you by a hair!!” Dash retorted.

“More like *lost* by a hair!”

“Whatever, Gil!”

The two fliers let out a short fit of laughter at their pointless quarrel. However, while Gilda’s laugh was full, Rainbow Dash’s was somewhat strained.

“But man Rainbow Dash, was I surprised when I saw you roll into town the other day!” Gilda said, slapping the pony on the back. “What made you ditch those dweebs back at Ponyville anyways?”

“Oh... you know. I guess I just felt like they were crampin’ my style, you know?” Rainbow Dash lied. “Besides, the most awesome pony in Equestria is more suited to the city life then life in a little backwater town, right?”

“Well Dash, you’re about 20 percent cooler now that you’ve ditched all those lame-o’s back in Ponyville and started hanging with me out in Fillydelphia!”

“Uh...yeah, haha.” Rainbow Dash looked sadly out in the distance, back in the direction Ponyville was in.

After Pinkie Pie’s funeral, Dash ran away from Ponyville, hoping to get away from everything that reminded her of Pinkie Pie. She just couldn’t spread her wings if every time she flew up into the air, the Cakes’ bakery entered her field of vision and brought with it those painful memories. Luckily, when Gilda visited Ponyville before she left Dash some contact information so she could reach her, so Rainbow Dash packed her belongings and hightailed it to Fillydelphia.

“So Dash, why’s your flying been so messed up lately?” Gilda asked. “It’s not like you to be so sloppy when flying. Did those dweebs keep you from practicing or something?”

Rainbow Dash put on a strained smile. “Yeah... that’s it.” Ever since she arrived in Fillydelphia, Gilda thought insulting Dash’s old friends was free game now that Dash ‘ditched’ them. Besides, it’s not like she totally ditched them anyways, she was just taking a little unannounced vacation from Ponyville to recuperate, that’s all! Sure she left without warning... and sure

she didn't tell anypony about her leaving... but it's not like she's planning to stay in Fillydelphia forever!

Gilda playfully smacked Rainbow Dash on the back again a couple times. "Well whatever dude! We'll get you back on your wings in no time, just stick with me and it'll be just like our old days back at Flight Academy in Cloudsdale!" Rainbow Dash flinched at the mention of Flight Academy. "Oh... what's this?" Gilda said upon seeing Dash's reaction. "Don't tell me you're still sore about what happened back in Flight Academy! That was *years* ago man, you should be over it by now!"

"W-what are you talking about, Gilda?!" Rainbow Dash hurriedly said. "Why wouldn't I be over that lameness back in Flight Academy?"

"Sure you are, Rainbow *Crash*," Gilda said sarcastically. "Look dude, I'm cool if you're not over it, I know you have a really hard time dealing with tough things like that. I *was* your best friend for all those years in Flight Academy after all!"

"Uh, yeah..."

Gilda sighed. "Look bro, I can't be seen hanging with somepony who's all mopey-eyed and crap over stuff that's happened *years* ago. So how 'bout this?" Gilda grinned mischievously at Rainbow Dash. "Why don't you and I go over downtown and nick some cupcakes from one of the vendors over there?"

Rainbow Dash froze at the mention of cupcakes. "U-uhh... I'm not sure I'm too cool with that..."

"C'mon Rainbow Dash, you and I used to nick things all the time back in the day!" Gilda criticized, not noticing what was actually bothering Rainbow Dash. "Don't tell me that somepony's lost all their backbone after living in a soft-hooved place like Ponyville for all this time! What happened to that cool Dash that was down with anything, huh?"

"I-I'm down with it!" Rainbow Dash hurriedly said. "I'm just... allergic to cupcakes. That's all. No biggie."

"You're... allergic to cupcakes."

“Yeah! I’m allergic to cupcakes, can’t stand the sight of them! You got a problem with that Gilda?!”

“Woah dude, chill.” Gilda lifted off from the cloud and spread her wings. “Well if you can’t eat cupcakes, let’s just nick some apples or something. Unless you’re gonna say that you’re allergic to apples or something like that too.” Gilda sneered.

“No way, Gil! I’m totally down with stealing apples!” Rainbow Dash lied.

“Now *that’s* the cool Rainbow Dash I knew! C’mon, maybe after we’re done eating I can show you some cool hangout places, you dig?”

“Sure, Gil!” Rainbow Dash lifted off and hovered next to Gilda. “Let’s go!”

“Oh, and Rainbow Dash?”

“What is it Gil?”

Gilda placed a talon on Dash’s head and ruffled up her mane. “Don’t stress so much about what happened in Flight Academy man. You ran away from it *years* ago, so put that behind you and get over it already! It’s not like you have to run anymore after you did that sonic rainboom of yours, after all!”

“I-I didn’t even run away from it in the first place, Gilda!” Dash shouted.

“Sure Dash, sure.” Gilda teased as she suddenly zoomed ahead of Rainbow Dash. “Just keep telling yourself that, broski!”

“Don’t call me broski!!” Dash called out angrily, boosting forward to catch up to Gilda.

No matter what anypony said about her fallout from Flight Academy, she did *not* run away. She was just too cool to hang at a place like Flight Academy, that’s all! Who did Gilda think she was anyways? Just because she knew Dash for many years doesn’t mean she knows everything about her! After all, she was Rainbow Dash! The greatest young flier in all of Equestria! A future member of the Wonderbolts! And somepony like her... somepony like her...

Somepony like her would never run away from a challenge, right?

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“Ooh little Angel Bunny... won’t you come out to eat your lunch?” Fluttershy was crouched over Angel’s tiny rabbit-hole, trying to coax the bunny to come out to eat his lunch. “I got the freshest little carrot for you Angel, and if you don’t come out then it’ll go bad...” Angel groggily crept out of his home and shot a grumpy look to Fluttershy.

“Ooh, there you are Angel,” Fluttershy said, completely ignoring the look Angel shot her. “Here’s a nice yummy carrot to fill up your little bunny belly this afternoon!”

Fluttershy brought a carrot out from her saddlebags and gave it to Angel. The bunny began appraising the goods, gingerly felling the texture with his paws and giving it a cautious sniff. He then took a cautious nibble from the carrot, before throwing it down haughtily in disgust.

“Oh... no Angel, you can’t waste food like that.” Fluttershy nuzzled the carrot closer to Angel with a gentle smile on her face. “Come on, be a good little bunny and eat your lunch.”

Angel crossed his paws and stuck his nose up in the air as if to say, “You interrupted my afternoon nap for this?”

“Come on Angel... come on, little bunnies like you need to eat their food if you want to grow nice and healthy...”

“Hi Fluttershy!”

“EEP!” Fluttershy jumped in surprise, scattering the carrots and other vegetables in her bag all over the place. Angel quickly took advantage of the opportunity and grabbed as many as the vegetables as he could before hurrying back into his den. “O-oh no Angel ,you can’t take all that food, it’s for the other animals...”

Twilight Sparkle quietly stepped next too Fluttershy. “Sorry, Fluttershy, I thought it’d be good if I greeted you energetically this afternoon...”

“Oh, no Twilight, it’s not your fault.” Fluttershy mumbled, staring at her hooves. “It’s my fault for being such a scaredy-pony all the time. Don’t blame yourself. Please. Don’t.”

“If you say so Fluttershy,” Twilight said, “Say, do you think you can spare a few minutes to talk for a bit?”

“Oh, I was feeding the animals right now... but it’s okay Twilight!” Fluttershy hurriedly added, seeing the expression on Twilight’s face. “Angel took most of my food anyways, so, um, I’d have to wait for him to finish eating so, um, well... I have time.”

“That’s great Fluttershy!” Twilight Sparkle replied enthusiastically. “Not about Angel stealing your food though, that’s horrible.”

“Oh, no, it’s okay.” Fluttershy said. “Angel does this all the time, so I’m used to it, so, um, he’ll give back what he doesn’t eat, which is usually most of it, so, um... yes.”

Twilight grinned nervously. “So...”

“So...” Fluttershy hoofed shyly at the ground.

“...so...”

“...so...”

“Uh...” Twilight wasn’t exactly sure where to start. It’d be rude if she just asked Fluttershy where Rainbow Dash was right off the bat after all.

“um...”

“So Angel Bunny!” Twilight said, breaking the awkward silence. “How long have you been looking after him anyways?”

“Oh, Angel Bunny?” Fluttershy suddenly perked up after being asked about Angel. “Well, you see, I’ve been looking after Angel for the longest time, I was there when he was born and watched him grow up ever since!”

“E-ever since he was born, Fluttershy?” Twilight asked nervously. Fluttershy’s sudden bouts of enthusiasm always left anypony unsure of how to react.

“Mhmm, ever since he was born.” Fluttershy smiled, looking back on her memories. “You see, back when I was a little filly, my mommy and daddy looked after me and the rest of the animals. And cute little Angel Bunny’s parents were a pair of those animals.”

“Ah...” Twilight Sparkle smiled at the thought of little filly Fluttershy playing in a flower field with her parents and the animals. “So you’ve taken care of Angel ever since you were a filly?”

Fluttershy nodded. “My mommy and daddy let me take care of Angel Bunny and his parents, so Angel is actually the first animal I started taking care of.”

“Is that why you never use the Stare when it comes to Angel?”

Fluttershy’s happy expression faded away after hearing Twilight’s question.

“Is something wrong, Fluttershy?” Twilight asked.

“Oh, no, not really, well... kind of.” Fluttershy timidly shuffled her hooves. “You see... I was a shy little filly, even shyer than I am now actually... and, well, um...”

“Angel’s parents died.”

“Oh... I’m so sorry Fluttershy.”

“No, don’t be, it’s okay, well it’s not but, well, it was a long time ago so... yeah.” Fluttershy brushed her mane out of her eyes, revealing a distant expression. “I was broken up for a while after that; I couldn’t talk to anypony for days. My parents tried to coax me out of hiding, but... it didn’t work.”

Twilight hesitated before asking, “So... how’d you get over it?” She hoped she wasn’t prying too much into Fluttershy’s life.

“Oh... well, you see... Angel Bunny saved me.”

Upon hearing her name once again, Angel stuck his head outside of his burrow and gave Fluttershy a look before giving back most of the food he stole. The bunny gave a little 'hmpf' noise as if to say, "It's not like I did it for you or anything, I just wasn't hungry is all."

Fluttershy gave a small smile to Angel and nuzzled the small bunny. Angel gave off an annoyed look, but did nothing to stop Fluttershy's nuzzling.

"You see, Twilight, little Angel Bunny here cheered me up by giving me a bouquet of flowers." Fluttershy explained. "He reminded me that there were still things I needed to take care of, and I shouldn't hide away all day. His flowers gave me the courage to face the world again, you see. Although..." Fluttershy blushed. "... I still hide away from everypony a lot."

Twilight smiled warmly at Fluttershy's story. "I guess you've dealt a lot since then huh?"

"Oh yes, Twilight," Fluttershy said, "With all the animals I look after, I've learned a lot about the circle of life and how to cope. Especially after my parents departed—"

Twilight let out a small gasp of shock.

"—to Trottingham to look after the animals over there. Is something wrong Twilight?"

"Oh... no." Twilight said sheepishly.

"Oh... well, since then I've looked after the animals in Ponyville myself, and had to deal with a lot of things myself, but it always hurts to lose one of my little animal friends no matter how often it happens..."

"Yeah... cope." Twilight Sparkle gave the pegasus in front of her a hug.

"Um... Twilight?"

"Oh, um, I'm sorry!" Twilight quickly got out of the hug and hoofed at the ground, embarrassed. "Didn't mean to..."

“No, that’s okay, it was... nice.” Fluttershy smiled.

“So...I actually came here for a reason.” Twilight Sparkle admitted, changing the subject. “I know it’s kind of rude to come over and spring a question like this on you but...”

“Oh, no, I’m sure it’ll be no trouble, really, go ahead.”

“Well... have you seen Rainbow Dash around?” Twilight asked.
“Applejack’s looking for her, apparently Rainbow Dash hasn’t been performing her weather duties lately...”

“Oh, Rainbow Dash? I, um...” Fluttershy bit her lip timidly. “I... no, I haven’t seen her.”

“... you sure about that, Fluttershy?”

“Honestly, truly!” Fluttershy insisted. “Oh, um, I’m sorry Twilight, I probably disappointed you...”

“No, don’t worry about it, just thought I’d ask.” Twilight smiled warmly at the yellow pegasus pony. “I got to talk to a friend again after all. Sorry I’ve been cooped up this whole week.”

“Oh, no, don’t be, everypony copes in their own way. But they feel better eventually.” Fluttershy smiled shyly. “I hope you feel much better Twilight.”

“Oh, I do, and your story helped a lot.” Twilight Sparkle glanced at the sky.
“Well, I guess I need to go head over to Sweet Apple Acres to tell Applejack I couldn’t find Rainbow Dash. And I should probably talk to Rarity a little bit later on too...”

“Oh, wait, sorry, Twilight?” Fluttershy stopped Twilight before she set off to Applejack’s farm.

“What is it Fluttershy?”

“You’ve got a little... something... on your lip... um...” Fluttershy put a hoof on Twilight’s lip and brushed something off it. “Oh, it’s a muffin crumb. Did Derpy give you one of these earlier today?”

“Derpy? Yeah, how did you know?” Twilight asked, confused.

“Oh, um, it’s just, well, Derpy gave everyone muffins the day after, um... the funeral... so, um, I guess she just gave you yours now since she never got your mailing address is all, I think.”

Well... Twilight never did turn in her residency application to Ponyville since Spike handled all her transactions...

“So... that pony kept my muffin ready until she saw me?”

Fluttershy nodded. “Um, yes, she did. Derpy’s a really nice mailpony...”

Twilight let out a warm smile. “She really is... maybe I should use the Ponyville Post Office more often, give Spike a break sometimes... oh!” Twilight quickly turned tail. “Sorry Fluttershy, look at the time, I have to head over to Applejack’s! I’ll see you later!” Twilight Sparkle galloped off into the distance.

“Twilight’s such a nice pony...” Fluttershy said to herself.

Angel pretended to gag as if to say, “You fillies and your friendship, it makes me sick.”

“Don’t worry Angel Bunny, I haven’t forgotten about you.” Fluttershy warmly nuzzled Angel Bunny.

The small rabbit let out a small ‘bleh’ sound as if to say, “Don’t think you can get all touchy-feely now that we’re alone. Honestly, geez.” But Angel still did nothing to get away.

“Oh Angel, you’re such a silly bunny... oh?” Fluttershy squinted out into the distance. She thought she could spy a purple and white pony trotting towards her...

Chapter 4

“Ah can’t believe ya’d lie ta me Big Mac!!” Applebloom shouted fiercely, tears streaming down from her eyes.

“Now Applebloom,” Big Macintosh said slowly. “It’s not that ah wanted ta lie to ya, but—”

“Ah see how it is Bic Mac!” Applebloom cut off. “Ya’ll think ah’m too much of a li’l filly to handle the truth! Well ah’ll show ya Big Mac! Ah’ll show ya that ah’m a big pony! Ah’ll show all o’ ya’ll!” Applebloom turned tail and sprinted away, leaving the red stallion by himself, wondering what to do.

