

Friendship is...

By Cascore



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Laughter

“Spike, can you fetch my Creatures of the Deep book, please?” Twilight asked, already buried horn deep in a book that was resting on her desk. She turned to the next page, enthralled by the first-hand accounts of mariners coming upon mermaids, beings she'd never seen before or even knew very much about.

She continued to read for a few more seconds until she realized her little dragon assistant hadn't even said anything confirming that he was on the prowl for the book she requested. She raised her head from her studies for a minute and glanced behind herself. He was nowhere to be seen.

“Spike?” she called.

The door to the bedroom on the top floor opened and slammed shut, and Twilight could hear little paws hustling through the hall and down the stairs. “Sorry, Twilight! What do you need?”

“My copy of Creatures of the Deep,” she reiterated.

“I'm on it!”

Twilight returned to her current book and, roughly a minute later, Spike returned with the requested item in hand. “Thank you, Spike,” Twilight said. “You can just put it down on the floor next to me.”

Spike did as instructed. “Anything else I can get you, Twilight?” he asked. The unicorn shook her head.

“Nope, that's it. Thank you, Spike.”

“No problem,” Spike said with a smile. With that bit of business out of the way, he turned around and headed back upstairs. A few moments of silence later though, Twilight suddenly remembered something else she wanted her assistant to get for her.

“Oh, Spike? It looks like I do need something else,” she said without turning away from her desk. “Could you get The Basics of Swimming for me?”

Twilight figured that as long as she was learning about underwater creatures, she may as well study up a bit on how to swim. When she thought about it, she never did have to do such a thing before. It couldn't hurt to at least learn the basics.

However, at the pace Spike was going in getting her the book, it would seem she wouldn't be learning at all. Again, she turned away from her desk, this time rotating her entire body around and trotting over to the stairs.

“Hello! Equestria to Spike!” Twilight called in a lighthearted tone. Spike suddenly appeared and bolted down to the floor level again, slamming right into Twilight at the bottom of the steps. Twilight got knocked back into a sitting position while Spike fell flat on his back from the recoil. Spike groaned a bit as tiny stars circled above his head, but he quickly shook himself out of his daze and hopped onto his feet, just as Twilight got back on her hooves.

“Uh, sorry again, Twilight,” he said, a nervous smile on his lips. “What do you need?”

“I was asking if you could find The Basics of Swimming,” Twilight responded, watching Spike with a smile and a raised eyebrow as he hurried off to the massive selection of books nearby. A ladder climb and a quick look through the top row of shelves later, Spike located the requested book and hopped down immediately. He carried it back over to Twilight's desk, where he put the book on the floor next to Creatures of the Deep.

“Done and done,” Spike said. Twilight came up behind him.

“Is something wrong, Spike?” she asked. Spike's eyes widened and he turned around to face Twilight. “You seem a little distracted today.”

“Well...”

Without another word, Spike ran back upstairs to the bedroom. He came back down moments later and held up a flyer, [which Twilight levitated out of his hand so she could get a better look.](#)

“‘The Laughing Pony’ is having its first ever open mic tonight for comedy routines,” Spike explained as Twilight perused the paper. It contained a picture of a grinning male pony standing in a spotlight onstage in front of an audience. Twilight couldn't help but smile as she put the poster back in Spike's paws. “I've been working on coming up with jokes all day.” He paused for a moment before a light bulb seemed to turn on in his head. “Hey, would you like to hear them? You could be my test audience!”

“Haha, sure, Spike,” Twilight said, smiling. “I was thinking of taking a little break from studying anyway.”

“Great! Then, um, stand over by your desk. I'll use the middle of the room as the stage.” With that, he went back upstairs to grab his paper of joke material. Twilight went over to her desk and turned around to take a seat.

“Ooh, I love comedy routines!”

“AH!” Twilight nearly jumped out of her fur once she noticed Pinkie Pie sitting right next to her, smiling brightly as she awaited Spike's return.

“Pinkie! When did you get here?” Twilight exclaimed. Pinkie glanced up at the ceiling for a moment before looking at Twilight.

“A month from now, it'll be nineteen years ago!” Pinkie answered cheerily. Moments later, Spike returned on the scene.

“Alright, I have everything right here!” Spike said, eagerly stepping out into the center of the floor. He turned to face Twilight and was taken aback when he saw the new guest sitting there. “Oh. Hi, Pinkie Pie.” Pinkie waved. Spike wasn't quite so sure how he felt about suddenly having another listener, but he forced himself to shake off the nerves. He'd be performing in front of a lot more than just two people that night after all.

He cleared his throat and looked at his paper. “What does a dentist say to the love of his life?”

Pinkie Pie raised her hand eagerly. Both Twilight and Spike looked at her.

“Uh, Pinkie-” Spike began.

“You're so sweet, you give me tooth decay!” Pinkie answered happily. Twilight couldn't help but smile, and Spike found himself suppressing a chuckle, too. He quickly stifled it, though.

“You weren't actually supposed to answer, Pinkie, but I like that,” Spike said.

“Oh, sorry.” Pinkie brought a hoof up to the side of her mouth and moved it over her lips. A zipping sound was heard and she went back to listening.

“So, what does a dentist really say to the love of his life?” Twilight asked, helping Spike get back on track.

“I'm *enameled* with you!”

“AHAHAHAHA!” Pinkie Pie bursted in laughter as Twilight let out a few chuckles. “Enameled! Because, enamel is on teeth, and it's a pun of 'enamored,' and it's a dentist! HA!” She started to roll on the floor.

“Haha, I get it, Pinkie,” Twilight said with a smile. “Anyway, what other jokes do you have, Spike?” Pinkie Pie immediately gained control over her laughter and sat up straight, waiting. Spike looked down at his paper again and cleared his throat.

“What's a dog's favorite kind of sound amplifier?” He half expected Pinkie to shout out an answer, but, keeping in mind that she was supposed to stay quiet, she waited patiently for Spike to give his own punchline. “A *woofer*!”

Twilight started to chuckle again as Pinkie Pie flipped onto her back and slapped her knee from laughing so hard.

Spike smiled as he watched his audience of two. The entire time he was working on his jokes, he wasn't really sure if anybody would think they were funny or not, but if he could make Pinkie laugh so hard...well, wait, Pinkie would laugh at just about anything. But he made *Twilight* laugh, and she was a bit of a tougher customer. He felt that if he could get to her, he'd

have a pretty good shot of wowing the crowd at The Laughing Pony that night.

Once Twilight and Pinkie Pie settled down, they looked at Spike, waiting for him to continue on with his next joke. When Spike simply stared back at them though, both of the ponies raised their eyebrows.

“Do you have any more?” Twilight asked. Spike furrowed his brows a bit as he looked back at his paper, then scratched the back of his head.

“Um. No. That's all I have.”

“Only two?” Twilight said. Pinkie Pie started clopping her hooves to the floor.

“Yay! Whoo! Alright!” Spike smiled at Pinkie’s praise, but Twilight wasn't quite so quick to applaud him.

“As good as those jokes were, Spike, I don't think that's going to be enough to count as a routine,” she said. “You're going to need to come up with a lot more by tonight. How long did it take you to come up with those?”

“Two hours,” Spike said, sighing. Twilight's eyes widened.

“Two hours? And all you got down were two jokes?” she asked.

“Well, coming up with material was a lot harder than I thought it'd be,” Spike mumbled, looking at his paper. “I took most of my time coming up with the dentist joke.”

“And it was fantastically awesome!” Pinkie exclaimed as Twilight walked over to the bookshelves. “I mean, sure, you could always use more jokes, but what you have already is great!”

“Hehe, thanks, Pinkie.”

“Here,” Twilight said just before a book came to the ground right in front of Spike. He read the cover. Secrets to Getting Snickers, Volume I. Spike picked it up and opened to a random page.

"Animate yourself,'" he recited. "A joke can be fine if it's just being told, but it's much better if you put your entire body into telling a story.' We have a whole book about comedy?"

"We have several," Twilight corrected, pointing a hoof to the spot on the bookshelf she got it from. There were a few other books next to the gap that looked like the book in Spike's hands. "I honestly don't really know why, but we have an entire collection about the subject. Comedy is a lot more intricate than people think, I guess."

"Really?" Spike said, his eyes suddenly losing a bit of luster. He looked back into the book. "Well, I better study as fast as I can before tonight then."

"Study, schmudy!" Pinkie Pie said, coming up behind Spike.

"Schmudy?" Twilight muttered. Pinkie Pie started to push Spike toward the front door with her head, making him drop the study guide in the process.

"You need to come up with a lot of jokes before tonight, and studying some book isn't going to help you make more!" Pinkie said. "What we need to do is go out and find some material. All the best comedy can be found in normal, everyday situations!"

"But, wait a minute-" Spike began.

"We don't have time to wait!" Pinkie said. She gave him one last, hard nudge out the door, then stepped outside herself. She poked her head back in the door and said, "We'll be back later, Twilight!"

"Um." Pinkie Pie slammed the door behind herself. Twilight stared at the exit and blinked. "Okay."

—

"So, delivery of the joke can be considered even more important than the joke itself?" Spike asked, frantically scribbling down notes on his paper as he walked alongside a hopping Pinkie Pie in the town square. The morning was bright and cloudless, and there were plenty of ponies all around,

milling about. Pinkie Pie kept her eyes on all of them, trying to see if any of them would do something particularly funny.

"Yep," Pinkie answered. "The joke itself can be completely and totally not funny in the least, but if you tell it in a super hilarious way, ponies will love it." She suddenly felt her tail start to twitch, which was usually a sign that put her on edge since it meant something was about to start falling, but, considering the circumstances, something falling might actually be a good thing; it could provide a bit of joke material for Spike to use. She looked around even more now, hoping to catch whatever falling action would be taking place.

"Huh," Spike muttered, looking at his paper. "You know, I never thought about it before, but it is true that it's easy to laugh at just about anything if- AAAHHH!"

Spike suddenly found himself stumbling down a steep decline, having walked right into a hole in the middle of the road. Pinkie Pie jolted to a halt and looked into the hole. At the bottom, she could see Spike laying on top of a pile of three little ponies, and all four of them were dazed. The situation looked rather painful, but she couldn't help but laugh over it.

Spike sat up and shook his head. It took him a while to realize that the ground was unusually soft, and he looked underneath himself. He appeared to be sitting on the flank of a tiny, slightly grey pony with a light purple tail.

Immediately, he jumped off the top of the pile and stood off to the side. Tangled up in the mess were Apple Bloom, Scootaloo, and Sweetie Belle, the fillies that made up the entirety of the local club, [the Cutie Mark Crusaders](#). They all moaned and groaned for a while as they spurred themselves back onto their feet. They were all wearing yellow miner's helmets, and there were three shovels on the ground underneath them.

"Gee, girls, I'm really sorry," Spike said, helping the fillies wipe the dust off themselves. "I didn't see this hole you were digging." He suddenly paused and looked up before scratching his head. "Uh...why were you digging a hole anyway? You've gotta be violating so many zoning laws right now," he added under his breath.

“Nuh-uh, we ain't violatin' any laws,” Apple Bloom said. “We asked for permission to dig here, an' we put up cones all around the hole to warn everypony, too.” Spike couldn't rebut that; he could see the caution cones from where he was standing. The hole was only about three feet deep after all.

“And we were digging 'cause we thought we could probably get our cutie marks that way,” Scootaloo explained. Spike didn't even have to ask, he should have already expected that answer.

“And I don't have my mark,” Sweetie Belle said after inspecting her flank. She dropped into a sitting position as her friends inspected their flanks as well. Neither of them had obtained cutie marks either. “Can we start doing something else? We've been digging for a whole fifteen minutes.”

“Yeah, ah don't think this is our special talent,” Apple Bloom agreed. “And even if it was, ah don't like it very much.”

“Alright, let's get outta here,” Scootaloo said. With that, she grabbed her shovel with her teeth and tossed it up over the side of the hole. Apple Bloom did the same, but when Sweetie Belle tried, she couldn't quite summon the strength to toss the shovel so far. Being ever helpful, Spike stepped in and did the throwing for her.

“Thanks, Spike,” she said, beaming. Spike smiled back at her.

“No problem.”

Spike proceeded to jump up and grab the edge of the hole, pulling himself up with a little assistance from Pinkie Pie, who grabbed the scaly scruff of his neck when he was almost up and gave him an extra pull.

All three of the fillies attempted to climb the very steep ramp leading back to the road. They had no such luck though, for they hadn't anticipated a plan on getting out, and the route was nearly vertical. “Uh oh,” Scootaloo muttered.

“Oh no, how are we s'posed to get outta here?” Apple Bloom asked. Behind them, Spike knelt down and extended his arms down over the side of the hole.

"Here," he said. "Jump up and I'll grab you."

The fillies lined up in front of Spike, Sweetie Belle being the first to receive help. She stood up on her hind legs and propped herself up against the wall before giving a little hop. Spike managed to grab her hoof, and he strained to pull her up. Sweetie Belle helped as much as she could by propelling herself up the wall with her hind legs, and Pinkie Pie soon knelt down and grabbed her by the scruff to pull her up the rest of the way, just as she'd done with Spike. The other two fillies were lifted out in a similar fashion, and soon, everyone was standing happily above ground, though Spike was a little winded from the strenuous pulling.

"Thanks, Spike! Thanks, Pinkie!" all of the fillies said on top of each other. Scootaloo and Sweetie Belle started to walk off, but Apple Bloom was eyeing the mound of dirt they'd piled as a result of their digging.

"Um, girls, shouldn't we fill this here hole back up?" she asked, making the other two stop and turn back.

"Aw, do we have to?" Scootaloo whined. Mere moments later, a pair of chattering ponies approached the hole, not seeing it. They both took a step at the same time onto thin air and tumbled into the ditch. Everypony around flinched, then Scootaloo sighed. "Alright, fine, let's fill it up."

The fallen ponies collected themselves, reassuring the fillies that they were fine after climbing out of the hole. They even offered to help the little ponies with the task of replacing the dirt, and the five of them set off to work immediately. Meanwhile, Pinkie and Spike continued on their stroll around Ponyville. As Pinkie hopped along, she glanced at Spike from the side of her eye.

"Well?" she said with a smile. Spike looked over at her.

"Well, what?"

"Aren't you gonna write a joke about what just happened?" she asked.
"Telling that story will get you some laughs for sure!"

“Oh.” Spike thought about it for a moment. He started to chuckle. “Yeah, I guess that was pretty funny, huh?”

“And I'm sure a lot more funny stuff will happen, too! [We just gotta look for it.](#)”

—

Sweet Apple Acres

Pinkie Pie and Spike poked their heads out of one of the many apple trees in the orchard. Underneath them was Big Macintosh, who had leaned back against the tree and drifted off to sleep. One of the apples became loose after Spike maneuvered over it, and it fell right onto Macintosh's snout. His eyes suddenly shot open and he gasped. He held his nose and stood up in panic, crashing his head against a low-hanging branch. Dazed, he stumbled a few steps away from his resting spot and fell to the ground. Pinkie Pie nearly fell out of the tree laughing as Spike scribbled on his paper.

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Carousel Boutique

Nestled outside a window on the first story, Pinkie Pie and Spike peered into Rarity's shop. They could see Rarity walking around, looking confused. She called out, then moved to a different room. Pinkie Pie and Spike noticed something move on the ceiling and glanced up to see Rarity's cat, Opalescence, walking on it upside-down with her claws. Pinkie fell over laughing as Spike jotted down what he saw.

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The Marketplace

Spike slowed to a stop as he and Pinkie passed by a stall that was selling tons of gems. His eyes sparkled as he took in the beautiful sight, and immediately dropped some bits on the counter in exchange for a delicious ruby. He happily bit down on the gem, but his eyes widened and he suddenly started spitting out his treat. It turned out to be plastic! He glared

at the shopkeeper, who sheepishly pointed at a sign saying, "Toy Gems, 5 Bits Each." Mad at himself, Spike tossed away the remainder of the plastic and walked away, Pinkie giggling as she followed behind him.

