

With a Heavy Heart

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Table of Contents:

Chapter 1		3
Chapter 2	Everything Goes My Way	14
Chapter 3	Young Tender Hearts Beat Fast	22
Chapter 4	Wanting	31
Chapter 5	Mechanisms	43
Chapter 6	With You	51
Interlude		60
Chapter 7	Gone	63
Chapter 8	The Ocean Between You and Me	73

Chapter 1

The party loving pink pony; Pinkie Pie, extinguished the last light within Sugarcube Corner, and with that, she was gone.

Rainbow Dash looked up into the flashing strobe and immersed herself. She blinked, and the outline of the resident pony DJ was obvious, nevertheless, when she blinked again, DJ Pon-3 was gone. Strobe lights were funny like that, and Rainbow Dash pondered whether that it was due to the fact that ponies wouldn't have had strobes in the wild. However, at this point she decided that she didn't really care, as she was out at a club, and that there probably wasn't enough alcohol in her bloodstream if she could think that coherently.

"Rainbow! You dragged me out here, and now you're just *ignoring me?*"

It was Twilight Sparkle.

Well, Rainbow had been told to call her Twilight, but she was unsure what she'd done to warrant such a close friendship.

"Twilight, you know when you just look into the lights, and then you go all trance-y? What's all that about?"

Well, she had to think of something to say, and the 'lights thing' was already in her head...

"What?"

"Uhhh, on second thoughts, never mind."

‘Damn’, Rainbow thought to herself. ‘Why’d I mention the lights, It was a stupid idea. Moving swiftly on...’

“Twilight, can I get you a drink?”

“That’d be splendid, Rainbow.”

...

“Well, it’d help to know what you want.”

“Rainbow, do you mind if I tell you something?”

Huh, she always has to beat around the bush, but if I told her that, she’d probably just laugh at me for using such a cliché.

“Is it what you want to drink?”

“Well, sort of.”

...

“Go on then...”

“You may be surprised, but...” Twilight goes off into an inaudible whisper.

“You’ll have to speak up, Twilight.”

Twilight moved towards Rainbow’s ear and whispered;
“I’ve never drunk before.”

Red spread across the purple pony’s cheeks. Rainbow stifled a laugh, but Twilight missed it, in her embarrassment.

“Don’t they have booze in Canterlot?”

“Well...”

“I’ll just get you what I’m having, shall I?”

In a small voice, Rainbow heard; "That'd be nice."

"Be back in ten seconds, flat."

Rainbow turned and clopped towards the bar. Maybe she'd been a bit mean on the poor filly, but she couldn't help but think that at somepony had to be a bit mean on the new pony. Well, maybe the not so new pony. Twilight *had* been living in Ponyville for quite some time now. Anyway, Rainbow had invited her out, so that was something.

"Four double Fillykicks please" She mumbled, nonchalantly.

Best to get a couple of rounds in, she thought; saves coming back for more so quickly.

"Rainbow Dash, *What in Equestria are you doing?!*"

"Just having a bit of fun, Twilight, lighten up."

"Yes, okay, fine, *just get off of the table!*"

Twilight Sparkle was overwhelmed with the drunken version of Rainbow Dash, she was even more of a loose cannon than she was normally.

Twilight didn't even think that was possible.

'*She's ruining all order in the club!*', Twilight thought; her obsessiveness rife within her.

"Geez, Twi', stop being such a killjoy!"

Despite the uncooperative speech, Rainbow still got off of the table, but she still insisted on flying down. And now she'd

started shortening her name to 'Twi'. She'd asked her to call her Twilight, not Twi', but Twilight had learnt not to argue with a drunk Rainbow Dash, as that was the reason she'd ended up on the table in the first place.

"Hey Twi', you wanna dance?"

"Fine, but only if you don't draw attention to us like that again."

"Like what?"

Rainbow ought to know perfectly what she meant, eyes were only just being averted from them now, and there were quite a lot of ponies they were sharing the table with, who'd put drinks down on said table.

"Oh, let's just go."

Probably best to move along, before we're hoofed with the bill for the ponies who'd put drinks down on said table.

"Oh, Twi', I love this song!"

Twilight wasn't sure how Rainbow could tell the difference, the thumping bass just sounded the same as the previous song, but she supposed that maybe the alcohol within her own bloodstream was beginning to take its toll on her senses.

"It's not bad, I suppose."

"Louder, Twi', I can't hear you!"

"It's not bad, I said"

The two ponies were on a rather cramped dance floor, below the bar area, crammed full of other rather drunk ponies, all doing

some sort of drunken dancing/stumbling about type affair.

Suddenly, Rainbow fell forwards, jolted by a few over-enthusiastic colts, into Twilight, sending them both into a heap on the dance floor.

As her senses came back to her, she could only hear an incredibly irate Rainbow Dash, screaming at the top of her lungs. The music had stopped.

“...F YOU HADN'T BEEN BEING A BUNCH OF IDIOTS, WE'D STILL ALL BE HAVING A...”

“Rainbow?” Twilight's voice was quiet.

“...NICE NIGHT OUT, BUT NO, YOU HAD TO...”

“Rainbow?” Twilight tried her best to be louder.

“...GO AND- Twi', you're awake!”

Twilight could feel pain across her forehead, spattered with a sort of wet feeling.

“Twi', can you open your eyes for me?”

She tried to open her eyes.

Vision came through, dappled by red.

“Twi', say something, please?”

She pulled her head off of the floor, mostly ignoring the wetness, and looked up. There was a mostly red faced filly looking down at her, but she couldn't quite make out the face it's self.

“Rainbow, where are you?” Twilight's voice was still quiet.

“Uhhh...”

The red filly waved a hoof at her.

“I’m right here, Twi’.”

“But, *what?* Rainbow, you’re all red.”

“Yeah, blood is red, ya’ know.”

Twilight’s sight had mostly come back to her by now, at least as far as she could tell, and Rainbow was right. Her face was largely red, caked in blood, with what looked like it was a rather deep gash on her forehead.

“By Celestia, Rainbow Dash! What happened?”

Rainbow looked pale, in-between the spatters of blood.

“Look; I’m fine, but I think we need to get out of here. Can you stand?”

Twilight pushed against the sticky floor with her fore legs, trying to ignore the pain in her left leg, followed by her putting her hind legs firmly out. She’d live; it was probably just a couple of large bruises, she thought.

Twilight looked around; the two of them really had brought the club to a standstill. There were mostly concerned faces, looking towards them, but slightly backed off. Twilight put this down to how irately Rainbow had been shouting at everyone. She also noticed a couple still going at it, dancing like a couple of mental ponies; she chuckled, and wished she had not a care like they did.

“C’mon, Twi’, let’s go.”

Rainbow was impatiently beckoning her to the door, At least from the side, she wasn't all red.

The two fillies stepped out into the cold. Twilight could see her breath, during the silence after the club. Rainbow hadn't said anything since, so she'd merely entranced herself staring at the patterns and the swirls in the low light of the night. However, she couldn't help think about convection currents, and how water vapour condenses when cold. Twilight smiled bitterly to herself, why couldn't she just enjoy things? She always had to over analyse everything.

"Rainbow, you're being awfully quiet."

"Yeah?"

"Are you really sure you're okay?"

"I'm fine."

For somepony who was so concerned about her earlier on, Twilight was surprised that she was being so blunt when it came to concerns regarding herself.

Maybe Rainbow just couldn't let go of her cool exterior, like Twilight herself couldn't help but analyse everything that came before her.

"You look awfully pale..."

"I said I was fine, Okay?"

Twilight could tell that she wasn't.

Rainbow's once powerful, confident stride had diminished into a stumbling, slow stagger, although it seemed as though she was trying to cover it up. Anyway, Twilight had a sneaking

suspicion that Rainbow was quite hurt, as would be flying along side her, if she could. In fact, this was probably the furthest Twilight had seen Rainbow Dash walk, well, *ever*.

“Rainbow, I hate to say it, but you don’t look just ‘fine’. I’m sorry, but you look *terrible*.”

Rainbow shot Twilight an evil look, but it looked pained, half-hearted.

“Look; you have a massive gash in your forehead, you’ve lost a lot of blood, you’re staggering along, you look like you’re going to be on the floor, if you don’t get *at least* some rest, and yet you’re *still* insisting that you’re ‘fine’? I don’t know what your definition of ‘fine’ is, but it’s definitely *wrong!*”

Rainbow didn’t respond, she just let out a dissatisfied huff, and looked away from Twilight.

“Rainbow, I’m just trying to be a friend, and you’re just pushing me away. Is that what you want?”

Something seemed to catch Rainbow’s eye, as she looked away from Twilight once more, instead gazing in the general direction of Sugarcube Corner.

“Hey Twilight, do you see that?”

‘Ah, so she completely ignored me.’ Twilight noted.

“See what?”

“Isn’t that Pinkie Pie?”

Rainbow waved her hoof in the direction of Sugarcube Corner. Twilight could see a pink-tinged shadow, walking away

from the cake parlour, slowly, subtly.

“Why, I do believe it is.”

Twilight tried to sound un-interested, as she was still annoyed with Rainbow’s dismissal of her worries; but it was intriguing, none the less. Where would Pinkie be going at this time of night?

“Heh, that Pinkie Pie can be so random, huh, Twi’?”

“I don’t know, but to be honest, Rainbow, I’m still more worried about you than what Pinkie could be doing at all. Don’t think because you changed the subject and started talking cocky again that I’ll just give up.”

“Look, Twi’ just leave it, okay? I’ll be fine.”

There was silence once more.

Twilight actually still felt pity for the cocky pegasus pony, but not for the pain. She really couldn’t let down her ‘cool’ exterior.

They walked, in the dead stillness, and Twilight thought to herself that it was always quite funny when pathetic fallacy applied to the real world.

Then she kicked herself once more for becoming to analytical of her own life.

“Well, this is me, then.”

Twilight and Rainbow were stood outside of the Library which acted as Twilight’s surrogate home.

She looked into Rainbow's eyes.

"Rainbow, I'm still worried about you..."

Rainbow looked up into the sky, eyes darting away from Twilight.

"Rainbow, *please?*"

"Twilight, just leave it."

She sounded exasperated, but in a quite, morose tone.

"But-"

"What'll it take to shut you up?"

Twilight was quiet for a second, as ideas formed in her head.

"Stay the night here?"

Rainbow looked back down at Twilight, but stared at her, not making eye contact.

"*What?*"

"You know, sleep at my house."

"Yes, yes, I know what you meant, but *why?*"

"Isn't it obvious?"

Rainbow stared at Twilight obliviously.
Obviously not, Twilight thought.

"Well, you're not well, anypony can see that. If you stayed here, I could just keep an eye on you, in case you take a turn for

the worse. I could get you cleaned up, you're covered in blood."

"Twi', I'll be-"

"Rainbow Dash, please? Just for me?"

Rainbow looked into Twilight's eyes.

"Don't just tell me you'll be fine."

"Fine."

Twilight chuckled at her turn of phrase, but Rainbow obviously didn't get the humour in it.

She ushered Rainbow inside, before she could change her mind.

Chapter 2

Everything Goes My Way

The library seemed vast, shrouded in darkness. The cavernous room was eerie, and the motley assortment of books formed cold, unnatural shapes, juxtaposing the soft, gradual shapes of the clouds Rainbow Dash was so used to coming home to. She didn't like it.

Well, Rainbow didn't like spending much time in the library anyway, it seemed as though it was lacking in energy; lacking in life.

Twilight's addition of light wasn't much better, either. Long shadows of cast aside books littered the floor, making the library seem somewhat even more surreal. At least the shadows weren't definite anymore; they petered out into grey, slowly morphing back into the warm, flickering yellows of Twilight's candlelight. It was more like the clouds of her home, which settled Rainbow, but she didn't like the incessant flickering, it seemed far too uncertain, almost ethereal.

"Rainbow, do you want to sit down?"

She jumped, retracting away from what had seemed to be a bellowing noise, against the ambience.

Twilight may have noticed, but Rainbow tried her best to shrug it off, with a non-committal huff.

"Yeah, why not."

Rainbow slumped down onto the sofa that Twilight was gesturing to, and shut out the confusing half-light of the library. She couldn't let the strange shapes and shrouds faze her, she was supposed to be strong.

No, she was strong!

"Twi', could I get a glass of water?"

"Certainly, Rainbow."

Twilight turned around, rump facing Rainbow, wiggling as she slowly moved towards the basin, just out of the main library area. Just before Twilight moved out of earshot, Rainbow heard her mumble to herself.

"Oh, and a please wouldn't go amiss, Miss 'I'm too full of myself to be polite-'"

Twilight went on, but Rainbow couldn't care much, at least she was getting what she wanted; her body was crying out for hydration, and she knew Twilight was good enough natured to comply with her meagre demands.

"Miss Dash, here's the water that you so eagerly await!" Twilight's voice was a cusp above sarcastic. "I brought some painkillers as well, madam. That gash upon one's forehead must be a touch painful."

Rainbow chose to ignore the mock-royal treatment, and knocked back the small white caplets, gulping them down, with most of the water Twilight had brought for her. Even so, the clinical bitterness of the pills was persisting on her tongue.