Big Mac sighed. “That Applebloom... don’t wanna be treated like a filly yet not ol’ enough to be treated like a full grown pony... guess I should let her alone for a bit for her to cool off.” He turned around to head back to the field, when he bumped into a certain purple unicorn.

“Eyaa!” Twilight Sparkle let off a startled yell before she fell over. “Oww...”

“Oh, well if it ain’t Twilight Sparkle.” Big Mac said, shifting over the hay in his mouth to the other side. “Sorry ‘bout that, didn’t see ya there.”

“No, no, it’s quite alright.” Twilight picked herself back up and brushed some of the dirt off her mane. “It’s my fault for not calling out to you right away.”

“Oh... ah guess you saw the whole thing then?”

Twilight kicked around a hoof sheepishly. “Well... uh... just a bit. I didn’t catch the whole thing... is something wrong with Applebloom?”

The large stallion sighed again as he started chewing on a new piece of hay. “She’s jus’ a li’l sore that ah hid from her the fact that Pinkie Pie... ah, well, you know. Didn’t think she could take it, being the li’l filly she is. But ah guess it’s my fault for treat’n her that way. Now that her friends gone and

tol' her 'bout the whole thing, ah guess ah'm bein' punished for tryin' to shelter her too much."

"Don't be too hard on yourself, Big Mac." Twilight said, "You just did what anypony would do to protect their kin. But you do have to realize that Applebloom can't be your little filly sister forever you know, she's going to grow up someday."

"Ah guess... but ah'm pretty sure you didn't come here to Sweet Apple Acres to talk to this here stallion, Twilight Sparkle." Big Mac pointed out. "Ah can handle mah own problems, Twilight, so why don't ya go ahead and tell me what's brought ya here today."

"Oh... well, I'm looking for Applejack. Do you know where she is?"

Big Mac hesitated. "Well... ah know where she is, but ah'm not sure if ya wanna talk ta her right now though."

Twilight Sparkle tilted her head. "Why not?"

"Well... AJ's been a bit on the edge lately since the funeral." Big Mac explained, "And she prob'ly ain't cooled down enough yet ta talk prop'ly."

"I'm sure it can't be that bad." Twilight said.

"Ah guess you'll see for yerself then, Twilight." Big Mac pointed her hoof towards the apple fields. "AJ should be somewhere in that direction, you'll know yer close when ya hear her gruntin'." The stallion turned his back on Twilight. "Now if ya'll excuse me, it's a slow day on the job, so I s'pose I should talk ta li'l Applebloom right 'bout now."

"Yeah, okay, see you later Big Macintosh!" Twilight waved the red stallion goodbye and headed into the apple grove to find Applejack.

As the season mandated, the apple trees were blooming beautifully, with lush apples of every color growing from the branches of every tree. The tart scent of apples filled the air, and Twilight Sparkle could almost taste the apples from their scent. She couldn't see how anypony could be cross when surrounded by such serene beauty.

Twilight heard a hollow clopping sound out in the distance. That must've been Applejack bucking apples off the apple trees. Twilight Sparkle quickly started trotting towards the sound, hearing the sound grow louder and clearer with each hoof she put forward. As the unicorn finally entered the clearing, she spotted Applejack bucking trees just a couple of meters in front of her.

The orange earth pony looked worn out. Her mane was all frazzled and her saddlebags were already overflowing with apples. Next to Applejack was a wagon containing a bunch of the same saddlebags filled to the brim with apples. It looked like Applejack already did enough work for the entire week, yet the earth pony was still working as if harvest season was just around the corner.

"Uhh, Applejack?"

The earth pony continued bucking the tree she was working on.

"Applejack?" Twilight Sparkle repeated.

She still paid no heed to Twilight.

"APPLEJACK!!"

"I GON' HEARD YOU THE FIRST TIME!" Applejack bellowed. "Can't somepony see when another pony is workin'?! Honestly!" She turned around and saw Twilight with a hurt expression on her face. "Oh... Twilight, didn't know it was you sugarcube. Sorry 'bout that."

"Um... no worries... you okay Applejack? You seem kinda... worn out."

"Worn out? Naw, ah'm as energetic as a parasprite at an all-you-can-eat buffet!" Applejack reassured Twilight. "So ya find Rainbow Dash yet, sugarcube?"

"Uh... sorry, Fluttershy didn't know where she was. It seems nopony has even seen her since the funeral either."

“Shucks... guess ah should call up Cloudkicker and get that pony up on cloud duty.” Applejack went back to bucking the apple tree she was working on. “Well thanks anyway, sugarcube, sorry ta take up yer time.”

“Oh... it’s no trouble at all Applejack.” Twilight Sparkle stood around, hoofing awkwardly at the ground.

“You still here, sugarcube? Somethin’ botherin’ ya?”

“Well... not me per se but,” Twilight hesitated. “Is something bothering you, Applejack?”

“Didn’t we go over this?” Applejack asked. “Ah’m totally fine, jus’ got a huge order ah gotta fill up. Now if you’ll let me alone sugarcube, ah gotta git back ta work!”

“Okay Applejack, I guess I’ll go now...” Twilight said dejectedly. However, before she even took two steps, a thought suddenly surfaced in her mind. “Wait a minute... Big Mac said that it was a slow day today!”

Applejack’s kick missed her target, causing the pony to lose her balance and fall over. She quickly picked herself back up and brushed back her mane. “O-oh! Ah guess ah forgot to let Big Mac know ‘bout the order! Guess ah’ll have ta let him know earlier, t-thanks for remindin’ me Twilight!”

“... Applejack, don’t all the orders for Sweet Apple Acres go through Big Macintosh?”

“I-Is that so?!” Applejack stammered, her voice noticeably going up a pitch. “W-well, Big Mac’s been letting me handle the las’ couple orders, jus’ so ah know what ta do in case somethin’ happens to him!”

“Who ordered all these apples?”

Applejack was thrown off by the sudden question. “Well, ah, uh... the apple bakery down at... Coltsdale?”

“Uh-huh. Right Applejack.”

“What’s it to ya anyways, Twilight Sparkle?!” Applejack huffed. “What ah do is mah business, and ponies like you should keep their hooves outta it!”

Twilight flinched at Applejack’s harsh words. “Applejack, if you have a problem, you can just come out and say so.”

“Mah *problem* is that *somepony* can’t figure out when she ain’t wanted here!” Applejack fiercely bucked at the apple trees.

“Applejack, it’s not like you to be so tense.” Twilight worriedly put a hoof on Applejack’s shoulder. “You sure you’re fine?”

“Gosh darn’it Twilight Sparkle,” The orange earth pony shook Twilight’s hoof off her shoulder. “Ah already told ya that there ain’t NOTHIN’ wrong with me!”

“You’re a horrible liar Applejack.” Twilight pointed out, her eyes tearing up. “You’ve been spending all your time at the farm for the past week! It’s nowhere near harvest season, and I’m pretty sure no major order just *happened* to come in right after Pinkie Pie’s funeral—”

Applejack stomped her hoof down, causing the unicorn to meekly shut her mouth. “Now you listen here Twilight Sparkle, what in the name of Celestia have *you* been doing the past week? Wastin’ the time of everypony in Ponyville, spendin’ all day in that library of yers while everypony else was doin’ their jobs! And you got the *nerve* ta call me out!?”

“Applejack, I-I—” Twilight choked on her words, trying to fight back the stream of tears.

“That’s what ah thought.” Applejack turned her back on the sobbing purple unicorn. “Now go git and let me do mah job, jus’ like everypony who’s name ain’t Twilight Sparkle!”

“A-Applejack... I...*hic*... I... I’m sorry!” Twilight Sparkle turned tail and ran off crying, leaving the orange earth pony by herself.

Applejack went back to bucking the apple tree she was working on. She bucked once, twice, three times, apples falling with every buck. The earth pony kept bucking and bucking, trying to get the very last of the apples

from the tree. Thwack. Thwack. Thwack. She spent several minutes driving her hooves in the bark of the tree, when suddenly, her aim slipped, throwing her to the ground beside the apple tree.

The earth pony slowly picked herself back up and glanced at the tree she was working so hard on. The apples were already long gone, and have been for the past while. Applejack stared blankly at the apples that lie on the ground, and saw her distorted reflection on the apple.

Drops of water fell onto the apple. Soon enough, rain started showering all over the grove.

“Ha... haha... ha...” Applejack laughed bitterly. She tilted her head up to look at the sky, and saw a pegasus pony push the last of the rainclouds over Sweet Apple Acres. “Guess Cloudkicker went ‘n did Rainbow Dash’s job for her...”

Applejack collapsed back to the ground and buried her head in her hooves. “Ah guess... now that it’s rainin’... ah don’t hafta worry ‘bout anypony seeing me cry... ha... haha... *sob*... ha...”

Under the cover of the clouds and rain, the earth pony openly let her tears flow. This moment was the only time she allowed herself to show her weaknesses, away from anypony who might see.

Her tears contained every emotion she tried to hide the past week. The sadness from Pinkie Pie’s departure. The anger from not being able to do anything to prevent it. And most of all...

The regret from hurting one of the best friends anypony could ever hope to have.

--

Fluttershy and Rarity were venturing through the Everfree Forest towards Zecora’s place. The yellow pegasus pony had absolutely no idea how she even got roped into following Rarity, she just knew she couldn’t get in a single word to object to Rarity’s proposal to venture into the Everfree Forest. Everything just happened so fast that she didn’t even know what Rarity was proposing!

“Come on, darling, Zecora’s house is only a few more minutes away!” Rarity said cheerfully, trotting at a brisk pace in front of Fluttershy.

“Um... R-Rarity...? I, uh, um—”

“Hush hush *hush*, darling!” Rarity exclaimed, holding a hoof out in front of Fluttershy. “You wouldn’t want to alert any of the *nasty* creatures that might be lurking around here!”

“... you’re the one who’d probably alert them.” Fluttershy muttered.

“Hmm, what was that darling?” Rarity inquired.

“N-nothing...” the pegasus pony squeaked. “W-why do you need me anyways...?”

“*Because*, you silly filly, what if I get *attacked*?” Rarity dramatically put a hoof to her forehead. “Oh, just think if one of these *creatures* got a hold of little old me! They’d tear me apart in a heartbeat! Oh no no *no*, we can’t have that, can we?”

“B-but... I don’t think I could protect you Rarity...”

“But *darling* you have the Stare!”

“B-but...”

“Not another word! See,” The unicorn pushed back a bush, revealing Zecora’s hut. “We’re already here!”

The Rarity took the lead and burst through Zecora’s door, Fluttershy gingerly following behind. They were greeted with Zecora mixing up another strange brew, and the two already learned not to question the strange things Zecora did.

“Oh if it isn’t my two little ponies, what compels you come here on this journey?”

“Oh Zecora, it’s been *too* long, darling.” Rarity flipped back her mane, aiming her sight directly at the zebra. “Now tell me, how’s life been for you in this forest?”

“I can tell you want something from the look on your face, so why not skip the greetings and cut to the chase?” Zecora clopped her hooves and gave her full attention to Rarity.

“Oh that’s what I like about you, Zecora, getting straight down to business!” Rarity cleared her throat. “Now, I’m *sure* you’ve heard of the trouble Ponyville has been going through for the past week, with everypony being all doom and gloom all the time. I was sifting through some fabrics the other day and thought to myself ‘oh, whatever shall I do to rid this town of its gloominess.’ And then, the perfect idea came to me to elegantly resolve all of Ponyville’s problems!

“Why not just bring *back* Pinkie Pie?” Rarity exclaimed.

Fluttershy’s eyes widened at the sound of Rarity’s idea. “U-um, excuse me, um, I think I, um, are you sure that, um, uh, well—”

“Oh Fluttershy, I’m quite sure of my brilliant idea!”

“B-but, um, I—”

“Shush now, darling.” Rarity brushed off Fluttershy’s frantic stuttering. “Now I *tried* asking Twilight Sparkle for some assistance, but the little darling didn’t know of any spell to bring Pinkie Pie back! So that’s why I come here, to ask you if you know of any spell or incantation to bring laughter back into Ponyville!”

Zecora put a hoof to her chin, pondering over Rarity’s request. “You do know in your unicorn head, that the spell that you seek is to bring back the dead?”

“Yesyesyes, I already know that. But there’s always been a spell for everything else, so why not a spell to bring loved ones back to life?” Rarity smiled awkwardly. “There *is* such a spell, right darling?”

The zebra was silent, deep in thought. She carefully surveyed Rarity's expression, debating over whether or not to answer the unicorn's question.

"U-um, I guess there is no spell then." Fluttershy awkwardly cut in. "I'm so sorry to have wasted your time Zecora, come on Rarity, let's go. She, um, doesn't have an answer so—"

"No!" Rarity stomped her hoof. "I am not leaving until Zecora gives me a definitive answer!" She firmly looked Zecora in the eye. "Is there a way?"

Zecora sighed. "There is a way to get what you seek, but the method to obtain it is not for the weak."

Rarity's eyes gleamed at the new information. "So there *is* a way! Tell me what it is, darling, quickly!"

"I myself do not hold the solution, but by taking a detour you will reach your conclusion." Zecora pointed towards the west. "You must pass through all that hinders, and arrive at the Ruins of the Ancient Pony Sisters."

"Why?" Rarity asked excitedly. "Is there a book there? A secret artifact? What's there, darling?!"

Zecora shook her head. "All I can do is point you the direction, everything else is up to your discretion."

"Well I suppose I just have to settle for that then!" Rarity turned on her heel and headed out the door. "Come on, Fluttershy, let's head over to the Ruins!"

"U-um, w-wait!" Fluttershy followed Rarity outside of Zecora's hut. "I-I don't think this is a good idea Rarity!"

As soon as the door shut behind the two ponies, the zebra sighed went back to brewing her stew. "That little pony is going in over her head; I do dearly hope she doesn't fall in with the dead!"

--

Outside Zecora's hut, the two ponies could be seen heading deeper into the forest, the yellow pegasus pony failing to get her words through Rarity. However, unbeknownst to the both of them, a sinister presence was watching their every step...

"Is that the pony? The one right there?" A gruff voice asked.

A shadowy figure responded to him. "Yeah, that's the pony, the one with the purple mane."

The gruff voice cackled. "Lucky for us she ventured in the forest herself. That makes our job much easier!" The gruff voiced one attempted to move out of the clump of bushes he was hiding in, but paused. "What should we do with the yellow one? Tear her apart? Have her as a snack?"

The shadow shook his head. "No, this isn't our territory. If we kill anyone in Equestria that Princess will know we're here... We signed a treaty, no wolves allowed in Equestria." The shadow bared its fangs. "Knock the yellow one out and take the purple one. We'll then take as many jewels as we can and hightail it back to our homeland."

"Won't taking that purple pony over the border break the treaty?"

The shadow smirked. "Not if nopony knows she was taken over the border... A lot of scary things live in the Everfree Forest, it wouldn't be surprising if one of those things came up and spirited that pony away..."

"Kehehe, you're great boss!" The gruff voiced wolf exclaimed. "So should I go get her now?"