—

The Joke Shop

The pony behind the counter pointed at a small sign next to the cash register that said, "Jokes Sold Out." Spike sighed, then gave a shrug. He and Pinkie Pie began to head for the exit, and Pinkie's tail grazed a bag of itching powder that sat on the counter. It fell to the floor and puffed into the air, getting all over Pinkie's tail. She suddenly stiffened up and bit her lip before she quickly turned around and tried to bite her tail. She missed and proceeded to frantically run in a circle until she finally caught it and began gnawing on it, easing the itchiness. Spike was cracking up next to her, and, when she thought about the situation, she started to laugh as well, but quickly stiffened up again and went back to biting her tail.

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Zecora's Hut

Spike looked questioningly at the potion Zecora gave him. He looked at Pinkie Pie, who was floating around the house after drinking a different potion Zecora handed her, and she nodded at the young dragon with a smile. Still unsure, Spike gave a big gulp before lifting the bottle to his lips and taking a drink. He burped a little while after taking a sip, and bubbles floated out of his mouth. He stared at them in amazement, then automatically burped again, producing more bubbles. Pinkie Pie flew around, popping all of them and laughing. Zecora and Spike joined in her laughter as Spike continued to burp bubbles.

—

"Ooh, today was so much *fun*!" Pinkie Pie chirped, bouncing around the tree she and Spike were resting under. The sun was starting to set, and Spike was sitting at the tree's base, looking over all the joke material he'd gathered that day. He smiled and chuckled to himself as he read all the stories he and Pinkie had come upon. Eventually, he let out a small yawn.

Prowling around town for so long was a pretty tiring process. Pinkie Pie stopped hopping as she came back in front of Spike. "So, how do you feel about your routine? Think you're ready for tonight?"

"Yeah, I think I'm good to go," Spike said. He stretched a bit and slumped back against the tree. "I think I could use a nap before tonight though. Going around town made me," he began to yawn again, "sleeepy. Do you think you could wake me up in time for the show?"

"Oki-doki-loki!" Pinkie Pie said. She dropped herself into a sitting position. "It begins in about an hour, right?" Spike nodded. "Alright. Sixty minutes from now, you and I will be on our way and you can wow everybody in the crowd!"

Spike yawned again, and he wore a content smile on his face once he was through. "I can't wait," he muttered. It wasn't very much longer before he drifted off to sleep.

Pinkie Pie found herself succumbing to the contagious power of yawning just after Spike zonked out. A few seconds later, she decided to go ahead and lay down. She would be waiting for an hour, so she may as well be comfortable.

After a few seconds, she lowered her head onto her forelegs. No need stressing her neck when the rest of her body was so relaxed after all.

A few minutes after *that*, she closed her eyes. She had a pretty good internal clock. She would be able to know how much time had passed without straining her eyes.

Moments later, she had fallen asleep as well. Sitting still when she was so used to constantly moving had more of an affect on her than she thought it would. She would wake up in time though. She knew she would.

—

Pinkie Pie cracked open her eyes and shook her head a little. She stood up and looked around wearily. It was pretty dark. Probably pretty well into the evening. That nap felt really nice though, in that meadow, under the tree, next to-

Her eyes shot very wide.

“AAAHHH!”

Spike jolted back to consciousness at the piercing scream, his body stiff as he shook into the air. Pinkie Pie got underneath him, making him land on her back, and she bolted to town, galloping as fast as her hooves would take her.

“Wh-What's going on?” Spike asked, still in a bit of a daze from being woken up so suddenly.

“I forgot to wake you up in time!” Pinkie Pie answered through her panting. Spike became fully awake after hearing that, his heart threatening to pound out of his chest.

“We missed the open mic night?!” he shouted.

“I don't know!” Pinkie Pie answered. She added under her breath, “I hope not!”

It wasn't long before they reached town square, and Pinkie Pie ran around the town hall to the entrance of “The Laughing Pony.” She jetted to the door and slammed right into it, pancaking herself against the wall as Spike fell to the ground. She popped back to her normal body shape and stumbled on her hind legs as small stars circled her head, then she fell onto her side. Almost immediately though, she got back up on all fours and pulled on the door with as much strength as her teeth could handle. It didn't budge.

Breathing heavily, Pinkie stepped back from the door and observed the “Closed” sign that sat on the windowsill nearby. Her ears lowered as a frown came to her face. She turned back to face Spike, who was already observing the sign himself. He was frowning too, and he had a noticeable slump in his stature. He let out the most disappointed sigh Pinkie Pie ever heard in her life, and, without a word, he turned and started to walk away slowly.

“Spike...” Pinkie muttered. She looked back at “The Laughing Pony” for a moment, scolding herself for what she'd done. Reluctantly, she looked back over to Spike and trotted alongside him. “Spike, I'm really sorry.”

Spike remained silent. Pinkie Pie looked up into the sky for a moment, trying to think of any way to console the baby dragon.

“Well, hey,” she said, perking her ears back up and forcing herself to smile, “You can always be in the next open mic night. You'll have everyone cracking up!”

“I don't want to be in the *second* open mic night,” Spike muttered. Pinkie frowned.

“Why not?”

“Because, the first one was gonna be the *first one ever*,” Spike answered. “It was a really special occasion, and it can't happen again. I wanted the debut of my comedy act to be on the debut of the open mic night. It would have been really special for *me*. I could have finally made a name for myself around here, aside from just being the only dragon in town. But I guess I'll just have to settle for that forever.”

“Spike...” Pinkie's ears drooped again, and she could feel tears coming to her eyes.

“I'm sorry, Pinkie, but I don't feel like talking right now,” Spike said, his voice filled with disappointment. Pinkie slowed to a stop and watched Spike continue his walk home alone.

Her eyes followed him until he was out of sight, then her tail dropped to the ground. Her own stature completely destroyed by the guilt of ruining something so important to Spike, she began to walk to Sugarcube Corner, her home.

After some time sulking, Pinkie suddenly straightened herself up and began to hurry home. If she was going to make everything up to Spike, she had to get to work on planning everything out immediately.

"Spike. Spike, wake up."

A soft voice accompanied by some light nudging urged Spike to join the conscious world the following morning. His eyes slowly opened, and he was greeted by Twilight's smiling face.

"Come on, Spike. It's time for breakfast."

"I don't feel like getting up," Spike grumbled, turning over in his basket bed. Twilight furrowed her brow a bit and moved to the other side of the basket.

"Look, Spike, I know you're upset over not making it to 'The Laughing Pony' last night," Twilight said, "and I'm really sorry that you couldn't show off your act, but the fastest way to start feeling better is to put a smile on and look to the future."

"But it was a once in a lifetime chance, Twilight," Spike said, his voice a little whiny. "Unless another comedy club opens up around here and has a first open mic night, I'll never be known as one of the first ever beginning comedians to perform somewhere. And it might sound like kind of a silly dream, but I've never done anything really special like that in my life. I've never really been special."

"You're special to me, Spike," Twilight responded. "You know you're my greatest little assistant, and you're the best and longest-lasting friend I've ever had. I wouldn't trade you for anything."

Spike squirmed a bit under his covers, but didn't move beyond that.

"I can understand being upset over missing an opportunity to live your dream," Twilight continued. "But you never know, Spike. Someday, you might get another chance to be one of the first comedians to perform somewhere, and you'll be able to leave your mark there. But right now, there's no use in sulking. It'll only put you in a worse mood."

Twilight stood there and waited for some kind of response from Spike for a while. After a few seconds, he finally lifted the covers off himself and sat up. Twilight smiled at him, though he didn't look at her as he stood up and began to walk to the bedroom door.

"So, what would you like for breakfast?" he asked. Twilight trotted behind him.

"Don't worry about making anything. I've already got it covered."

Spike stopped just before opening the door and looked at Twilight with a raised eyebrow. She never cooked breakfast. Huh. She must have felt really bad for her assistant if she went that far.

Twilight went ahead and opened the door with her magic, leading Spike out into the hallway. He followed her down to the ground floor of the library, which was enshrouded in complete darkness.

"Why are all the lights off?" Spike asked. Immediately after, the room became illuminated, and Spike was greeted with a loud, "SURPRISE!" from Twilight and a lot of other guests. Applejack, Fluttershy, Rainbow Dash, and Rarity were all around him. The others in the room were Big Macintosh, the Cutie Mark Crusaders, Zecora, and quite the number of ponies Spike never formally met before. And standing clear on the other side of the room, by the front door, was Pinkie Pie, who wore a somewhat forced smile. She obviously didn't know whether or not all her efforts to put together that party would help patch things up between her and Spike.

Twilight gave the little dragon a nudge in Pinkie Pie's direction. He stepped forward, and, reluctant as he was to talk with Pinkie after last night, he started to walk over to her. Pinkie went to take a step toward him, but suddenly put her hoof back on the ground. Something kept her planted on the spot to wait for Spike to travel the whole distance.

"Hi, Spike!" she greeted, trying her best to force out some enthusiasm. "How are you?"

"I'm okay, I guess," Spike answered. "Let me guess. You put on this party?"

"Yeah! How'd you know?" Spike didn't respond. Pinkie's ears lowered a bit, and she allowed her smile to waver a bit. "After what happened last night, I ran home and planned this for you. I invited as many ponies as I could to come. I wanted to make up for what I did yesterday."

“Sorry, Pinkie, but a party can't make up for ruining last night,” he said, turning away from Pinkie Pie and crossing his arms. “It was my big chance to make myself known for something, and now- Hey!” Before he knew it, Pinkie was pushing him toward the center of the room. Everypony moved out of the way as the cross-armed Spike stood still, glaring at the wall, and Pinkie addressed the room.

“Excuse me, everypony!” she announced. The room fell silent, and all eyes turned to her. “As you all know, this party is being thrown in honor of my friend, Spike!” Various whoops and clomps came from the crowd. Spike couldn't help but let his steady frown lighten up a bit at the acknowledgment. “Last night, Spike meant to become one of the first open mic comedians at 'The Laughing Pony' and make a name for himself, and he spent all day working toward that goal. But he trusted me to wake him in time to get there while he took a nap, and I ended up falling asleep too. So, neither of us made it in time...

“That's why I'd like to ask everypony to give Spike all of your attention, so he can do now what he couldn't do last night.” Spike's arms suddenly dropped and he turned to look at Pinkie, his mouth agape and his eyes wide. She looked back at him with a smile. “Spike is a very funny dragon, and he has some amazing material, so I would like all of you to put your hooves together for the debut comedy act in 'Spike's Corner!'”

All the guests erupted into applause as Pinkie addressed Spike quietly, Spike himself still quite shocked.

“Good luck, Spike,” she said. “Really wow 'em!”

With that, she joined the rest of the guests who all gathered to one side of the room and sat in the front row, next to Twilight and the rest of her best friends. She watched Spike, who simply stared at her for some time in silence. The applause was dying down, and an awkward silence was quickly creeping its way into the room. Pinkie just watched Spike, a sorrowful smile on her face. She knew asking him to perform on the fly like that was probably a bit overwhelming, but she trusted that he could do it. She knew he could.

Finally, Spike cleared his throat and put on a nervous smile. “Well, I wasn't really prepared to go into my routine just like that, but I'll try my best. So,

uh, anyone know what a dog's favorite kind of sound amplifier is?" He waited a moment and looked around the crowd. As he hoped, nobody said anything, but, for some reason, the silence seemed to dry out his throat a fair bit. He toughed through it though and delivered, "A woof!"

The entire crowd chuckled in unison, some laughing a fair bit louder than others.

"Haha, my, how clever," Rarity commented aloud, bringing a natural, beaming smile to Spike's face. *Rarity* liked his joke. *Rarity!* That alone felt worth all of the festivities, [and that was only the beginning](#).

Spike glanced over at Pinkie, who smiled back at him, though it was still serving to mask her uncertainty. When she saw Spike giving her a genuinely happy look though, her spirits lifted exponentially.

Spike carried on with his repertoire of comedy material, from miming a tumble down a hole, to flipping onto his back and clawing the air, to chasing his tail in circles until he finally caught it. Every single story seemed to go over very well with the audience, even those members who were the subjects of the jokes. And every laugh that he got from the crowd only seemed to feed into Spike's energy and general joy. Finally, all eyes were on him for once, and he was making ponies happy with what he was doing. He couldn't possibly ask for anything more at that moment.

Everypony stomped and cheered loudly as he took his bows at the end of the routine. It was nothing short of a rousing success, and Spike shed a smile brighter than the sun itself.

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As the party continued on, Spike found himself constantly busy with talking to the many guests that enjoyed his act. He received all sorts of praise for being such a good comedian at such a young age, and, for the first time in his life, Spike felt like a genuine celebrity.

"You have to perform at the next open mic night 'The Laughing Pony' holds. You'd be great!" a red pony with a silver mane and a cutie mark of fire told Spike.

"You know, I think I'll do that," Spike said, beaming.

"Please do! Ponyville needs to see your talent," the pony continued. "I mean, I can't believe this was your first time actually performing. I never would have guessed!"

"Haha, thanks!"

It was quite some time before Spike finally had a moment to himself wherein he grabbed a cup of punch. He took a nice, long sip of it, sighing afterward. He hadn't had a thing to drink since he woke up, and his performance left his throat pretty arid. He quickly gulped down the rest of his cup and was about to get more juice when Pinkie Pie approached him.

"Hey, Spike! You did really good up there," she said, smiling. Something in her voice betrayed that she was still a bit on edge about speaking with him though. Ignoring it, Spike turned to her.

"Thanks a lot, Pinkie," he said. "I can't believe you did all of this just for me. You're a great friend!"

"So, do you forgive me?" she asked, a little timid. Spike began to laugh, making Pinkie back away a bit, afraid that he wouldn't.

"Are you kidding? Of course I forgive you! How couldn't I?" The old Pinkie that Spike knew and loved suddenly came back to life as the pony grinned from ear to ear. It almost seemed as if a bit of color came back to her, and she brought up her forelegs to snatch Spike into a vice grip of a hug.

"YAY! Oh, Spike, you're totally super awesome! I'm so glad we're pals again!" She suddenly let go of the dragon, causing him to tumble to the floor, out of breath. "Gosh, I was so scared that you wouldn't want to be my friend anymore after last night; when I woke up and I saw that it was so late, I was like, 'OOOHHH NOOO!' I couldn't believe I messed up so bad; I mean, you trusted me and everything, and I totally let you down; but then I thought, 'Hey, what if I throw him a party and let him perform his act for everypony at the library? then he would still technically be a part of the first ever comedy performance *somewhere*,' so, I planned the party and came up with the name 'Spike's Corner' so it could seem like this place was its own comedy club, and who knows, maybe you actually *could* make this into

a comedy club, ooh, that'd be so fun, I'd come every single night if you guys did that!"

"Hey, Pinkie, why don't we go dance?" Spike suggested, having not understood a single word Pinkie Pie just spilled from her mouth.

"Okay!"

Spike and Pinkie Pie were the first two on the dance floor, and, after a little while, Rainbow Dash flew over and began busting some moves of her own. Applejack followed shortly thereafter, and several other ponies who caught the dance bug joined in on the fun.

Mysterious

Twilight and Spike gazed out of the same window, observing the dreary morning storm outside. They both sighed in unison as the rain pounded against the window, and Twilight turned away just as a bolt of lightning illuminated the outside world.

"I was hoping to spend the day outdoors, but it looks like the pegasus ponies had other plans," Twilight muttered, sitting down on the carpet in the middle of the room. Thunder sounded, and Spike jumped off Twilight's desk.

"I was gonna have a picnic with Rarity and Fluttershy," he said, kicking the air as he walked over to Twilight's side. "No way that's happening now."

"Aw, I'm sorry, Spike," Twilight said, knowing how much the little dragon must have been looking forward to having a picnic with Rarity. "You could always go another day."

"Yeah, I guess. I'm going back to sleep." Twilight watched as Spike headed for the stairs. Figuring she may as well occupy herself with something as well, she approached her desk and used her magic to lift a book sitting on the floor. In the middle of transporting the item, however, the front door to the library suddenly slammed open, shocking Twilight into tossing the book straight up into the air. It came back down moments later and struck her on the head, stunning her for a moment as the door was thrown shut. Twilight shook her head furiously and looked over at the door. Standing just inside was a completely drenched white pony with a purple mane and tail that fell straight to the floor under the weight of the water. Twilight was no less than completely shocked when she figured out who it was.