"Thanks, Twi'"

Rainbow looked into Twilight's eyes, and did her best to smile, but it wouldn't come through. She wouldn't tell Twilight this, but she was putting all her effort into not letting the tears inside her well up from the gash on her forehead pulsing pain. She brought her hoof up to the wound, and brushed across it. Rainbow let out an audible gasp, her head was still tender.

"Don't be a silly pony, Rainbow! Of course it's still going to hurt!"

Twilight was being far too chirpy for Rainbow's tired, pained head, and so she chose to remain quiet.

"Rainbow, we ought to get you cleaned up, you're absolutely caked in blood!"

It was true; she could feel its dryness clinging to her face, stiffening her mane, beginning to itch.

"I'm going to run you a nice, warm bath! You just take it easy, okay?"

"Thanks, Twi'."

Rainbow wasn't really in the mood to talk; she'd rather be at home now, sleeping. Still, she was sure this was the only way to keep Twilight quiet, and it had worked; to an extent.

Twilight Sparkle turned around once more, this time heading towards the bathroom. She was once again wiggling her rump, swishing her tail side to side, almost as if she was trying to entice Rainbow.

She didn't want to admit it, but Rainbow was enjoying it. She hadn't meant to look, but the flick of Twilight's tail had caught her eye, and then that was it. She was thinking of Twilight in *other* ways. She was cute, Rainbow would give her that. It was the lilac

colour; that hue painted Twilight in intense innocence, yet upon a rump so fine, Rainbow was wondering how she'd never seen through such an innocent veil.

Maybe it was Twilight's personality. She'd spent so much time thinking that, well, Twilight was quite frankly *boring*. Yeah, she was a good friend, and not bad to be around, but *books*? *Seriously?*

It's not like Rainbow was a stranger to the occasional book, she'd been to flight school, and there was no escaping the textbooks there. Of course, she didn't know that when she'd signed up, but that was beside the point.

It was then that Rainbow realised what she was doing.

She was slumped upon a sofa, in Twilight's library, fantasising about her, whilst staring at her rump.

Thinking of another filly like that?! Rainbow, have you gone mad?! She checked her wings; they were up in the air too, along with her thoughts. Rainbow hated that about herself, the one thing she couldn't control. To be so excited that her wings manifest a life of their own. It just wasn't cool.

Rainbow could feel her face burning up, but she decided it was probably just due to the wound on her head; it definitely wasn't anything to do with her... 'feelings.'

Besides, if she was going to be with another filly, it would be with somepony else. Somepony she'd already shared her feelings with. She didn't like to think about it, though. That a pony like her; ***"Rainbow Dash; The fastest flier in all of Equestria!"*** would do such *things* with another filly. It just wasn't cool. However, Rainbow couldn't keep the two fillies out of her head. Twilight Sparkle, who was currently running a bath for her, and Rainbow's

other, already established, albeit secret... '*Friend.*'

Just thinking of the situation made Rainbow burn up, so much so that she couldn't even bare to name the other damn pony. If she'd known that it was going to turn out this way, well, she might have changed things. Just a bit, at least.

Rainbow Dash realised that her wings were up, yet again.

"Damn things!" She uttered.

Rainbow folded her wings away, and laid down upon her back. That ought to keep them in control, she thought, as another wave of heat cascaded over her face.

"Why won't my wound just stop burning me up? It's just so..."

Rainbow exhaled a long breath, wavering.

She'd beaten herself into a corner, and she knew it. So what if she was embarrassed? It was probably just the alcohol taking its toll on her, she thought, although she knew that she didn't believe it. Rainbow wavered yet again.

So there *wasn't* just one thing she couldn't control, Rainbow thought, to her annoyance. Maybe that's just how it works.

Of course, she still wasn't going to tell Twilight that.

It just wasn't cool.

Twilight slowly swayed towards the bathroom, watching her hooves blur before her.

"Heh, it's like I've got, like- I don't even know how many hooves!"

Then Twilight then realised what she'd done; she'd used 'like' in a sentence, *and twice at that!*

She trotted into the bathroom, still 'tutting' at her literary disregard; she was beginning to sound too common for her liking.

Twilight cranked the faucet on the bath over to hot, and watched the water flow out of the old, chunky library pipes. At least it was functional, she thought to herself. Some of the newer designer bathroom suites had stupid twiddly, nonsensical handles on the faucets. *She didn't have time to put up with such gimmicks!* Well, she was a busy pony, what with all the studying and all.

Twilight winced, as she realised she'd blatantly disregarded the English language *again!* That didn't even make sense!

Maybe it was down to the alcoholic intoxication, she thought. She'd definitely read books about it; there was a section in her copy of 'Slumber 101' labelled 'Adult', which touched on Alcohol, amongst other things, but that wasn't the kind of book she was thinking about. Twilight needed something more academic, really.

All of a sudden, the quote she was searching for surfaced within her brain:

"The first few beverages **will** affect judgement, reaction time and brain activity, regardless of a Pony's metabolism, tolerance to alcohol or BMI. As alcohol consumption increases, reactions **will** become even more sluggish and delays in physical and mental coordination will become far more pronounced."

Twilight was pleased with herself; she'd remembered the quote with such ease, although she was a bit disappointed that she'd turned to 'Slumber 101' before the acclaimed yet controversial thesis; "Alcohol: The bane or father of Equestria?"

Twilight sat down on the cold, tiled floor of the bathroom, and brought her hoof over her fringe. It felt matted, rough to the touch. It was odd, she thought, having another pony's blood upon one's self, especially that of Rainbow Dash. Twilight wasn't sure why it was so odd for Rainbow in particular; it just didn't feel quite right.

Maybe it was because she was too *cool* to bleed? Twilight knew this was complete nonsense, the moment she thought it, but she entertained the thought, if only momentarily, just out of mild humour. Anyway, the cocky pony would probably insist that she was too cool for bleeding, regardless of the facts.

Condensation began to form on the tiled floor. Twilight slid her hoof half-heartedly, causing a light, traced line to form across a few tiles. The line, however, was only definite for a couple of seconds, as condensation began to incur upon the divide she'd drawn.

Twilight didn't like this lack of certainty; it was as if as soon as she'd created the definite, perfect line, the boundaries were blurred. It was as if the condensation was disobeying her rules, trying to overwhelm the change, trying to remain the same.

However, Twilight still felt a sense of victory over the constantly condensing tiles: Even if it covered up the lines she'd created, there was still presence. If you looked, ever so closely, you could see that there was indeed a line there before;

It'd merely just... changed.

Twilight thought back to the events of the evening, and realised that she didn't actually know *why* Rainbow was bleeding so much. Well, she knew that it had some relevance to a collision between them, but nothing like a straight up collision could have caused such a deep gash as the one Rainbow had acquired upon her head. To do something like that, somepony would have to use something sharp, something *piercing*.

A wave of realisation overwhelmed Twilight, and she leapt to her feet, leaving wet hoofprints upon the floor, soon to be consumed by the condensation. She staggered over to the sink, snagging a towel en route. However, it wasn't the sink Twilight was after, but the mirror above it.

She slowly brought the towel up to the once reflective mirror. Shaking, Twilight slid the flannelly material across the surface, and she was presented with a fleeting look at her own face.

It may well have only been distinct for a couple of seconds, but she saw it. Her horn was red.

However, it wasn't a sort of jolly red, not the kind of red you'd associate with whimsical, happy things.

No.

It was a horrible red. A dark, accusatory crimson.

Even though the outline was no longer visible, it was still there. Twilight could see the marks on the mirror, from where the condensation hadn't quite healed over properly, and within that, she saw herself.

She was only a smudge, when viewed through the veil of the condensed mirror.

She was a Purple smudge; Indefinite.

Dashed with crimson.

Chapter 3

Young Tender Hearts Beat Fast

Rainbow was dozing, her mind drifting through the library's musky essence.

She'd been laid there for a while now, waiting on Twilight's call, but she'd heard a distinct lack of sound from her friend, just the constant of the distant flow of water was audible.

Even though Twilight was a quiet pony, at times, especially when in the library, Rainbow had to admit it was odd that she'd said nothing to her *or even made a noise* since leaving.

Maybe she was a quiet drunk?

Hopefully not, Rainbow thought. She couldn't stand silence, it made her jumpy. Not that her friends would know that. However, that wasn't completely correct, really. It wasn't the absence of audio that made her jumpy. *It was what lies within silence.*

Anyway, Rainbow was fine, for now. The sound of the trickling water was tiding her over.

If Twilight didn't talk?

'Well, that'd be troubling,' Rainbow thought; although she'd weighed up the silence with the presence of a friend, and all of a sudden, well, it just didn't seem as bad.

She'd experienced it once before, on *that* cold, stormy night. A massive clap of thunder had caught her off guard, in the ambient soundscape that had surrounded her, and she'd dropped to the ground, fearful.

Then *that* filly had rescued her, taken her in, and just sat with her. Neither of the ponies said anything, it wasn't needed.

Just to be together.

Two ponies as one.

Only somepony special could make her feel safe like that.

Of course, Rainbow had still told her not to tell anypony about the fear she'd experienced that night.

It just wasn't cool.

Rainbow could feel another 'wave' of warmth gearing to flush across her face, so, to distract herself, she decided to see what Twilight was up to; She'd been taking her time, after all.

As soon as she rolled over to stand, Rainbow's wings eased back out into an arc. She chose to ignore them, she didn't really care. Yet still, Rainbow felt embarrassed, as her thoughts turned to Twilight once more.

As Rainbow clopped sluggishly through the library, she wasn't fazed at all by the once sinister manufactured shapes of the books. Much more so was Rainbow worried about a sound, coming from the bathroom. A sound other than the flow of water; the sound of a quietly crying filly, morose.

She hadn't heard the sobs at first, but as Rainbow neared the door, each sob became more pronounced, a spike of noise amongst the listlessness of the library.

"Oh Rainbow..."

Rainbow Dash froze, a mane's breadth from the door separating Twilight and herself.

"I can't believe I'd do such a thing..."

Twilight sounded pained, it was layered within every word of her voice. Not even the barrier of the door could take the chilling edge off of the words, for Rainbow. She felt each word hit her ears, laden with despair.

“I just-“

Twilight broke into tears.

Rainbow was finding it hard to cope with Twilight's emotions. Each sob was worse than the last, making Rainbow feel uneasy.

She'd not heard much of what Twilight had been lamenting about, but it was clear that she was the source.

“I'm *so sorry...*”

It was too much. Rainbow had to go in. She couldn't bear hearing her friend like this.

Rainbow brought her hoof up to the door, and tapped it, quietly, yet firmly. Regardless, the taps echoed around the library, accentuating their presence.

“Twilight, I'm coming in.” Rainbow sounded uncertain.

“Wait, Rainbow. Just give me a-“

Rainbow pushed the door open, regardless. A plume of vapour hit her, filling her lungs with warm, moist air, and clouding her vision.

“Second,” Twilight finished.

Twilight was slumped upon the floor, head in hooves. Her purple, starkly against the black of the tiles made for a powerful contrast.

It was almost as Twilight was alone.

The tiles were streaked with indefinite misty lines, once drawn in by hoof and tear.

“Twilight?”

Rainbow tried to remain sounding calm, yet her concern for Twilight wavered through into her voice.

Twilight looked down, shielding her face from Rainbow with her hoof.

“Y-yeah?”

Twilight’s voice was as quiet and as light as the vapour that hung in the air, but without the stifling heat.

Rainbow slowly clopped around Twilight’s place on the floor, making a move towards the seemingly hap-hazard plumbing leading to the large, old bathtub of the library.

She cranked the faucet closed, with a screeching creak that sliced through the mist, breaking the tension, whilst simultaneously reinforcing it’s intensity.

“You alright?”

At least she sounded more confident this time, Rainbow thought to her self, albeit a tad quizzical.

“Well, I’m just a bit...” Twilight exhaled, but her huff was interjected by a spike of sorrow. “You know?”

Rainbow faced Twilight once more, although she didn’t return the gesture.

Rainbow thought, for a moment. She thought about how Twilight was *definitely* not just a bit ‘You know,’ and how Twilight had cried to herself, for some reason regarding *herself*.

If only she could remember what it was that had made Twilight feel so morose.

Rainbow knew it was to do with her, or something she'd *done*.

However, that somehow made it worse, as it had clearly rubbed off onto Twilight, but she herself, well, she hadn't the foggiest idea as to what she'd done.

It didn't help that Rainbow wasn't terribly well versed within the art of emotions. It was probably down to the fact that she'd never experienced anything like this before; she'd been far too busy racing around to think about such embarrassing things.

Nevertheless, Rainbow was sure she could fix this; after all, she was the best young flier, so she could be the best at emotions, too, surely?

This should be *easy*.

Rainbow picked her hoof up and eased it silently towards Twilight, reaching through the vapour. She brought her hoof up to Twilight's chin, and brought her eyes up to her own.

Twilight snapped her eyes shut, but didn't resist Rainbow's soft, reassuring touch.

Rainbow noticed the red streaks upon Twilight's horn, jolting her memory. This was probably what had her down; she must have been feeling *guilty*. Guilty for something Rainbow *wasn't even worried about*.

It was just a small gash, nothing more.