The shadow paused, and then nodded his head. "Make it clean though, I don't want that yellow pony harmed too badly."

"I'm on it boss!" The other wolf jumped from the trees, and descended on the two unsuspecting ponies...

Chapter 5

Twilight Sparkle was lying down emotionlessly on her bed, her eyes red from crying. She ran straight back home from Sweet Apple Acres and flung herself into her bed, crying her eyes out from the pain of Applejack's words. After two straight hours of crying, she finally settled down into an emotionless stupor and spent the time just staring the constellation chart on her wall.

The unicorn knew in her heart that Applejack didn't mean to hurt Twilight the way she did. The earth pony just had a different way of coping, that's all. However, knowing that fact did nothing to ease the pain Applejack's words inflicted onto Twilight. After all, those hurtful words did hold some truth to them...

Twilight shook her head. It wouldn't do anypony any good to get stuck in a cycle of sad thoughts. All Twilight had to do was get back to work and... what was her job anyways? Unlike Applejack or the other ponies, Twilight was still a student, so no job aside from studying could come to her mind.

The purple unicorn groggily forced herself out of bed and surveyed the room. Books were scattered all across the floor, some books on arithmetic, others on biology, none of them catching Twilight's interest. These books shouldn't be all over the floor anyways!

"Spike!" Twilight called out. "Spike! Clean up these books!"

Silence filled the room. Twilight forgot that Spike's been out of the library ever since she got back in. If he was going to take an afternoon walk, the least he could do was clean up before he left...

Twilight groaned as she plopped herself back onto her bed. As she did, her eye caught sight of a piece of parchment lying alongside a lopsided stack of books. *Come to think of it*, Twilight thought, *I haven't sent a friendship report for the past week... I just haven't really learned anything about friendship since the funeral...*

Suddenly, the sound of knocking filled the library, startling Twilight Sparkle out of her bed. She was about to call for Spike to open the door, before once again remembering that the dragon was out.

“Agh, what’s that Spike doing to be out for more than two hours anyways...” Twilight muttered to herself. The knocking continued to echo through the room, although now that she thought about it, the knocking was strangely subdued to really be called a knock.

“Coming!” Twilight called out as she galloped towards the door. She pulled the door open and was greeted by a sorry sight.

“F-Fluttershy?! What happened to you?!”

The yellow pegasus pony was bruised and battered. Her feathers were disheveled and sticking out at odd directions, and her normally flowing pink mane was tangled with twigs and leaves. There were a bunch of shallow cuts on her body with faint traces of blood oozing out of them, and she wore an incredibly distraught expression.

“T-Twilight!” Fluttershy struggled to say between breaths. “R-Rarity! She, and, um, it, we, in the, um, forest and, uh, um, I—”

“Fluttershy!” Twilight exclaimed worriedly. “Take a moment to catch your breath, and calmly tell me what’s going on!”

Fluttershy took three deep breaths and paused before breaking the bad news to Twilight.

“Rarity’s been kidnapped!!”

--

“Wake up, pony!”

A cold splash of water slapped Rarity’s face. The shock caused her to regain consciousness quickly, and the unicorn was greeted by a looming pair of sharp teeth.

“Gyaah!” Rarity took a startled leap back. She frantically surveyed her surroundings. From what she could tell from the unrefined greenery, she was somewhere in the Everfree Forest, although she had no idea exactly where.

“Wait, what’s going on here?!” Rarity inquired with her usual haughty tone of voice. “Who are you two, and how dare you handle a lady the way you did?!”

“Shut it, pony.” The one who spoke was a shadowy figure, whose features Rarity couldn’t quite make out in the darkness.

“Yeah, yeah! Keep it down, pony!” The other one who kidnapped Rarity had a gruff voice, and a grey coat of fur.

“Well aren’t you two rude?” Rarity criticized. Maybe the same method she used before with the Diamond Dogs would work on these two too. “And what’s with this ‘pony’ talk, I do have a name you know!”

“I told you to shut it, pony!” The shadowy one said.

“That is *not* how you ask a lady to do you a favor!” So far getting on their nerves seemed to work. “But I suppose you cannot really refer to me properly if I don’t introduce myself. You may call me Miss, or you can call me Rarity, or you can call me *Miss* Rarity, and maybe—”

“Shut your mouth, pony!” The gruff voiced one shouted.

“I thought I told you to call me ‘Miss’,” Rarity scoffed. “You didn’t even give me your own names, even if you are kidnappers the very least you could do it introduce yourselves to me!”

The shadowy one sighed. “Call me Shadow. Call him Gruff. Now stop talking before you regret it.”

Rarity ignored what she thought was an empty threat and continued her verbal assault. “Shadow? Gruff? Seriously? The shadowy one is called ‘Shadow,’ and the gruff voiced one is called ‘Gruff?’ Well *obviously* your parents didn’t have a good naming sense. Those names lack any creativity whatsoever! And those coats of yours are so *filthy*! I would absolutely die if

my mane was messed up like that, wouldn't you? Oh wait, obviously not, my apologies. And I dare say, the *smell* you two are emitting is absolutely—”

A paw suddenly grabbed the back of Rarity's head and shoved it into the ground. The surprised pony tasted the foul texture of the dirt before she realized what was going on, and she struggled with every ounce of strength she had to break free, but the grip on her head was too strong. After what seemed like an eternity, the grip loosened and Rarity was able to break free, panting desperately for air.

A second later she noticed how dirty she was. A strange skittishness crept up all over her body and she started anxiously twitching in place.

“I guess you just died once.” Shadow commented, smirking.

Rarity was able to suppress her urge to panic and instead diverted her thoughts to the current situation. She was not at all expecting that her kidnappers had backbone in them this time, and she didn't even know what her kidnappers were or why they were kidnapping her. The first logical step of action for her was to gather some information.

Rarity spat out some of the dirt that got in her mouth, and spoke with a much more subdued and compliant tone than earlier. She knew now that she couldn't take her kidnappers lightly. “W-who are you and why are you kidnapping me?”

Shadow tipped his head to Gruff for him to explain. “Well, *pony*, we're Diamond Dogs.”

Rarity almost did a double-take out of surprise. “You two, Diamond Dogs?” She said incredulously, forgetting about how she should be acting for a moment and going back to her haughty tone. “That's ridiculous; the Diamond Dogs were rude, disgusting, and *stupid*.”

“Oh, so you're going to talk about our brethren like that, pony?” Shadow bared his fangs.

Instantly, Rarity shifted back into her subdued tone of voice. “O-of course not, slip of the tongue darling.” She gave a sheepish smile.

Shadow smirked. "You're right about that; Diamond Dogs are rude, disgusting, and stupid. However, we're of a higher breed than those mutts. The two of us are *wolves*."

"... wolves?" Rarity questioned, not exactly comprehending.

Shadow sighed. "Explain, Gruff."

"You see, pony, back before your little Princess Celestia rose the sun for Equestria, a bunch more species of animals lived around these parts. There was this little thing called the food chain, you see, and once Celestia came into power with her *magic* this food chain thing had to go. So she sent all the species that proved a danger to you *ponies* off to a faraway land ruled by destruction and anarchy. Of course, we put up a fight, but us non-magical species had no way to stand up against Celestia, and in the end we signed a truce, agreeing to stay on our side of the border, while you ponies lived happily and blissfully unaware of our plight."

"F-food chain?" Rarity stopped listening to Gruff's history lesson after the mention of the food chain. "D-do pray tell, what does that entail?" The unicorn asked, knowing full well what it would entail.

Shadow bared his fangs again. "You see, us wolves are carnivorous, and your little Princess Celestia banished us for a single reason.

"We *eat* ponies like you."

Rarity gulped.

"But don't worry, we have no plans to eat you. After all..." Shadow threw Rarity a stick. "You're going to be our little goldmine."

Rarity bit her lip. "I-I don't know what you're talking about! Me, a goldmine? Ridiculous! W-well, since I'm *obviously* going to be of no use to you, I guess you should set me free, right?"

"Haha, that's rich!" Gruff laughed. "We heard all about your skills from our underlings that stupidly let you go some time ago. But if you really have no skills..." Gruff licked his chops. "I could always go for a little snack."

“G-gemstones it is, gentlemen!” Rarity nervously concentrated her magic and surveyed the land for gemstones. There were a few gemstones buried underground a few meters away, and Rarity marked the spot with the stick. “T-there’s a couple of gemstones right there, gentlemen. Have at it!”

The wolves just stood still and smirked at Rarity. “Well, go on, dig, we’re waiting.”

Rarity grimaced. She just got a pedicure the other day too... The unicorn hesitantly drove her hoof into the ground and slowly started digging. This dirt will have an *awful* effect on her hooves...

“Dig faster, pony!”

Rarity did a slight jump and increased her speed. These Diamond Wolves or whatever they wanted to be called were dangerous, and it’d be in ill health to go against their orders.

As she dug, she spread her survey of the land further, trying to get a decent grasp of where she was in the off chance she could find an opening to escape. She was halfway done with the gemstones she was digging up when she suddenly felt a sudden influx of magic rebound from her extended survey. It felt awfully familiar too...

Rarity gave an excited jump when she realized what it was.

“Hey pony! Who told you to stop digging?!”

“Y-yes sirs, I’m dreadfully sorry!” Rarity continued to excavate the gemstones. If she was right... just maybe...

Rarity finished unearthing the gemstones that lay at her feet, and the wolves took them and threw them into a cart. “You’re going to pull too, pony.” Rarity grimaced as the wolves fastened the harness onto her back. She again marked another spot and began digging.

Just a couple thousand meters away... were the Ruins of the Ancient Pony Sisters. Even though the situation was dire, Rarity still didn’t forget the reason why she was in the Everfree Forest in the first place. Besides,

Zecora mentioned the Ruins held ancient magic, it was possible she could find another spell for self-defense. If she could somehow get closer to the Ruins and break away from her kidnappers...

An idea sparked in her head. In the worst case, her friends would be unable to ever find her in the uncultivated forest. But if she could get to the ruins, then even if she couldn't find the spell she could possibly find a place to hide until her friends found her. And a landmark was a lot easier to locate than a random spot in the Everfree Forest.

"Stop slacking off and work, pony!" Gruff bellowed.

"Y-yes gentlemen!" Rarity responded.

Her plan was risky, but at the moment it was the only feasible option available to her. Bearing the task of hard labor, Rarity grudgingly put up the with the wolves' demand, all the time working one more step toward her plan's fruition...

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Everypony was gathered at the town center to discuss the new crisis that arose. After Fluttershy told Twilight that Rarity was kidnapped, the poor yellow pegasus pony collapsed from shock and exhaustion. Since then, Mercy the nursepony applied some minor first aid to Fluttershy, cleaning up her minor injuries, and Twilight gathered everypony to the town square to discuss the crisis.

Fluttershy fluttered herself awake, dazedly staring out of the first aid tent she was in to see Twilight talking to the townspeople.

"Everypony stay calm!" Twilight dictated. "I don't know the exact details, but once Fluttershy regains consciousness she'll be able to inform us of what's happening!"

The pegasus pony hid her face behind the curtain upon hearing her name, not wanting to face the public spotlight. However, she saw that Twilight was having trouble keeping the crowd under control, and she timidly stepped out of the first aid tent.

“Hey everypony!” Lyra called out. “Fluttershy’s awake!”

Fluttershy shot a meek glare over at Lyra and Bon-Bon. Even though she resolved to step in front of the crowd to assist Twilight, she still would’ve appreciated a couple more seconds of anonymity.

“Oh thank goodness you’re okay, Fluttershy.” Twilight Sparkle said. “Come up here on the podium and explain to everypony what’s going on!”

“Oh, um...” Fluttershy shyly took the stage. “Um... hello everypony... um, my name is Fluttershy, which, um, I’m sure you all know.” The pressure was starting to make her sweat a little. “Well, you see, me and Rarity, um, I mean, Rarity and I, um, we went into the Everfree Forest to see, um, Zecora. And, uh, on our way back something attacked us, and, um, uh, yeah... they took Rarity and knocked me out.” The last part came out little more than a squeak, but somehow everypony managed to hear her.

“The Everfree Forest!” Somepony called out. “We can’t go in there! It’s too dangerous!!” Cries of agreement were scattered throughout the crowd. No pony other than Twilight Sparkle and her friends ever set foot into the Everfree Forest, meaning that everypony was too afraid to venture in.

“Guys!” Twilight desperately tried to get her voice heard in the crowd. “We need to send a team in to search for and rescue Rarity!” However, no matter how loud the purple unicorn shouted, her voice was drowned out by the objections of the crowd.

“Um, everypony,” Fluttershy tried to have her voice break through the crowd, but as expected she met with much less luck than Twilight. “Um, we need to help Rarity. She is our, um, dear friend, and, uh, *squeak*!” Fluttershy ducked her head in fear of the rising volume of the crowd.

Suddenly, a single pony’s voice bellowed throughout the crowd. “WHAT IN TARNATION IS EVERYPONY ARGUIN’ ABOUT?!”

Applejack ran into the town square, an annoyed expression on her face. She briefly made eye contact with Twilight for a second before averting her gaze to Fluttershy.

“Oh Applejack, thank *goodness* you’re here!” Fluttershy said, relieved. “Rarity’s been kidnapped!”

“What! When?!”

“Um... a little more than two hours ago, I think.” Fluttershy squeaked.

“Are you serious?!” Applejack cried out. “Firs’ Applebloom’s gone disappeared, and then Rarity was kidnapped!? Can this day git any worse?!”

“Waitwaitwait, Applebloom’s missing?!” Twilight called out to Applejack.

“Uhh, yeah.” Applejack answered, avoiding Twilight’s gaze. “Big Mac’s out lookin’ for her now.”

“Oh dear...” Twilight held her head in her hooves for a moment. “Okay, everypony listen up! We’re going to divide up into two teams! Me, Applejack, Fluttershy, and Rainbow Dash will go out into the Everfree Forest to search for Rarity! Everypony else will scour the town for Applebloom!”

“Um, Twilight...?” Fluttershy tugged gently at Twilight’s mane. “Rainbow Dash isn’t here...”

Twilight’s eye twitched for a second. “What do you mean she’s not here?! A crowd like this *a/ways* draws her in!”

“Come to think of it,” Vinyl Scratch cut in, “I haven’t seen Rainbow Dash since the funeral last week.” Murmurs of agreement rose from the crowd. It seemed that Rainbow Dash completely disappeared the day after the funeral.

“AGH! Where’s that pony when you really need her!!?” Twilight exclaimed.

“Um... Twilight?” Fluttershy shyly interjected.

“What is it Fluttershy?”

“... I know where Rainbow Dash might’ve went.”

Twilight's eye twitched once again. "B-but... earlier, when I asked, you said you didn't know where she is!"

"Oh, yeah, um, well, about that..." Fluttershy bit her lip. "... I lied. Sorry." Twilight gave Fluttershy an exasperated glare. "Oh, um, it's not like I lied because I was playing around Twilight! Oh, nonono, you see, um, I thought she needed to be by herself for a while, so, um, I decided to give her some... *gulp* ... time?"