"Rarity?" she said. The uttered name caught Spike's ear and he immediately ran back downstairs. Upon seeing Rarity for himself though, he came to a dead stop and proceeded to walk casually, trying not to appear *too* happy to see her. "Why in the world did you come all the way here in the rain?" Twilight asked. "I thought you hated getting wet."

"I do... But I am in the absolute *direst* of situations." Rarity suddenly started shaking her entire body, whipping all the water off of herself. Once she was perfectly dry, she looked like the regular Rarity that Twilight and Spike were used to, but she seemed on the edge of tears. "Somepony has stolen all of my gems!"

Twilight was less than thrilled to be drenched in the water Rarity sent flying everywhere, but hearing the news made her indifferent of her own condition immediately. "That's horrible!" Spike reached Twilight's side by the time Rarity spoke again.

"Oh, it's most horrible!" she wailed, walking past her two hosts. She dropped herself onto the carpet and began to cry profusely. "What dastardly...*dastard* would do such a thing?! And at *the* most inopportune time, might I add! Hoity-Toity called just last night and expects me to have seven unique, jewel-encrusted dresses ready for pictures in five days! How am I to make jewel-encrusted dresses without *jewels*?!"

She cried out the last word and began to weep even louder. Twilight and Spike looked at each other for a moment before approaching Rarity. Twilight gave her a pat on the back. "Do you have any idea who might have done it?"

Rarity stood up immediately, her brows lowered as a certain ferocity came into her eyes. She trotted over to the nearby window and rested her front hooves on the sill, glaring out into the storm. "Every fiber of my being tells me it must be those Diamond Dog ruffians again. Those layabouts are the only group I know of brash enough to do something like this. We *must* find them! Sweetie Belle and I have already informed everypony to stay on the lookout."

The front door swung open again, and in hurried Sweetie Belle, followed by Apple Bloom, Scootaloo, Applejack, Fluttershy, Pinkie Pie and Rainbow Dash. Dash slammed the door behind herself, and all seven ponies proceeded to shake off the rainwater. Drops were sent flying all over, hitting a number of books and unprotected paper, as well as Twilight. She let out a low grumble.

"Twilight, somethin' strange is goin' on!" Applejack said as soon as she was dry. Twilight started using her magic to replace all the loose books on the shelves, though it was obvious she should have done that a little sooner.

"Why does everypony always come running straight to me when something strange is going on?" she thought.

"Yeah, all of us have had something stolen from us!" Rainbow Dash added.

"...Wait, what?"

Twilight turned back to the group, but Rarity was quicker to the draw with the question. "You've all had something stolen, too?"

Sweetie Belle, Apple Bloom, & Scootaloo: "Our club capes are gone!"

Applejack: "Somepony hijacked my galoshes!"

Fluttershy: "I was growing some tea leaves at home, and they turned up missing..."

Pinkie Pie: "...Um..."

Rainbow Dash: "The tiara I won in the Best Young Flyer competition is gone!"

Pinkie Pie: "...Uh..."

"And *I'm* missing all the gems I was planning to use for Hoity-Toity's dresses!" Rarity exclaimed, stunned by the strange turn of events. "How odd is it that all of us have lost something?"

"But, I never lost anything," Pinkie Pie said. She glanced upward, confused. "At least, I don't think I did. Hold on, let me check." She went back out into the storm and hopped in the direction of Sugarcube Corner. Everyone simply stared at the door for a moment before Twilight broke the silence.

"Spike and I haven't lost anything either," she said. "But then, we never really checked, I suppose. When did you all notice you were missing your things?"

"This morning," they all answered. Twilight thought about the event for a moment and excused herself from the group to head upstairs. Spike followed her up, and everypony could hear her bedroom door open, followed by a while of silence. Then,

"AAAAAHHHHH!"

Twilight suddenly reappeared back downstairs, having teleported to hasten the delivery of her news.

Twilight Sparkle: "The Element of Magic tiara! T-The tiara! It's-"

"Gone?" Rainbow Dash finished Twilight's sentence for her.

"YEEESSS!" Twilight shouted as a cascade of tears bursted from her eyes. Fluttershy came over to Twilight and gave her a consoling nudge with her head.

"Now now, it's alright."

"No, it's nooot! To me, that tiara, was a symbol of, our friendship!" she said, speaking through occasional sharp breaths. By now, Spike had come back downstairs, worried about Twilight. "What heartless monster would do such a thing?" she said quickly, squeaking every word as she looked at Fluttershy. Twilight went back to sobbing as Fluttershy continued to try to comfort her. Applejack let out a snort and stomped her hoof on the ground.

"That does it! Once ah get my hooves on the pony who did this, they're gonna wish they'd have never messed with us!"

"Yeah!" Rainbow Dash said, standing up on her hind legs as she slammed her front hooves into each other. "They're gonna be black and blue when I see them! I'll give 'em the old one, two!" She jabbed at the air first with her left hoof, then her right. "Then a roundhouse kick to the *face*!" She jumped up and spun around, assaulting the air with her right back hoof. "Then I'll give them a taste of the patented 'Rainbow Special!'" She started flapping her wings and gained speed by flying in a tight circle. She started to form a rainbow tornado when her hoof clipped Twilight's desk, throwing her off and causing her to fly right into the wall underneath the stairs, slamming into it

with her back. Her eyes went around in circles as she slid down the wall and lied motionless on the floor.

Pinkie Pie appeared at the front door, newly drenched in rain. “Nope, nothing of mine is missing,” she said as she closed the door and walked in. “But it sounds like we’ve got a *mystery* on our hooves, so I brought *this!*” She turned behind her back and whipped out a rather large brown tote bag from nowhere. She dived her head into it and, seconds later, she pulled out a brown overcoat, which she threw over her body, blocking herself from everyone’s view for a moment. Once everyone could see her again, she was completely dry and wearing not only the coat, but a brown detective’s cap as well.

“Pinkie, P.I. is on the case!” She poked her head back into the bag and came back up a little while after. “And I’ve got my lucky magnifying glass to-”

She let out a sharp gasp once she realized she was holding up nothing but thin air. She poked back into her bag and searched around it frantically.

Pinkie, P.I.: “Hey, my lucky magnifying glass is missing! Well, good thing I carry a spare, regular magnifying glass.”

“So, we all truly have lost something,” Rarity concluded. Spike raise his hand into the air slightly.

“I still have all my stuff,” he said. Everypony suddenly turned to him, making him step back and sweat a little, a nervous smile occupying his lips. Rainbow Dash bolted to him and stared him down face to face.

“So, *you* still have all *your* stuff, huh?” she said in an incredibly accusatory tone. She started to advance on him, forcing him to step back. “And how do we know that it wasn’t *you* who stole all of *our* stuff?”

“Yeah,” Scootaloo agreed, suddenly at Rainbow Dash’s side, helping her intimidate the dragon. “I think I smell a thief around here.”

“C-Come on, girls. Why would I ever want to steal any of your stuff?” Spike asked, his voice a little shaky. Rainbow Dash suddenly came to a halt,

prompting Scootaloo to stop too. Dash looked around at the other ponies, then stopped when she came to Rarity.

"Rarity said that her gems were missing, and we all know who in this room loves to snack on those," Rainbow said, turning back to Spike. Rarity gasped as Spike's eyes widened. He shook his head quickly as Rarity began to make her way over to him.

"I-I would never steal anything from Rarity, especially not her gems!" he said, his pupils growing smaller as Rarity grew closer, scowling. "Y-You know I would never do that, right, Rarity? Right?" Rarity continued to approach him, and Spike found his back pressed against the wall. He sunk down and brought his tail in front of his body and over his head. He shuddered as he cried, "Twilight! Do something!"

A purple light enshrouded Spike and lifted him up into the air. He floated across the room and came to rest on Twilight's back. The three ponies that were previously crowding him turned to face Twilight as she spoke up.

"Now, girls, I'm as upset as the rest of you about this," she said, trying her best to stay level-headed, "but we can't let ourselves jump to conclusions. Pinkie Pie-

"Pinkie, P.I.!" Pinkie interjected happily. Twilight smiled at her.

"Sorry. Pinkie, 'P.I.' has the right idea. We need to investigate this if we want to figure out what really happened."

"An' how do you propose we start doin' that?" Applejack asked as she and the rest of the older ponies began to crowd around Twilight. Meanwhile, the younger ponies were having a congregation of their own over by the front door.

"*First*, we should make any deductions that we can under our current circumstances!" Pinkie, P.I. answered before Twilight could say anything. "Since it's storming really bad right now, it's pretty obvious that looking for clues outside of here isn't going to be very easy to do, so, we should start off by asking ourselves, 'Why would all of the stuff that was stolen be stolen?'"

"Well, it should be obvious why my gems were stolen," Rarity answered. "They are among the most valuable items in all of Equestria."

"Yeah, my tiara's valuable too! It's made out of pure gold after all!" Rainbow Dash said.

"So is my tiara," Twilight muttered, looking out the window above her desk.

"And the capes Sweetie Belle made for her club have a golden fabric on the underside," Rarity said, looking over at the group of young ponies. The trio was still quite wrapped in conversation and didn't hear any of what was being said.

"So, the thief only stole stuff that they could sell off for a lot of bits," Rainbow Dash figured. "What if he's already sold everything? How are we supposed to find it all?"

"Now hold on a minute," Applejack intervened. "My galoshes ain't worth nearly as much on the market as gems and tiaras are. If our burglar was tryin' ta make a bit, why would he steal a pair of boots?"

"Well, maybe he wanted some shoes because he knew a storm was coming," Rainbow Dash responded, pointing out the window.

"Don't forget that my tea leaves are gone too. They're not worth a lot of money at all," Fluttershy added.

"Maybe he got thirsty," Rainbow Dash said.

"And Pinkie's missing her magnifying glass," Spike said. Pinkie nodded, but didn't say anything about the matter. She appeared to be pretty focused on the conversation around her. Rainbow Dash glanced upward for a moment, trying to think of an excuse.

"Maybe he...couldn't see very well?" she said. She looked around at everypony giving her disbelieving looks. Rainbow Dash lowered her brows and stared back at them all. "Okay, fine. Why do *you* guys think somepony would steal that stuff?"

"Beats me," Applejack said.

"I honestly haven't a clue," Rarity admitted at the same time.

"Alright!" the Cutie Mark Crusaders all suddenly exclaimed simultaneously. They turned back to the group of older ponies, a look of determination settled in their eyes. Everypony turned to them, confused.

"We've decided that we're gonna solve this mystery!" Apple Bloom said, standing her tallest as she delivered the news.

"And we're going to see if we get our cutie marks when we're done!" Sweetie Belle added.

"So, for now, consider us the Cutie Mark Crusaders: Private Investiponies Extraordinary!" Scootaloo said proudly.

"*Extraordinaire*," Sweetie Belle corrected.

"Or 'PIE' for short, 'cause Pinkie was the one who inspired us to give this a shot!" Apple Bloom said, smiling at Pinkie, P.I.. Pinkie suddenly dropped her stoney concentration face and beamed at the fillies.

"Yay! I have three little apprentices!" Pinkie cheered as she hopped around the trio. "This will make the investigation much more fun!" She suddenly stopped in front of the young ponies and readopted her steely, serious face. "Alright, you three, listen up!" she said in a suddenly commanding voice. The girls lined up next to each other and put on straight faces, just like Pinkie. The elder pony began to walk back and forth across the line. "We have a very serious investigation on our hands. What we know so far is that a lot of the stuff that was stolen is really valuable, while all the other stolen stuff is good for walking, drinking, and making things look really big. What we need to do now is start investigating the immediate premises for-"

"The immedi-what?" Scootaloo asked, her serious face having been tossed out when she heard the confusing words.

"Twilight's house," Pinkie P.I. said.

"Oh," Scootaloo muttered. Then she put back on her no-nonsense face.

"We need to search the house for clues that might lead us in the direction of our culprit!" Pinkie continued. "Anything that looks even a teeny-tiny, itsy-bitsy, eensy-weensy bit suspicious should be considered evidence! Now then, everypony," she brought a hoof up to her brow, saluting the young ponies, "move out!"

"Yes, ma'am!" the members of PIE exclaimed at once after saluting their superior. They all dashed off in different directions immediately, and Pinkie, P.I. dropped her salute. She then smiled and hopped off toward the top floor.

"Pinkie Pie and those three as detectives?" Rainbow Dash said, smiling in an attempt to hold back a laugh. "This oughta be good."

"Gotta appreciate the dedication, though," Applejack commented. "Least they're tryin' ta help."

"Do you think there's anything we could do to help, Twilight?" Spike asked. The pony took a moment to look around. Sweetie Belle and Apple Bloom were already busy scouring the ground floor, and Scootaloo and Pinkie were working upstairs.

"We could always help look for clues, I suppose," Twilight answered. "The more eyes we have, the better. And once the storm clears up, we can look around all the others places our thief visited."

"Speakin' of, can't ya do something about those clouds, Rainbow Dash?" Applejack said. "It'd sure help move this mystery along."

"Hey, don't look at me," Rainbow Dash responded, a smug smile on her face. "I've done you guys the pleasure of gracing you with so much sunshine lately that I had to make a storm happen today. It'll be clear skies again by this afternoon, though."

"This afternoon may be too late," Rarity muttered, looking out the window to the left of the front door. "My gems could be gone forever by then, if they aren't already."

"Sorry. There's nothing I can do about it, though," Rainbow Dash said, a slight hint of remorse in her voice.

"Let's just focus on what we can do now, then," Twilight cut in. "Let's split up and try looking for some clues. There aren't really that many places to search around here, so it shouldn't be likely that we miss something if we all keep our eyes peeled.

"Fluttershy and Rainbow Dash, you two search high," Twilight continued. Both of the pegasus ponies nodded, and Rainbow Dash zoomed upstairs immediately. Fluttershy flapped her wings slowly and moved over to the top row of the nearby bookshelf. "The rest of us will look wherever we can. Don't leave any place unchecked; if you can get to it, search it."

"Aye aye, Twilight!" Spike said, immediately running over to the same bookshelf Fluttershy was searching. He started at the bottom row. Rarity and Applejack went to help their little sisters in their investigation, and Twilight made her way upstairs to join the group scouring that area.

—

"I found something!" Scootaloo exclaimed from underneath Twilight's bed. She struggled to pull out a cardboard box as Pinkie, Rainbow Dash, and Twilight gathered around. Twilight appeared to be rather surprised.

"It's just a bunch of stuff in a box," Rainbow Dash said, unimpressed by the find. Twilight stepped forward and inspected it more closely, though.

"I was wondering where this disappeared to," she said as she dipped her head into the box. Once she came back up, the other three ponies couldn't contain their laughter. She had on a large, rainbow colored afro and wore a red squeaky ball on top of her nose. Twilight herself chuckled before shaking the items off. "These are some old toys I used to play with when I was little. I've always kept them with me, but I had no idea where I put them when I moved out here. They're not exactly clues, but thank you for finding them, Scootaloo."

"Haha, no problem," Scootaloo said with a smile. She immediately dived back underneath the bed as the other three ponies continued their search elsewhere. Moments later, though, Scootaloo reported a second finding. "Hey, there's a hole down here!" All of the other ponies turned back to the bed, eyebrows raised.

"A hole?" Twilight muttered. She stepped over and closed her eyes. Her horn shined purple, and her bed became engulfed in the same light. It flew up into the air, and Twilight carefully set it down on the floor below the sleeping area. She, Pinkie, and Rainbow Dash crowded around Scootaloo, all staring at the hole. It was rather small, big enough for a filly to fit through easily enough, but not a full-grown pony. "I don't remember that being there when I moved here."