Twilight was overreacting, probably partially due to the alcohol she'd consumed, but also probably partly to do with her obsessive, delicate personality. She'd been known to snap when under tension before.

"Twilight..., Open your eyes."

Twilight slowly brought her eyelids apart.

Only by a crack, at first, but then widening, looking up to Rainbow's tentative, attemptedly reassuring smile.

"Twi', I know you're feeling a bit shaken..., but let's not get all tearful, eh?"

Twilight continued to study Rainbow's face, moving on from her smile.

She was a pretty pony, really, but Rainbow would probably deny the notion. Then again, if she'd tried to make an effort on fabricating *any* sort of 'look', then it would probably fall down.

"Okay."

It was just the way she hung herself so nonchalantly, without a care in the world.

Even with her wound...

Twilight felt sadness well up inside her.

Even with that unsightly gash upon Rainbow's forehead, she looked good. In fact, it somewhat enhanced her tomboyish beauty. But she'd just shrug it off, she'd say; 'Oh that? It's just a scratch, no big deal!'

Oh, but Rainbow, it *is* a big deal, Twilight thought. You need to think about yourself, too, instead of trying to please *everyone*.

"Twilight, maybe *you* should get in the bath, to-" Rainbow faltered, momentarily. "-To calm down, you seem a bit..."

Twilight nodded her head, but still managed to make it look morose, albeit unintentionally and slowly raised herself off the tiles.

She left uncertain hoofprints upon the floor, fading away, barely there.

“But Rainbow, I ran the bath for *you*. I can’t just usurp you of that pleasure, I’d feel bad...”

Rainbow smiled, more certainly than the last time.

“Twi’, you’re too kind. But you need this more than me, I think.”

The last couple of words seemed to peter out, back to uncertainty. Twilight thought it odd, hearing Rainbow Dash so tentative. She was usually so brash, so cocky. To hear her like this... It didn’t seem right.

“Well, why don’t we share?”

Rainbow’s face flushed out in red.

But not like that dark, accusatory crimson upon her forehead. A jolly red, pale.

The kind of red you’d associate with friends, and happiness. It made Twilight smile.

“What, get in the bath? *Together?*”

Rainbow’s wings started to rise, slowly.

“Yes, why not? It’s big enough, and it would be practical; we wouldn’t have to run another, once one of us had finished, and well, I’d like to help clean up your wound...”

Twilight liked this idea, it’d be quality time with Rainbow. She could use it to get to know her better, after all, they were friends, but the more Twilight thought about it, the more she realised how

little she knew about Rainbow Dash: ***The fastest flier in all of Equestria!***

She ought to have a couple of interesting stories to tell her.

“Okay, if you’re sure...”

Rainbow sounded very flustered, all of a sudden. What’d got into her? Maybe it was just the alcohol, warping her emotions slightly.

Twilight clopped towards the bathtub, hauled herself into the warm water, and melted in bliss. She let out a calming sigh, and stretched her legs, relieving tension.

Twilight looked into Rainbow’s eyes, and then to her forehead, to the wound.

Against the blush of Rainbow’s cheeks, it didn’t look quite as bad anymore.

“Come on Rainbow, get in!”

Rainbow halted for a moment, and then put her fore-hooves on the side of the bath. She looked into the water; although blurred, she could see Twilight’s legs.

This wasn’t a good idea, Rainbow thought to herself. She should just have said no, but she didn’t want to put Twilight down. She’d only just come up, as well, she’d be delicate, and Rainbow didn’t want to shatter her again. I mean, look what Twilight’d done just by sitting on the floor by herself.

But Rainbow couldn't help but have inappropriate thoughts. Thoughts like *that*.

"Uh, Rainbow, you should probably close your wings first?"

Damn things, always popping up uninvited. She was trying to be a *friend*. Twilight was vulnerable, melancholic, and yet Rainbow's body had *other* ideas. *She just wanted to help!*

"Yeah, Twi', I already got it."

Rainbow tested the water with her hoof, it was an amiable temperature. The kind of warmth you'd get that makes you just want to sleep, forever.

Rainbow faltered once more, looking down at the seemingly impenetrable water's surface, even thought her hoof was touching it, not even ten seconds ago.

She would try to be a good friend, even if she had to hang her own feelings.

No, Rainbow wouldn't try.

She'd be the best friend there could be.

Forcing herself, she took the plunge.

Chapter 4

Wanting

The warmth of the water engulfed Rainbow, she could feel its swirling encapsulate her; capture her, even more so than the vapour did.

Now? The once warm, oppressive vapour was now like fresh air, for Rainbow. Now it was the water that was clingy, effortlessly smothering her body, she was in its grip.

“Rainbow, you’re looking awfully stiff!” Twilight was stating the obvious for her. “Why don’t you lean back and relax?”

Yeah, relax. Right.

If only she could stop thinking about the current situation. Twilight and herself, in a bath, together.

It was all far too *exciting*.

Rainbow sighed, melancholically; she couldn’t let Twilight know that she was even *remotely* into fillies. Plus, it wasn’t like Rainbow lusted after each and every filly; it was just the select couple: Twilight, and that *other* filly, but somehow, that made it worse.

Still, she had to make it look otherwise, after all, there were reasons Rainbow hadn’t told anypony about these feelings. She had to play it *cool*.

“Rainbow, if you lean up against me, I can clean up your-” Twilight’s voice panged with a twinge of guilt. “*Injury*.”

There goes that innocence again. Does Twilight not see the intimacy in that position?

‘Play it cool, Dash. Play it cool.’

With her newly devised internal mantra, Rainbow tentatively shifted backwards, the film of the water ever-clinging to her body.

Her back made contact with Twilight’s belly, its warmth sending shivers down Rainbow’s spine. It was odd, warmth giving her the shivers, but she was more shocked at how Twilight’s warmth *differed* from that of regular warmth.

The warmth of a living, loving pony.

Not the warmth of a cold, inanimate object.

Rainbow laid back into Twilight, overcome with emotions, deciding that focusing on her mantra was more important than keeping bodily composure.

“Ah, good. Rainbow, you don’t mind if I touch your forehead, do you?”

Yes, right, that’s why she was here, so Twilight could help her *clean up*.

“N-no, it should be fine, Twi”

‘Great, I’ve stuttered,’ Thought Rainbow, ‘and on top of that, I accentuated her name a bit too much...’

“Okay, just tell me if it hurts, okay?”

Rainbow juddered her head, ever so slightly, to show the affirmative. It was the reaction that used the least amount of concentration; she needed it, after all. She needed it to keep on top of her mantra. She needed it to keep her wings down.

“Are you still going to Pinkie Pie’s party tomorrow?”

Twilight spoke nonchalantly, as if this was no different to a regular conversation. As if there was nothing that hung in the air; only vapours.

“Y-“

Rainbow began to answer, but Twilight’s manoeuvres caught her off guard. Twilight leant forwards, pushing into Rainbow, their bodies locking together, in an unintentional embrace, *becoming one*. Rainbow felt Twilight’s hoof; tracing along her shoulder, moving towards her face, carefully brushing her mane away, to reveal her tender wound.

“Pardon, Rainbow?”

Wow, Twilight really was *clueless*. It was clear from her voice; there were no quiet, husky whispers, just stark, everyday voices.

This made Rainbow feel a bit more at ease.

“Yes, Twilight, I should make it.”

Rainbow was glad she’d managed to get the words out this time, she’d show Twilight just how confident Rainbow Dash; Equestria’s best young flier could be!

“Good, I shall look forward to seeing you there.” Twilight’s voice was still normal. “I’m going to clean your wound now, okay?”

Twilight brought her leg up to Rainbow’s forehead, with flannel in hoof. She brushed across the cut, slowly, tentatively. It hurt, but Rainbow didn’t mind; she could feel the affection Twilight was putting into her care, and it was like anaesthesia.

Rainbow closed her eyes, to divert her feelings; both the pain and the blush threatening to coarse their way across her forehead. She thought about Twilight and herself; how had they ended up in

this situation?

“Rainbow, your head is all cleaned up!”

Rainbow opened her eyes, and looked down. The water was contaminated with red. Red, watered down from her blood, but it didn't look sinister, it was more reminiscent of love.

Hah; Twilight, if only you knew, my head is far from clean, inside. It's as convoluted as the pink, swirling around in the empty, clear water. But you won't know; you'll never know.

I can't tell you, *it wouldn't be cool*.

“Thank you, Twilight.”

At least she was still confident in her speech, if not in mind.

“Anything to help out a friend!”

Rainbow felt Twilight's body relent for a second, a cool rush of air in place of where their pelts pressed together. Rainbow sighed for a second, relieved, but then she felt Twilight once more, her fore-legs snaking under her own, almost caressing her body, closing around her front, pulling their bodies together once more. Twilight softly laid her head upon Rainbow's shoulder, and brought her mouth up to Rainbow's ear.

Rainbow's heart was pounding; this was what it was like, that time before, with that *other* filly, before she'd confessed to her. That was like *her*, to do something as brash as that- but not like Twilight. It wasn't like Twilight at all.

“Oh, Rainbow,” Twilight's voice was quiet, husky, whispery. It was just how Rainbow had imagined, not only moments ago. It sunk into her, like her stomach had been sinking; twisting and turning with each of Twilight's seemingly blasé touches. “I'm so sorry...”

Rainbow felt warmth on her shoulder, but not like the warmth of life, *or* the warmth of something inanimate. It felt cold. The cold of sorrowful, regretful tears. This wasn't what she'd imagined at all. Intimacy like this was supposed to be joyful, that's what she'd learnt, anyway.

"Twilight?"

Rainbow could feel her compassionate sadness, against Twilight, *as one*, reverberating with each tear, each miniscule movement. Their bodies jolting, juddering, with each wave of emotion.

"I just... I j-j-just didn't mean to hurt you s-s-s-"

'I *have* to calm her down.' Rainbow thought, 'I can't bear to hear her like this, *to feel her like this*.'

"Twi', It's fine." Rainbow put her most affirmative voice on. "Didn't I tell you it was fine?"

Rainbow could still hear Twilight in her ear, snorting, choking on sorrow, ungainly.

"I'm so s-"

"Twilight, just..." Rainbow was lost for words, not sure how to comfort Twilight.

Rainbow picked her legs up, from her sides, and moved her hooves to Twilight's, still clinging to her. Rainbow prised them apart, exhaling slightly, and moved slightly forward, away from Twilight.

She felt Twilight's head leave its place on her own shoulder, and Twilight's hooves leave her own, withdrawing.

Rainbow dipped her forelegs back into the water, and using them to steady herself; she twisted around, as fast as the ever-clinging water would let her, to face Twilight.

“Just... don’t be so hard on yourself,”

Rainbow sliced through the water’s resistance with her right foreleg, to connect with Twilight; hoof to hoof. Rainbow saw their hooves meet, tentatively yet firm, within the swirling translucent red of the water.

Rainbow was studying Twilight’s face, she had a delicate air about her, her lavender somewhat contrasted by the blood red Rainbow had left upon her.

Twilight was looking down into the water, dejected. Rainbow picked her left hoof out of the water, dripping. She brought it up to Twilight’s chin, and slowly, ever so slightly, brought Twilight’s gaze up to her own.

“Okay?”

The edges of Twilight’s frown faltered, twitching into the faintest of smiles. Delicate.

Subtle.

But definitely *there*.

“Yes...”

Twilight’s voice was still quiet, still incurred upon with undertones of moroseness, but with a hint of affirmation.

Rainbow stroked her hoof up from Twilight’s chin to her cheek, slightly ruffling the thin, downy pelt that coated her. Rainbow looked into her eyes; they were coy, yet forlorn. Rainbow could see that the thin purple irises were not as definite as they

could be, blurred by tears and a red bloodshot presence. This didn't stop them from being pretty, yes, the melancholy shimmered through, but that somewhat made her eyes seem all the more vivid, all the more *real*.

"You're a fantastic pony, Twilight." Rainbow's confidence had left her, and in its place, there was careful heartfelt speech. "No; you're a fantastic *friend*."

Twilight looked very pretty; there was no two ways about it. Rainbow studied her face a bit closer, leaning in. No, wait, she couldn't find Twilight *that* pretty; she wasn't into fillies. It was just something about *her*, something alluring.

'Well, whatever,' Thought Rainbow '*I suppose Twilight can be cool sometimes too.*'

Rainbow felt her hind legs bump against Twilight's, leaning in closer. Rainbow weaved her legs over Twilight's, the water now putting up little resistance, pulling their bodies closer, chest to chest, haunches brushing together, then resting upon one another, diffidently.

All the time, Rainbow was peering upon Twilight's face, examining every last detail; how the edges of her mouth slowly petered out into a smile, how her endearingly innocent dolefully joyful eyes darted around, as if looking for an answer, where her pink streak of mane slowly faded out, into deep purple.

Rainbow took her hooves back from Twilight, and placed them around her back, pulling them the last couple of intimate inches together; closing the indefinite gap of vapour between them, becoming one, once more.

Rainbow felt Twilight's arms join around her own back, brushing just above her wings. With this touch, Rainbow realised that her wings were doing that '*thing*' again. Though she didn't

care, she was beyond that now, it didn't really matter what was cool or not. Not with Twilight, anyway.