"Where is she, Fluttershy?" Twilight asked sternly.

"Oh, um, she, uh... flew south... towards Fillydelphia." Fluttershy admitted.

Twilight facehoofed. "Fillydelphia is *hours* away from Ponyville! There's no way anypony other than Rainbow Dash could fly over there and back fast enough!!"

"Supersonic time traveler sergeant muffins reporting for mailtime!!"

Twilight showed a confused expression. "... what?"

The crowd awkwardly dispersed, revealing a certain wall-eyed pegasus pony standing happily in the middle with her hoof up.

"Mailpony job for express dolphin service!" Derpy called out happily. "Delivery in 30 minutes or less, or postage is free!"

Twilight still held a confused expression on her face. "I don't get it."

"Don't you know, Twilight?" A stallion with an hourglass cutie mark stepped beside Derpy. She thought his name was Doctor Whoof or something...

"Derpy is the second-fastest flier in Ponyville!" Doctor Whoof exclaimed. "Why, just the other day when I was constructing an incorporeal wormhole, Derpy flew fast enough to stop the thermonuclear reactor from imploding on itself! It was brilliant to see how fast she flew to stop the invasion!"

"Muffins!" Derpy agreed.

Whatever Doctor Whoof was talking about flew straight over Twilight's head. However, she understood one thing. "Derpy, can you fly to Fillydelphia and bring Rainbow Dash back here in less than an hour?"

Derpy nodded. "The bullet express train saves the muffin money!"

"I'll take that as a yes! Hold on for a moment though." Twilight hastily brought out a piece of parchment from a nearby stand and quickly scribbled a message onto it. "It's not my best handwriting, but it does the job!" She passed the note to Derpy. "Pass this on to Rainbow Dash when you find her, okay Derpy?"

Derpy did her trademark wall-eyed salute. "Faster than muffin baking!" The mailpony took Twilight's note and stuffed it into her bag, and launched herself into the air.

"Alright, we'll leave a trail so Rainbow Dash can quickly find us once Derpy gets her here." Twilight told the other ponies. "Fluttershy, Applejack?" The two ponies stepped towards Twilight, both nervously averting their gaze, which was normal for Fluttershy, but uncommon for Applejack.

Twilight Sparkle disregarded Applejack's strange behavior. There were more important things to worry about right now.

"Ready girls? It's time to go find Rarity!"

Chapter 6

Rainbow Dash was taking a nap up in her favorite tree, lazily watching the clouds drift by. Sure, the weather for the day was scheduled to be clear, but she was in no hurry since something simple like a bunch of clouds would only take her ten seconds flat to clear out. Everypony could wait a while longer while she took her afternoon nap.

The rainbow-striped pegasus let her eyes blink away to sleep, a peaceful, peaceful sleep...

“Hey, hey, Rainbow Dash! Rainbow Dash!!”

... if a certain high-pitched hyperactive voice didn't keep her awake.

Rainbow Dash grudgingly rolled over and groggily glared at the pony that was keeping her from falling asleep. The pony in question was bouncing happily up and down, completely oblivious to the grumpy state Rainbow Dash was in after being woken up.

“What do you want, Pinkie Pie?”

“Come down, come down!” The hyperactive pink pony called out. “There's a super-duper extra special omega delicious super thing you have to see!!”

Rainbow Dash sighed and glided down from the tree and landed next to Pinkie Pie. “Are you always this hyper, Pinkie? Seriously...” The pegasus let out a huge yawn.

Pinkie Pie put a hoof to her chin, appearing to think deeply about Rainbow Dash's question. “I don't know what you're talking about, Rainbow Dash!” She finally said. “This is me being my normal everyday energetic Pinkie Pie self! Last time I was hyper was... I don't even remember the last time I was hyper!”

“If this is normal I'd hate to see hyper...” Rainbow Dash muttered to herself.

“What was that Rainbow Dash?” Pinkie asked, grinning happily.

“Oh, uhh, nothing Pinkie Pie!” Rainbow Dash nervously scratched her mane. “So what’s this thing you wanted to show me?”

“You silly filly! If I told you it wouldn’t be a super-duper ultra-special surprise now, would it?”

The pegasus pony giggled. “Oh Pinkie Pie, you are so *random*!”

The pink earth pony energetically nodded. “Well, *duh*! What fun would I be if I didn’t throw in some excitement in everypony’s lives?” She grabbed Rainbow Dash by the hoof. “Come on, Rainbow Dash, if we sit around any longer then the super-duper extra special omega delicious thing you have to see won’t be so super-duper anymore!”

Rainbow Dash had no idea how Pinkie could trot along with only three hooves on the ground, but she learned a long time ago not to question the strange ways of Pinkie Pie. The pegasus pony happily obliged to letting Pinkie Pie lead her around, much less work for her since all she had to do was hover while Pinkie dragged her around. Besides, it was probably just another one of Pinkie’s parties again, nothing too special.

As expected, Pinkie Pie led Rainbow Dash to Sugar Cube Corner. “Is this where your super-duper thing is?” Rainbow Dash asked.

“No silly, it’s where my super-duper extra special omega delicious thing is!” Pinkie corrected. “Come on, open the door! Open the door!”

Rainbow Dash grinned and opened the door, and as expected, she was greeted with a sudden wave of confetti and waves of “Surprise!”

Inside Sugar Cube Corner was a lavishly decorated party, in other words, the standard Pinkie Pie party. As usual, everypony in Ponyville was there, and DJ Scratch P0N-3 was mixing the music at the turntable for everypony to dance to. Everypony was having a good time, and with the atmosphere Rainbow Dash couldn’t help but to smile.

“What’s this for, Pinkie Pie?” Rainbow Dash asked. Knowing her it was for some trivial reason, maybe it was Tuesday or something. Dash wasn’t exactly somepony who kept track of the days.

However, for once, Pinkie Pie didn’t give a straight out answer. “Well... it’s a special reason.” Pinkie said softly.

“Special?” Rainbow Dash was caught off guard by Pinkie’s hushed tone.

The earth pony nodded. “You see, it’s a party I’ve been planning for a super long time, and I wasn’t even sure if I wanted to throw it.”

“You? Not wanting to throw a party?” Rainbow Dash laughed playfully. “Get out!”

Pinkie Pie just smiled warmly in response and waited for Rainbow Dash’s laughing to die out. “Well... you see Rainbow Dash, I have something to confess.”

“You’ve been keeping something a secret from us Pinkie? What, you spike the cupcakes with hot sauce again? I don’t think there’s anypony who doesn’t know about your pranks around here!”

“No, it’s not that Rainbow Dash...” For once, Pinkie Pie looked like she was struggling with what she was going to say.

“Well c’mon, Pinkie Pie!” Rainbow Dash playfully slapped her on the back. “Spit it out!”

“Well... actually... that cake looks super scrumptious!” Pinkie Pie quickly changed the subject. “I think I’m going to take an itsy-bitsy tiny taste of it!” She hopped over to the snack table.

“You are so random, Pinkie Pie!” Rainbow Dash called out to her, laughing. The pegasus watched Pinkie gorge herself on the sweets like she always did at her parties. Well, Dash couldn’t say she didn’t enjoy Pinkie’s randomness! It was always funny to see her shove all those sweets down her throat, like she was some kind of vacuum. All those cupcakes, pies, and candies...

... wait a moment. Sweets?

As Rainbow Dash watched Pinkie Pie eat, an eerie silence crept over the party. *H-hey... what was going on?* Rainbow Dash thought. She looked over to the DJ table. Scratch was still doing her thing, but for some reason no sound could be heard from the speakers. Not only that, but the room had some sort of strange monochrome tint to it now, a stark contrast from the usual color of Sugar Cube Corner.

The only thing that retained its color in the room was Pinkie's vibrant mane. "H-hey, Pinkie? What's going on...?"

The earth pony didn't appear to hear Rainbow Dash, as she continued to eat the sweets.

"Pinkie? Pinkie!" Rainbow Dash was starting to feel unsettled by the strangeness of the situation. She started to trot over towards Pinkie, but for some reason she never got any closer. In fact, it looked like Pinkie was actually moving away from Rainbow Dash. The pegasus started galloping, fearing that Pinkie would disappear from her sight, but the pink pony continued to move farther away.

Rainbow Dash lifted off on her wings, frantically flying towards Pinkie Pie. She could feel the speed beneath her wings, but it still wasn't enough to catch up to Pinkie. Dash started to push her body as fast as she could, almost stretching the sound barrier to close the distance between her and Pinkie, when finally...

Rainbow Dash slammed into Pinkie Pie, knocking the cookie from her friend's mouth. "Pinkie! You can't! You know what the doctors said! Just one more binge could kill you!"

Pinkie looked up at her friend. Smiling with tears in her eyes, she gave a weak laugh. "It's... it's okay, Rainbow Dash. I'm... I'm not afraid." Rainbow Dash settled down to the floor, blinking at a crunching noise beneath her hooves. She looked down, a look of horror spreading over her face at all the crumbs. "And... it's... not like one cookie would make much difference now anyways."

“Pinkie! Wh... what have you done!” Rainbow Dash sped to turn the room apart, looking for that needle thing the doctors gave Pinkie.

“I already used that yesterday. I... It was torture Rainbow Dash... terrible. Haha... can you imagine it? What if you suddenly weren’t able to fly anymore? What if Applejack suddenly became lame? Haha... ha... I couldn’t help myself Rainbow... I... haha...”

“It’s going to be okay, Pinkie! You’re gonna be okay. We’ll get you to the doctor. They can fix this. We can make you better.”

Pinkie looked at the floor, mane hiding her eyes, laughs starting to sound more like sobs. “Can... can you do me a favor, Dash? ...can... can you hold me a bit? I... I keep laughing... but... it’s not working as well as it used to... haha... ha... ha...”

Rainbow Dash took a hold of Pinkie Pie. “Don’t worry Pinkie Pie, I’ll get you to the doctor as fast as I can, just—just stop talking okay! Save your strength, please!”

“Aha... ha...” Pinkie Pie let out a weak cough. “Hey... Rainbow Dash...? I... I...”

Time froze for Rainbow Dash. She knew that Pinkie Pie collapsed before she got another word out, falling into a diabetic coma. That moment was forever frozen inside the pegasus pony’s brain, the sickly fruit odor coming off of Pinkie’s breath, the flushed tint of Pinkie’s skin. Mercy called it keto-something, but what it was called didn’t matter to Rainbow Dash.

“Hey, hey, Rainbow Dash! Rainbow Dash!!”

Pinkie Pie hopped in through the window Rainbow Dash broke through. Shocked, Dash looked back down at her hooves, and saw that Pinkie’s body was missing.

“You silly filly, I’m over here!” Pinkie Pie turned Rainbow Dash’s head to make eye contact with her.

“P-Pinkie Pie... what’s going on?”

The pink pony said nothing and hopped over to a table filled with cakes. "You know something, Rainbow Dash? There was a reason why I went on that last binge."

"P-Pinkie...?" The earth pony suddenly chomped down on a large pink cake. "What are you doing!" Rainbow Dash called out frantically. "Stop that!!" The pegasus tried to restrain Pinkie, but when Dash grabbed a hold of Pinkie a burst of static clouded Dash's vision, and Pinkie was suddenly standing somewhere else.

"Do you know why I eat so many sweets?" Pinkie asked Rainbow Dash. "It's not just because I like the taste of them." Rainbow Dash tried to jump onto Pinkie again, but the static burst again when she tried.

"You see, it's not really that hard for me to restrain myself from eating sweets!" Pinkie said. "I can actually go weeks without a single cupcake! I know, I did it once before!" Dash frantically leapt again for Pinkie, and again the static blacked her vision out.

"But... sometimes I get this icky stingy feeling in my heart. And when that happens, eating lotsa sweets takes my mind off of it. So what happened that day couldn't really be helped."

An intense static filled the room, and when it cleared, Dash found herself in a dark void with only Pinkie Pie and herself.

"So go ahead, Rainbow Dash," Pinkie said, smiling. "Guess what caused me to go on that binge! Guess!"

Rainbow Dash gulped. "I-I don't know!!"

"I know you already know, you silly filly. You just don't want to admit it." Pinkie Pie continued to smile. "The cause of that icky squicky feeling was..."

"No! NO!! I don't want to hear it!!!" Rainbow Dash frantically covered her ears, trying to block out Pinkie Pie's words. All Rainbow Dash could hear was white noise, but her eyes saw the words come off of Pinkie Pie's lips.

A single tear fell from Pinkie Pie's eye as she spoke the words, the only flaw to her perfect smile.

The world suddenly crumbled away. Rainbow Dash could feel herself falling, her wings unable to support her weight anymore. Pinkie Pie remained up in the air, becoming smaller and smaller, until her pink coat blended in with the darkness.

As Rainbow Dash fell, the words Pinkie uttered echoed in her thoughts, despite the soundless voice with which she spoke them with. The words felt like daggers piercing Dash's heart, crippling her with the pain she felt.

... you, Rainbow Dash. I died because of you.

--

"PINKIE PIE!!"

Rainbow Dash woke from her afternoon nap, screaming Pinkie's name. As she regained her connection with reality, she noticed how heavily she was breathing and the sweat rolling down her mane.

"... you alright Rainbow Dash?" Gilda flew down from a cloud to the tree Rainbow Dash was napping in. "You woke me up with that yell of yours. What is it? Having nightmares about that dweeb you left back at Ponyville?" Gilda joked.

Rainbow Dash stayed silent for a moment. "... huh? Oh, yeah, I'm fine Gil."

Gilda shot Rainbow Dash a concerned look. "... you sure about that Dash? From what I see you definitely do *not* look okay."

"I said I'm fine, Gilda!" Rainbow Dash snapped.

"Woah, woah, chill man." Gilda said. "No need to snap!"

"... sorry Gilda. Just had a bad dream, that's all."

Gilda hesitated for a moment. "... just a bad dream?"

“Yeah, yeah, don’t get your feathers in a bunch!” Rainbow Dash brushed off the issue.

“Alright, alright! Sheesh!” Gilda decided to drop the issue. “I guess our plan to nap around’s been ruined. What d’you say we go around pranking some people? That’ll make you feel better!”

“... sure. Why not?” Rainbow Dash responded.

“Alright, cool!” Gilda spread her wings, and Rainbow Dash followed suit. “Now how ‘bout we go pull a prank on that shopkeeper downtown? She shot me this nasty look last time I saw her... what’s that?”

A bluish-gray blip was flying closer towards Gilda and Rainbow Dash. At first, Rainbow Dash paid no attention to it, but as the shape got closer, Rainbow Dash widened her eyes in recognition.

The shape suddenly flew past Rainbow Dash and Gilda and crashed into a picnic table behind them. “The muffins have landed!!” A voice called out from the rubble.

“No way...” Rainbow Dash said, shocked. “Derpy?!”

The wall-eyed pony picked herself up from the rubble and brushed herself up, then happily trotted towards Rainbow Dash.

“You know this dweeb?” Gilda asked, keeping her distance from Derpy. “Her eyes kinda creep me out...”

“Oh, yeah, she’s Ponyville’s mailpony.” Dash explained.