"That'sh 'ecause whoever shtole your tiara made that hole lasht night," Pinkie, P.I. said, leaning in to inspect it with her magnifying glass, which she held in her mouth and angled to the left. She had her right eye closed and poked her left eye out a bit in order to see. "Yesh," she continued. "The edge of the hole hash shplintersh around it. It'sh obioush whoever did thish isn't a profeshional hole-digger. Or hole-cutter in thish cashe, shinsh thish ish wood." She put the magnifying glass aside and turned to Scootaloo. "Private Investipony Extraordinaire, Scootaloo, since it's clear that you're the only one here that can fit, it is your duty to investigate this hole and report your findings." Pinkie pushed the magnifying glass over to Scootaloo. "Take this, as well as," she pulled out her tote bag and produced a flashlight from it, "thish." She dropped it in front of the filly, who curled her forearm around the flashlight and took up the magnifying glass with her teeth. "We're all counting on you."

Scootaloo hopped up onto her hind legs and saluted with her free hoof. "Yesh, ma'am!" She came back down on all fours and turned to the hole. She hopped into it, and the three older ponies stood around it, peering down as they waited for news on any discoveries. It wasn't long before Rainbow Dash stepped back from the tunnel, though, and looked at the other two ponies.

"Hey, don't you think it's kind of weird that the hole is just big enough to fit Scootaloo?" she asked, piquing the interest of Twilight and Pinkie. "That has to mean that a younger pony broke in here, right? And didn't Spike tell some story about Scootaloo, Sweetie Belle, and Apple Bloom digging a hole just the other day? How do we know they weren't practicing so they could break into our houses?"

"Oh, don't be a silly-filly!" Pinkie said, smiling. "The girls would never do that. And besides, they hate digging anyway. Why would you do something you hate?"

"To get money, duh," Rainbow Dash retorted. "How do we know they didn't steal our stuff?"

"Well, first of all, they all had something of theirs stolen, too," Twilight answered.

"They could be *lying*," Rainbow said, staying firm in her idea. "Or maybe one of them stole everything, and the other two didn't know about it."

"That's ridiculous, Rainbow Dash," Twilight said. Rainbow Dash furrowed her brows.

"What's ridiculous about it?" she asked. She went over to the hole and peered into it. She could see a light coming from down there, but it was pretty weak. Scootaloo had jumped to the bottom where it branched off into a flat pathway and was exploring over there. Dash stepped back from the hole and gestured for the other two to come closer. Once they were within whispering distance, she said, "I bet *Scootaloo* did it."

Pinkie gasped, entertaining the idea for a moment, but Twilight simply shook her head. "There's no way she could have," she said. "Just think about it. Assuming only one thief came to all of our houses, that thief had to have some way of getting to your house, which is pretty high in the sky."

"I did think about that, and it makes perfect sense," Rainbow Dash pressed on, undeterred. "Scootaloo is the only pegasus pony in her club, which means she could walk around my house just fine."

"Yes, but you forgot about one little thing," Twilight said, going back over to the hole.

"What did I forget?" Dash asked, obviously agitated by Twilight's constant denial.

"I think I found something!" Scootaloo called, standing at the base of the hole. The other two ponies came to the opening and peered inside as

Scotaloo began to flap her wings. She lifted herself a few inches off the ground, but fell back down fruitlessly. She looked up and chuckled weakly. "Uh, can you help 'e up, Twilight?" Twilight glanced over at Rainbow Dash with a smile.

"Scotaloo hasn't learned how to fly yet," she said. Rainbow Dash merely blinked for a moment, then looked toward the floor.

"Oh. Right," she muttered. Twilight proceeded to lift Scotaloo out of the hole with her magic. Once the filly was back in the room, she dropped the magnifying glass and flashlight, and shook a piece of green fabric off her snout.

"This was stuck on a splinter down there," she said, nudging forward the torn fabric. Pinkie, P.I. quickly approached the fabric and took up her magnifying glass. She stared at the piece of clothing for a moment, then flipped it over to inspect the other side. She found a single red hair, and suddenly dropped the magnifying glass out of her mouth as she let out a sharp gasp. A light bulb suddenly turned on in her brain.

"I know who did it!" she shrieked, causing the other three ponies to jump in shock. Pinkie quickly pressed her face against Rainbow Dash's. "You have to clear out the storm clouds, Rainbow Dash! We need a rainbow outside, pronto!"

"What the heck are you talking about, Pinkie?" Rainbow Dash said, backing away from the excited pony. "How is a rainbow gonna help us?"

"How else are we going to catch that leprepony?!" Pinkie exclaimed. Twilight, Scotaloo, and Rainbow Dash all stared at Pinkie, completely baffled by what she just uttered from her mouth.

"A...leprepony?" Twilight asked.

"Yes!" Pinkie shouted back. "Isn't it obvious? All the signs point right to the work of a leprepony!"

Dash couldn't hold in her building laughter any longer and suddenly began to chortle as she fell onto her side, holding her gut. "Oh man, I think Pinkie

Pie's finally lost it!" she said through her laughter. Pinkie stomped a hoof on the floor.

"No, I haven't!" she said. "Just think about it!

...

Rainbow Dash & Twilight

"You two lost your tiaras. And what were they made out of? Gold! The one thing lepreponies love the most!

...

Apple Bloom, Scootaloo, & Sweetie Belle

"The Private Investiponies Extraordinaire lost their club capes, which Rarity said was made partially out of gold!

...

Applejack

"Applejack said that she lost her galoshes. Lepreponies are always making and fixing shoes! He's probably doing her a favor actually.

...

Fluttershy

"Fluttershy's tea leaves were taken, and what's one of the things lepreponies love to drink? Tea!

...

Pinkie, P.I.

"My lucky magnifying glass was missing, and part of a leprepony's diet is a daily dose of lucky charms!

...

The Evidence

"The fabric that Scootaloo found is green, and there's a red hair on it. Green! Red! Those are the colors of a leprepony's clothes and hair!

...

The Means

"The hole that we found is meant for somepony who's small. Lepreponies are small. Therefore, this hole wasn't meant to fit a filly, but to fit a leprepony!

...

The Motive

"Lepreponies are big fans of pulling pranks, and this could probably be nothing more than a joke to him!"

...

Pinkie, P.I. looked around at everypony, who all simply stared at her, admittedly shocked that she came to such a wild conclusion while still managing to make some sense. They all shook their heads though, refusing to believe her explanation.

"Come on, Pinkie, we all know that lepreponies aren't even real," Rainbow Dash said.

"How do you know?" Pinkie asked.

"I've never seen one," Rainbow retorted. Pinkie suddenly stepped over to her and stared at her with just her right eye.

"But have you ever *not* seen one?" she said. Rainbow Dash raised an eyebrow as Pinkie backed off from her.

“...What?” Rainbow muttered.

“I'm sorry, Pinkie, but I have to agree with Rainbow Dash on this one,” Twilight said. “Lepreponies aren't real. And even so, none of what you said explains why Rarity is missing her gems. Lepreponies aren't know for stealing those.”

“Um, Rarity's gems... Uh... Okay, I don't know why a leprepony would steal those, but please, just trust me! I'm almost completely sure a leprepony did this!” Pinkie pleaded. Rainbow Dash merely scoffed and began to flap her wings, lifting herself off the floor.

“You really have lost it this time, Pinkie Pie,” she said as she went back to her search for clues. Quite hurt, Pinkie turned to Scootaloo, who was wearing a meek frown.

“Sorry, Pinkie,” Scootaloo said, following Dash's example and going back to work on finding more evidence. Crestfallen, Pinkie now looked to Twilight, her last hope. Her eyes grew larger in an attempt to smother Twilight with guilt for not believing her friend. Twilight could hardly stand to look at her without feeling like she should listen.

When Twilight thought about it, though, Pinkie Pie had a knack for doing and suggesting some very off-the-wall things in the past, and they rarely proved untrue. It probably couldn't hurt to at least give her conclusion a shot.

“You know what, Pinkie...I'm going to give you a chance this time,” Twilight said after a while of silence, bringing a bright smile to Pinkie's lips. “This is hardly the weirdest thing that's ever come out of your brain, after all,” she added with a chuckle. Pinkie hopped up onto her hind legs and gave Twilight a hug, ecstatic to finally have someone really listen to her.

“Thank you, Twilight!” she said. She let go of her friend. “And hey, even if I'm wrong, it's worth a shot anyway, right?”

“Right,” Twilight agreed. She turned to Rainbow Dash, who was looking around the top of the bookshelf next to the door. “Rainbow Dash, could you please get rid of the clouds?” Rainbow Dash stopped what she was doing and stared at Twilight with a raised brow.

"What, now *you* think it's a leprepony too?" Rainbow said with a sigh. Scootaloo stopped her searching and listened to the conversation.

"Please, Rainbow Dash, it's the only possibility that we've come up with so far," Twilight said. "And even if it's not a leprepony, we should at least give it a try."

Rainbow Dash let out an exasperated groan. "Alright, fine," she seceded. She flew over to the nearby window and put a hoof on it. She turned back to Twilight and said, "If I get in trouble for stopping this storm early, though, you're gonna owe me big time. *Especially* if we don't find your leprepony." With that, Rainbow Dash pushed open up the window and zoomed out into the rain. Twilight used her magic to close the window back up, and she, Pinkie, and Scootaloo all went back downstairs.

—

"Ah really hope this crazy idea of yers is true, Pinkie Pie," Applejack said through her panting as all the ponies hurried off to the end of the rainbow that showed up after Rainbow Dash got rid of most of the clouds. Spike stayed back to look after Twilight's place in their absence.

"Trust me! We're gonna find a leprepony, or my name isn't Pinkie, P.I.!" Pinkie said happily.

"But that's not yer name," Apple Bloom commented. Pinkie raised an eyebrow for a moment, then smiled.

"Oh yeah!" she said.

The run turned out to be a lot longer than any of the ponies expected, but they finally reached the rainbow's end some time later. They were well outside of Ponyville but then, and all of them aside from Rainbow Dash and Fluttershy, who flew the entire way, were out of breath. The three fillies nearly passed out on the spot in the grass when their run was completely, and the older ponies had to sit and recuperate for a while. Fluttershy and Rainbow Dash landed, and, not very eager to wait for everyone to catch their breath, Rainbow Dash said, "Come on, Fluttershy. Let's look for this leprepony."

“Okay,” Fluttershy quietly agreed. Everyone had run through a grassy meadow the entire way out there, but the rainbow ended just inside a clump of trees. The two of them walked in and could hear humming from nearby. Fluttershy suddenly stopped and let Rainbow Dash walk a little ways in front of her, then dipped in behind her, hiding herself from what might be beyond the next few trees. Rainbow Dash was more curious than anything, though, and she found herself hurrying along to peek around the corner. Once she did, her eyes widened. Fluttershy peered out from behind her and was equally as surprised by what they found.

“Hoidilly-doo, fixin' the shoe! Hidilly-dee, makin' it gleam!” the small, grey pony in the clearing hummed to himself in a thick Irish accent. The pony appeared to be a pegasus/unicorn mix, and had a red mane and wore a green tunic. He was sitting next to a large black pot, similar to the one in Zecora's hut, filled with not only gold coins, but three golden capes, and a couple of golden tiaras. The pony had a pile of gems and a chisel sitting on the ground next to him, in front of him were a pair of galoshes, and resting on a stump on the opposite side of the gems were a cup of tea and a magnifying glass. He was presently levitating one of the galoshes in front of himself, and was bringing a piece of one of the jewels over to the shoe. A flash of light covered the two items once they came near each other and the gem was suddenly embedded in the boot. He then dropped the galosh and brought the cup of tea to his lips, taking a little sip. Rainbow Dash's jaw dropped to the ground.

“Oh my. It looks like Pinkie Pie was right,” Fluttershy said. Rainbow Dash responded with incoherent noises of bewilderment.

Pinkie soon arrived on the scene, along with the rest of the ponies, all of whom were still working on catching their breath. Pinkie came up next to Rainbow Dash and peered into the clearing. Once she saw the leprepony, she immediately turned to everypony else and said, “Okay, the leprepony is right here, and he has all of our stuff. What we need to do now is stay completely quiet and-”

“*My gems!*” Rarity suddenly shrieked, stunning everypony around her and causing the leprepony to drop what he was doing and turn to the group of ponies staring at him in the trees immediately. Rarity jumped out into the

clearing, fire in her eyes as she stared down the troublemaker and charged.

"Uh oh!" the leprepony exclaimed shortly before his horn gave off a little spark. He disappeared into thin air just as Rarity went to jump him. She crashed to the ground, but quickly got back on her hooves and looked around frantically, panting heavily in her anger. The leprepony reappeared in the sky, flying above Rarity and out of her reach.

"Come down here, you no-good thief, and face the wrath of Rarity!" the enraged pony demanded. The leprepony raised a brow at her and folded his arms.

"Um... No thanks, ah don't think ah'll do that," he responded. Rarity stomped her hoof against the ground.

"Well, if you won't come down on your own accord, I suppose I'll just have to *make you!*" Rarity levitated several of the nearby gems and began to swipe at the leprepony with them. The mischief-maker, rather surprised by Rarity's aggression, barely dodged the sharp precious-stones-turned-weapons, bobbing and weaving all through the air.

Over in the trees, Pinkie nudged Rainbow Dash. "Rainbow Dash, you have to catch him," she whispered. "He can't use his magic after he's been caught, and he'll be forced to give us all our stuff back and grant us three wishes!" Rainbow Dash looked at Pinkie from the side of her eye, still unable to believe she was even looking at a leprepony.

"Oh, come on. Three wishes?!" she said.

"Ah wouldn't be questionin' what Pinkie says right now," Applejack spoke up. "We *are* watching Rarity tryin' ta take down a leprepony after all."

That was true.

Rainbow Dash let out a groan. "Okay, fine. This day couldn't possibly get any weirder," she added under her breath.

With Rarity's rage distracting the leprepony, catching him was a pretty easy feat, once Rainbow Dash found a way to get past the flying gems safely

anyway. She tackled the pony out of the air, and the two of them began to tumble to the ground. The leprepony's horn tried to spark again, but being wrapped in Dash's arms prevented him from teleporting away. Just before they crashed back into the clearing, Rainbow Dash flapped her wings and eased into the landed. She dropped the leprepony on the ground, and the rest of the ponies circled around him, all their glaring eyes focused on the source of their distress that day.

"Haha, well, looks like ye all caught me!" the leprepony said in a surprisingly congratulatory tone. He smiled at all the ponies, sufficiently shocking them with his cheery mood. "Good work, not many ponies can get a hold of me!"

"Oh, um...thanks?" Rainbow Dash said. The leprepony hopped up onto his feet, and, as Pinkie said, he was right around the same size as the fillies in the group, even though he sounded like a full grown stallion.

"Ye know, most ponies don't even come lookin' for me," the leprepony began. "Most don't believe ah even exist. Mighty perceptive of ye all to come lookin' for me!" Everypony looked over at Pinkie P.I.

"Mighty perceptive, indeed," Twilight said with a smile. Pinkie giggled at the acknowledgment.

—

"Dear Princess Celestia,

"Today, my friends and I discovered a new friend in the most unlikely of situations.

...

"Early this morning, a leprepony broke into all of our houses and stole something from us.

"Haha, man, you are a riot!" Rainbow Dash exclaimed as she flew through the skies above Ponyville with the leprepony. "Where did you learn all these funny flying tricks?"

“Ye have a lot of spare time to think these things up when people don't think ye exist,” the leprepony answered as the two of them approached a cloud. He dashed through it on the upper right, then U-turned and came back through the upper left, creating two small holes. He then turned back toward the cloud and laid himself out parallel to it. He rolled back into the cloud as fast as he could, making a sideways “D” shape under the circles, causing the cloud to look like it was smiling. Rainbow Dash roared with laughter.

...

“When we found him, we were surprised at just how happy he seemed to be that we caught him. I guess when people don't think you exist, life can become pretty lonely. He was happy just to meet us.”

“An' that's how ah got me cutie mark!” the leprepony said, having just finished his story for the trio of fillies. They all looked at him with twinkles in their eyes.

“Wooow. Ah hope ah get my cutie mark like that,” Apple Bloom said.

“Yeah, me too,” Sweetie Belle chimed.