Rainbow slowly moved her face towards Twilight's, now seeing every detail upon her. She could see each hair, each impurity, every part of her intricate prettiness. Well, Twilight could never be *just* pretty, could she? She'd even have to make that complex too, wouldn't she?

However, instead of continuing to move face to face, Rainbow drifted her head over to Twilight's side, making a move for her ear. Rainbow's mouth was closing in, almost touching; when she adopted the huskiest tender voice she could; "Twilight, *you deserve so much more...*"

Rainbow slowly retracted her head back, brushing her lips across Twilight's cheek, for a bit longer than what could be described as a fleeting accident. Rainbow regained eye contact with Twilight, which was accompanied by another flush of warmth across her own face. This was fine though, she just *knew* Twilight would be feeling the same way.

"Ah... Uhm... Rainbow, I, I don't know what to say..."

Twilight was cut short, by Rainbow, leaning forwards the last couple of millimetres and bridging the gap between them, in a clumsy, ineloquent kiss. She bashed her teeth into Twilight's, but she didn't mind, something that *trivial* couldn't ruin the sweet couple of seconds they'd spent connected.

Rainbow pulled away, just by a fraction, parting from Twilight's lips, but still almost touching. As Twilight's eyes opened, they gave way to a look of confusion, which quickly subsided into longing.

The gaze was all the confirmation Rainbow needed; she was sure that words weren't necessary at this moment in time, which

was what she'd heard in stories, anyway. She closed her eyes once more, and moved in the short distance between herself and Twilight.

Again, they made contact clumsily, Rainbow missing Twilight's mouth by a fraction. She righted her mistake, (albeit enjoyable), and brought their mouths together. At first, their kiss was only skin-deep, lips to lips, but Rainbow pushed forwards, opening up, deepening.

Rainbow thought, as she explored with Twilight, it was as if they were closer, not only in body, but in minds.

Rainbow slowly eased her tongue forwards, in a tentative sway, dancing across Twilight's teeth, and then onwards, coercing Twilight's tongue to join the dance, to share the ecstasy.

Within their intimacy, it was really as they truly were together, not just in mere physicality, but within minds. Rainbow could feel a flood of emotions, emotions she'd never felt before, emotions that belonged to *Twilight*.

Rainbow broke the ring she'd formed around Twilight with her legs, in favour of expressing her self further. She brought her left hoof up to Twilight's mane, tracing its way up her back, as she went, stroking.

The rush of emotions was hard, for Rainbow. Although it was beautiful, it was just so... *Intense*. She'd only experienced emotions like that once before, during her times with *that* filly.

With that filly...

A wave of guilt came over Rainbow, overcoming the new, intense emotions.

Rainbow pulled away from Twilight, prising her tongue from its lustful dance, bringing her hooves back in check, breaking Twilight's embrace, and finally, prolonged by Twilight's eager leaning forwards; Rainbow broke the kiss.

For a moment, a thin, delicate string of saliva connected the two fillies, glistening, only to be shattered by Rainbow's drive to look down, into the void filled by reddened water, where they once connected so tenderly.

"I'm, so sorry, Twilight." Rainbow spoke to the water, in a tiny voice. Her words were absorbed, without a reply. In an even tinier, almost inaudible tone, she continued; "*but I have to go...*"

Rainbow got to all fours, and dripping blood-tinged water back into the bath, she flapped her already-erect wings, and flew out the door; spraying red back into Twilight's bemused, disconcerted eyes.

She found the library front door easily, and threw it open, but in her frantic haste, Rainbow neglected the idea of closing it behind her.

As the cold night air whipped past her in the sky, chilling her sopping wet pelt; Rainbow couldn't care less, she just repeated the same hysterical thoughts around in her head:

"Oh, Celestia; I've betrayed them both, I've been *disloyal*.
And I'm supposed to be the element of Loyalty..."

The bath water had long since become frigid, yet Twilight still remained in the reddened mixture, beginning to wrinkle, but still in the same position that Rainbow had left her in. However, Twilight

didn't care that she was cold and wrinkling, or rather, *she didn't notice*.

She was too busy desperately trying to piece together what'd just happened. There had to be a reason, she knew it; things didn't just *happen*. There was always cause and effect, as science would have her know. Also, if she looked into her magic studies, she knew that Rainbow would never leave like that, not if she didn't have good reason to, she *was* the Element of Loyalty, wasn't she?

Even so, Twilight would have liked to have had an explanation for the whole *thing*. She'd been enjoying her time with Rainbow, even if it was unexpected, she'd thought they were just sharing a bath out of necessity, like Twilight used to when she was small. She'd been taken aback, but it seemed like the right thing to do, after all, she was here to learn about the magic of *friendship*.

Twilight sighed to her self, and stood up on all fours, mirroring Rainbow's image, and levitated the same towel that she'd used to clear the mirror to her. With a sinking feeling within her stomach, Twilight thought to herself;

"Why does friendship have to be so... *Complicated?*"

Tears came back to Twilight, involuntarily, delicately, leaving sorrow behind, slowly diluting the reddened water.

Rainbow was tired, even after just ten minutes of flying, but she attributed this to the mach speed at which her brain was whirring at; not how the evening had taken its toll on her athletic body.

"I'm supposed to be loyal; *I'm supposed to be loyal.*"

As she landed, Rainbow felt a small pang of bittersweet satisfaction; she'd made it this far.

Rainbow's eyes were dimming, now, out of exhaustion, but she could still focus on what she'd come for.

She hesitantly crept forwards, towards the window she'd come for. It was open a crack, like a small glimmer of hope.

Rainbow brought her hoof up to the window, and pushed it open, the pane of glass sliding silently into the dark stillness of the room. She timidly hauled herself over the windowsill, landing in the room with a silent clop.

There were shadows, all of unnatural, unnerving shapes, carved by moonlight, not dissimilar to that of Twili- *Of the library's shadows*. Nevertheless, Rainbow did her best to ignore them, and honed in on a more toned, natural looking shadow, laid on top of what seemed to be a bed.

"I need to talk to you..."

Rainbow's voice was ghostly, diminished in the dead of the bedroom.

She sighed, with a tint of frustration; she'd have to be louder. Rainbow brought her voice up to a loud, firm, important tone, and with a hint of apprehension, announced:

"I need to talk to you; *Applejack*."

Chapter 5

Mechanisms

Rainbow felt pain, coursing through her body. Only aching within her legs and wings, it was mainly concentrated upon her head. It was as if somepony had tried to dig into her brain. Even if it wasn't so; it still felt that way.

As much as Rainbow tried to shut it out, she could see the warm light through her eyelids; there was no way she could pretend it was still night. As much as she respected Princess Celestia, Rainbow wished she hadn't brought the day about so soon.

Rainbow hauled her eyelids open, tentatively, easing her eyes into the bright morning light. She looked over at the open window, and watched the piercing sunlight, reflecting off of flecks of dust, swirling around, forming dappled, complex patterns, seemingly restless.

The ground was hard against Rainbow's hindquarters, as she sat up, trying to shrug the aches off of her back. She stretched her back out, fore hooves reaching up to the clouds. *Or rather, the ceiling.*

Rainbow felt dizzy, for a moment, her vision slowly, but only partially leaving her for a second. Her home was made of *clouds*, not ceilings, windows and hard, wooden floors... *Where was she?*

She looked around slowly, being kind to her over-sensitive eyes. The floorboards looked rough, untreated. Rainbow swept her hoof across them; they felt rough, yet worn; devoid of splinters.

The walls were also wooden, but seemed more reassuringly smooth, but Rainbow supposed that it could have just been to do with the fact that the walls were just *further away* than the floor, but she decided to stop thinking of further complexities; it was the morning, after all.

Rainbow stretched her forelegs out once more, and decided to brave standing up. She grudgingly lifted her body off of the ground, and whilst arching her back, she spread her wings out, extending from tip to tip, cutting through the dust-laden air. Slowly, wings folding away, she clopped towards the window, the window with *apple-print* curtains.

Rainbow realised where she was, moments before the view of the Sweet Apple Acres' apple orchard came into view. She'd spent the night at *Applejack's*...

"Oh, Celestia..." Rainbow groaned, "What did you *do* last night, Dash?"

Rainbow stood there, for a while, letting the tiniest of breezes wash over her, airing her stale, matted mane. Rainbow was clearing her thoughts, or attempting to, at least. She let a groan out into the quiet voice of the wind.

'I think I just need to *go...*' Rainbow thought. It wasn't an easy decision to make, after all, things with Applejack were tenuous at best, and whatever had happened last night, well, it probably didn't help their *relations* all that much at all. Although she wouldn't admit it, Rainbow knew all too well what she was like after a few drinks...

Things would probably be better after she'd mulled them over a bit, and Rainbow really didn't want to drum up any *awkward* conversation between herself and Applejack; she had problem enough *thinking* about that sort of stuff, let alone talking.

Rainbow pushed against the window's frame, exposing herself to the fullness of the farm's calm breeze. It came with a slight fragrance of apple, reminiscent of days long past, napping in trees, casual chats about nothing with Applejack, thinking to the future. It'd been a while since one of those chats; they'd stopped as soon as Rainbow had deemed them '*Too embarrassing...*' And yet, what'd they replaced these times with?

Stunted, difficult words, exchanged in fleeted meetings. Just because of one night.

Maybe that was one other thing Rainbow couldn't control: *Friendship*.

Rainbow moved her fore hooves up onto the windowsill, ready to take off, out of the window, but the papery feel beneath her right hoof made her think otherwise. She looked down at the paper, and lifted her hoof up. Folded, it was adorned with 'Dash', in scruffy, yet attemptedly careful writing.

Rainbow felt her stomach twist, she knew whose hoofwriting this was, and with what premise it was probably written after, yet still, she unfolded the letter as quickly as possible. After all, Rainbow couldn't bear to not know.

Dash,

I knew you'd try to climb out the window, and pretend like nothing happened, but I'm hoping a loyal pony like yourself would realise that their friend needs them, and change their mind?

We really need to talk, but y'know, like a proper talk. Not an 'It's 3AM, I'm really drunk and decided to break into Applejack's bedroom' talk.

I'll be out applebucking; I'm on a tight schedule, but come and talk to me. I can always take time out to see you.

You really did ~~say~~ do some interesting things last night.

-That 'Other' Filly

(Thanks for the new nickname, by the way...)

"Oh, Celestia."

If there wasn't such a cooling breeze, Rainbow would've probably burned up and melted, right on the spot.

"...light?"

"Twilight?"

“Twilight?”

On the uncouth awakening of having her own name shouted in her ear, it was obvious Twilight was going to be unhappy, but surprisingly, that wasn't what had garnered the most of her early-morning contempt. What had been bestowed with that award was, in fact, the overall wet, ice-cold feeling that surrounded her body.

“Twilight, why were you sleeping in the bathtub?”

Without opening her eyes, Twilight responded, groggily.

“Don't be silly, Spike, I'm just a bit cold, that's all. Now, if you just pass me my blanket, I'm going to go back to sleep... *I don't feel too good.*”

“Uhh, Twi'? Don't go all 'Pinkie Pie' on me; you're definitely in the bathtub.”

Twilight opened her eyes, and was met with a slightly pink-stained white, taking up her peripheries.

“Ah.”

“You see, Twilight?”

Twilight was most definitely in the bathtub, she knew that much. However, further from that, she knew nothing. She remembered walking home, after a night out with Rainbow Dash, and then...

“*Oh...*”

“Twilight, are you okay?”

The pony braced herself, and then put what seemed like far, *far* too much effort into lifting her body out of the chilled, pink-y concoction. Although despising the effort put into the task of standing up, Twilight still took it upon herself to shake the blood infused water across the bathroom, and across her assistant, Spike.

“Ugh, *Twilight!* You’ve been soaking in that! I don’t want it on *me!*”

Nevertheless, Twilight, now dry, wasn’t really fussed about her assistant’s wellbeing. She had other things on her mind, *other fillies...*

“Oh, *Rainbow...*”

“Twilight, you mean *Spike*, right?”

Twilight felt a light blush across herself; she hadn’t said that *out loud*, had she?

“Yes, *Spike.*” Twilight tried to speak with an air of authority, but her voice was failing, under assault from the memories from the previous night. Well, the ones she could *still remember*.

Twilight stepped out of the bathtub, onto the well-streaked tiles of the floor.

“Spike, you know how you’re my number one assistant?”

Spike groaned; he knew what was coming next.

“Yeah, yeah, I’ll clean the bathroom for you.”

Twilight could hear the dejectedness in Spike’s voice, but she wasn’t too fussed, she knew he’d bounce back. After all, he really was a fantastic assistant.

“Thanks Spike!”

Twilight spun around on the spot, turning to face the doorway. As she lifted her hooves, she left pale red marks upon the tiles, adding colour to the once labyrinthine lines traced, the night before.

Twilight could think clearly, now. There was colour to her thoughts, and colour on her mind.

As she walked out into the library, everything looked a little brighter. The shelves, once imposing, stifling the library with their

books, no longer seemed to oppress, to demand silence. Now, they stood for possibilities, for opportunities, each one different. However, none of the hundreds of possibilities that surrounded Twilight could have been anywhere near negative.

Life was just too fantastic.