“Special delivery from pseudo-Belmont!” Derpy called out energetically. “Delivered faster than raining trampolines!!” Derpy dug out a small note from her mailbag and passed it to Rainbow Dash.

“Uhh... thanks.”

Derpy gave her trademark wall-eyed salute. “Much more mail to be baked in pies!” The mailpony took off to deliver her route in Fillydelphia, leaving the confused pair behind.

“Well go on,” Gilda said, “Open it!”

Rainbow Dash opened up the letter.

Dear Rainbow Dash,

Fluttershy told us you were probably in Fillydelphia, and I send this letter in hopes that Derpy Hooves can locate you. I know the past week has been hard for you, but an emergency has come up! You see, Rarity's been kidnapped by some really dangerous creatures in the Everfree Forest, and we need the help of everypony in order to find her!! I'm extremely sorry to disturb you while you must feel so torn up on the inside because of Pinkie Pie's death, but this is urgent! Just think how horrible it'd be if Ponyville lost another dear friend! Please, hurry back to Ponyville!

*Your faithful friend,
Twilight Sparkle*

Rainbow Dash froze. Rarity was in trouble? But how? Why? That didn't matter, a friend was in trouble! The pegasus prepared to take off, when suddenly, a horrible thought struck her.

What if she couldn't get there in time? If Rarity died before she could get back to Ponyville, wouldn't it be Rainbow Dash's fault for not being there? Such a horrible thought plagued Rainbow Dash's mind, keeping her from taking off.

“What's it say, Dash?” Gilda asked. “C'mon, don't leave me hanging!”

Rainbow Dash didn't hear Gilda. She didn't think she could live with the guilt if she failed to save Rarity. If she was too late to save her friend once, the guilt would tear her apart from the inside! The pegasus pony was frozen in place, she couldn't think about how she was too late to stop Pinkie Pie from eating herself to death, how it was her fault for not being fast enough...

How it was her fault for killing Pinkie Pie.

Suddenly, a rough force snatched the letter away from Rainbow Dash's hooves, breaking the pony away from her thoughts.

As Gilda read through the letter, her expression softened for a moment, before twisting into anger. "Rainbow Dash... what the hell is this?"

The pegasus pony's heart was beating frantically. "W-what are you talking about, Gilda?" Dash said, trying to brush aside the issue.

"DON'T SCREW AROUND WITH ME, RAINBOW DASH!!" Gilda bellowed angrily. She shoved the letter in Dash's face and underlined with her claw the part about Pinkie Pie's death. "This. Right here. Explain."

"Oh... that..." Rainbow Dash was at a loss for words.

In response to the pegasus's lack of response, Gilda crumpled up the letter, her fist shaking. "Stop screwing around and tell me!!"

Rainbow Dash flinched at the volume of Gilda's voice. "Oh... well... Pinkie Pie was diagnosed with diabetes." The pegasus said emotionlessly. "She ate too much sugar, went into a coma, then died."

"That pink pony... died."

Rainbow Dash was silent.

Gilda was shaking with anger. "The hell... Why didn't you tell me!?"

"I didn't want you to worry!!" The pegasus shouted. "That's all..."

"DAMN IT, RAINBOW DASH!!" Gilda tore the note into pieces and threw it onto the ground. "What the hell, man!? What the hell!?" The griffon angrily paced around Rainbow Dash. "And why the hell are you still here?!"

"What're you talking about?!"

Gilda's eye twitched in anger. "That letter. Your friend's in trouble, isn't she?! So why are you still here!?"

"Because! I—" Rainbow Dash choked on her words.

“... oh Celestia,” Gilda grabbed Rainbow Dash. “Don’t tell me you’re running away again!!”

“Me, run away?!” Rainbow Dash shouted. “That’s... that’s ridiculous!! Since when have I ran away?”

“Stop lying to yourself!!” Gilda threw the pegasus down to the ground. “That time... in Flight Academy... you were in flight practice, and you lost control and crashed into that first-year, remember?!”

Rainbow Dash hung her head.

“Of course you do!” Gilda continued. “That first year only ended up with a sprained wing, and she already forgave you, but you ran away from your guilt!!”

The blue pegasus tried to cover her ears to block out the memory of the incident. “Please, don’t bring that up.”

“And why shouldn’t I?!” Gilda shouted. “You ran away without saying a word to anypony, you didn’t even say anything to me! Did you know how much that hurt?!” Gilda’s eyes were starting to water. “But whatever, man. You’re Rainbow Dash, right? You can only deal with things when it’s *convenient* for you, but once things get really hairy you skip town! That’s how the Dash rolls, ain’t it?!”

Rainbow Dash flinched at the words Gilda spoke. “N-no... that’s not it...”

“THEN WHY THE HELL ARE YOU STILL HERE?!” Gilda once again grabbed the pegasus and lifted her up from the ground. “I thought you grew a little from your time in Flight Academy, but apparently not. You think that if something goes wrong you can just cut yourself away from the situation and everything will be all sugar and rainbows, huh? Huh!?”

“Shut up!” Rainbow Dash yelled desperately. “You don’t me! You don’t know anything about me!!”

“I don’t know anything about you?” Gilda said sarcastically. “Me, the one who’s known you for most of your damned life?! You think I can’t read you?”

You think it's not obvious why you're here in Fillydelphia right after your friend died? YOU THINK YOU'RE NOT BEING A COWARD?!"

Gilda slapped Rainbow Dash, sending her spiraling to the ground. Gilda was breathing heavily, her shoulders heaving.

The pegasus slowly picked herself up. "... you think I don't know how I'm being a coward right now?" Rainbow Dash asked, her voice cracking. "You think I haven't beaten myself up enough for running away from Flight Academy all those years ago?" Rainbow Dash threw back her mane, revealing the torrent of tears that ran down her face.

"I'm scared Gilda." Rainbow Dash finally admitted. "I'm scared that I won't be able to save Rarity. I'm scared that I'll have to watch her die the same way I watched Pinkie Pie. I'm so scared that I can't even spread my wings right now. I'm scared because... because..."

"I'm the one who let Pinkie Pie die."

Gilda averted her eyes away from Rainbow Dash's pitiful expression. "... that's the lamest excuse I've ever heard."

The pegasus looked up at Gilda, hurt. "B-but—"

"Who freakin' cares, man?!" Gilda shouted, hiding her face from Rainbow Dash. "You're putting way too much credit on yourself. 'I'm the one who let Pinkie Pie die?' Weak man, weak." Gilda turned her back on Rainbow Dash. "So you say you're a coward. You know what, maybe you are a coward. Maybe you're the biggest freakin' coward in all of Equestria—no, the world! You sure look like you are by moping around here anyway! Rainbow Dash, the greatest coward in the history of the world, that's what they'll call you! But you know what?"

"Who cares if you're a coward?"

"W-what?" Rainbow Dash stood there, confused.

"I said, who cares?" Gilda continued. "You may be a coward, but if there's one thing you got, it's loyalty. You're the most freakin' loyal pony I've ever met. And even a coward can pretend to be brave when she's fighting for

something. So what if you're scared? Just shove it and take life head on anyways."

"Gilda..."

"So what the hell are you still doing here?" Gilda asked, her voice cracking slightly. "Go put aside that fear and show how loyal you are. If you let that cowardice get in your way, you'll just regret it even more for not even trying to save your friends." The griffon paused. "Of course, you're perfectly welcome to continue moping around, no skin off my bones."

"Gilda..." Rainbow Dash wiped away her tears. "Thanks."

"Shut up and go." Gilda said. "I don't wanna be seen hangin' around with a loser who mopes around all the time. Come back when you're cool again."

Rainbow Dash spread her wings. "I'll make that a promise!" She braced herself and lifted off, flying as fast as she can towards Ponyville—towards her friends.

Gilda watched the rainbow pegasus soar through the sky, wiping away the stream of tears flowing from her eyes. "That freakin' dweeb..."

Chapter 7

Twilight Sparkle, Applejack, and Fluttershy were creeping through the Everfree Forest, carefully making sure they kept the noise to a minimum. They may have been the rescue team, but that didn't mean they couldn't be attacked by one of the dangerous creatures of the Everfree Forest. Even the slightest rustle of brush made the ponies jump, putting all the ponies on edge.

"Um, Twilight...?" Fluttershy timidly spoke up. "D-do you have lead on where Rarity might be?"

Twilight Sparkle was concentrating her magic, maintaining a locator spell to try to pick up on Rarity's trail. "Sorry, Fluttershy, but I don't." Twilight said in hushed tones. "This spell isn't powerful enough to survey the entire forest, especially with the amount of interference around the area. And I can't make it more powerful, it's hard enough to maintain as it is."

"Oh, well... okay." Fluttershy hung her head down. "I hope we can pick up her trail soon..."

"Don't worry, Fluttershy, we'll find her." Twilight reassured. "I'm sure of it."

Fluttershy smiled shyly. "I believe in you, Twilight."

"Excuse me, everypony," Applejack cut in from behind the two. "Ah think all this conversatin' should be shut down soon. Remember where we are."

"Oh, yeah, you're right Applejack." Fluttershy responded. "I'm sorry."

Applejack gave a tired nod in acknowledgement. "S' long as ya'll know what ah'm talkin' about."

Twilight Sparkle shot a concerned look at Applejack. The two of them never resolved what happened at Sweet Apple Acres, and a tense atmosphere hung over the two ever since then. Applejack caught sight of Twilight's look, and quickly averted her eyes from the unicorn.

"I'm sorry, but... is everypony alright?" Fluttershy noticed the strained atmosphere and decided to speak up about it. "It seems you two have been down since we left Ponyville..."

"T-there's nothin' wrong, sugarcube!" Applejack said, trying to cover up what was going on. "I-It's just that we're all worried 'bout Rarity, that's all!" She turned to the purple unicorn. "Ain't that right, Twilight?"

"Huh? Oh, yeah..." Twilight bit her lip. It wasn't right to keep things like this, but this was neither the time nor the place to discuss their issues.

"Well... if you two say so..." Fluttershy obviously didn't buy what the two ponies said, but she picked up that it wasn't an issue that needed to be openly discussed at the moment.

"So where're we headed anyways, Twilight?" Applejack asked lightly, as if she was trying to falsely reassure Fluttershy that nothing was wrong.

Twilight was about to point out Applejack's obvious disregard for her earlier advice, but decided that it wasn't worth the trouble it would cause. "I'm not really sure." Twilight admitted. "We're just sort of going through the forest trying to pick up Rarity's trail. It'd be much more efficient if the three of us split up, but it's too risky of a maneuver to do."

"So yer sayin' we're just wanderin' aimlessly?" Applejack criticized.

Twilight Sparkle shook her head. "Not exactly... we're taking the same path we took towards the Ruins of the Ancient Pony Sisters, but that's only because we walked it once before. If Rainbow Dash were here I'd send her to scout out the area since she has the skill to do reconnaissance, but she's not here, and I don't want to risk sending Fluttershy by herself."

"I'm sorry, Twilight..."

"No, no, it's not your fault, Fluttershy." Twilight took out a compass and a pocket-watch from her saddlebags. "Judging from the amount of time we've been walking... we're about twenty minutes away from the Ruins at this pace. Once we get there we have to determine an alternate plan of action."

“S’ long as you know what yer doin’, Twilight.” Applejack commented dryly.

Twilight silently stashed away her materials back in her saddlebags in response, not wanted to start another argument with Applejack.

The trio spent the next couple minutes in an awkward silence. Twilight Sparkle concentrated on her spell while Applejack was blankly watching herself put one hoof in front of the other. Fluttershy looked upon the other two with a look of concern, but thought it would be best to let it alone for now. The yellow pegasus pony sighed. She hated it when her friends were fighting...

crack

The three ponies froze in their tracks. They all took glances at their hooves, making sure it wasn’t them who made the sound.

crack

Fluttershy gulped. “T-t-that wasn’t you t-two, right?”

“N-no...” The two said simultaneously.

thump

The two ponies walking on the ground felt a vibration come from behind them. Hesitantly, they turned around, and the ponies were greeted by a dreadful sight.

Standing behind them was a creature that had two... no, three heads! The main body and the head appeared to belong to a lion, while the head of a goat was protruding over its back at the center of its spine, all leading into the creature’s tail, which spouted the body of a snake that spat venom towards the ponies.

“C-c-c-c-c-CHIMERA!!” Fluttershy squealed.

At the pegasus’s cry, the chimera roared, causing the three ponies to launch forward, running at their highest speeds.

“W-why are we runnin’?!” Applejack cried out. “Can’t ya calm it down somehow, Fluttershy?!”

“I-I can’t!” Fluttershy admitted. “C-chimeras are vicious creatures! And that one looks h-hungry!!”

“Can’t ya use the Stare on it?!” Applejack asked frantically.

“It has three heads!!” Fluttershy squeaked. “While I stare at one the other two can get me!”

“But you took on a *dragon*, sugarcube!”

“But a dragon isn’t a *chimera*!”

“Oh, stop arguing you two and RUN!!” Twilight Sparkle shouted.

The chimera was hot on the ponies’ tails, threatening to capture one of them if they slipped up. The ponies weaved around the trees, trying to lose the chimera, but it refused to give up the chase. To the chimera, these ponies were its meal tickets, and the hungry beast wasn’t about to let a free meal get away from it!

In order to increase their speed and put more distance between them and the chimera, the three ponies dropped their supply saddlebags, but the increased speed seemed to have no effect on how close the chimera seemed. It seemed that the chimera was going to catch up to the ponies, however...

“Look, everypony, a clearing up ahead!!” Fluttershy shouted as loudly as her small voice could go. “Get ready to jump, though, there’s a cliff up ahead! M-maybe we can lose the chimera there!”

“We hafta try!” Applejack called out.

Taking the lead, Fluttershy quickly flew over the gap. Applejack leaped over the crevice with all her strength and barely landed on the other side. The two ponies braked to a halt and noticed that somepony was missing.

“Girls!” Twilight Sparkle yelled desperately. The unicorn was hanging onto the ledge with a single hoof. She wasn’t strong enough to make the jump by herself. “I-I’m slipping!!”

“Hold on, sugarcube, ah’m a comin’!” Applejack flung herself over to the ledge, just barely catching Twilight before she lost her grip on the ledge.

“Oh, thank goodness you caught her.” Fluttershy said, relieved, as Applejack pulled Twilight over the ledge. “For a moment there I thought... oh no, *look out!*”

Twilight Sparkle and Applejack looked back over the ledge, where they saw the chimera in mid-air after taking the jump the ponies took. At the rate it was going, the chimera would have landed with its front claws digging into Twilight’s head. The purple unicorn was frozen, unable to react quick enough to cast any sort of spell that would save her from the impending doom headed towards her. A small tear formed in her eye as she prepared for the inevitable...

“Like hell ah’m a gonna let you lay a claw on mah friend!!”

Applejack leaped into action before anypony else could react, jumping up to give a brutal kick to the oncoming chimera. Somehow the kick managed to connect in midair with the chimera’s lioness head, diverting enough force to make the chimera fail its jump. In exchange, however, the chimera managed to dig its claws into one of Applejack’s hind hooves, leaving behind a painful gash.