“Ye'll all get yer marks one day, lasses,” the leprepony assured them. “And when ye do, it'll be the greatest feelin' in the world, I can promise ye that!”

...

“As it turns out, he has a history of stealing things pretty often, but he always returns whatever he took in a better condition than when he took it.”

“Ah hope ye like these tea leaves,” the leprepony said, setting down a packet of tea leaf seeds in front of Fluttershy. “I heard a storm was comin', and tea leaves probably would have gotten uprooted in all that mess anyway. Of course, ah do like tea a lot, so ah did take them fer kinda selfish reasons, too, but ah hope these'll make up for it.”

“Oh, thank you so much,” Fluttershy said, smiling at the leprepony as she accepted his gift. “I'm sure these tea leaves will be just as good.”

...

"For instance, he took Applejack's galoshes, but when he gave them back to her, he'd fixed them so they were like new again, and even attached a few gems to them."

"Golly, these boots sure are a sight now," Applejack commented, admiring the galoshes and she wore them on her hooves. "And they're more comfortable than they ever were. I don't know if Rarity's all too pleased about you usin' her jewels, but ah gotta admit, ah love 'em."

"Ah'm glad ye like them!" the leprepony said cheerily. "They should last ye a pretty long time!"

...

"As a reward for catching him, we were granted three wishes. Pinkie Pie wished to know the best practical joke in the world."

"Ahahahaha!" Pinkie was on her back, laughing harder than she had in a while after hearing what the leprepony had to tell her. "I can't wait to try that out someday!"

"Just be careful when ye do!" the leprepony warned. "If the rubber chicken isn't used properly, it could explode on contact, and that wouldn't be very much fun."

"I'll be extra careful, then!"

...

"Rarity wished for some extra gems. The leprepony returned all the ones he stole from her, minus the little pieces he put on Applejack's boots, but that wasn't enough for the dresses she needed to make, apparently."

"Oh my..." Rarity said once she saw the impressive amount of gems the leprepony scrounged up for her. He floated them all in to the boutique behind himself, at least ten or eleven carts worth of jewels. It made the haul she came home with on the day the Diamond Dogs kidnapped her look insignificant.

"Ah hope this is enough for ye," the leprepony said. "Ah know how much ah distressed ye by takin' yer gems. Ah'm hopin' this can make amends."

"Oh... Believe me, this...this is much more than enough," Rarity mumbled, wondering where in the world she was going to store all the stones.

...

"Everypony agreed that I should get the third wish, since I supported Pinkie Pie in her decision to search for the leprepony, but I couldn't think of anything I wanted."

"Are ye sure now?" the leprepony asked. "Ye can ask for anythin' in the world, and it'll be yers."

"I honestly can't think of anything right now," Twilight said, smiling.

"Well, if Twilight's not gonna use it, then I wish Rarity would fall in love with me!" Spike suddenly spoke up. Twilight chuckled at the little dragon.

"Are you sure you want to win Rarity over with a wish, Spike?" she asked. "Wouldn't you feel better if you could get to her with your own, natural charm?" Spike stopped and thought about it for a moment, then gave a nod.

"You're right, Twilight," he said. "It might be better if I get her to like me myself."

"It would definitely be better," Twilight assured him.

...

"What I am glad to have discovered, though, is that friendship can be found anywhere, even under the most unexpected of situations. I suppose friendship is just mysterious in that way."

*"Your Faithful Student,
"Twilight Sparkle"*

—

“Well, everypony, ah'm off,” the leprepony announced to his group of newfound friends. “Lepreponies can't stay still for too long, ye know. Gotta keep on chasin' those rainbows.”

“Goodbye! Farewell! See you later!” the ponies all said in a jumble of noise. The leprepony turned to Twilight.

“And ah'll be back to grant ye wish when ye can think of one, alright?” he said. Twilight smiled.

“Alright. Take care of yourself,” she said. The leprepony nodded and turned away from the group. His horn gave off a quick flash of light and he disappeared into thin air.

Respect

“Ah, what a perfectly marvelous day for a picnic,” Rarity said, looking around at the scenery of the hill. Everything was so green and alive, and the group's picnic spot had a great view of the entirety of Ponyville off in the distance. Spike and Fluttershy soon came up next to her, Spike carrying a folded plaid blanket and Fluttershy holding a basket. Rarity turned to her friends as they set up the picnic area, and she helped Fluttershy spread out the amenities. A while later, everything was set up, and the two ponies were laying on the blanket, with Spike sitting as he indulged in one of the gems Rarity brought along just for him. “Thank you two so much for accompanying me today. I really needed this to destress.”

“You're welcome, Rarity,” Fluttershy said with a smile. “And thank you for inviting us.”

“Yeah,” Spike said through a mouth full of ruby chunks. “Thanks a lot. I really appreciate these gems.” Rarity giggled.

“You're welcome, Spike,” she said. “I have quite a lot of extra gems left over from Hoity-Toity's dresses, and I figured I could spare a few for my favorite little dragon.”

Spike suddenly stopped chowing on his treat and his eyes widened. His cheeks turned crimson and a goofy smile came to his face. “I'm your...favorite little dragon?” he said quietly.

“But of course you are, dearie,” Rarity answered. She looked off toward Ponyville, taking in the scene. “After all, I don't even know any other baby dragons. But rest assured, if I did, you would still be my favorite.” Spike promptly fainted from the amount of happiness coursing through him, and Fluttershy couldn't help but chuckle at the little guy. Rarity looked back to see what Fluttershy was giggling about, but her attention was stolen by a sudden yell.

“Look out below!” a familiar voice shouted shortly before a blue blur from above slammed right into the middle of the picnic blanket. Fluttershy

shrieked and dashed behind the nearest tree, her heart pounding, while Rarity jumped back to avoid getting caught in the collision. Spike, unfortunately, got tangled in the instantaneous mess. Once everything calmed down, Rarity scowled at her new guest.

Rainbow Dash laid there, wearing most of the food everyone had set out and her eyes twirling in circles. Spike was right next to her, the basket having flipped up onto his head. He lifted it up to get a look at what just happened. "Whoa. Looks like Rainbow dashed the picnic," he said. The joke didn't serve to lighten Rarity's mood, though.

"Rainbow Dash, what in the world are you doing?!" Rarity asked, stepping over to the fallen pegasus pony. Rainbow Dash shook her head before looking up at Rarity, then got up onto the roller blades she had on. Meanwhile, Spike got up and came over to Rarity's side.

"Sorry," Rainbow Dash began, her voice a little weak from the fall. "I was practicing a trick in town for the roller skating competition and kinda biffed it."

"In town?" Rarity said, looking over at Ponyville. "*Town* is half a mile away! What trick could possibly cause you to land all the way over here?!"

"Only the most awesome trick in all of Equestria! The one trick that's gonna win me the skating competition for sure!" Rainbow Dash responded as she spread her wings. They both suddenly locked up, though, and Dash's pupils shrunk in pain as her body stiffened. She brought her wings back to her sides immediately. "Ow..." she mumbled, her voice a little shaky.

"Well, your 'trick' has single-handedly ruined my picnic!" Rarity said, ignoring Rainbow Dash's obvious pain. By then, Fluttershy had come out of hiding and stood a little behind Rainbow Dash.

"Hey, I said I was sorry. What more do you want?" Rainbow Dash retorted. Rarity let out an aggravated sigh.

"Nothing," she answered. "You just always do things like this. You make some kind of mess with your antics, and you expect a simple 'I'm sorry' to magically fix everything." Rarity's horn glowed and the mess of a picnic

started to get cleaned up. "Well, / have to magically fix this. You've ruined a day that I've desperately needed for some time now."

"Oh, come on, it was an accident!" Rainbow Dash said.

"You're a constant accident waiting to happen," Rarity shot back. Enraged, Rainbow Dash pushed against Rarity's head with her own.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Rainbow Dash said. Rarity pushed back.

"It means that you're infinitely wrapped up in some dangerous stunt that ultimately winds up hurting you and everypony around you," Rarity said before she backed off and went back to cleaning up the wrecked picnic site. All of the ruined food was already back in the basket, and she started folding the blanket. "I'm willing to wager that you couldn't pull yourself back and participate in an event that's actually lady-like for once, instead of things like your silly roller skating competition."

"Hey, I can be in a boring event if I wanted to," Rainbow Dash said.

"A lady-like event," Rarity corrected.

"That's what I said, boring. Sorry that I like to actually have fun sometimes." Rainbow Dash went to start flying, but her wings cramped up again and she was forced to pull them back to her sides. Fluttershy looked at Rainbow's wings, surprised. Rarity noticed the pegasus pony's pain.

"Aw, is poor wittle Wainbow Dash hurt?" Rarity said. "Can't open her wings and fwy?"

"I'm not hurt!" Rainbow Dash said, trying again to open her wings. They seized again before fully coming out, and Rainbow Dash groaned through her pain. Fluttershy hurried over to her side.

"Please, Rainbow Dash, stop straining your wings," Fluttershy said. "We should get them wrapped before you hurt them more." Rainbow Dash gave a frustrated growl.

"I told you, I'm *not* hurt," she insisted. She tried once again to open them up, this time throwing them out as fast as she could. Just before she got to

her maximum wingspan, a loud snap was heard, followed by a moment of silence wherein Rainbow Dash stood completely still, eyes wide, pupils small, and a frown that nearly dropped off her face.

“AAAAHHHH!!”

—

Fluttershy pulled the wrapping bandage tight, having circled it around Rainbow Dash's middle several times to hold her wings still and close to her body. Rarity levitated a pair of scissors over to the bandage and cut it, allowing Spike to finish up the job with the glue brush he had ready and waiting. The four of them had moved over to Fluttershy's home after Rainbow Dash tried to push her wings a little too far beyond their limits. The picnic crash served to fracture a bone in both the wings, and her attempt to open them caused the bones to flat-out break. Now, Rainbow Dash was standing in the middle of the group.

“I can't believe my wings are broken,” Rainbow Dash said, her voice drenched in sadness. “And just a week before the skating competition, too. I can't do most of my tricks without my wings.”

“I feel sorry for you, dear, but this is part of the reason why I'm so against what you do,” Rarity spoke up. “Eventually, you were bound to get hurt very badly, and it seems that's finally happened to you.”

“Rarity,” Fluttershy said, seeing Rainbow Dash's sadness begin to be replaced with anger, “I don't think-”

“Why do you always have to criticize me?!” Rainbow Dash cut in, turning to face Rarity. “You're always walking around, talking down to everypony like you're just better than us! If you think you're so great and perfect, why don't *you* try doing what *I* do?”

“Girls, I-” Fluttershy began again.

“Oh, please. I doubt it's very difficult to imitate your boorish ways,” Rarity said. “I would personally be impressed if you did what I do on a daily basis. It takes true skill to have as much poise and charisma as moi.”

"Pfft, whatever!" Rainbow Dash said. She proceeded to walk in a very formal manner and imitate Rarity's speech patterns. "'Honestly, I think 'twould be quite easy to act like you. I just have to speak with a stuffy voice and sometimes refer to myself as Rainbow Dash.'" She broke out of the theatrics and started to laugh immediately, as she could barely contain herself by the end. Rarity wasn't quite so amused. She looked away from Rainbow Dash for a moment and smirked as she thought about something.

"Alright, Rainbow Dash, I have a proposition for you," Rarity said. Fluttershy's eyes widened, and she stepped between the two ponies. She had a feeling she knew what was about to happen.

"Girls, you don't have to-"

"Not now, Fluttershy," Rainbow Dash said, nudging the pony out of the way. "What's this proposition of yours?"

"If you agree to act like a proper lady for one full week, then I will do...whatever it is you do for just as long," Rarity offered. "We will see once and for all which of us can truly adapt to the other's lifestyle." Rainbow Dash obtained an impish grin.

"Oh, really?" Rainbow Dash said. "Well, that means you have to be in the skating competition." Rarity appeared rather uncertain for a moment, but quickly regained her composure and responded.

"And that means that you can't be in it," she said. Rainbow Dash quickly lost her smirk, but remembered that her lack of usable wings made joining the competition unlikely anyway. But still, it was a tough loss to deal with.

"Okay, fine," Rainbow Dash said. "Let's shake on it, then." Rarity nodded and reached out her hoof. Dash simply stared at it with a smile on her face. "Ah, ah, ah. If you're going to be like me, you have to spit on your hoof before the shake to make it official." Rarity's pupils shrunk immediately.

"Are you daft? I could never-" she began.

"*You* could never," Dash said. "But *I* could."

Rarity glared at Rainbow Dash before she lifted her hoof and looked at it. She closed her eyes, took a deep breath to will herself into doing it, and spit on it, whimpering the very moment the saliva touched down. She held out her shaking hoof, appalled at what she just did. "Okay, let's shake, quickly," she said through a wavering voice. Rainbow Dash looked at the wet hoof and scoffed.

"Are you insane? A lady wouldn't dare touch a hoof covered in saliva!" Rainbow Dash said in a stuffy voice. She bursted into laughter and turned to trot out of Fluttershy's house. Watching Rainbow Dash go, Rarity blushed in anger and slammed her hoof onto the floor, which caused her to shudder immediately after hearing the distinctive splatting noise. She closed her eyes and forced herself to focus, though.

"Okay... Rainbow Dash wouldn't care that she spit on her hoof and put it back on the floor," Rarity muttered to herself. "I just have to...not care. Yes. Just...walk away...as if nothing happened..." She slowly exited Fluttershy's home, leaving a trail of wet hoofprints in her wake. Fluttershy and Spike watched her, and they both sighed simultaneously.

"Well, this oughta be interesting," Spike said. "Though, I'm gonna miss the old Rarity. I liked how much of a lady she was."

"Yes, this will be very interesting," Fluttershy said, frowning. She looked at the trail of spit on her floor. "Could you get a mop, please?"

—

Day One

"So, you and Rainbow Dash have essentially traded places for a week?" Twilight asked, watching Rarity struggle to keep her balance as she slowly rolled along on her four skates. Rarity also wore a white helmet with a hole through the front to accommodate her horn. The two of them were going through the marketplace.

"Yes," Rarity answered, keeping more of her focus on skating than on Twilight. "We got into a bit of an argument over our vastly different lifestyles, and I-oh!" Rarity lost her balance and tumbled to the ground. She groaned as she forced herself back up onto her skates. Thinking that

Rainbow Dash wouldn't worry very much about taking a spill, she tried to ignore it and continue what she was saying. "I came up with the idea of switching personalities to see which of the two of us could truly imitate the other. That way, I could prove that I can be lady-like, like I naturally am, and careless, like Rainbow Dash. She will learn I'm much more versatile than she thinks."

"Well, I guess that's harmless enough," Twilight said. She stopped at one of the stalls and began to look through its selection of baked goods. "Why are you skating, though?"

"Rainbow Dash meant to participate in a silly skating competition, and since I'm to imitate her, I have to be in it now," Rarity responded, much to Twilight's surprise. Twilight dropped a few bits on the stall's counter and levitated a cherry pie onto her back before turning back to Rarity.

"Are you sure you're up to that, Rarity?" Twilight asked as the two continued on their way.

"Up to what? Being in a little competition?" Rarity said, struggling a bit to regain some speed to keep up with Twilight comfortably. "I'll admit, I'm nowhere near the greatest skater in Ponyville, but nopony said I ever had to win the competition. I just have to be in it. It can't be that hard to roll around for a while."

"Have you seen the park it's taking place in, though?" Twilight asked. "It looks pretty intimidating."

"Please, what could possibly be intimidating about a *park*?" Rarity said with a chuckle.

—

A look of sheer and utter dread took over Rarity's face.

Twenty foot tall ramps. Stairs and rails everywhere. Almost no completely even ground to speak of. Rarity's ears drooped as she took in the sight.

"And the competitors have to start up there," Twilight said, pointing at a platform on an extremely tall ramp, no less than at least thirty feet in the air,

nestled in an indentation in the audience seats. Tears came to Rarity's eyes as she stiffly fell over in terror. Twilight stood over her, a piteous look in her eyes. "Do you still want to do this?"