As a breeze swept in, through an open window, Twilight thought to herself; about friends, about friendship, about *Rainbow Dash*.

She wondered, 'All this time, I've been studying friendship, and nothing has ever felt quite this *fantastic*. Is this *true friendship*?'

Even though Rainbow had left her during the night, Twilight was sure she'd had an important reason, after all, she was the most loyal pony in all of Equestria, and more importantly; she was her *friend*, and Twilight believed in her.

"Rainbow, I just can't wait to see you; *we have so much to talk about...*"

The view across the apple orchard was beautiful, from on top of Bloomberg's old hill. It was good for thinking, and for reminiscing, after all, it held a lot of memories, for Applejack, at least.

Lost in the scent of freshly bucked trees, and their bruised bark, Applejack's mind began to drift, to the thoughts that lay within her. They'd happened so long ago, and yet, they seemed so vivid; almost pelt-deep.

Even though Granny Smith had told her otherwise, so many times, she'd taken shelter under Bloomberg, during a sudden thunderstorm. It was odd; getting caught in such rainstorms was commonplace, for somepony that works on a farm, but for some reason, Applejack felt bothered by it.

She still wasn't sure why, despite the amount of times she'd been through the events in her head. In the end, it didn't really matter, these things weren't really the reason Applejack constantly replayed these memories.

It was: when a dripping wet rainbow fell from the skies, streaked with tears, shaking, *sobbing*.

Applejack had said nothing to the poor filly; they just sat, in a trembling, yet compassionate embrace, nuzzling, tears soaking into her back. It was Dash who'd done the talking, but it was nothing like Dash's usual, cocky speech. It was so very *real*.

Real problems, real thoughts, *real feelings*.

Applejack had been fine, up until that point. She liked that Dash could trust her, depend on her, after all the years of their banter-esqe relationship. She'd finally *opened up*, and Applejack was glad for that. Of all ponies, Applejack knew better than to handle things by herself, but there was no telling Dash that. It was a good thing she'd come to that conclusion herself.

Still, as strong as Applejack tried to be for Dash, the next thing she said had caught her off guard.

"Applejack..."

Even looking back on it, Applejack felt embarrassed. However, that *feeling* was always overwhelmed by another, every time.

"I think..."

Overwhelmed by confusion.

"I think I I..."

Confusion, tinged with sadness.

"Love you..."

Applejack felt the trio of emotions inundate her, as if she was reliving the memory, of that rainy eve, on Bloomberg's hill.

“Why’d yew have ta go and puzzle me so, Dash? You toying with me or something?”

Applejack frowned through her sad, embarrassed confusion. One minute Dash was fighting with her, over even the most trivial things, the next? Dash would be on top of her, crying into her arms once more, as if they never argued, as if all Applejack were was *just* a friendly face in the dark, somewhere to dump her emotions.

Applejack sighed, and thought to herself. ‘I guess that’s what y’all get for being the most dependable pony in Ponyville, huh?’

Rainbow Dash didn’t feel like flying. Her heart wasn’t in it.

It was elsewhere, occupied, *gone*. Rainbow Dash slowly trotted up in-between the rows of carefully planted apple trees, towards where she thought it lay; in the hooves of *that other filly*, at the top of Bloomberg’s hill.

Rainbow shook her head, a desperate attempt to try to understand what was happening. Everything she had, everything she’d made, albeit accidentally, was falling apart.

It’d been fantastic, even if it had only been a choice few evenings, shrouded in rain, teary-eyed.

If only she had another reason to spend time like that with *her*. No pony else could know, after all, Dash *had* to be cool.

Rainbow gulped, and continued her slow, pained walk, up to Bloomberg’s hill, two thoughts reverberating around her mind.

“What have I done?”

“Why do I have to be cool?”

Chapter 6

With You

Chills surrounded Rainbow Dash.
Chills of temperature, and chills of doubt.

Rainbow had never really experienced doubt before; she was a confident, strong, 'cool' pony.

Only twice had she done so, yet her previous experiences still hadn't managed to shirk the way it smothered her. Nor did it lessen the blow on her insides; lurching around with every contemplation of every possible eventuality.

She'd thought that the somewhat scenic walk through the apple orchards coating Bloomberg's hill would be able to calm her, to ease her angst, yet, as Rainbow increased in her altitude, she got further and further away from what felt safe. Rainbow thought this was odd, as she'd normally feel at ease rushing up through the clouds, engulfed in their strangely comforting, soft, ethereal feel. Nevertheless, now, they didn't emanate any positive vibes at all; the cool positivity now seemed like cold, sad detachment. That's what Rainbow thought, anyway.

Perhaps she was spending too much time with earth ponies.

The systematic abundance of the apple trees didn't help Rainbow's state of mind either. With each tree she passed, her mind wandered more and more towards Applejack, and what Rainbow had said to her.

Not that Rainbow really remembered.

Applejack's letter had jogged her memory a tad, and the wound upon Rainbow's head had helped it on its way, but it still wasn't all there.

She remembered about Twilight and herself, almost begrudgingly. However, it wasn't remembering the *events* that jarred Rainbow's mind so. It was her own thoughts and feelings. Thoughts and feelings that nopony could really synthesise, even in retrospect. They were very much real.

From Rainbow's experience, she only knew these feelings from a tiny amount of night encounters before, but all from the same place.

A place which now, seemed only to be foreshadowed with doubt, despite its open, airy atmosphere.

Bloomberg's hill.

Twilight was sprawled out on her sofa, happy, merely through just existing. She exhaled, in a long sigh, finally relaxed after her night on cold enamel and water.

On breathing back in, Twilight noticed a slight odour. One that was somewhat familiar, yet alien, to the library at least. She moved her gaze down, and against the white fabric of the sofa, Twilight saw faint, pale fibres. Curiously, Twilight brought her head down to the fabric, and gave it a quick, speculative sniff.

Twilight knew that was quite unscientific, and could be considered as *odd*, but in the situation, she'd decided it was the right thing to do. Besides, nopony was in the library with her, so nopony else would know to be able to call it odd. Not that she would have minded, anyway.

After a couple of minutes, Twilight realised what was so familiar about the scent, after all, she'd spent a good part of the night before engulfed in it. The scent had caressed her, surrounded her and been *with her*.

Twilight lightly pushed her face into the sofa's cushions, and inhaled as deeply as she could, swimming in the memories of Rainbow and herself. Yet, as she was deepest in thought, she involuntarily broke down into a fit of childish giggles.

'Wow, Twilight' she thought to herself. 'That *really* was odd...'

Regardless, Twilight just immersed herself in Rainbow's scent once more. She'd often wondered why everypony in

romance novels did things like this; just sitting, thinking about their loved ones, *inhaling their scent*.

Now, though, things were different.

Perhaps, like in those books, she wasn't odd, but she was *in love*.

Twilight inhaled another gasp of Rainbow's scent, and filled her thoughts with the pegasus. No pony had ever quite shone in this sort of light to Twilight before, and so, she intended to make the most of it.

After all, it felt *good*.

Applejack had been laid out on Bloomberg's hill for quite some time now, exasperated. Not that she minded the location, but she really had to get back to work on the farm. She *was* the most dependable pony in Ponyville, and knew she really *should* get back to bucking, but...

Applejack didn't feel like doing *anything*.

Not out of laziness, Applejack was far from lazy, and she knew it; but somehow, that made it worse.

However, her disdain for it did nothing to counteract it. The one thing that gave Applejack solace was that at least she knew what was causing her listlessness.

Light hoof-fall began to puncture the murmuring soundscape of rustling leaves and light breeze, and with each muffled clomp, Applejack's thoughts began to run amok. She was painting situations in her head, some more brash, whilst others were tenderer.

Applejack knew it was silly, but she couldn't stop acting the scenes out in the safety of her own mind.

She could get the words *just right* in there.

There was a modest sound of setting down, beside her, and Applejack, still with her eyes firmly closed, knew who was there.

She heard a sigh. Not one of exasperation, but a long, drawn out sigh of relief. Applejack found it reassuring.

She laid there, basking in the sunlight, alongside her counterpart, just doing nothing, just revelling in her company. Applejack would have liked it to stay that way, Rainbow and herself, just sat around. Applejack didn't even have to open her eyes to acknowledge Dash; they both knew that presence was merely enough.

Yet, Dash didn't make that possible. She had to keep up the whole 'cool' charade. They couldn't just bask in the ambience of Equestria, not when other ponies were around.

Dash was so intent on keeping their 'rivalry' up, that it seemed to be clouding over what they had between them. Applejack wished, even though she thought it a bit foalish to do so, but she still wished. She wished that Dash could just learn to *switch off*.

Even though Applejack had such feelings for her, Dash was starting to wear on her patience. As time went on, more time, according to Dash, had to be spent '*keeping up appearances*'.

As much as Applejack hated to have to *lie* to everypony, as the two of them put more and more effort into covering up, times like these became more and more precious. They came to mean more than they ever used to.

Times when Applejack and Dash had nowhere to be, *nothing to do*. Just to be.

To be, but together.

However, as much as Applejack wanted to dwell on such a seldom moment like this, she knew she had to break her much sought silence, and for a conversation she didn't really want to start. In fact, Applejack was quite sure, for a moment, at least, if she wasn't the element of honesty, well... She wouldn't have even *thought* of starting a conversation about such a thing.

Especially when the obvious results weren't going to be something either pony engaged would have wanted, but Applejack knew what the right thing to do was.

For a moment, Applejack caught herself thinking.

'If only I wasn't the element of Honesty.'

Applejack sighed, but unlike Dash's earlier sigh, it was an exasperated, annoyed sigh. Even though she was troubled with the fact that she'd wanted to disown her own element, Applejack knew she was in the wrong, and she knew that if she could accept it already, her honesty wasn't far gone.

Nevertheless, this only accentuated Applejack's thought. This conversation *needed* to happen. If she was questioning her own element, well, that'd be like questioning a cutie mark.

"Dash?"

Applejack's voice was quiet, yet harsh, overshadowed by Dash's now increasing breaths. At least Applejack knew she wasn't the only anxious pony.

"What in tarnation was last night about, eh?"

Applejack's voice was still hushed, yet not as quiet as it had been, she had Dash to contend with as well, now.

"Applejack, I-"

Dash cut herself short. Applejack wasn't surprised, she'd sounded uncertain from the first letter of her name.

Applejack opened her eyes, into the sunlight. Everything was bleached, shades of white. She looked over her shoulder, at Dash, and smiled, even though the rainbow pony looked so morose.

It was strange, seeing the majestic Dash in a whitened colourless format.

It was almost as if she was a different pony.

Rainbow Dash looked up to the sky.

She could feel the words she wanted to say, building up inside of her. Yet, none of them would come out, no matter how hard she coaxed them. Rainbow was annoyed by this. It was almost as if she couldn't control herself *at all*.

It wasn't as bad when it had just been her wings that acted up, but now? Everything was moving *too fast*.

Not in speed, of course, Rainbow was still the fastest, she was quite sure of that. It was just in everything else she did.

It was as if Rainbow's life wasn't in her own hooves anymore. Seemingly, it belonged to everypony else.

"Dash, y'know you can say anything to me, right?"

Rainbow was still looking to the sky for answers.

She remembered the days in which she could just fly, not thinking about anything, just to move, and *fast!*

The sky had stayed the same since then, a place where a pony can be free, no worries, no thoughts.

It was funny, but upsetting. The sky, which had been her friend, was unable to help her, as it was free, emotionless.

Rainbow Dash levelled her gaze, and brought her eyes to meet Applejack's. As much as she'd wanted to stare away, and let time go on; Rainbow couldn't just let Applejack hang like that. After all, it was her own fault.

"I'm just... *so sorry*"

Rainbow felt her eyes begin to water, and a wave of melancholy hit her, with more force than she thought it would.

"I'm so sorry for what I said, and what *I did...*"

Even though it was an apology, it was bittersweet. For even though Rainbow knew she was saying the right thing, the right feelings weren't behind them. Mainly, this was due to the fact that she couldn't really remember what she was apologising for.

There were things that Rainbow did remember, though. She remembered that the whole night was shrouded by her own crestfallen state. She remembered sitting with Applejack, crying into her mane, and most of all, the overwhelming feeling of regret.

One particular image stuck in Rainbow's head; the morose smile of a pony, one who looked let down, *deceived*.

A pony with beautiful, green eyes.

Howbeit, Rainbow didn't see them, not anymore, as they were clouded, hidden behind a veil of emotion. Even though they tried to be honest, to be dependable, Rainbow knew them well. She knew that they were anything but.

"What about Twilight?"

Rainbow gasped.
That was brash, even for Applejack.

Rainbow tried to keep her gaze locked with Applejack's, but the dampness of her own eyes forced her to look down at the ground, as she tried to regain control of her own tear ducts.

Rainbow thought for a while.
'What *about* Twilight?'

Twilight was nice, and all. Well, she was *very* nice.

Initially, Dash had thought that Twilight was boring, always buried in books, telling everypony "*interesting facts*", obsessed with learning. Dash was her friend; she just didn't like the things Twilight did.

Yet, over time, Twilight changed.
Not completely. She still had a thirst for knowledge, as she probably always would. In fact, it was probably that thirst for knowledge that changed her; due to her study of friendship. Twilight had developed a whole new social side, and Rainbow liked it.