The chimera fell down into the depths of the crevice, and Applejack was able to kick herself back onto the ledge where the other two ponies were at.

“Heh... ain’t nothin’ to it.” Applejack said lightly.

“Oh dear Celestia...” Twilight put a hoof to her mouth in shock. “You’re bleeding, Applejack!”

“Oh... this ol’ thing? It ain’t nothin’ to worry ‘bout, just a li’l scratch is all.” Applejack said, trying to hide the pain from her face.

“Stop kidding around, Applejack!” Twilight frantically surveyed the area.
“Uhh... uhm... Fluttershy!!”

“Y-yes, Twilight?” Fluttershy was extremely worried and jittery about Applejack’s injury.

“Head back over the crevice and search for our saddlebags!” Twilight ordered. “There’s should be some first aid equipment in some of them, so please, hurry!”

“I-I’m on it!” Fluttershy quickly flew off back in the direction they came from to search for the bags. The purple unicorn turned her attention back to Applejack’s injury. From the look of it, the gash was pretty deep, and blood was flowing freely from the wound.

Oh dear, what should I do... Twilight didn’t know much at all about medical magic, she only read a couple of books on the subject while she was passing the time back at Canterlot. She wanted to vomit at the sight of Applejack’s blood, but the earth pony’s life depended on her keeping it together.

“Hey... why ya look so worried, sugarcube?” Applejack asked, smiling weakly. “S’ nothin’ to worry yer head about, ah’m a gonna be alright.”

Applejack’s weak voice brought tears to Twilight Sparkle’s eyes. “Shh, don’t talk! Save your energy, okay?”

“Ah guess ah should...” Applejack winced as she tried to move her leg.
“Ouch, guess ah’m not goin’ anywhere for a bit...”

Twilight bit her lip. Regardless of if she wasn’t skilled in medical magic, she had to try something to keep Applejack from bleeding out! Gathering up the faint memory of what was written in that medical book she read, the unicorn concentrated her magic on Applejack’s wound.

“... what’re ya doin’, Twilight?”

A cloud of magic burst from Twilight’s horn, settling itself onto the gash.
“I’m using my magic to try to slow down the flow of blood in your system...”

Twilight said, panting from the effort she was exerting. "This is a tough spell, and I'm not used to it, so it's taking a lot of energy..."

"Ah don't want ya ta wear yerself out, sugarcube!" Applejack yelled.

"Shut up, Applejack, I am *not* going to let you die from this!" Twilight stared into the earth pony's eyes for the first time since the incident at Sweet Apple Acres. "You're my friend, so I have to do whatever I can until Fluttershy gets back here."

"I-is that so, huh..." Applejack stared back into Twilight's eyes. "Ah'm sorry, sugarcube. Ah didn't mean ta snap at ya the way ah did back then..."

"J-just stop talking, Applejack! You have to save your energy until we get you stable!"

"Shucks, Twilight, this ain't that bad." Applejack lied.

"... you're a horrible liar, Applejack." Twilight said, tears streaming down her face.

"... ah guess ah am." Applejack smiled. "Forgive me for lyin' ta ya, sugarcube. Ya see... I jus' don't want anypony ta worry about me. You prob'ly saw right through mah act back on the farm..."

Twilight's spell faltered for a moment due to the emotional interference, but she quickly concentrated again after seeing Applejack's wince of pain from the increased bloodflow. "Please... save your energy Applejack..."

"Ah afraid ah can't do that, sugarcube." Applejack smiled again. "It'd be a shame if ah left this world without lettin' ya know how dear a friend to me ya are."

"D-don't talk as if you're going to die, Applejack!" Twilight yelled.

"Ah'm not goin' to, sugarcube... ah just..." Tears welled up in the corner of the earth pony's eyes. "Ah jus' wanna get things over with while ah still have the nerve. I'm normally not somepony who talks about all this emotional stuff..."

“So it takes your leg being cut open to talk about it then?” Twilight joked, trying to lighten the mood slightly.

“Ah guess!” Applejack gave a dry laugh. “Y’know... when Pinkie Pie died... all ah felt was anger at everything. Ah felt sad like everypony else at first, but ah’m stubborn so ah didn’t want anypony to see me cry. But lookit me now...” The tears she held back were now flowing freely across Applejack’s face. “Ah guess ah always thought of mahself as the older pony who looked after everypony else, so ah couldn’t show any weakness...”

“Don’t do that Applejack, nopony can be strong all the time.” Twilight softly put her hoof on Applejack’s. “You’ve got your friends, so there’s no need to hold back anything from us...”

“Ah know that now, sugarcube.” Applejack wrapped her uninjured hoof around Twilight’s. “Ah’m just as stubborn as a mule sometimes, that’s all.”

“Twilight! Applejack!” Fluttershy came flying in with the lost saddlebags. She dropped them down next to Twilight before tiredly collapsing on the ground. “I-I didn’t know which one was yours, Twilight, I’m sorry...”

Twilight frantically dug through the saddlebags, emerging with a white First Aid kit. She lifted out the gauze and the disinfectant, and started to dress Applejack’s wound.

“... is she going to be okay, Twilight?” Fluttershy asked quietly.

Twilight was applying the gauze sponges to absorb the blood flowing out of the wound, while casting a spell to relieve Applejack’s pain. “We’re cutting it kinda close but...” Twilight gave a sigh of relief as soon as she noticed the blood flow start to decelerate. “I think she’s going to be okay, the wound was thankfully not as deep as I thought.”

Fluttershy collapsed again after hearing Twilight’s confirmation. “Thank goodness she’s going to be alright...”

Twilight Sparkle wiped the sweat off from her forehead. “Applejack should rest here for a bit to recuperate.”

“What about Rarity?” Applejack inquired, her voice still somewhat weak.

Twilight hesitated. "I was thinking we should split up... I'll go on ahead and Fluttershy will stay behind and look after you."

"As if, Twilight Sparkle!" Applejack bellowed. "Ah'm not gonna let a friend walk into the great unknown all be her lonesome!"

"Y-yeah...!" Fluttershy agreed.

"You guys..." Twilight gulped down the warmth emanating from her heart. "Are you sure? You lost a lot of blood, Applejack..."

"Ya'll can support me!" Applejack stood up wobbily after Twilight finished putting on the bandages and put a hoof over Twilight's shoulder. "Ah won't be able ta run around, but that don't mean ah can't walk!"

"Well..."

"Oh, I'm sorry, but," Fluttershy cut in. "Rarity needs us, Twilight. All of us."

Twilight threw her hooves up in defeat. "I guess it can't be helped." She gave a small smile to her two friends.

"Then what're we waitin' for?" Applejack shouted as energetically as she could. "Le's continue on our way!"

The three ponies smiled at each other and threw their saddlebags back on. Twilight took the compass out of her bag and examined her surroundings. "We went a little off-course when we were running away from that chimera, but... we should be pretty close to the Ruins."

Suddenly, a shrill cry echoed through the forest.

"SOMEponY HELP MEEEEEEEE!!"

The three ponies turned their heads towards the direction the scream came from. "Oh no..." Twilight hurriedly stuffed the compass back in her bag. "Rarity?!"

--

Rarity frantically dodged the pair of claws that were attempting to dig inside her, sidestepping away from the wolves who were assailing her.

“You’re wasting your breath, pony!” Gruff shouted. “There’s no one around to hear your cry!”

Rarity ignored the wolf’s comment, instead choosing to divert her thoughts to how she could escape. She led the wolves closer to the Ruins of the Ancient Pony Sisters by selectively choosing to dig up gemstones that only led in the direction of the Ruins. When they were close enough to the Ruins, Rarity chose to make a break for it and find a hiding place in the Ruins to lose the wolves. Unfortunately the wolves noticed her trying to make her escape, and cornered her on the outskirts of the Ruins.

Shadow took a swipe at Rarity, but Rarity used her magic to manipulate a vine on the ground, tripping the wolf up. “As if I’d let a cretin like you touch me!” Rarity commented.

“Why you—get back here!” Shadow quickly picked himself up and attempted to swipe at Rarity again, but Rarity managed to pull off the same trick twice and kept Shadow down.

“That’s what you get for trying to harm Rarity!” The unicorn could be as haughty as she wanted, but she knew that she was in deep trouble right now. If there was only one wolf around, she’d be able to defend herself long enough to escape, but there were two here. While Rarity concentrated on tripping up one wolf, the other could sneak up on her! Speaking of which...

Rarity quickly ducked as a claw came swooping over her head. She let off a kick with her hind hooves, connecting with Gruff’s face. Thank goodness the other wolf was a moron, otherwise she’d already be dead! As Gruff stumbled on the ground, Rarity saw her chance to make a break for it. She took off away from the wolves and headed into the Ruins. This was it, she was about to make her esca—

A sudden pain struck Rarity in the back of her head, causing her to tumble onto the ground. A heavy rock fell down to the ground next to her. “Don’t think you can get away that easily, pony!”

Shadow made his way towards Rarity. “We only need that magic of yours, so if we have to break one or two hooves, it ain’t no fur off our skin!”

The unicorn frantically picked herself up, but it was too late. Shadow already got a hold of Rarity’s hooves. Oh dear, if her hooves were broken, how would she ever become Equestria’s most fabulous pony now?! Her dreams would be crushed along with her body!

Rarity shut her eyes and braced herself for the pain.

“WAAAAAAAAIIIIIIIIIIITTTTTT!!”

Another pony’s voice echoed through the forest, causing Shadow to loosen his grip for a second. Rarity used that opportunity to deliver a swift kick to his face, before running towards the voice.

“Twilight Sparkle! Fluttershy! Applejack!” Rarity ran to join the other three ponies. “Oh thank *goodness* you’re here! Those *cretins* over there were about to ruin my career!”

“We’re just glad you’re okay, Rarity.” Fluttershy said softly. “Although... I’m sorry... your mane is hideous...”

Rarity’s mane and hooves were covered in dirt from all the digging she was supposed to do. “Oh, don’t worry about it girls, let’s just make our escape, quickly!”

Twilight Sparkle grimaced. “We can’t! Applejack’s injured!”

“You think just because you’ve got some friends here, you can get away!?” Shadow and Gruff furiously bared their fangs. “We’ll skin the lot of ya!”

“Ah’d like ta see ya’ll try!” Applejack taunted. She was about to leap into action, when she fell over from the pain. “Tch, this darn injury!”

The two wolves were about to descend upon the group of ponies, when Twilight hurriedly erected a bubble barrier around their group with her magic. The wolves crashed into the barrier and quickly regained their footing.

"Don't think a trick like this will keep you away from us forever!" The two wolves started beating mercilessly on the barrier, Twilight Sparkle wincing with each strike.

"Oh dear, will you be able to keep this up darling?" Rarity asked worriedly.

"I... I don't think I can." Twilight admitted. "I used up a lot of magic a little while ago while mending Applejack's wound... I can only hold out like this for a couple more minutes at best.

"If ah wasn't injured ah'd give them varmints a piece of my mind!" Applejack said angrily.

"W-what are we supposed to do after the barrier gives out?" Fluttershy asked.

"I-I don't know!" Twilight bit her lip. "As a last resort, I could try casting an explosion spell... but it'd be too risky with how close they are! Not to mention that I'd pass out from the exhaustion of using so much magic today! And what if I fail, we're doomed!"

"At this rate ya might have ta resort to that spell, sugarcube!" Applejack pointed out.

Twilight grimaced. It looked like there was no safe way out of this situation. Each and every blow those wolves put on the barrier strained her mentally, at this point she was already unsure if she'd be able to pull off the spell! But it looked like there was no other way...

The purple unicorn gulped, and prepared to relinquish the barrier and unleash the explosion spell. *Here goes nothing...*

Twilight released the barrier, and a brilliant flash of light filled the air. However, while Twilight dispersed the barrier, she didn't cast her explosion spell yet...

"Looks like I arrived just on time!" The blue pegasus said cockily. "Never fear, Rainbow Dash, Equestria's greatest young flier, future member of the Wonderbolts, and all around awesome pony, here to save the day!!"

Chapter 8

Twilight Sparkle, Applejack, Fluttershy, and Rarity stared agape at Rainbow Dash's sudden appearance. It seemed like a miracle for the blue pegasus to arrive at the moment she did. Twilight was the first to snap out of her stupor.

"Rainbow Dash, what in Celestia's name took you so long?!" She shouted.

The pegasus in question shrugged. "Just had to take care of a few things, that's all. No worries!" Dash put her hoof to her chest. "I got it all figured out now!"

"R-Rainbow Dash!" Fluttershy squeaked. "Look out!"

Shadow and Gruff already shook out of their surprise from Dash's arrival, and were about to charge onto Rainbow Dash. In the nick of time, the pegasus pony leaped up into the air to dodge, taunting her assailants. "You think you can catch me? Fat chance!" The wolves howled in response and tried harder to land a blow on the fast-flying pony.

Twilight Sparkle bit her lip. Rainbow Dash may be able to go toe-to-toe with the wolves using her acrobatics for now, but those wolves aren't stupid. Twilight could tell that they'd change their strategy and go for the other ponies soon enough. "Rainbow Dash!" The unicorn shouted. "Keep them busy! We're going to find someplace in the Ruins to recuperate!"

"As if we'd let yo—" Shadow's yell was interrupted by Dash delivering a swift kick to the back of his head. "Why you—!"

"Rarity, Fluttershy, go on ahead!" Twilight said, supporting Applejack's weight. "Applejack and I will be right behind you!"

"Oh, fine, darling!" Rarity grudgingly went along with Twilight's order. "I do so hope you know what you're thinking by sending us in there though!" Rarity and Fluttershy ran into the Ruins, with Twilight and Applejack slowly following behind.

“Rainbow Dash! Come after us once you’ve given us enough time to get away!” Twilight ordered.

“You got it, Twi!” Dash shouted after her, dodging the stones the wolves were throwing at her. Twilight led the injured earth pony inside the Ruins, leaving Rainbow Dash to fend for herself.

“Egh, Gruff! Chase after them!” Shadow roared.

“On it, boss!” Gruff attempted to give chase, but Rainbow Dash interrupted him by flinging over a rock in his head.

“Na na na na na, you can’t catch me!” Dash taunted again. However, Dash said her taunt too soon, as Shadow managed to land a blow on Rainbow Dash with a projectile rock. Dash lost her balance and spiraled closer to the ground, catching her balance again before she crash landed.

“You may be fast, pony.” Shadow growled. “But us two have been in more scuffles than you can count!”

Rainbow Dash snorted at the threat and spread her wings. “I’d like to see your power match my speed! Bring it on!!”

--

“Twilight, Applejack, over here!” Rarity called out. The four ponies made their way into the altar room, where the Elements of Harmony once stood. Fluttershy flew over to Twilight to help her support Applejack, and the three of them walked over to Rarity.

Applejack removed herself from the two other ponies’ support. “Alright, sugarcube, why d’we have ta hide anyways? I reckon there were more than enough of us to take on those wolves now that Rainbow Dash is here!”

“You think we could take them? Just look at the state of our group!” Twilight pointed out. “Rarity and I are exhausted and can’t cast a proper spell, you’re injured Applejack, and Fluttershy’s... Fluttershy!”