The image of Rainbow Dash laughing and mocking her ran through Rarity's mind, Rainbow Dash boasting that she won the bet. Unable to bear such a thing, Rarity forced herself back onto her skates.

"Y-Yes," she said, trying her best to maintain her fear as she stared at the starting ramp. "I...I must." Twilight wished Rarity would just suck up her pride and not take the risk of doing this, but if Rarity was intent on participating, Twilight figured she could at least give her a little help.

"Well, if you're really sure about this, then you might want to ask Pinkie Pie to teach you how to skate," Twilight advised. "She's really good at ice skating, so she's probably good at in-line skating, too."

"Yes... Pinkie Pie," Rarity muttered, still staring at the starting ramp. "Skating. I..." She fell over again, having fainted from fear. Twilight simply sighed and shook her head.

—

Day Two

"Horseshoes?" Rainbow Dash asked. Applejack shook her head, smiling. The two of them were walking around Sweet Apple Acres, Applejack pulling along the last cart of apples after her harvest. Rainbow Dash had been there all day, but couldn't do anything to help because, "A lady would never go around kicking trees," even though Rarity herself helped Applejack harvest apples in the past.

"Nope. A lady would never play a game about throwin' shoes," Applejack said. Rainbow Dash groaned.

"Um...how about jacks?" Rainbow Dash asked. Applejack chuckled.

"A lady would never-" she began.

“Yeah, yeah, 'a lady would never play a children's game,' or whatever,” Rainbow Dash muttered. She let out an exaggerated sigh. “This is so *boring!* What does a lady *do?*”

“Well, if ya want a job, ah could use some help decoratin' the barn for a party Apple Bloom is havin' tomorra night,” Applejack said. Rainbow Dash frowned.

“Decorating?” she mumbled. She figured Rarity would be completely up for such a task, so she let out a sigh and went with it. “Okay, fine. I'll help out.”

“Great! Then just let me drop off these apples and we can get to work,” Applejack said, hurrying along. Dash frowned and dragged behind.

After delivering her apples, Applejack met Rainbow Dash at the entrance to the farm, and the two of them headed for the marketplace together. Applejack tracked down a vendor selling party supplies and began to inspect their wares.

“So, ah was thinking ah could use shades of red as the color theme,” Applejack said. The stall's owner nudged forward a bin of red decorations.

“Here are all things red for ya,” the pony said. Applejack looked at packets of balloons first and asked for Rainbow Dash's opinion.

“Which shades do ya think would work best?” Applejack said. Rainbow Dash looked at the balloons for herself and raised an eyebrow.

“Uh...I guess the pinkish ones and the...darker red ones?” Rainbow Dash answered.

“Salmon and magenta?” Applejack asked. Rainbow Dash blinked.

“Yeah. Those.”

—

Day Three

“There you go, Rarity! You're getting the hang of it!” Pinkie Pie said, skating near the petrified unicorn in the skate park being used for the competition. There were a few other skaters around, taking advantage of the park. “It's good that this place is open for ponies to practice in. You'll be used to the park before you know it!”

Rarity merely squealed in response as she rolled over the top of a hill, her legs completely stiff. She screamed as she came down the other side, crying the whole time. Pinkie Pie zoomed by, skating on her hind legs. “Having fun?” she asked. Rarity looked at her and tried her best to put on a smile.

“Oh...yes, absolutely,” she said, giving a weak chuckle. “I mean, sure, I can't control how fast I move or when I stop and I can't really keep my balance very well and I only have four more days to completely master this, but I'm having a *fabulous* time! There's nothing to worry about, nothing at all! Eh heh heh heh.” Pinkie beamed, oblivious to Rarity's obvious distress.

“See? Skating is great!” Pinkie Pie said, zooming off to explore more of the park, squealing with glee the entire time. Rarity watched her for a while, smiling. She then looked forward again and let out a nervous sigh.

“What have I gotten myself into?” she mumbled to herself.

Pinkie Pie zoomed up a ramp behind Rarity and performed a backflip. She giggled as she landed and sped by Rarity. The wind that blew by in Pinkie's wake propelled Rarity forward a bit, and her eyes widened as she skated straight toward an emptied out pool.

“Ah! *AH!* Pinkie! Pinkie Pie! How do I-*AAAAHHH!*” Rarity fell into the pool, zooming down the steep incline. Pinkie hurried over to the pool's edge and looked into it.

“Woohoo! Go, Rarity!” she called.

Rarity flailed her legs about uncontrollably, screaming the entire way down. She reached the bottom and came up on the opposite side. She flew up past the lip and screamed even louder as she twirled about madly in the air. She closed her eyes in fear and found herself touching down on the wall of the pool again. Amazing herself, she'd actually landed on her

skates, albeit sideways. She very quickly slowed herself to a stop at the bottom of the pool, and Pinkie Pie hopped in to join her. Rarity's pupils were the size of pebbles, and she stood completely still. Several ponies gathered around the edge of the pool, cheering for her.

"Wow, Rarity, that was spectacularific!" Pinkie said. "You're a really fast learner! You'll be great by the time the competition starts!"

Rarity stood there, stiff as a statue.

—

Day Four

"Rarity and I meet each other every week for a spa day," Fluttershy explained to Rainbow Dash as the two of them approached the spa. "We're both usually very busy, since she has the boutique to keep up with, and I have the animals to look after. We come here to catch up with each other and relax."

"Huh. That doesn't sound bad," Rainbow Dash said. Fluttershy held open the front door and let Rainbow in.

"It's very nice," Fluttershy said, smiling. "I'm sure you'll enjoy yourself."

The moment the pair entered, the ponies in charge of the spa, a blue pony with a pink mane and a pink pony with a blue mane, approached them. They both smiled, and Fluttershy addressed them.

"I'll have my usual, and my friend will have the 'Rarity Treatment,'" she said. Both ponies nodded silently and dashed off. The blue pony held open the door to the steam room, and Fluttershy led Rainbow Dash over.

"Rarity has a whole treatment here named after her?" Rainbow Dash asked. Fluttershy nodded, causing Rainbow Dash to scoff. "She would. She's such a girly girl."

"There's nothing wrong with pampering yourself once in a while, though," Fluttershy said. She and Rainbow Dash reached a small room before the main steam room where there was a stack of fresh towels and several

hanging robes. Fluttershy took a towel and a robe, wrapping her body in the robe and her hair in the towel. Rainbow Dash took a robe and put it on. She tried to go into the steam room, but Fluttershy stopped her. Fluttershy shook her head and pointed at the towel around her hair. Rainbow Dash rolled her eyes and followed Fluttershy's example. After, the two of them entered the steam room.

"What's the point of this?" Rainbow Dash asked as they laid on a bench in the back of the room.

"The heat loosens your muscles so they can relax," Fluttershy explained. "It's great if you've been stressing your body a lot. And it forces you to sweat, which helps you lose a little water weight. It's actually very good for somepony who does a lot of sports, like you, Rainbow Dash." Rainbow Dash was taken aback.

"Really?" she said, looking around the room. "I never knew that. I always thought it was just some weird, fancy thing some ponies liked to do."

"Oh, far from it," Fluttershy said, smiling. "Athletes use steam rooms all the time, and they're in a lot of gyms to help ponies relax after a tough workout."

"Huh," Rainbow Dash muttered.

A while later, Fluttershy and Rainbow Dash exited the steam room and were guided to a couple massage tables. They laid down on them and Fluttershy had two small drops of a guacamole mask placed on either of her cheeks. When Rainbow Dash was approached with a thick brush covered in the stuff, she reared back and looked over at Fluttershy. Fluttershy merely raised an eyebrow. Rainbow Dash sighed and waited.

The mask was spread all over her face, and cucumber slices were placed over her eyes. A pair of masseuses came into the room and began their work. Fluttershy was enjoying her light massage, but Rainbow Dash was scowling at being hit on her back quickly and repeatedly.

"H-Hey, w-watch it!" she said, her voice shaking from the massage. "My w-wings are b-broken, s-so, s-stay away f-from..." She slowly trailed off as her masseuse moved to a different region of her back. Fluttershy looked over

at her, and Rainbow Dash slowly lowered her head down to the table, having grown quiet. Fluttershy giggled. It looked like Dash was coming around to enjoying the spa.

The next amenity they visited was a rather large hot tub. Their guacamole masks had been removed and their robes and towels were sitting next to the tub. Rainbow Dash now had curlers in her hair. She was leaning back against the edge of the tub, her forward hooves resting up against the edge as she leaned her head back, closed her eyes, and smiled.

“How are you enjoying the spa so far?” Fluttershy asked. Rainbow Dash popped an eye open and looked at her. She lowered her head and put her hooves back in the water, dropping her smile immediately.

“Uh. It's okay, I guess,” she answered, trying her best to sound indifferent. Fluttershy giggled.

They spent a while in the tub and were transported to the last stop, a pair of miniature hot tubs in which Fluttershy and Rainbow Dash soaked their hooves. They both had their robes back on, and Rainbow Dash's hair was as curled as it could get. She looked at her reflection in the water and frowned.

“Okay, I'll admit that this place was pretty good, but I really could have skipped them messing with my mane,” she said. Fluttershy smiled at her.

“Well, next time you can choose what you want,” she said. Rainbow Dash looked over at her.

“What do you mean, 'next time?' I'm only doing this 'cause I have to,” she retorted. “It's not like I'm gonna make a habit out of it.”

“Hm hm, okay, Rainbow Dash. Whatever you say,” Fluttershy said.

—

Day Five

“I really should be focusing on my skating prowess,” Rarity muttered, staring at the sandbag in front of her. She was at the local dojo, dressed in

a white karate gi. Spike stood on the other side of the bag, holding it. He wore a gi similar to Rarity's. "Doing this isn't going to help me in the least."

"Yeah, but Rainbow Dash told me that she practices here every week," Spike said. "She went to the spa with Fluttershy yesterday, so I figure you may as well do this." Rarity sighed.

"Fine," she said, stepping up to the sandbag. She turned her back to it, reared up onto her forelegs, and delivered a kick to it. The bag didn't move, and she found herself teetering forward, having lost her balance. "Ah! No! No!" She fell flat on her face. Her body fell to the floor shortly after. Spike came out from behind the bag.

"Are you okay, Rarity?" he asked. Rarity suddenly hopped back onto her hooves and let out an angered snort.

"That is *it!*" she shrieked, scaring Spike a fair bit. She turned back to the sandbag, glaring at it. Then she began to back away, her head low to the ground "This entire week has been nothing but one mess after another, and I am *not* about to let an *inanimate object* get the better of me!" Rarity let out a battle cry as she stopped and rushed forward, charging the sandbag. She jumped into the air and delivered a kick with her hind leg that sent the sandbag toward the ceiling. Rarity landed, panting heavily after letting out her rage. She then gave a slightly crazed grin and looked over at Spike. "There. That's how it's-"

The sandbag exacted its revenge by swinging back down and crashing into Rarity, sending her flying across the dojo. She slammed her back against a wall and fell to the ground, sitting up with her legs curled close to her body. Her eyes were wide with bewilderment.

"Rarity! Are you hurt? Are you gonna be okay?" Spike asked as he ran over. Rarity blinked exactly once. She then started to cry streams of tears.

"How does Rainbow Dash live like thiiiis?!"

—

Day Six

Rainbow Dash shifted around in her green vest uncomfortably and kept readjusting her beret. It felt a little odd standing up there in front of town hall next to the mayor. They were in front of a herd of fillies, all of whom were looking at her. Sure, she enjoyed attention, but the kind that came from a crowd cheering her on while she performed some kind of stunt, not a bunch of silent little ponies just staring at her. In the front of the group were Apple Bloom, Sweetie Belle, and Scootaloo, the latter of whom appeared to be ecstatic about having Rainbow Dash there.

“Alright, Filly Scouts, I would like you all to give a warm welcome to our guest today,” the mayor said, indicating Rainbow Dash. Various greetings burst forth from the girls for a while, and Rainbow Dash waved, giving a small smile. “I know we usually have Rarity here to help us, but Rainbow Dash volunteered her time to assist us today, so everypony mind her and be respectful.

“Now then, we will be working on crafts today,” the mayor continued. Rainbow Dash had to do everything she could not to groan. “We will start by creating birdhouses. We will all split into two groups, one led by me and the other led by Rainbow Dash. We have the stations set up already on either side of you. You may choose whichever one you please.” The Filly Scouts proceeded to split up and head for the rows of tables, on top of which were all the materials they needed. The mayor turned to Rainbow Dash and smiled at her. “Thank you for volunteering to help. I know for a fact that several of the girls here look up to you as a role model, so this is a real treat for them.” Rainbow Dash shed a smile. “If you need anything, don't be afraid to ask. And remember, have fun.” Rainbow Dash nodded, and the mayor departed for her station. Rainbow sighed.

“Alright. Let's do this,” she muttered. She turned and headed to the opposite row of tables, where Apple Bloom, Sweetie Belle, and Scootaloo greeted her before the other fillies could get in the way.

“Rainbow Dash, I'm so happy you volunteered today!” Scootaloo said. Rainbow smiled at her, grateful to at least have some friends there with her.

“Yeah, when ah heard you were standin' in for Rarity, ah got really excited,” Apple Bloom added. “This is gonna be great!”

“Oh yeah, we're gonna have a lot of fun,” Rainbow Dash said, obviously trying to force the excitement into her voice. The three fillies nodded happily and ran off to the station. Rainbow Dash stood on the opposite side of the table from the girls. She noticed everypony had their own paper of instructions for making a birdhouse, which took a load off her mind. She sure didn't know how to make one. It didn't take long before she realized why her assistance was needed though.

“Miss Rainbow Dash?” one of the fillies spoke up. Rainbow walked over to the scout and lent an ear. “My glue bottle isn't working.”

Rainbow Dash inspected the inside of the bottle's nozzle and saw that there was a seal of dried glue stuck in it. She grabbed one of the filly's toothpicks in her mouth and attempted to poke it through the seal. The bottle fell over under the pressure of her push, though. She stood the bottle back up and held it in place by pressing her hooves against either side. She pushed the toothpick against the seal again, and the second she poked through it, glue flew out of the bottle and splattered all over her face and hooves, and it effectively stuck the toothpick to her forehead.

“Blah!” she spat, for a bit of the glue got in her mouth. The fillies that witnessed the events started laughing. Rainbow Dash glared at nothing in particular as she pushed the glue bottle back to the filly. “Here.”

She started to search for something she could clean her face with when another filly asked for her help. “Yeah?” Rainbow muttered, approaching the new filly, who pushed her instruction sheet to the temporary Scout Leader.

“I don't understand what this step is telling me to do,” the filly said. Rainbow Dash looked at the instruction and tilted her head a bit. She had no idea what it was trying to say, either.

“Well,” she began, determined to fake her way through the situation, “you just have to take a popsicle stick, like this.” She scooted a popsicle stick over without thinking, forgetting that her hoof was covered in glue. She didn't notice though and continued going. “And you stand it up on its side to attach it to the bottom of the house.” She grabbed the already-finished floor of the birdhouse with her other hoof and brought it to herself. She attempted to turn the stick she grabbed onto its side, but couldn't move it,

for it was stuck to her hoof. Scolding herself for forgetting about the glue, she sighed and pressed the hoof with the platform stuck to it against her forehead in an attempt to rub away what she felt was an ensuing headache. She went to remove her hoof from her head and ended up pulling her head to the table, slamming it against the surface before she slipped and fell to the ground. Once again, the fillies all around her started to laugh.

“...How does Rarity do stuff like this all the time?” she muttered.

—

The Final Day

Rarity stood over at the top edge of the thirty-foot ramp at the skate park, looking down at the second-to-last competitor. He was zooming around the park, pulling off all kinds of tricks Rarity could hardly even wrap her mind around, let alone ever hope to outdo. Her heart was threatening more and more to beat right out of her chest with every second that passed by, for that meant one second less she had to gather herself and prepare herself to go. Not that she would ever be ready anyway. She turned her attention from the skater to the ramp below her and gritted her teeth in fear. She backed away and collapsed onto the floor, on the verge of tears.