However, Twilight still had much to learn, and Rainbow knew so. Wasn't that the reason she'd asked Twilight to come out?

For Rainbow, it was nice to be the one teaching, for once. Not to be the one in control, but to be able to help another pony, who'd have complete faith in her, even if she only knew a little.

It was a nice change to how things with herself and Applejack went. They were just stumbling around in the dark; neither pony had known how anything had 'worked', per se.

It'd been uncertain, and each time spur of the moment, and that was fine, for Dash, at the time. After all, she was 'The Fastest Flier in all of Equestria,' and didn't have time for anything *serious*.

Not that she'd known what anything serious would have actually meant.

However, Rainbow wasn't sure if she wanted that anymore. She wasn't even sure about herself anymore.

Even though her time with Twilight had been short and impulsive, much like the spurts of time she'd spent with Applejack, Rainbow could see the start of something much more *reliable* with Twilight.

Reliable.

Was that what she needed?

Was that what she *wanted*?

"Uhh..."

Rainbow's voice still wavered, huskier than usual, the immersion in emotion taking its toll on her.

"...I need to *go* and think, Applejack."

Rainbow looked back towards Applejack's gaze, once more. Her green eyes were no longer just clouded. The clouds had burst, and begun to leak; two lines traced across the freckles that pockmarked her face.

"You're always moving, aren't you? Why can't you just slow down?"

Applejack sounded hurt. It was as if she wasn't trying to hide it now, her honesty shining bright, even when shrouded in upset.

"I'll talk to you about it properly, Applejack... but another time. "

Rainbow hated having to shirk such an important talk off, especially in one of the few times the two of them would normally so desperately strive to have.

“I just need to sort my head out.”

“Ah can see that, Dash.”

Rainbow passed an unhappy smile Applejack’s way. She knew she needed to sort it out, but the words Applejack had fed back had hurt.

But Rainbow knew she couldn’t help it.
She was the element of honesty.

“I’ll talk to you as soon as I’ve worked it out...”

Rainbow’s words faltered, momentarily, and a thought lapsed up; *‘Was that really the best thing to say?’*

“I...”

Rainbow felt her chest tighten.

“I promise.”

Rainbow stood up, rather more quickly than she meant to, and with the biggest trace of a reassuring smile as she could muster, she turned away from Applejack, and began the decent from Bloomberg’s hill, step by step, down between the apple trees, letting their swaying branches’ sounds engulf her once more.

Rainbow Dash just didn’t want to fly.

Interlude

An eerie silence shrouded Sugarcube corner.

It wasn't that Mrs Cake disliked silences; she positively revelled in the thought of just snatching couple of quiet seconds, in-between the constant flow of customers, and Pinkie Pie's incessant yet overly optimistic babble.

However, when those seconds *were* snatched by Mrs Cake, they were always somewhat bittersweet.

In contrast with Pinkie's overbearing, the silence was bland, *boring*. Always, though, Mrs Cake would build the silences up, within her own head, growing ever more excited, and when they came along, she would always wonder to herself about why she built these moments up to herself; as she always knew, in the end, they'd be disappointing.

Fleeting, too.

Ending as abruptly as they started, punctuated by the shrill alarm of the oven, by the tinkling of the door bell or merely just the living, breathing laughter of Pinkie Pie, finding hilarity, even in the mundane face of life.

Mrs Cake supposed it was hope that kept her going. It kept her thinking about what could happen, even if the thing that could happen was just something as trivial as a few moments of silence.

Or perhaps it wasn't the silence at all, but what the silence put into perspective.

The times lacking in vivacity contrasted Pinkie's presence well, and even if Mrs Cake didn't realise it sometimes, *that* was what kept her going.

Although nopony really knew it, save for her husband, Mrs Cake probably would have left Sugarcube Corner, if Pinkie Pie hadn't turned up.

It wasn't the baking of cakes that was the issue; after all, nopony grew weary of their cutie mark's origins. It was the running of the shop that'd made her want to leave.

Everyday, Mrs Cake would see the same old faces, come to order the same thing, day in, day out. Yet, even though they were such *devoted* customers, Mrs Cake hardly knew any of them. If any at all.

It was only ever; "Good morning, Mrs Cake!"
Or an; "I'd like a batch of muffins, please, Mrs Cake!"
And then possibly a; "Thank you very much, Mrs Cake!"

Mrs Cake never *really* knew anypony, after moving to Ponyville, short of her husband, Carrot Cake.

Then, when a young Pinkie Pie had appeared in Ponyville, just, as it turned out, on a whim, Mrs Cake felt reason for staying.

Pinkie had exploded into Sugarcube Corner, on a particularly rainy afternoon, which seemed to have shirked a large number of the Cakes' customers, and turned the whole store hooves-up.

Even though, without Mrs Cake's permission, the excitable filly Pinkie Pie had eaten much of the shop's contents, without even so much as acknowledging her, Mrs Cake was smiling.

This was because, in a short couple of minutes, the young pink filly that Mrs Cake *hadn't even heard mention of before* had suddenly managed to show more gratitude for the cakes that she'd baked than everypony before her, put together.

It was as the young filly was attempting to climb a particularly tall wedding cake, to reach the sickly-sweet candy bride and groom, Mrs Cake was no longer smiling.

For the First time in a long while, Cup Cake laughed.

It crept up on her, at first, but as she watched the young pink pony's further attempts to climb up the icing-coated tiers, eventually resulting in the collapse of the frosting-fortress beneath her, the laugh became louder, until it filled Mrs Cake's store to the brim.

Candy-ponies in mouth, and with a self-satisfied grin, the young Pinkie Pie spun around, noticing Mrs Cake for the first time, and, instead of apologising, like any other pony might well have done, Pinkie Pie dropped the candy newly-weds, and joined in Mrs Cake's laughter.

After the main body of the two's laughter had subsided, into just a light giggling, the young filly said her first words to Mrs Cake.

"You're kinda funny, miss!"

Mrs Cake couldn't help but smile, the filly that had appeared in her shop and eaten all of her stock, climbing up cakes and spreading icing around the room whilst not even realising she was in the presence of another pony was calling *her* funny.

Then, before Mrs Cake knew it, Pinkie Pie had taken up residence within Sugarcube Corner, but she didn't mind. Pinkie was Mrs Cake's life, or so it seemed.

It wasn't "I'd better go and open up Sugarcube Corner," in the mornings, anymore.

It was always "I'd better go and check in on Pinkie Pie..."

Sometimes, to Mrs Cake, it was like Pinkie Pie was the daughter she never had. Even if she wasn't, Pinkie sure brought that laughter into Mrs Cake's life.

Wallowing in the thoughts of Pinkie Pie only made the silence worse for Mrs Cake.

It wouldn't have been so harsh on her, if Carrot Cake had been there, as his presence would have at least incurred on the deathly silence of the shop.

However, it wasn't Pinkie Pie's absence that had stolen away the sounds from Sugarcube Corner and Mrs Cake.

It was the presence of a letter, left behind by the young pink filly that had once burst into her life.

As abruptly as Pinkie Pie had exploded into Mrs Cake's life, with her ever-present element of laughter, the explosion had died down, leaving only ashes of memories behind.

Mrs Cake looked down at the letter Pinkie Pie had left, and as she stared into it, drops began to fall from her eyes, soaking into the paper.

At least she didn't have to deal with the silence anymore.

Chapter 7

Gone

Twilight hauled her saddlebag on, yet lingered by the door of the library, instead of leaving. This was because, due to her eagerness to leave, and her exceptional organisational skills, she was once again, ready far too early.

She looked up, back towards the literary forest behind her, and called out to her assistant; Spike.

“Spike!”

Twilight heard the soft padding of Spike’s steps, ricocheting delicately off of the bounds of information, upon the shelves of the library. Twilight liked how the library’s cavernous nature accentuated such sounds. It was as if the books were helping her further than anypony thought they actually could, relaying real world sounds to her.

Nevertheless, even though the sounds of his steps were all too obvious to Twilight, Spike refrained from vocalising his movement.

However, Twilight was kind of expecting this. She suspected that Spike was still rather annoyed from having to clean up behind her, and thus, would probably try to make a point, and not speak to her for as long as he could.

But, Twilight knew he wouldn’t hold out *too long*... After all, he *had* to speak to her, Spike was her assistant!

“Yes, Twilight?”

Twilight could see that Spike was trying to sound as dejected as he could, but looking at the floor whilst doing so. She was sure that if she could make eye contact with her assistant, he’d probably snap out of his act.

“Would you like to come to Pinkie Pie’s party with me?”

Spike’s eyes shot up, brightly, away from the forced melancholic stare at the ground, apparently forgetting all disdain for having to clean up behind Twilight.

“Oh boy, I’d *love to*, Twi’!”

Twilight grinned, and instead of replying, she just waited for Spike’s next inevitable question.

“Will Rarity be there?”

Even though she knew she’d have this question asked of her, Twilight was hoping Spike wouldn’t ask it, as then, she’d have to be the bringer of bad news, and twice in one day, at that! First the horrors of cleaning, and now *this!*

“I’m sorry, Spike, but didn’t I already tell you?”

Spike looked blankly at Twilight, Obviously she hadn’t done so. Or perhaps he forgot?

No, Twilight thought to herself; Spike wouldn’t forget *anything* about Rarity.

“Spike, Rarity won’t be there…”

Spike exhaled loudly, disappointedly, and brought his gaze back down to the floor.

However, Twilight, used to his behaviour, carried on.

“She’s away with Fluttershy, on a spa weekend break, I recall her mentioning it last week.”

Twilight took a couple of hoofsteps towards Spike, and gave him a quick tap on the shoulder, and attempted to act more like the mother figure, instead of her normal role.

“I’m sorry, Spike…”

Spike looked back up to Twilight’s eyes, with a sad smile.

“It’s okay, Twilight, I’ll just stay here, *I’ve still got some cleaning to do.*”

Twilight let out a quiet chuckle to herself. Even if Spike didn’t mean to, he always put a grin on her face.

“Oh, but Spike, *Rainbow Dash’ll be there too!*”

Twilight immersed herself in thoughts of Rainbow, reminiscing just from the combination of her name rolling off of her own tongue, mingling with her left over scent, still lingering from the night before.

Twilight just couldn’t wait to see Rainbow, even if Pinkie Pie and Applejack were to be at the party too, Twilight was *sure* she could have Rainbow to herself, for the most part, anyway.

“Twilight, why do you keep mentioning Rainbow Dash? Other ponies will be there too, you know?”

Twilight felt a tad embarrassed, again, but managed to hold out on any blush, this time. How had she managed to let Rainbow’s name slip out *twice!*?

Not that Twilight thought that she ought to hide what she thought the two fillies had together. No, she wanted to run around Ponyville, declaring her love for Rainbow. Twilight wanted *everypony* to know.

However, Twilight knew two things, both drawn from her time reading romance novels. The first was that, in these novels, it was apparent that most of the couples would wait to announce their relationship together, and Twilight wanted to be gracious, and give Rainbow that opportunity.

The second was that, had Twilight done so, *the whole thing would’ve been horribly cliché.*

“Oh, Spike, look at the time! I’d best be off!”

Twilight knew she still had a few more minutes until she was actually scheduled to leave, but she’d decided that it’d probably be the best to leave early, after all, it meant she didn’t have to figure out how to vocalise all these thoughts in her head, and then find a way to convey it so Spike would understand it.

Due to instinct, Rainbow Dash had headed straight home.

Yet, as she lay, sprawled upon her cloud sofa, she couldn't help but feel that her relaxation was merely synthesised. Although, at heart, Rainbow wanted nothing other than to be able to exist, to have it easy, she knew that she was far from able to do such a thing.

The fillies that were running around within her brain were making sure of that.

Of course, Rainbow knew that there *weren't actually* tiny little ponies running around her head, but it sure felt like it to her. Not only due to the bizarre concoction of affection and animosity the two conflicting fillies managed to somehow create within Rainbow's brain, but because it felt like they were *trying to dig their way out of her skull*.

Still, Rainbow was aware that that wasn't actually the case, although the wound upon her forehead had been conceived with one of the two ponies, Rainbow was adamant that such a scenario would never occur.

That'd be crazy on a level higher than Pinkie Pie.

Thinking of Pinkie Pie, Rainbow had already made the decision that she wasn't going to attend her party. Not because of Pinkie's craziness, no, that was somewhat of a draw for Rainbow; it was fun, for a while, anyway.

No, the reasons behind her want for being alone were, yet again, Twilight Sparkle and Applejack.

As much as Rainbow would've liked to meet up with Applejack, and make amends, or to as much as an extent as she could, Rainbow knew that Twilight's presence would hinder that; and possibly even damage Applejack's and her own relationship beyond repair.

But even if Rainbow didn't go, would Twilight and Applejack's encounter without her harbour even more problems?

Without her there, Twilight might stumble into problems with Applejack.

Yes, Twilight *was* a clever pony, but even she hadn't learned of the *relationship* between Applejack and Rainbow Dash, and, with this in mind, she could potentially ruin everything.

Rainbow wasn't an idiot, and she knew Twilight. She knew that Twilight would be itching to tell everypony about their newly

formed *bonds*. Not because Twilight liked to brag, or because she wanted to gossip, but merely because Twilight would be *happy*.