The yellow pegasus hung her head. “I’m sorry...”

“The only one of us who’s in fighting condition is Rainbow Dash!” Twilight continued. “And she can only do so much against those beasts!”

“So what do we propose we do, darling?” Rarity asked, trying to rid herself of some of the dirt on her mane.

“I... I don’t know.” Twilight admitted. “But if we rest for a bit and regain our strength, I’m sure we can do something! I just hope Rainbow Dash can hold out long enough... Rarity? What are you doing?”

The white unicorn was dashing through the room, peaking through all the doors. “Oh, Twilight?” Rarity responded. “I’m trying to find this place’s library.”

“Rarity, you need to conserve your strength!” Twilight shouted.

“Hush, darling!” Rarity said. “If we find the library there might be an ancient spell we can use to bring back Pinkie Pie!”

The other three ponies’ faces fell. “Um, Rarity,” Applejack cut in, “Are ya feelin’ alright?”

“Of *course* not, my mane is absolutely filthy!” Rarity answered.

Applejack shook her head. “No, uh, that’s not what ah’m talking about.”

“Then you have to make yourself *clear*, dearie! That vagueness simply won’t do!”

Applejack hesitated to speak. “Um, well, ya do know that Pinkie Pie’s... dead, right?”

Rarity stopped in her tracks at Applejack’s words, before she quickly resumed her survey of the rooms. “Of *course* I know that, Applejack! That’s why I’m trying to find a way to bring her back! Ahahaha.”

Twilight trotted over to Rarity and put her hoof down. “Rarity. Stop.”

Rarity shot Twilight an annoyed expression. "I know *you've* given up, dear, but that doesn't mean everypony else has to! Now go remove yourself from my path!" Twilight refused to budge from her position, and Rarity sighed and attempted to go around her, but the purple unicorn stopped her again by putting a hoof on her shoulder.

Rarity brushed off Twilight's hoof. "What is your problem, darling?!"

"You can't bring ponies back to life!" Twilight yelled. "It just can't be done!"

"Well I'll have you know, Twilight Sparkle, that it *can* be done!" Rarity said in her usual haughty manner. "Zecora said it could be, and we could find the method to bring her back in these Ruins!"

Twilight was caught off-guard by Rarity's words. "What? But... not even Princess Celestia can revive the dead..."

"I'm about to prove you wrong then, darling!" Rarity tried to get around Twilight, but the other unicorn stopped her again. "What is it this time?!"

"Even if there is a method..." Twilight muttered. "It's still not right to disturb the dead."

Rarity lost her composure for a second. "B-but, it's *Pinkie Pie*! If anypony's not suited to the dreariness of the afterlife, it'd be her!"

"Um... Rarity?" Fluttershy finally cut into the conversation. "I'm sorry, but I agree with Twilight... it's not right to bring back the dead..."

"Y-you too, Fluttershy?!" Rarity asked, shocked. "B-but surely *you* want to have Pinkie Pie back too!"

Applejack limped over to Rarity. "We all want Pinkie Pie back." The earth pony gave Rarity a sympathetic look. "But it just ain't right to mess with the circle of life."

"B-but, but..." Rarity's eyes began to tear up. "Life's just so... empty without her..."

The other ponies were caught off guard. For the first time in her life, Rarity was crying genuine tears, completely unlike the overdramatic crying Rarity always enjoyed putting out. The three ponies didn't know how to respond other than to lend Rarity a shoulder to cry on.

"I know I've always complained about her..." Rarity mourned, "But I never really knew how big a part of everypony's lives she was! Especially for me... it's like there's this large Pinkie Pie shaped void in my heart! I can't design, I can't sew, I can't do anything with her missing!"

"We all feel the same way." Twilight sympathized.

"I know, that's why I wanted to bring her back." Rarity said tearfully. "If it was only me who felt this emptiness, I would have been content to suffer on my own. But everypony's pain was too much... so I wanted to do something, anything, to ease everypony's pain. I know it's wrong to mess around with death, but everypony was just so broken, you see?"

"We understand, Rarity." Twilight comforted. Applejack and Fluttershy nodded in agreement. "But you can't heal everypony by yourself. Sometimes you just have to let other's cope with things by themselves."

"You really think so, Twilight?" Rarity asked.

"Well..." Twilight glanced at Applejack. "Sometimes a pony wants to be by themselves, but as a friend you have to be ready to give them a shoulder to cry on."

"I guess you're right, Twilight." Rarity wiped the tears from her eyes. "But... we still need to search for the library. There might be a different spell we can use to escape from this sticky situation!"

"It's too late for that, pony!"

The four ponies looked in the direction of the voice, and were greeted by the two wolves. Rainbow Dash was struggling in Gruff's grasp, trying to break free. "I'm sorry guys, they hit me with a sucker punch!" Dash yelled. "You no good low-life scum! Let me go!!"

Gruff tightened his grip on Dash. "Fat chance, pony! Struggle anymore and I'll break you in two!"

Rainbow Dash glared at her captor but decided it was best to keep her mouth shut.

"Well I have to say, this was pretty annoying." Shadow said. "But now that we've got you cornered, it's over." He beckoned to Rarity. "Now let me offer you a deal. Come with us and be our slave, and we'll let all your friends go. Refuse, and well..." He signaled to Gruff, and the other wolf increased the pressure on Rainbow Dash. The blue pegasus gasped in pain. "You can guess the outcome."

"Y-you cretins!" Rarity yelled.

"Call us what you want, but don't forget we're offering you a deal." Shadow smirked.

"How d'we know if you'll even keep yer side of the agreement?!" Applejack shouted.

"You don't." Shadow stated simply. "But can you afford not to believe us?"

"Tch!" Applejack turned to Twilight Sparkle. "What d'ya think we should do, sugarcube?"

Rarity and Fluttershy turned to Twilight, hoping for an answer too. Twilight tried to hide herself due to all the pressure, and she wracked her brains to find some sort of solution. Her eyes darted all around the room, looking for something she can use to improve the situation. However, all she could see were pillars, rubble, the altar...

Wait a moment. An idea suddenly sparked in Twilight's mind.

"Rarity..." Twilight said in hushed tones. "How much do you know about combustion spells?"

"Combustion spells?" Rarity tilted her head. "Not much outside of the basics unicorns learned back in Filly Academy!"

“That’s good enough! Now listen Rarity...” Twilight lowered her voice even more to make sure the wolves couldn’t hear what she was saying. “I want you to concentrate all of your magic on a combustion spell in front of those wolves, okay?”

“W-what? But even if you and I combined our magic it would barely even be a spark!”

“What’re ya plannin’, Twilight Sparkle?” Applejack asked cautiously.

“A last ditch effort.” Twilight said calmly. “Applejack, Fluttershy, Rarity... if this doesn’t work, I want you all to know that you’re all my very best friends.”

“I-I’m sure it’ll work, Twilight...” Fluttershy squeaked. “W-we believe in you...”

“We don’t have all day!” Shadow roared. “Make your decision now, or we’ll snap the blue pony’s neck!”

“Alright, alright!” Rarity shouted. “I’m on my way, don’t do anything you might regret!”

The two wolves smirked as Rarity started to slowly walk over to them. She glanced over into Rainbow Dash’s eyes, trying to tell her that they’ve got a plan. Rainbow Dash appeared to get the message, and prepared herself.

“Now Rarity!”

The two unicorns concentrated the last vestiges of their magic to create a small explosion in front of the wolves. Startled, Gruff loosened his grip enough on Rainbow Dash, allowing the pegasus to break free and fly over to her friends.

“Ha ha!” Dash shouted. “Looks like you losers just lost your hostage!”

“As if that changes anything!” The wolves growled. “So much for giving you ponies a chance to go free, we’re going to kill the lot of you!”

“As if!” Twilight yelled. The moment she finished casting the combustion spell, she immediately set forth on another spell. A spell that she only ever used once before...

Bursts of light suddenly surrounded each of the five ponies. “T-Twilight?” Fluttershy stuttered. “T-this feeling... what are you—”

“The Elements of Harmony?!” Rarity yelped, noticing the familiarity of the magic that surrounded her. “B-but, there’s only five of us here! How in Celestia’s name are we going to make it work?!”

“J-just believe!” Twilight shouted over the whirlwind of magic.

“S-stop what you’re doing right now!!” The two wolves ran to attack the ponies, but the whirlwind of magic prevented them from getting too close.

Twilight Sparkle shut her eyes and concentrated. She had the Spirit of Kindness, with Fluttershy’s reassurance that everything will eventually be okay. She had the Spirit of Honesty, with Applejack admitting her true feelings and discarding the veil of anger she hid behind. She had the Spirit of Generosity, with Rarity’s wish to bring happiness back to Ponyville for everypony else, not for herself. And she had the Spirit of Loyalty, with Rainbow Dash’s return to help her friends in their time of need...

However, she was trying to summon the magic of the Elements with one missing. The Spirit of Laughter, which had been missing from everypony’s hearts since Pinkie Pie’s funeral... But surely five would be enough magic to banish these wolves, it’s not like they needed its full power like with Nightmare Moon, right...?

Twilight could feel the strain that casting the incomplete spell was putting on her mind. She couldn’t fail here, if she did who knows what would happen to them! The whirlwind of magic was steadily getting weaker and weaker as Twilight faltered. Soon enough, those wolves would be able to attack them, and all would be lost...

When a sudden familiar voice enthusiastically cut through the whirlwind.

“Did somepony order a party?!”

The wavering spell suddenly regained its structure, and the whirlwind picked up speed again. Magic surged through Twilight and the other ponies, rejuvenating their mind and bodies. The ponies felt as if they had unlimited power, and were surrounded by the warm glow of the rainbow.

“No... it can't be!” Shadow turned to Gruff. “We have to retreat! That's the same spell in our history books that Celestia used to—”

The rainbow swallowed the two wolves up before they could get another word out. A brilliant flash of light filled the dark corners of the Ruins, and when it cleared, the only thing that could be seen were the ponies that cast the spell.

“I... I can't believe that worked!” Twilight exclaimed, relieved. “Is everypony alright!”

“More than alright, sugarcube!” Applejack pranced around Twilight. “Look, mah hoof's fixed up!

“And my mane is so *clean*!” Rarity added, nuzzling her purple mane. “Oh, I'll *never* let it get dirty again...”

“U-Um... what happened to those wolves?” Fluttershy squeaked. “T-they didn't... die, did they?”

There was no hint that the wolves ever existed in the Ruins anymore. Twilight patted Fluttershy's head. “Don't worry, the Elements of Harmony don't cast magic to harm, only to purify. They aren't dead, but I'm sure they've been transported to someplace where they can't do harm to anypony anymore...”

“Uh, girls? Girls?!” Rainbow Dash shouted. “I-I think you should see this!” The other ponies turned to look where Rainbow Dash was pointing, and as soon as they saw what she saw, their jaws fell agape.

“N-no way...” Twilight Sparkle stuttered.

“Why does everypony looks so shocked? Oh, oh, wait! Don't tell me! It's uh... um... a gianormous cookie! No? Uh, the most tastylicious cupcake

ever? No? Hmm, don't tell me, I wanna guess and win the prize! It's uh... it's uh..."

"Pinkie Pie!"

"What? Just me?" The pink earth pony frowned. "I don't see how that's a surprise to anypony, I don't even have a party going on!"

Rainbow Dash was the first to react, flying as fast as she could to hug Pinkie Pie. However... instead of wrapping her arms around the earth pony, Rainbow Dash crashed into the ground behind her.

"W-what?" Dash stuttered.

"Oh neato!!" Pinkie bounced around. "I'm all intangible and stuff! I could totally make a new party game out of this! No wait, a haunted house! This is perfect for a haunted house!"

Twilight tried to cut in. "Pinkie—"

"But a haunted house can't just have a ghost pony! There has to be something else... Oh, I know! I know! Zombie ponies!!"

"Pinkie—"

"And then those zombie ponies could be all like 'Grraaaarrrrghh graaaaaarrrgghhh!!' and then the other ponies could be all like 'EEEEEEKK ZOMBIE PONIESSS!' and then I'd be all like 'No silly, I'm a ghost pony!' and then they'd be all like—"

"PINKIE!!" Twilight Sparkle screeched.

"Hey Twilight, what's up?" Pinkie asked in her normal Pinkie Pie way.

"Oh, darling..." Rarity was tearing up. Applejack and Fluttershy were following suit.

"Why does everypony look so sad? I mean it's not like anypony died or someth—oh wait..." Pinkie Pie frowned as if she suddenly remembered something. "Oh yeah... I died. Neato! I guess I really am a ghost pony!"

Twilight spoke hesitantly. "Pinkie... how did you..."

"Become a ghost pony?" Pinkie twisted her head in thought. "Well I dunno, I was in a shiny white place that looked like winter, and then for some reason something else that was shiny felt like it was pulling my heart, and then WHAM I was here! It's still pretty shiny too." Pinkie Pie pointed to the necklace that was hanging around her neck.

"No way... the Elements of Harmony!" Twilight gasped.

"Yeah, I guess it was that! Somepony's voice in my head told me that the Elements of Harmony have to stay together, so I had to come back and leave it here! I guess I should do that now!" Pinkie unhooked the necklace, and it turned to light and launched off into the sky to search for the new inhabitant of the Spirit of Laughter. "Bye bye necklace!"

None of the ponies really knew what to say to Pinkie Pie now that she was in front of them. They were all frozen in shock at the sight of the friend whom they were never supposed to see again.

"Well aren't you all party poopers." Pinkie frowned. "You all look so gloom and doom, laugh and smile will ya? Oh?" Pinkie started sparkling. "Cool! I'm like an ornament! And I'm feeling lighter too!!"

The realization that Pinkie was about to disappear for the last time suddenly hit everypony. "Wait Pinkie!" They all called out.

"Silly fillies, I can't stay! I'm dead, remember? And dead ponies tell no tales... unless I tell you all a story right now! But I don't think there's time for that!" Pinkie said jokingly.

"Pinkie Pie!" Rainbow Dash tried to hug Pinkie again, but fell through her for the second time. Pinkie finally gave a sad look to everypony.

"You know... when I was dying, I felt the most saddest most miserable feeling in the world." Pinkie Pie confessed. "I felt like I was letting everypony down by giving into my sugar cravings. Especially you, Rainbow Dash..." She put her hoof on Dash's shoulder, but to the blue pegasus only air was touching her. "I didn't get to say this before, but Rainbow Dash..."

“I love you.”

Tears welled up in Rainbow Dash's eyes.

“I love all of you too,” Pinkie Pie turned to her other friends. “I love Twilight for her super-duper knowledge on everything, I love Applejack for all her tasty delicious apples, I love Fluttershy for her adorable shyness, and I love Rarity for fabulishousness. I love everypony for every reason, so when I was dying... I was really sad. But not because I'll never see you all again, but because...”

“If I disappeared, everypony else would be sad, and I couldn't stand to think of the sad expressions everypony would have.”

The other ponies were crying freely at Pinkie Pie's words, but the one crying the hardest was Rainbow Dash.