“Rarity, what are you doing, you fool?” she scolded herself, closing her eyes to prevent the welling tears from escaping. “You're going to kill yourself if you do this, or horribly injure yourself at best! Ooh, what was I thinking, proposing this bet? I can't do what Rainbow Dash does! What possessed me to ever think I could? And everypony is out there, watching. Fluttershy, Twilight, Spike, Pinkie Pie, Applejack...everypony! I'm going to make such a fool of myself...”

“You don't have to do it,” a voice said. Rarity opened her eyes, letting the tears escape as she glanced up at the source of the voice.

“What?” Rarity said. She quickly got on her skates and wiped away her tears. “No, I must do it. I will prove to you that I *can* do this.”

“You're just gonna hurt yourself, Rarity,” Rainbow Dash said. “This competition can be really dangerous, and you never even stepped into a

set of skates before this week.” Even though Rarity could hear something in Rainbow Dash's voice that let her know that Dash was speaking only as a friend and not as a competitor, she felt she couldn't let up.

“Nothing you say will stop me, Rainbow Dash,” Rarity said, her voice still shaky with uncertainty. “I won't simply give in and let you think that I'm nothing but talk. I will have your respect. Even if it means putting my own well being in danger.” Rainbow Dash's ears drooped a bit and she sighed.

“Look, Rarity, I guess it's not really *that* easy doing what you do,” Rainbow Dash muttered, surprising Rarity a fair bit. “I mean... I don't get how you can do things like decorate and make stuff look so nice. When I watch you do it, you always make it seem really easy, and I ended up thinking that it was, but when I had to do it, I was completely stuck. And how the heck do you stand volunteering for the Filly Scouts all the time? I almost lost it trying to keep track of all those girls and help them. I just don't have a knack for that kind of stuff.” Rarity smiled and gave a little chuckle.

“The Filly Scouts certainly take some getting used to, and it requires a fair amount of patience, I will admit,” she said. “Though, I must say, Rainbow Dash, leading your life was no simple task. It takes much more skill and focus than I imagined just to learn how to skate, and you do so many similar activities that it must take quite the amount of trial and error to master them like you've done. I never stopped to think about just how much dedication you put into everything. After trying some of it myself, I admit that I am very impressed.”

The ponies simply smiled at each other as the competitor before Rarity finished his run. The crowd started to cheer and the announcer spoke a few words. Taking note that Rarity was due to go next, Rainbow Dash said, “So? Call it a draw?” Rarity nodded eagerly.

“Most certainly,” she said. Rainbow Dash turned to head back off the platform. Rarity started rolling after her, but was going a bit too fast. “Honestly, I'm thrilled that you came up here to talk to me.” Her nose brushed up against Rainbow Dash's tail. “I...ah...ah...CHOO!” She flew backwards and was suspended in the air right above the steep ramp. Rainbow Dash turned around and looked at her, and her eyes widened when she saw where Rarity was. Rarity look down at the thirty-foot drop, then back at Rainbow Dash. Her pupils shrunk.

“*AAAHHH!*” Rarity screamed as she dropped to the ramp. Her skates made contact with the wood and she sped down to the ground backwards. The crowd cheered her on as she made her appearance. “WHERE AM I GOING?! *I CAN'T SEE WHERE I'M GOING!*” She lowered herself to the ground, as if trying to hold on to it for dear life.

“And here comes Rarity, starting her session!” the announcer said over the loudspeakers. **“She was a surprising addition to the roster list, indeed! Almost as surprising as the lack of a certain Ponyville favorite, Rainbow Dash!”**

Rarity shrieked as her tail end lifted into the air above her body; she'd skated right onto a ramp. Once she was in the air, the pressure she was exerting downwards caused her to flip forward, against her will. Her flip came to a stop when her body was at a ninety degree angle to the ground, her tail being on the bottom. She screamed as she came back to the ramp and she extended her hind legs downward and her forelegs straight out ahead of her. When she landed on the ramp, the back of her skates smacked against its lip and pushed her up onto her forelegs. He was skating on her forelegs for a while, but the weight of the back of her body was flung forward, and she was soon flying along the ground upside-down, her forelegs in the back and her hind legs in front. The entire time, she was screaming manically.

“And she starts off by performing a nice front flip, followed by...actually, I'm not entirely sure what she's doing right now. I've never seen anypony skate like this before.”

Soon, she found another, rather tall ramp which she didn't launch off of. Instead, the steepness of the incline helped her push her body back into its natural orientation. She felt a moment of relief and she came back down to the ground, until she realized, “...I'm still going *backwards!*”

She looked behind herself and her eyes widened upon seeing that she was heading straight for a rail. Without thinking, she jumped up and turned herself around just as she came over the rail. She put her hind legs out below herself, her left skate directly in front of her right, and rolled down the length of the ten-foot rail. She came down and landed on all fours as the crowd erupted into cheers.

"Impressive! Instead of performing a traditional rail grind, Rarity actually *skated* down the rail, and didn't lose her balance! She's proving to be a very innovative skater!"

"Okay, I've managed to face forward," Rarity said to herself, breathing heavily. She lifted her right front hoof. "Now, to figure out how to stop at high speeds... I hope this works!" She turned her hoof sideways and jammed it against the ground. Her entire body flipped over her hoof, and she starting screaming again as she landed on the side of the pool, zooming down to the bottom of it. She tried again to stop herself before she flew off the opposite incline by jumping and turning her entire body to the side, pressing her skates against the ground sideways. Her skidding didn't bring her into a stop before she reached the pool's lip, though, and her legs got caught and caused her to barrel roll through the air. She came to a landing next to the pool and promptly collapsed to the ground, ecstatic to have finally stopped herself.

"Rarity performs a quick flip into the pool and rolls out of the other side! Again, two moves I've never seen done before! This pony's really got talent! Though, it seems that her session ends here, since she doesn't look like she's about to start moving again anytime soon."

—

The Next Day

"I'm glad you decided to join us, Rainbow Dash," Fluttershy said, smiling at her fellow pegasus pony, who was climbing into the hot tub. Rarity and Twilight smiled as well, surprised to see Rainbow Dash there.

"Hey, what can I say, this is actually a really good place to relax after I'm done being awesome," Rainbow Dash said. Rarity rolled her eyes and giggled.

"How are your wings, dear?" Rarity asked, seeing that they were unwrapped. Dash didn't attempt to move them though.

"They're a little better, but I'm gonna let them rest until I'm sure they're ready to fly again," she answered. "Trust me, I don't want to be stuck walking all the time again. I don't know how you guys deal with it."

"You get used to it," Twilight said with a chuckle. "Rarity, I still can't believe you got third place in the skating competition."

"Oh, yes. Congratulations again, Rarity," Fluttershy added. "I couldn't even tell that you only just started skating a week ago. Well, until you stopped moving before your turn ended."

"Yeah, for only going thirty seconds when a session is two minutes long, I'm really impressed that you got third place," Rainbow Dash said. "Imagine if you'd gone the whole two minutes? You probably could have won."

"Oh, it was nothing more than dumb luck," Rarity said, brushing off the compliments, but appreciating them all the same. "I'm sure that if you'd participated, Rainbow Dash, you would have easily won, even with your broken wings." Rainbow Dash looked up for a moment, then smiled.

"Yeah, you're probably right," she said. "We should compete against each other in the next skating competition, Rarity." Rarity was quick to shake her head.

"Heavens, no. My days of skating are most definitely over," she said. Everyone chuckled for a while, and Rarity added, "However, I would be interested in joining you on your days at the dojo. I never realized how wonderful karate worked as a stress reliever."

"Oh yeah, it's great!" Rainbow Dash said. "There's nothing better than just hitting stuff as hard as you can, especially when you're in a bad mood. I love beating up the sandbags there when I'm feeling stressed out."

"Sandbags... I have a bit of a debt to settle with those..."

Twilight and Fluttershy smiled at each other as they listened to Rarity and Rainbow Dash speak with each other so excitedly. It was wonderful seeing two ponies who couldn't be any more opposite get along so well.

"Dear Princess Celestia,

"This past week has been an interesting one, to say the least, and out of it, I learned something very important about friendship: respect is necessary to keep a friendship strong. Everypony is good at certain things, and regardless of whether or not you like what they do or agree with what they do, you should respect them and their special talents. If you put yourself in their horseshoes, you might find that what they do is a lot more challenging than you expected, and you might learn a few things from the experience. In other words, never judge a book by its cover; see things from others' points of view and take a peek into their lives to see what it's truly like.

*"Your Faithful Student,
"Twilight Sparkle"*

Life-Changing

Twilight was whiling away the morning by studying up a bit on a new kind of teleportation magic Spike mentioned to her. It seemed pretty complicated, but if she could pull it off, Twilight would be able to switch two items with each other instantly.

Figuring she may as well give it a shot, she placed two of her books on the floor next to each other. She stood back, closed her eyes, and began to focus, thinking about what the book described to her. Both items started to hover a few inches in the air, and just as Twilight strained a little more in her attempt to make them instantly switch places, the front door to the library slammed open. Twilight screamed and shot both of the books at the doorway, and they slammed right into Pinkie Pie. She didn't seem to be fazed at all, though, for she simply stood there with a smile as the books rebounded off her face.

"Oh, it's just you, Pinkie Pie," Twilight said, sighing. "I swear, you ponies really need to learn to knock before coming in."

"Sorry, Twilight," Pinkie began as she hopped in and approached Twilight, "but I have the bestest-y best news *ever!*" She pressed up against Twilight's face with her own. Twilight took a step back and smiled.

"And what would that be?" she asked. Pinkie Pie hopped around the room, excited.

"The circus is in town!" Pinkie answered. Spike suddenly appeared from the bedroom and rushed downstairs.

"Did someone say the circus is in town?!" he said, his eyes wide with excitement.

"Yeah, I did!" Pinkie Pie said, still hopping around.

“Alright!” Spike cheered as he jumped into the air and smiled. He proceeded to follow Pinkie's example and hop around the room. Twilight watched the two of them and giggled.

“I've never seen anypony so excited about a circus before,” Twilight said. “Spike, I didn't know you liked the circus.” Spike stopped hopping around and turned to Twilight, still smiling.

“Well, I was never really interested in it until Pinkie Pie told me about it one day,” he said. “Ever since I learned about everything that happens at a circus, I've really wanted to go to one. Could we go to this one, Twilight? Please?” Pinkie stopped, too, and joined Spike in staring at Twilight, bright-eyed and giddy. Looking between her two friends, Twilight couldn't help but chuckle.

“Haha, sure, I don't see why we couldn't,” Twilight said. Both Spike and Pinkie Pie whooped with glee.

“Great! Ooh, this is so exciting!” Pinkie Pie said as she hopped off toward the door. “I'll go invite everypony else. Tonight's gonna be a blast!”

“Yeah! Woohoo!” Spike cheered, hopping around the room happily as Twilight watched Pinkie Pie leave. Twilight closed the door, and turned to her little assistant. She couldn't help but giggle as she watched him prance about.

—

“[Whee!](#)” Pinkie Pie squealed as she and Spike went ahead of the group. They hurried along onto the circus grounds as their five companions took in the sight before them.

It was after dark, and the circus monopolized on the spacious area around the town hall, having set up a few large tents; they even converted the hall itself into a tent. Cheery music filled the air, and families and friends walked around wearing bright smiles. The scent of delicious fried foods wafted toward Twilight and company, and it caught Rainbow Dash's attention immediately.

"Is that..." she sniffed the air, and her pupils were replaced with the image of a pair of cakes, "funnel cake?!"

She flapped her wings and flew off to the nearby food stand. The group watched her go and proceeded to walk onto the grounds.

"My..." Rarity began as she looked around. "All of the tacky red and white stripes on these tents...the obnoxious music..." A six-foot tall pony dressed up in a clown suit walked by. Everypony smiled up at him, minus Rarity, who merely stared. "Ridiculous costumes... This is certainly a gaudy event, isn't it?" Applejack raised an eyebrow at her.

"Well, what'd ya expect? This is a circus!" Applejack said. Rarity scoffed.

"Yes, I know, but I've never actually been to one," she said, looking around again. "It's an utter eyesore. Would it really be so difficult to make things look a little more attractive?"

"But all of this is attractive in its own way, Rarity," Fluttershy spoke up, smiling. "It's a very fun and busy environment. That's what circuses are all about." Rarity looked at Fluttershy, the one other pony present she could have trusted to have a better sense of taste, and simply sighed.

"I suppose you're right," Rarity seceded, looking around one last time. "This place certainly is busy, I will give it that."

"Come on, Rarity, lighten up," Twilight said with a smile. "Sure, circuses aren't very fashion-forward, but there are a ton of things to do."

"Like what?" Rarity asked.

"You can play games," Applejack answered.

"You can watch trained animals perform," said Fluttershy.

"You can get your face painted," Twilight added.

"You ca' ea' fu'el cake," Rainbow Dash said with a mouthful of cake as she floated by the group upside-down, her treat on her belly. Rarity stepped away from the pegasus, disgusted.

“As marvelous as all of that sounds...well, actually, none of that sounds very marvelous at all,” Rarity said. Applejack playfully nudged her.

“Come on, girly, stop bein' such a wet sponge,” she said. She hopped behind the unicorn and started pushing her toward one of the tents.

“W-What are you doing? Stop pushing me!” Rarity demanded, pushing against Applejack with her front hooves. Applejack overpowered her, though, and kept scooting her along.

“Ah'm gonna get you to play some games,” Applejack said. “Everypony has a good time playin' games.” Rainbow Dash flipped herself around so she was right-side up again and her funnel cake landed on her back.

“Games? I wanna play!” she said as she flew off after Rarity and Applejack. Twilight and Fluttershy chuckled, and Twilight turned to her friend.

“Well, looks like it's just us now,” Twilight said. “What do you want to do?”

Fluttershy glanced over at the town-hall-turned-tent in front of them and observed a sign saying, “Main Show in Big Top Tent (To the Left) in 45 Minutes.” Fluttershy looked back at Twilight and said, “Face painting sounds fun.” Twilight smiled at her, and they headed off for the face painters, who were on the opposite side of the town hall.

By the time Twilight and Fluttershy got to their destination, Pinkie and Spike were already leaving the area, their faces covered in art. Spike had a simple design, and Twilight and Fluttershy chuckled when they saw it.

“A mustache and a monocle, eh?” Twilight asked. Spike nodded.

“But of course,” Spike said as formally as he possibly could. “Only the finest for a dragon of such high caliber as myself.” Twilight rolled her eyes and smiled.

“Whatever you say, Spike,” Twilight responded with a chuckle. Meanwhile, Fluttershy was observing Pinkie's paint. All she had were a few black whiskers on her face.

“Are you a cat, Pinkie?” Fluttershy asked. Pinkie shook her head.

“Nope. I'm a panther! Rawr!” she responded, hopping up onto her hind legs as she roared. Once she came back down, she and Fluttershy laughed before Fluttershy noticed something a little off.

“You know, Pinkie, panthers are usually black,” she said. Pinkie raised an eyebrow at her.

“I thought all panthers were pink? That's why I figured getting painted up as one would be really quick and easy.”

“Oh, no. There's no such thing as a pink panther,” Fluttershy assured her friend.

“Huh,” Pinkie mumbled as she glanced down at the floor. She soon gave a shrug and said, “Oh well. I can always pretend!” She turned and walked over to Spike. “Come on, Professor Spike! We have a circus to explore! ...I mean, RAWR!”

“Indeed, Pinkie Panther! Let us be off!” Spike said, pointing a finger off to the distance. Spike hopped on Pinkie's back, Pinkie reared up as she let out another roar, and the two ran off. Fluttershy and Twilight watched them, laughing.

“Well, it sure looks like those two are having a good time,” Twilight commented. Fluttershy nodded in agreement, and the two ponies took their turn at getting their faces painted.

—

“Grr!” Pinkie growled after coming to a stop. She pointed at a large canopy tent, underneath which were rows of tables where ponies were eating.

“Good work, Pinkie! We have discovered the eatery, and in the nick of time, might I add. I'm becoming quite famished,” Spike said as he rubbed his grumbling belly. “Onward, my friend!” Pinkie reared up onto her hind legs and kicked her forelegs at the air. She came back down and immediately started hopping over to the tent at a leisurely pace.