Twilight wouldn't want to hide her happiness. Instead, she'd want to spread the reason for her happiness, so everypony could feel it, too, and without knowledge of Applejack's relationship with Rainbow Dash, there'd be no reason for her to hide it.

Rainbow didn't know how much Applejack knew of her night with Twilight, nevertheless, Rainbow knew that after their imminent meeting, she'd probably know *everything*.

Well, perhaps not *everything*. Rainbow hoped that Twilight would at least be a bit prudish with *some* of the details. Even though Twilight was smart, her naiveties within love *could* lead to revelations of more *intimate* scenes. However, Rainbow Dash supposed that not even Twilight's naivety stretched to describing such... *Scenes*.

Anyway, even though the whole situation seemed incredibly daunting for Rainbow, without *any* certainties to rely on, she knew one thing.

She still wasn't going to Pinkie Pie's party.

Applejack could still feel the cool breeze, carried down from Bloomberg's hill, yet it didn't ruffle her mane as much as it could've done, as she'd pulled her Stetson down tightly, in an attempt to cover her face. Or rather, her eyes.

Applejack knew it was silly, if she was upset, that was all there was to it, why bother hiding it? Yet, it had seemed the right thing to do, to cover up her red, puffy eyes. She looked down at the floor, moving below her, as she absent mindedly, slowly clopped her way over to Sugarcube Corner.

She hadn't *really* wanted to go, in fact, if she hadn't stopped crying, Applejack probably wouldn't have left Bloomberg's hill at all. However, Applejack knew that she had to go; after all, there

was *at least* a small chance that Dash would be there, and Applejack desperately needed to see her.

When Dash had left her upon the hill, Applejack hadn't returned to help her brother, like she'd said she would. Instead, she'd just remained, pondering. Wondering why Dash had continued to be like she was, always trying to look cool, all the time.

Yet, to Applejack, it was apparent that this '*keeping up*' of appearances seemed to only apply to the relationship surrounding Dash and herself.

Not that Applejack would've realised this, had Dash not told her herself.

Applejack played back the groggy scenes from the night before, in her head: Dash was nuzzling her, burying her tearful eyes into the orange of her own neck, warming. Yet again, like their times before, Applejack had just listened, absorbing Dash's melancholy, desperate to make the pony she loved feel '*right*' again.

However, try as she might, Applejack couldn't forgive Dash for her actions, not yet, anyway. Despite Dash's forlorn upset, and despite Applejack's dependability, her *forgiveness*, it would take a while for Dash to get the catharsis she so desperately desired.

Even though Dash was full of apologies, none of them were quite spectacular enough to compensate for what she'd broken in to confess to Applejack.

Although the fact that Dash was willing to make an effort to confess showed that she still had feelings for Applejack, and she knew where she'd gone wrong, it still didn't fix what she'd done wrong, but only showed that she wanted to try.

The last variable was what pained Applejack. The variable that Dash may not have even meant to come and confess to her at all; it may well have been just the alcohol in her bloodstream that had taken over.

Applejack stole a glance upwards, and realised that she was nearing her destination, Sugarcube Corner, as was another pony, from the opposite direction. A purple filly.

As Applejack gazed forwards at Twilight Sparkle, trotting gently towards her, she remembered, once more, the words that Rainbow Dash had passed on to her the night before, the words that had clouded Applejack's thoughts ever since she'd heard them; repeating, constantly.

"Applejack, I'm so sorry. I really am, but..."

"But I think I'm in love..."

"With Twilight..."

Twilight Sparkle couldn't contain her joy; it was only moments from her arrival at the party, *she'd be able to see Rainbow again!*

Escaping from her runaway scenarios in her head, Twilight began to focus back onto the real world, after all, she was nearly at Sugarcube Corner, and needed to pay attention to walking, if she didn't want to trot into anything.

As Twilight looked towards the entrance of the store, she could not only see the ornate cakey exterior of Sugarcube Corner, but the contrasting orange of Applejack, waiting by the door, looking to the ground.

"Hey, Applejack!"

Twilight called out loudly, yet she got no response. Applejack just kept gazing into the ground, seemingly unaware of Twilight's presence. Perhaps Applejack just didn't hear her, Twilight thought. It was rather blustery, and that could've just overwhelmed her voice, despite how loud she called out.

Reaching the entrance of Sugarcube Corner, Twilight sidled up to Applejack, with a smile.

“Hey, Applejack!”

At first, Twilight thought Applejack was just ignoring her, yet, as a couple of seconds went by, it was clear that she was just being a bit slow, pre-occupied.

“Oh. Hi, Twi”

Applejack sounded rather dejected, to Twilight. Initially, Twilight would've just put the tone of voice down to an accidental slip in Applejack's southern drawl, yet after reading her gait, Twilight couldn't have mistaken Applejack's apparent emotions.

“Applejack, *are you okay?*”

Twilight nuzzled up to Applejack, she was clearly in a state of upset, and Twilight wanted to fix that; Applejack was her friend, and she hated to see any of her friends in such a state.

However, something then happened that Twilight wasn't expecting; whilst she'd thought that nuzzling Applejack would help her to feel at least a bit better, instead of returning the embrace, Applejack shrugged her off, and pulled away.

“Ah'm fine, Twilight.”

There was that tone again, Applejack certainly *was not* okay. Her voice was layered with trembles, immersed in despondency.

“Applejack...”

Twilight stepped towards Applejack once again, attempting to embrace her, yet, before she could even make contact, Applejack pulled away, mimicking her own earlier actions.

“Just leave it, okay?”

Applejack's voice was hurt, but irritable. However, this time, tone wasn't all Twilight had to go on, as Applejack looked up to her, making eye contact, with a pleading gaze, through clouded irises.

Twilight didn't like it, but if Applejack didn't want to talk about it, there was little she could do, Applejack was her friend, and she wanted to respect her wishes.

She could have responded, but Twilight thought it was best to leave it at that, with an affirmative silence in place of an answer.

Trying to move on from her friend's melancholy, Twilight decided to move towards the front door of Sugarcube Corner, ready to brave what was undoubtedly going to be a rather *over the top* welcome from Pinkie Pie.

As Twilight reached forwards to push open the door, she noticed that the sign on the door read 'closed.'

This seemed slightly odd, but Twilight assumed that the sign didn't really apply to them, and was probably there due to the party they were attending.

When the door swung open, despite what its label tried to profess, Twilight was met with an all too familiar sight; streamers, balloons, confetti, banners and all. It was a trademark Pinkie Pie party. However, something didn't seem quite right.

Twilight stood in the doorway for a moment, with Applejack reluctantly in tow, until she could put her hoof on what was feeling amiss.

"Oh, Celestia! Mrs Cake! *Are you alright?*"

Mrs Cake was laid on the floor, among the party detritus, below a banner that read "*Pinkie Pie's Pony-fabulous Party!*" She clung to a piece of paper, pouring her tears into it.

Stuttering through tears, Mrs Cake mumbled into the paper, inaudible to Twilight. Moving closer, Twilight lowered herself down on the floor, levelling herself with the morose pony.

Attempting to give Mrs Cake a comforting pat, Twilight brought her fore-hoof down on her shoulder, and did her best to make friendly eye contact with the tear-stricken pink of Mrs Cake's eyes, but they remained fixated upon the content of the paper in front of her.

In a softened, consoling tone of voice, Twilight continued.

"I'm sorry Mrs Cake; I didn't quite hear you... *What's wrong?*"

In-between sobs, Twilight, caught the reason for Mrs Cake's sorrow, escaping in almost silent whispers, like she couldn't bear to pass the words from her lips.

"It's Pinkie..."

"She's..."

"Gone."

Chapter 8

The Ocean Between You and Me

"You're wasting my time, Pinkie."

A lot of ponies tell me this.

I don't think they mean for it to be as mean as it comes across, but the feelings are still there.

For a time, I just endured this. Somehow, it didn't hurt much when said by ponies I didn't really know.

Then, my friends started saying it.

It hurt.

Did they not trust me? Did they not believe in me?

Did they not love me for who I am?

If I stopped acting as I did, I'd no longer be Pinkie Pie. I'd no longer be the pony you continue to hurt for being who she is.

Do you know what's worst about it?

My friends; Rarity, Fluttershy, Rainbow Dash, Applejack, Twilight Sparkle, they haven't even noticed that they're hurting me. Is it because my feelings are so unimportant to them?

I thought they might've noticed, and tried to help, but seemingly, the magic of friendship isn't really as strong as it once appeared to be.

~~Mrs Cake~~ Cup Cake, don't for a second believe that this is your fault, because, if you do, you couldn't be further from the truth.

Your company has been the best thing that's ever happened to me, and you're the reason I've been here as long as I have. Without you, I wouldn't have lasted as long as I've done so.

But, despite that, this is goodbye.

Even though I always feel your love, it's no longer enough to counter a life in a town that seems to think my time is worth nothing.

If I'm gone, then I'll no longer be able to waste everypony's time.

Don't bother to tell ~~my friends~~ the others about this.

I wouldn't want to waste their time.

-Pinkie

Twilight stared at the letter for what could've been hours. However, she'd not read a word on the letter for ages, she was staring into it, past the words, to try and find what Pinkie really meant...

Twilight knew Pinkie, she was her friend. Surely the Pinkie she knew wouldn't have done... 'that'...

But Twilight began to wonder, staring into the paper, whether the Pinkie Pie she'd known was Pinkie Pie at all...

It wasn't just the not knowing that Pinkie had been hurting that upset Twilight, it was the fact that she had been hurting because of her friends, *and they hadn't even noticed.*

That, and the friendliest pony she'd ever met; Pinkie Pie, was telling her that 'the magic of friendship wasn't as strong as it once appeared to be.'

Finally, Twilight looked up, from the crumpled, tear smeared words she'd been reading, and upon doing so, realised that she was no longer standing firm like she'd been when she began reading, but collapsed on the floor, curled up in front of Mrs Cake. She could hear Applejack's heavy breathing from beside her, no doubt caused by Pinkie's words.

Twilight sighed, unhappily. It may well have heightened the awkwardness of Sugarcube Corner's silence, but Twilight wasn't really fussed. Although she didn't know the scientific basis behind it, she knew that a sigh could normally alleviate any of her grief.

She'd hoped that this would've been true in this situation too, but, her efforts seemed in vain.

In fact, to Twilight, it seemed that the thought of a sigh dealing with such important, sensitive things such as Pinkie's disappearance made the bitter sinking sensation within her a thousand-fold worse.

Twilight looked across to Mrs Cake, through her slowly clouding eyes, to meet with already cloud-burst ones. Even though the movement of eyes should only take a tiny amount of effort; to Twilight, it felt as if she'd never performed a task more arduous: to meet Mrs Cake's eye's in honesty.

"Mrs Cake..."

Mrs Cake looked on to Twilight, saying nothing, her forlorn expression speaking in place of words, tears dropping down in place of tone.

Twilight rifled through her own brain, searching for the perfect words to say – How do you avoid upsetting somepony in this situation?

Unable to think, Twilight looked away from Mrs Cake, to Applejack, for support. Yet, even the dependable, honest pony Applejack was unable to reassure Twilight; her eyes were glazed over, fazed out, staring at the floor. Joining Applejack, regaining her gaze down at the floor, Twilight resigned herself to the fact that in the time she needed to, she'd never be able to truly

find words that wouldn't hurt, and so, Twilight decided to speak her mind. Raw, yet still tentatively.

"I didn't realise Pinkie Pie felt this way..." Twilight gulped, she knew what she was saying was probably incredibly cliché, and far from eloquent. Holding back tears, Twilight continued, "But if she did, why didn't she say so?"

Twilight still looked to the floor, somewhat guiltily, away from Mrs Cake. Even so, she still heard her sigh, tinged with sadness, but overwhelmed with what sounded like disappointment

"Pinkie always told me you were the clever one, Twilight Sparkle."

Upon mention of her name, Twilight looked back up, reflexively, towards Mrs Cake. She was no longer tear stricken, but her eyes were dulled, her snout pulled back, ever so slightly, in a look of disappointment. Perhaps even anger.

"However, I'm beginning to seriously doubt what she said."

Twilight answered in silence, fearing that what she'd said had worsened the situation.

"If you really were smart, Twilight, you'd have noticed that Pinkie Pie really hasn't been that 'Pinkie' for a long while now..."

Unable to find speech once again, Twilight was relieved to be rescued by a choice few words of Applejack's southern drawl, even if they did sound slightly wavering.

"But Mrs Cake, Pinkie was happy. Wasn't she?"

Once again, Mrs Cake sighed, remorsefully.

"That's just it, isn't it?"

Twilight and Applejack's confused expressions must have made their thoughts clear to Cup Cake, as she continued on, explaining further.

“To you, and everypony around her, Pinkie Pie was the ‘happy pony,’ wasn’t she? This was good, for Pinkie. She could spend her days spreading the happiness she loved to surround herself, and then when she had an ‘off’ day, she felt no guilt in taking time away, to rest. She felt no guilt in being unhappy, when she had to be.”

Mrs Cake looked on, seemingly nostalgic, to Twilight’s perceptions, towards the window, into the distance.