“So... I want to ask everypony a favor.” Pinkie smiled. “Don't be sad anymore. When you all think of me, I want you to think of all the fun parties, and all the fun thoughts. I don't want you all to cry when you think about me, but laugh instead. That way... that way I can rest peacefully, knowing my friends will be okay. Can you all do that for me?”

Everypony but Rainbow Dash nodded, unable to speak properly due to the tears.

“Thank you all, thank you all so much. You all are my very very super duper best of best friends!” A single tear streamed down Pinkie Pie's face, but the pink earth pony smiled brightly despite that. “It's... about time for me to go. I can feel it in my twitchy twitchy heart!” Pinkie Pie began to fade away.

“Pinkie Pie, wait!!” Rainbow Dash desperately stretched out her hooves to reach for Pinkie. “D-Don't go! I... I... Pinkie Pie, I lo—”

Pinkie held up a hoof to keep Dash from finishing her sentence. “Shh, Rainbow Dash, it's okay, you don't need to say it.” The earth pony smiled warmly. “I want you to be able to live on and push forward, so if you say those words that you're going to say, you'll stay hooked to the past. And I don't want that.”

“B-but...” Rainbow Dash stuttered.

“Shh,” Pinkie Pie softly interrupted. “And... don’t blame yourself for what happened that day. If anything you should blame me for being such a weaky weakikins. It was totally my fault...”

“Pinkie Pie...” Dash sobbed. She wiped her tears and gazed into Pinkie Pie’s eyes. “Is... is there anything I can do for you before you go?”

“Well... you can do one last thing for me.” Pinkie responded. “You and everypony else.”

“A-anything!” Dash exclaimed. “Right girls?!” The other ponies nodded in agreement.

Pinkie Pie smiled. “Giggle at this ghostie, and let me see all of your smiles one last time.”

Everypony complied with Pinkie’s last request, and gave her their best smiles. The tears still streamed down their faces, but they smiled regardless, knowing that if they let the sadness overtake their hearts, they’d be letting Pinkie Pie down.

“Thank you, everypony...” Pinkie Pie started to float away back into oblivion. She gave one last wave of her hoof to her irreplaceable friends.

“Thank you.”

Epilogue

It was truly a beautiful day for a party.

They'd spared no expense this time on all the beautiful decorations covering the event. They'd held it outside of course, and a surprising amount of people had come out for it. Rainbow Dash could even see the balloons from here. Pinkie Pie always had the best parties, and this was no exception.

Rainbow Dash usually sped into Pinkie Pie's parties with great enthusiasm, ready to play pranks on whatever unsuspecting pony that happened to walk into them. However, today was different.

Instead of gliding excitedly towards the partygrounds, Dash proceeded with a slow trot. There was a strange tension in Rainbow Dash's stomach, making Dash feel slightly nervous as she made her way towards the party.

"Thanks for coming, Dash!" Pinkie said, trotting alongside her friend as soon as she saw her. "This party's been planned for *months* now, so if you missed it, everypony would be super duper disappointed! You seemed kinda hesitant to come, which is kinda weird since you always loved to come to my parties, ready to play a prank on somepony, like the electric buzzer on the hoof prank! I always loved that one, it's always so funny, and you're always so funny Rainbow Dash! Even when you're all tingly and nervous like right now, which is fine since this is a super duper important event, except I wouldn't be tingly and nervous because if I was, these super-duper fantastic fantabulishous parties wouldn't be able to be thrown all the time! And look!" Pinkie said, bouncing in her step. "You got all dressed up!"

Rainbow Dash laughed to herself. She didn't like to get dressed up, it wasn't her kind of thing. But today, she'd done it for Pinkie. "Yeah, well... it's the least I can do for you."

Pinkie just smiled at her in response. But very suddenly, her expression changed to one of worry. "... listen, Dash... There's something I need you to do for me."

"Sure thing, Pinkie!" Dash said as they stopped in place, surprised at Pinkie's uncharacteristically mellow response. "What do you need? I'll get it done super quick!"

"It's about time for you to completely move on." Pinkie tilted her neck down so that she could look up at Dash, smiling at her sadly. "Dash... you've always been my bestest best best friend, and I know you tried your hardest. So... no more frownie frown face, okay?"

"Pinkie Pie..." Dash just laughed again in response, shaking her head from side to side in disbelief. "You are so... random."

"Yeah yup yuh-huh!" Pinkie said, still smiling. "So you'll try? For me?"

Rainbow Dash responded by pulling Pinkie Pie into a tight hug. "I don't need to try anymore. If I stay tied down, I'd be disappointing you, right?"

Pinkie Pie smiled warmly in response, deciding to stay silent in Rainbow Dash's embrace. Unable to think of anything else they could say to each other, they simply stayed locked in that embrace, sharing a moment together. But before too long it was interrupted by the sound of footsteps coming up from behind them. Embarrassed to be caught in such a way, Dash lifted her head back up, a glimmer of a tear in her eyes. "So... aren't you going to go get started?"

"On what?" Twilight Sparkle's voice asked from somewhere close behind her.

"On the... on the..." Rainbow Dash choked on her tears.

For a moment, Twilight looked at Rainbow Dash with concern. "... where do you think we are?"

Rainbow Dash wiped her tears as she looked at the purple unicorn. The way her mane was combed neatly yet not too formal. The way she was dressed up in a party dress, just like Dash was. Slowly, Rainbow Dash

turned around to look at the party. At all the people who had gathered there today. The beautiful decorations, all centered around a photograph of Pinkie Pie, with three balloons tied to the frame.

It was truly a beautiful day for a party. Only one thing was missing.

“Where’s the sarsaparilla?” Rainbow Dash asked.

Twilight laughed and pointed to Derpy Hooves. “You’re too late, Derpy drank it all already.”

“Hey, no fair!!” Rainbow Dash laughed. Everypony laughed along with her.

It’s been one year since the funeral and everypony in Ponyville was throwing a party in remembrance. After all, what other way could a pony honor Pinkie Pie but with a party?

Life had gone back to normal, and although everypony kept Pinkie Pie in their memories, nopony allowed sadness to take hold of them because of it. Fluttershy was still taking care of the animals, Applejack still tended the farm with her family, Rarity continued to run her business, and Twilight Sparkle was still doing her research for Celestia. The only pony who still felt a pang of sadness when thinking about Pinkie Pie was Rainbow Dash.

“Hey Rainbow Dash, you okay?” Twilight asked.

“Yeah... it’s been a year after all, right?” Dash grinned. “I see her in my dreams sometimes, but it ain’t all bad since I’m able to laugh with her there.” Twilight’s worried expression remained on her face. “Stop worrying about me! This pegasus isn’t going to stay down forever! Besides!” Rainbow Dash squeezed her face to make a silly looking expression. “It’s a party! So you should be so worried, Twilight!”

Twilight Sparkle couldn’t help but laugh at Rainbow Dash’s face. “Oh gosh, now you’re almost as random as Pinkie Pie!”

“Yeah? I don’t think I’ll ever be as random as her, but I can sure try!” Rainbow Dash decided to fly upside-down with the goofy expression still on her face.

“Now why in Celestia’s name are ya foolin’ around like that?” Applejack laughed, only arriving to the party with Rarity and Fluttershy just now.

“Hey Applejack, you think I can be as random as Pinkie Pie?” Rainbow Dash asked. “I think it might make me 20 percent cooler!”

“More like 20 percent *sillier*!” Rarity commented. “I dare say you must be out of your mind if you can be as random as that pony! Isn’t that right, Fluttershy?”

“Oh, uhm...” Fluttershy cowered at having the spotlight suddenly shine on her. “Well... uh, I think that... um, that face is... nice.”

The other ponies laughed merrily at her response.

“That is so *you*, Fluttershy!” Rainbow Dash commented jokingly. The blue pegasus bared her wings. “Hey everypony, you wanna see me do something *awesome*?”

“Don’t be so full of yourself, Rainbow Dash!” Twilight said.

“Ya know that’s like askin’ DJ Scratch P0N-3 to stop jammin’, right sugarcube?” Applejack asked, grinning.

“I know...” Twilight said, blushing. “It’s just that... hey, Rainbow Dash!!”

The blue pegasus already lifted up into the air, letting the wind flow beneath her wings. Everything was right in Ponyville, and everypony lived happily like usual. Rainbow Dash gazed back at the portrait of Pinkie Pie at the centerfold of the party. She smiled.

Nothing would stop this pony from zooming through life. Rainbow Dash made her decision about this a long time ago, keeping her fondest memories of Pinkie Pie fresh in her heart.

--

“Oh Shaadooooowwww?” Celestia called out. “Would you mind fetching me some tea, please?”

The wolf bowed grudgingly. "Yes, m'lady." Shadow sighed and left the room to get more tea, where he ran into Gruff.

"Oh, heyo boss!" Gruff said energetically. "Haven't seen you in a while!"

"No kidding." Shadow muttered. After being zapped by the Elements of Harmony, Shadow and Gruff were transported to Celestia's castle, where Celestia put them to work as her and Luna's manservants. It was either that or be punished harshly as treaty-breakers.

"You know, boss." Gruff said. "Workin' for these ponies isn't that bad! We get weekends off and paid benefits, it's great!"

"Yeah, great." Shadow huffed. No matter how good these jobs were, there's no way he'd let go of his pride as a wo... he sniffed the air. "Is that... some black tea? Oh goodie!" The wolves went out to perform their duties as Celestia's manservants.

Celestia giggled at the wolves. It sure was interesting to watch them work. Although she did let them off easy for bringing so much trouble to her student and her friends... but she decided to look the offense over, for her protégé learned a valuable lesson because of those wolves. And they sure were amusing!

Princess Celestia laughed to herself and pulled out a letter from the drawer where she kept all of Twilight Sparkle's friendship reports. She opened it up and fondly read over its contents.

Dear Princess Celestia,

I know I haven't sent you a single report in the past week, but today I've learned a valuable lesson in friendship. I'm sure you know about the death of our dear friend Pinkie Pie, as you sent your condolences earlier (I apologize for not sending a reply, I was unable to think of a proper response). I learned that it is inevitable for everypony to experience tragedy at some point in their lives, and that it is sometimes extremely hard to get over the sadness resulting from it. However, a pony doesn't have to cope alone. Everypony has friends to support them through their darkest times, even if they don't acknowledge them. There is always a friend to lend a shoulder to cry on, or an ear to listen with, you just have to be willing to accept their kindness. Coping with Pinkie Pie's death has been hard for all of us, but with each other's help and support, we'll be able to live on despite her absence.

*Your faithful student,
Twilight Sparkle*

~~~ The End ~~~

Alternate Ending

It was the biggest party Pinkie Pie had ever put together. She'd been baking since before noon to get enough goodies ready, and everypony in Ponyville had turned up to celebrate the news of Rainbow Dash's acceptance to the Wonderbolts after the most amazing tryout any of them had ever seen. The Wonderbolts themselves had even stopped by, and were now busy signing autographs and taking pictures with everypony in sight. The day couldn't have been more perfect, but Pinkie heard a strange sound coming from one corner of the room.

Somepony was crying.

Pinkie ran over to discover none other than the pony of the hour herself, Rainbow Dash, backed up against a wall, sobbing. She didn't even seem to notice how many people had turned up for her party.

"Aw, Dash, what's wrong? Are you just so amazingly super duper happy you can't help crying? I made you some special cupcakes with rainbow sprinkles, so dry those eyes and let's have some fun!" But dash didn't seem to hear her. "You okay, Dash? Are you crying for real? Are there not enough balloons?"

"P... P-Pinkie..." The blue pegasus could barely get the words out.

"I'm right here, Dash," Pinkie responded. "What's wrong?"

"Pinkie, p-please..."

"Hm?"

"Pinkie please... please get up."

Pinkie Pie tilted her head, confused. "Huh? I'm not the one sitting on the floor at a party. Are you feeling okay?"

“Please, Pinkie.” Rainbow Dash pleaded. “Please wake up. You’re my best friend and I...I—” She broke into tears again. Pinkie put a hoof around her friend’s neck.

“I’m right here Rainbow Dash. We’re at your party. Don’t you remember?”

“I’ll... I’ll give up flying for the rest of my life if she just gets better.” Pinkie couldn’t figure out who Dash was talking about, but suddenly she started feeling dizzy. The room was spinning, and the room started to blur. Bad cupcakes maybe? Everything went black, then Pinkie realized she must have fallen down. She opened her eyes.

Pinkie wasn’t at the sweet shop anymore, and this new room was empty. It was dark outside and she was lying in somepony else’s bed. What had happened at the party? Pinkie turned her head and saw Rainbow Dash sitting on a stool, smiling at her friend with tears in her eyes.

“Hey Dash, what happened at the party?” Pinkie asked weakly. “I think I fell asleep.”

“Pinkie...” Dash tried to find her voice. “I think you were dreaming, Pinkie. We’ve been here at the hospital for two days, ever since your...” She choked. She didn’t want to think about how horrific it had been to find Pinkie in her condition, to see her pass out and start convulsing like that. The trip to the hospital carrying Pinkie on her back was quicker than Dash could usually fly by herself, and she’d nearly thrown up after the nurse ponies had forced her out of the room when Pinkie stopped breathing. It wasn’t until an hour later when they let her back inside, and Pinkie was out cold. They didn’t know how long it would take for her to come around.

They sat and stared at one another in silence. Pinkie did her best to think about what had happened. Her fateful doctor visit, the awful needle, the first fit of depression the cheerful Pinkie Pie had ever felt, and how she tried to kill herself with sweets. And Rainbow Dash catching her in the act. Now the pink pony was choking back her own tears. “Dash, I’m sorry. I’m sorry I acted so selfish. I’m sorry I made you feel sad. I’m supposed to be the one who makes everypony smile and laugh.”

Dash chuckled. "I'm just happy you're still here. I was really... I... I was so scared. And after I got you here I couldn't do anything to help. I felt so useless."

"You stayed with me, Rainbow Dash. I think that helped a lot." Pinkie looked away. "I'm sorry for what I did. I don't want to make anypony sad, especially my best friend. If I can't eat sweets anymore then that's okay. I can still make people laugh. I can still make my friends smile."

"Pinkie, I was thinking about what you said that night." Rainbow Dash said. "About it being like me not being able to fly anymore. And you were right." She paused. "But I made a promise. I said if you'd just get better I'd never fly again. I'd rather give up flying than give you up."

Pinkie turned back towards her friend. "I think I could hear you when I was dreaming. But Dash, I don't want you to do that. You're not happy stuck on the ground, and if you can't be happy, I couldn't be happy either."

Dash couldn't keep it together after that. She jumped up and threw her forelegs around Pinkie, hugging her friend tightly. Neither spoke until Rainbow Dash finally released her friend and stood up.

"So what were you dreaming about, Pinkie?" The blue pegasus asked. "Something good?"

"Yeah, something good. I'll tell you, but it's super top secret, so you can't let anypony else know." Dash leaned in closely to hear what her friend had to say, and Pinkie tipped her head forward to plant a tiny kiss on Rainbow Dash's nose. They both blushed.

"Pinkie Pie, you are so random."