“However, after the Summer Sun Celebration, after she gained the element of Laughter, after she met you, Twilight, she started feeling guilt.”

Twilight’s stomach sank, further than it’d already sunk, with the horrible realisation of what was going to come next.

“After she had her element bestowed to her, spreading laughter and happiness were no longer just an enjoyment. To Pinkie, she felt that it was her duty to do so. This was fine, for a time, but then I realised that she was having less and less unhappy days. To begin with, I thought this was good, I thought she was just becoming an even happier pony than she already was. It was when the off days became so scarce that they petered away into nothing; that I started to worry.”

Mrs Cake’s nostalgic look had left her face, once again to be replaced by the grief stricken look she’d worn earlier, tears once more tumbling to the ground, sobs beginning to punctuate her speech.

“When I confronted her, Pinkie said that I should stop being so silly. She shouldn’t question what her element bestowed upon her. If she could’ve done, Twilight would’ve said so. After all, Twilight was not only one of the smartest ponies in Ponyville, but one of her very best friends...”

Although it may not have been so, but to Twilight, it seemed as though within her upset, Mrs Cake had delivered the last few words with venom.

Even if she didn't mean to say her words like that, they still took their toll on Twilight, seeping deep into her, as she realised how devastating her negligence had been to Pinkie.

She'd been suffering, yet she was too worried to tell anypony.

After all, Pinkie Pie, the party loving pink pony, the spirit of the element of laughter, wanted anything but to bring about unhappiness...

All Twilight would've had to do was say a few words, and then Pinkie Pie would never have gone...

Gulping down, forgetting the delicacy of the situation and remembering the urgency, Twilight began to speak quickly, her organisational skills coming into play.

"Mrs Cake, we need to find Pinkie Pie. Before she does anything..." Twilight paused for a moment, searching for the right word. "Silly... Where would she go when she was feeling 'off?'"

Mrs Cake sighed, again.

"Twilight, if you really were Pinkie's friend, you'd-"

Twilight butted in, still headstrong from her sense of urgency.

"If you really want to, we can discuss to what lengths my friendship with Pinkie extends to, but right now, if you really cared, you'd help me *find her*."

Twilight looked dead into Mrs Cake's eyes, unwavering.

For the first time in a while, Sugarcube Corner felt a bit happier, warmed by the faintest of smiles. Even if Cup Cake was still looking down to the floor, tears still seeping out, it was still there.

"On the days when Pinkie wasn't feeling so 'Pinkie,' she used to climb the mountain trail above Ponyville." Cup Cake's smile tinged with sadness again, "If she hasn't left completely, she'll be there, I'm sure of it."

Twilight began to pour concentration into her horn, focusing on Pinkie's supposed location, yet she still had concentration for a few choice words.

"Thank you."

"All I did was tell you where she was, Twilight Sparkle."

Twilight shook her head, smiling happily.

"No, thank you for believing in the magic of friendship again..."

Just before Twilight blinked away, she caught the glimpse of one of the happiest, teary eyed faces she'd ever seen...

Applejack jumped, gasping suddenly.

Even though she'd gotten mostly used to Twilight's magic, whenever she disappeared like that, well, it just didn't seem natural.

Applejack turned away from Mrs Cake, slowly trotting towards the door, but feeling guilt with every hoofstep. How could they just not notice Pinkie's unhappiness?

As she reached the doorway, Applejack faltered, hoof waiting in the air to push at the door. As much as she wanted to just leave the resonating tension of Sugarcube Corner, she knew that she ought to say something before she did so, just to try and patch things up.

Looking over her shoulder, glancing towards Mrs Cake, Applejack spoke, huskily, tentatively.

"Mrs Cake, we'll find Pinkie Pie."

Applejack tried desperately to convey her voice in its normal, reassuring affirmative manner, but it just wouldn't come through. In the end, she settled once again for tentative huskiness.

"We're her friends, after all."

Not wanting to let the melancholy linger, and wanting to leave on an optimistic note, Applejack finally outstretched her forehoof, nudging the door forward, emptying her lungs of the bitterly sickly sweet air, and breathing deeply, replacing it with the cold fresh air of outside.

As the door behind her slammed shut, sending a light breeze through Applejack's Stetson topped mane, she began to slowly trot, absentmindedly, deep within thought, in no particular direction.

However, Applejack knew she wasn't going anywhere in particular; it was a conscious decision to just wander around, as what was a pony supposed to do on receiving such news?

Applejack's mouth moved to form an 'o,' as she realised what she had to do, and where she had to go. She had to let Pinkie Pie's other friends know what was happening.

Fluttershy and Rarity were away, far out of town, which left Applejack with one main choice. She had to go and see Rainbow Dash.

Regaining control over her hooves' direction, Applejack pointed herself at the floating mass of clouds and rainbows at the edge of Ponyville, and trotted on.

Absentmindedly staring at Dash's cloud-house, trudging onwards, Applejack's mind became overcome with worry, not just as Pinkie's words sank in, more and more so, but also over the prospect of meeting Dash. Not because of the relationship between them, Applejack wasn't a stupid pony, she knew there were more important things to confront than the growing distance between them, but even so, Applejack couldn't help but let constant worries about what Dash was actually thinking about her.

Applejack knew that Dash wasn't at all the most emotionally mature pony, and so, she knew that Dash would probably react somewhat badly to Pinkie's letter. Load that on top of how Dash was reacting over the relationship between herself and Applejack, and well...

In truth, not even Applejack, the pony who was pretty much closest to Dash, the pony who'd stayed up on stormy nights, listening to Dash, listening to her every thought, could know how she would react.

Despite her not knowing, Applejack liked that about their relationship, the idea that Dash didn't hide anything from her, she trusted in Applejack enough to confide in her all of her secrets, however, she still felt the need to tell Applejack all the little things too. The tiny, inconsequential things that amount to nothing. No thought was deemed too small, nor too pointless to tell her.

However, despite Applejack's happiness that she could be there for Dash, and to listen to her, this was also, unfortunately one of the things that made Applejack begin to question the relationship between them.

It was the way Dash told her these things. Always in secret, during nights, reminiscent of their first night spent together.

Why couldn't they meet during the day? What was wrong with meeting how ponies in a relationship normally would?

But, the meeting places weren't the only problem for Applejack.

The way these thoughts were told to her; they felt cold.

Cold, passed on thoughtlessly, dumped onto Applejack. Not once had Dash ever asked if Applejack was okay, or if there was anything *she* wanted to talk about.

Sure, Applejack knew Dash was loyal. She was the most loyal pony Applejack had ever known. She would always come to see Applejack, if she called for her, without hesitation, and despite Dash's lack of asking after Applejack, would always tell her that she loved her.

Until now, that was true.

Now, Applejack felt Dash's loyalty wavering, unhinging with her far from mature emotions.

Applejack didn't doubt Dash's loyalty one bit, however.
She just suspected that Dash's loyalty was beginning to shift to somepony else.

As Applejack reached the base of Dash's cloud-house, she scuffed the ground with her hooves, kicking up dust, trying to delay what she knew was going to be a difficult conversation.

She would've liked to think otherwise, but with the element of honesty within her, Applejack found it hard to even lie to herself.

With her still wavering southern accent, Applejack began to call out...

"Dash, I need to talk to you."

As much as she'd been building it up to look bad, Applejack was still very much looking forward to speaking with Dash.

Sounding more eager than stern, Applejack yelled, loudly.

"Dash, haul yer flank out here RIGHT NOW!"

Rainbow Dash smiled, sadly.

She knew Applejack was going to turn up at her house, sooner rather than later, but even so; she still couldn't think of anything that she could say which would help her out of her predicament.

She *had* contemplated flying off. To fly off and not talk to Applejack at all.

But Rainbow Dash wasn't that stupid. She may have been stupid enough to drop herself into the mess she'd gotten herself into, but she wasn't about to abandon all of her friends over something like this.

She was the spirit of the element of loyalty, after all.

Rainbow Dash trotted towards her door, and, in the presence of Applejack, the only pony who could *really* make her feel uneasy; sheepishly poked her head out, nervously grinning.

“Hey, Applejack.”

Rainbow Dash sighed; she could see the look on Applejack’s face, her serious, determined look, and with that, she knew that it was pointless to resist Applejack. Of course, that wouldn’t stop Rainbow Dash from trying.

“I said git down here *now*, Dash.”

Rainbow Dash still stayed behind her door, head poking out.

However, instead of dancing about the issue, she decided to come out and just be truthful; she felt as if too many lies had passed between the two of them.

Well, Rainbow Dash wanted to think that they were between the two of them, but really, they were just her own lies.

She spoke, subdued.

“I... Don’t know if I’m quite ready for this talk yet, Applejack...”

As embarrassed as Rainbow Dash was about actually admitting such a thing, she still looked down to Applejack, continuing to meet her gaze. It was as if they were together on one of their nights; she just didn’t mind Applejack being there, and knowing more than Rainbow Dash might ever let on to just *anypony*.

“Quite rightly, Sugarcube, I don’t think I’m all that ready for ‘that’ talk mahself, either...” Applejack’s voice was no longer as harsh. It’d calmed, somewhat, softened. This was the voice that Rainbow Dash was used to, on cold, dark nights. This was the voice that Rainbow Dash especially *loved*. “But I’m not here for ‘that’ talk.”

Rainbow Dash arched an eyebrow, questioning.

“Ah need to talk to you about something else, Dash.”

Rainbow Dash was still somewhat confused, what could Applejack want to talk about that was more important than their *relations*?

Even *without* her somewhat egotistical tendencies, Rainbow Dash struggled to see what could possibly need to be more imminently addressed than that.

However, she didn't complain; it gave her more time to think of what she could actually say to Applejack that wouldn't ruin *everything*.

Yet, the fact that she didn't know what to say wasn't the only reason that Rainbow Dash was stalling. It was also that she'd never really stopped to think about what she was going to say before.

Yet now? It seemed like she was doing so all the time; especially with Applejack.

Slowly, spreading her wings, Rainbow Dash descended from her cloud-house, not flying down, but floating down.

“What?”

Rainbow Dash touched down in front of Applejack, face to face, trying to still seem confident by still meeting her eyes.

“Ah ain't gonna beat around the bush, Dash. This is something you need to know, sooner rather than later.”

Even though Rainbow Dash knew that they *weren't* talking about the relationship between the two of them, she still couldn't help but let her mind run away, applying everything Applejack was saying to the two of them, regardless.

Rainbow Dash heard Applejack inhale, loudly, and then begin to speak, in a pained, upset tone.

“It's Pinkie Pie; she's...”

Applejack silenced for a moment, her look turning thoughtful.

“Gone.”

Rainbow Dash blinked, confused.

“Gone?”

For what felt like the thousandth time in the day, Rainbow Dash didn't actually know what to say.

Pinkie Pie, gone? Why would she leave? Why would she leave without saying goodbye?

Was she not important enough to Pinkie Pie to at least tell her she was going?

Perhaps she wasn't gone, Rainbow Dash supposed, but she'd merely gone away, for a day or two. That was what she wanted to believe. However, from the look she'd got from Applejack; the concerned, serious, matter-of-fact look, Rainbow Dash was sure that that wasn't the case.

Still, that didn't stop Rainbow Dash from hoping. Hoping that Pinkie Pie had, in fact, gone away, on an unplanned holiday, just for fun; anything but just 'gone.'

After all, Pinkie Pie did unplanned things like that, didn't she?

*“Gone *where?*”*

Again, Rainbow Dash heard Applejack sigh, unhappily, whilst scuffing her hooves against the ground, looking down.

“We don't really know, for sure.”

Rainbow Dash felt her insides turn over, her worst fears seemingly confirmed.

“Twilight's gone to look for her, where Mrs Cake thought she could be.”

Rainbow Dash suddenly felt a tiny bit better, her ears pricking up at Applejack's words of possible redemption.

Rainbow Dash began to speak quickly, suddenly eager.

"Where? Where did Twilight go?"

Applejack turned around, looking towards the mountain beyond Ponyville, away from Dash.

She wanted to draw out this moment, even if it was just for a few seconds more, because, Applejack knew, as soon as she told Dash where Pinkie's supposed location was, she'd be gone.

Applejack didn't blame her for this; she knew that Dash was loyal, and that even the few seconds Applejack was keeping her from Pinkie were probably tearing her apart.

Even so, Applejack still wanted Dash close to her; after all, she was hurting too.

"She's gone to the mountain trail, the one above Ponyville."

Pretty much as soon as the final word had left Applejack's tongue; she heard the predictable sound of wings flapping, frantically, quickly, and then, as Dash shot past her, she felt wind shoot along with her, washing through her hair. Her Stetson trembled in the wind, unsteady.

She couldn't fault Dash for having wings, after all, without them; she wouldn't be the Dash that Applejack knew.

Sometimes, she just wished Dash would slow down a bit, to wait. Perhaps even to think.

Applejack sighed, sadly. She didn't normally mind being left behind by her friends; she was proud to be an earth pony.

But right now, there was nothing more that Applejack wanted then to be up to speed, with them.

As the final gust formed by Dash's flight whipped past Applejack, it loosened the Stetson's trembling perch, stealing it away, flying gracefully in the wind, sweeping down to the ground.

Falling.