The pair arrived seconds later and immediately stood in line for slices of cherry pie. Spike was busy looking around while waiting for the line to move. He scanned the crowd and noticed that, over in a corner of the canopy, there was a small crowd gathered around a blue pony with a light blue mane. The pony was wearing a flashy purple mask over her eyes, and she had on an equally purple cape and pointy hat. Rather surprised, Spike peered a little closer, and noticed a wand cutie mark on the pony's flank...

"Hey...is that...Trixie?" Spike mumbled in his normal voice. Pinkie turned her head to look at him.

"Rawr?" she said.

"Trixie, that show-off pony that came to town a while ago," Spike said. Pinkie stared at him blankly. Spike looked back at Pinkie. "You know, the one who said she once defeated an Ursa Major?" Pinkie continued to stare. "The reason why Snips and Snails brought an Ursa Minor to town that Twilight ended up defeating?"

"...Where was I during all of that?" Pinkie said, looking forward again.

"Anyway, that pony in the mask over there looks just like her," Spike said, peering at the pony again.

Just as Spike finished his sentence, the pony in question glanced over at him. She looked away for a moment, then suddenly looked back at Spike, obviously more surprised the second time. She said a few words to everypony around her which Spike couldn't hear over the noise of the crowd, and the pony wrapped her cape around her front. The moment she did that, a thick cloud of smoke erupted from nowhere, and once it was gone, so was she. The ponies who previously served as her audience made noises of amazement as they looked all around, trying to see if they could find the pony. Meanwhile, Spike had a frown on his face and his arms were crossed.

"Pinkie Panther," he said.

"Grr?" Pinkie replied, looking back at Spike again.

"It looks like we," he suddenly paused and stroked his paint mustache, "have a *mystery* on our paws! ...And hooves."

"Yay! I love," she paused and stroked her paint whiskers, "*mysteries!*"

"Then let us commence our investigation into this matter after we take care of our first order of business," Spike said. He and Pinkie had reached the front of the line, and they both received slices of pie. Spike held on to both of them as Pinkie found a table. "Cherry pie. The ultimate fuel for an impending investigation."

"Rawr-deed!" Pinkie agreed happily.

—

"I wasn't having very much fun at all," Rarity said. She'd joined Twilight and Fluttershy in walking through the grounds. "Rainbow Dash and Applejack are so wildly competitive, I didn't have the slightest chance of winning a game."

"Did you try, at least?" Twilight asked. Rarity nodded.

"I did, and I admit that it was rather fun in the beginning, but with those two constantly trying to best each other, it got old very quickly," Rarity responded. She paused and looked at her friend's faces, then raised an eyebrow. "By the way, what is that on your faces?"

"This is the Gemini constellation," Twilight explained with a smile. Her face was decorated with white lines connecting dots, and the overall image looked like two stick figure ponies holding hooves. "It's become my favorite constellation since I came here. It's suppose to be the image of twins, but I like to think of it as two friends."

"I asked to have some butterflies painted on," Fluttershy said. Her cheeks each had one pink butterfly on them. Rarity, confused, looked at Fluttershy's flank.

"But, dearie, you have butterflies as your cutie mark. Why would you ask for them to be painted on your face as well?" Rarity asked.

“Because, I really like butterflies,” Fluttershy answered, smiling.

“Can't beat that logic,” Twilight said with a chuckle.

Suddenly, Pinkie and Spike dropped in on the trio, hanging upside-down as they looked around. Once they saw that the coast was clear, Spike waved for the three ponies to come closer. They just stood there and stared, confused about what the pair was doing. When Spike saw that they weren't moving, he waved more furiously, urging them to step closer. Twilight, Fluttershy, and Rarity all looked at each other, then came closer to Spike together. Spike looked around one more time, then cupped his lips with a paw.

“I regret to be the bearer of bad news, but it appears 'You-Know-Who' has returned,” Spike whispered. All three ponies raised a brow.

“‘You-Know-Who?’” Twilight asked. Spike nodded.

“Yes. I'm fairly sure that Trixie is back,” Spike said. Fluttershy appeared clueless, but Twilight and Rarity were rather surprised by the news.

“Wait, since when has Trixie been known as 'You-Know-Who?’” Twilight said. She then looked into the air above Pinkie and Spike. “And what are you guys hanging off of?”

Spike and Pinkie both looked down, or up from a normal point of view, and there was nothing there. They both plummeted to the ground with a thud, but got up almost immediately.

“We first witnessed her at the snack tent,” Spike said, pointing across the circus grounds. “After satiating ourselves there, we set off on the trail of our target immediately. We've been searching for a full minute now. Pinkie Panther and I implore that you keep your eyes peeled for Trixie and catch her if you can. We must discover what she's doing back in town, lest we wind up facing another disaster like the Ursa Minor incident!”

With that, Spike hopped on Pinkie's back. “Let's go, Pinkie!” he shouted.

“Rawr!” Pinkie responded, and she ran off. Twilight, Fluttershy, and Rarity stared at them as they disappeared into the crowd.

“What in Equestria has gotten into those two?” Rarity asked.

“Their face paint,” Twilight said, obviously rather shocked. “That mustache and monocle combo must have really increased Spike's vocabulary. I don't think he can even spell half of what he just said.”

“Who is that Trixie they were talking about?” Fluttershy asked. Rarity scoffed as she began to walk again. The other two girls followed suit.

“Trixie is nothing more than a stand-offish unicorn who lied to everyone in town about her abilities,” Rarity answered, disdain dripping from her voice. “She was a true aggravation if I ever knew one.”

“Honestly, her magic wasn't really that bad, but they're not much more than simple tricks,” Twilight added, less agitated at the thought of Trixie than Rarity was. “Thanks to her, Snips and Snails brought an Ursa Minor to town, because they thought Trixie could beat it, and we almost had a huge disaster on our hooves.”

“But Twilight here saved the day with her *real* magic,” Rarity said, making Twilight blush. “Thanks to her, that Ursa was ousted before any real damage could be done.”

“I do have to wonder, though,” Twilight said, looking around a bit, “why would Trixie come back here? After what she did, she definitely wouldn't receive a warm welcome.”

“It beats me, but I would certainly like to see her again. I have a word or two for that pretentious pony,” Rarity said. The group was walking by the town hall again at this point, and Fluttershy glanced over at the sign telling how much time was left for the main show: “30 Minutes.”

—

[Pinkie's and Spike's eyes could be seen poking out of a bush.](#) They'd found their pony, who was busy chatting up another crowd. They watched as her horn glowed and her cape flew off her back and levitated next to her. The pony then stood up on her hind legs, and the cape imitated her movements, standing up as well. The pony started to kick her forelegs at

the air, and the cape jutted its top two corners into the air at the same time. The audience applauded after the miniature show, and the unicorn put her cape back on. She excused herself from the crowd and began to walk off toward the big top tent. Seeing their target moving away, Spike and Pinkie lifted up the bush and proceeded to walk after her. The dispersing crowd stopped and stared at the moving foliage.

The pony walked around to the back of the big top tent, where a trapeze artist and a lion tamer were chatting amongst themselves. They greeted the unicorn as she walked by and entered the tent through an "Employees Only" flap. Spike and Pinkie parked their bush next to the entrance, waited until the two ponies on site were busy talking again, and swiftly jumped out of the bush and ran through the flap. Once inside, they immediately ducked underneath a lion cage on wheels, in which a lion was gussying himself up in his own personal vanity.

The unicorn approached a table on the far side of the room and glanced down at a clipboard for a moment. After that task was complete, she headed back over to the flap and exited the tent. Close on her tail, Pinkie and Spike dipped outside and back into their bush disguise. The two ponies that were previously chatting turned and went into the tent together, while the unicorn headed a ways away from the circus grounds. A little beyond the nearby fountain were parked two rows of small trailers, each row containing three, and the pony walked up to one of them situated in the middle of the left row. She used her magic to open up the door, and Pinkie and Spike hurried over after the door was closed. They hopped out and ran up to the door.

Spike was about to barge right in, but Pinkie bit on his tail and pulled him back. Spike raised an eyebrow at her, and Pinkie pointed up at the name plate on the pony's door. It read, "Gimmi C.K." Pinkie countered Spike's eyebrow raise with her own after Spike observed the sign. Spike gave a shrug.

"Huh...maybe it really isn't-"

The door opened back up, and the unicorn stepped out, her mask levitating next to her.

"I'm never going to get used to this horrible thing," she muttered, glaring at her mask. Upon seeing her full face and hearing that familiar voice, there was no longer any doubt in Spike's mind.

"Trixie!" he shouted. Trixie's eyes widened and she looked at her two guests. She immediately put her mask back on and slammed the door, and Spike pushed on the door as hard as he could. The door eventually flew open and Spike fell into the room, but he got up immediately. "Aha! We've got you...huh?" He looked around, but Trixie was nowhere in sight. "Where'd she go?"

"Over there!" Pinkie said, pointing at the unicorn, who was tip-toeing out of the neighboring trailer further up the row. She realized she was spotted and immediately ran into another trailer opposite the one she exited from.

["After her!"](#) Spike shouted.

He hopped on Pinkie's back and the steed ran over to the trailer Trixie entered. She dove in, and the door of the trailer next to it opened up. Trixie hurried out and ran down the aisle of trailers, entering the one closest to the circus grounds on the left row. Pinkie and Spike exited from the furthest trailer in the left row, looked around for a moment, and ran to the middle trailer on the right. Trixie poked her head out of her original trailer for a moment, then brought it back inside. Spike stepped out of the farthest trailer on the right and simply stood there for a moment, looking around. Trixie's trailer suddenly started shaking, and Trixie ran out of it in a mad panic with Pinkie Pie clamped on to her tail. Trixie levitated the bush the sleuthing pair had been using as a disguise and slammed it against Pinkie, making her detach from the tail. Trixie immediately ran back to the circus grounds with Spike and Pinkie right behind her.

Trixie galloped as fast as she could, blowing by many a patron in her attempt to evade her pursuers. Everypony standing by had no idea what was going on as the blue blur blasted by, and seeing that it was pursued by an equally speedy pink object didn't help much. The only wholly visible sight was Spike, who was trailing far behind in his failing attempt to keep up with the chase.

Trixie made her way straight to the game tent, running into it from a side entrance reserved for employees at the different booths. Pinkie followed

behind her, and the two of them quickly had to slow themselves down immensely to avoid flying darts being thrown at balloons pinned to a wall. The employee behind the counter stared in shocked as Trixie and Pinkie contorted themselves to avoid being stabbed, and they jumped over the wall leading to the next booth. Here, players were shooting streams of water at personal targets in an attempt to be the first to have their pedestal powered by the water reach the ceiling. Applejack and Rainbow Dash were competing in this game when Trixie ran right through both of their streams, grumbling as she did so. Applejack and Rainbow Dash immediately stopped, shocked at the sight of Trixie interrupting their game, and Pinkie soon passed them.

“Hi, girls!” she stopped and greeted happily. Immediately after, Pinkie put back on her game face and recommenced her chase.

“What in tarnation?” Applejack muttered. “Was that Trixie?”

“I dunno,” Rainbow Dash answered. Next to them, a player who was undeterred by the strange interruption won the game. Rainbow Dash and Applejack looked at the winner as he celebrated, then they gave each other a look. They immediately ran off, joining the chase.

By then, Trixie and Pinkie had brought the chase into the next booth over, where ponies had to toss a basketball into a hoop, but nopony was there at the moment aside from the employee. They were about halfway through it when Applejack jumped over the counter right in front of Trixie, stopping her in her tracks, and Rainbow Dash flew just above Applejack, creating a wall. Trixie turned back and saw Pinkie standing there, blocking her path back out. Trixie shrunk a bit, certain that she was finally caught, until an idea struck her. She looked at the counter next to her, then simply jumped over it, escaping back in the circus proper. Figuring she would have the best chance of catching up and trapping Trixie, Rainbow Dash flew out of the tent.

Before Trixie knew it, she was tumbling to the ground, flipping in circles uncontrollably in a multicolored ball after Rainbow Dash tackled her. The two ponies were spinning toward the front of town hall, where Twilight, Rarity, and Fluttershy were making a pit stop to see how much longer until the show.

As Twilight read the sign, Rainbow Dash and Trixie collided into her, making her a part of the ball for a moment before it finally stopped in a big cloud of dust. By then, the continuous scene of Pinkie's pursuit had attracted a large portion of the circus crowd, and they were slowly gathering around the scene, as were all of Pinkie's friends, including Spike, who finally managed to find them again as he huffed and wheezed.

Twilight's eyes twirled in a daze for a moment, then she shook her head and got on her hooves. "What in the world is going on here?" she asked. Rainbow Dash had Trixie pinned down. Trixie used her magic to move Rainbow's hooves off her spread-eagle forelegs, but Applejack quickly joined in, helping the pegasus restrain her.

"You remember...how I said Pinkie and I...saw Trixie earlier?" Spike said through his tired breaths. Trixie suddenly began to panic.

"No! Shh! *Shh!* Be quiet!" she whispered. A few of the ponies in the crowd already started whispering, for they still remembered Trixie quite clearly. Spike ignored Trixie's pleas and stepped up to her.

"Well, as it turns out, the pony hiding behind this mask really is," Spike pulled off the mask, revealing Trixie's eyes for all the world to see, "Trixie!" Everypony in the crowd let out a collective gasp.

"Is that really Trixie?" one pony whispered.

"Who would have thought she'd ever show her face around here again?" another said.

"I can't believe it. I thought we'd seen the last of her when that Ursa Minor nearly destroyed the town," a third pony muttered.

Trixie looked around as much as she could at all the ponies staring at her. Talking about her. Mocking her. Then she looked up at Applejack and Rainbow Dash, who were smiling evilly at her as they played a part in exposing her. Humiliating her.

Enraged, Trixie closed her eyes and her horn sparked just before emitting a thick cloud of smoke. Applejack and Rainbow Dash were distracted enough for Trixie to squeeze her way out from underneath them, and she got to her

hooves. As the cloud dissipated, she was still standing there, glaring at everypony around; particularly at the girls who chased her down and revealed her like they did. She shot her gaze over to Spike, who still held her mask, and used her magic to snatch it out of his paws. She then turned tail and fled back to her trailer without a word.

Twilight stepped forward as she watched Trixie go. With the exception of Fluttershy, everypony started talking more and more about what they just saw, and the crowd began to leave. Once the group of friends were the only ones left, Twilight turned to face them, a frown on her face as she observed them reveling in Trixie's capture.

"I hope you all are proud of yourselves," Twilight said, extremely disappointed. Everypony stopped and turned to her. "You really upset her."

"So what?" Rainbow Dash said. "It's not like she didn't deserve it. You remember what she did last time she was here."

"Yes, I do, and you would think that the embarrassment she went through after all of that was enough," Twilight responded. "You guys went way too far."

"But that's what she gets for thinkin' she was better than everypony," Applejack said.

"Well, you all just proved that you're no better than she is," Twilight scolded. Everypony fell into a stunned silence. "And you never know. It's been a while since she was last here. She may have changed in that time. I mean, did you guys even see her doing anything before you started hunting her down?" she asked Spike. He rubbed the back of his head.

"Um, we saw her doing tricks for crowds, and...she has a trailer that says 'Gimmi C.K.'" he answered. Twilight raised an eyebrow.

"Gimmi C.K.?" she muttered. She got back on track quickly, though.

"Anyway, tell me, even if Trixie is back in town and she has a pretty bad history, what did she actually do tonight to make you think it would be okay to do *this* to her?" No pony could answer her. An awkward silence fell over the group as Rainbow Dash, Applejack, Pinkie Pie, and Spike all looked rather remorseful for what they'd done. Rarity felt apologetic herself for

enjoying what was done to the pony. "I'm truly disappointed in all of you. You're all so much better than this." Twilight turned away from the group and began to walk off. "I'm going to find Trixie and talk to her. Or try to at least."

Everypony looked at each other and traded humbled glances as Twilight walked off in the direction Trixie ran off to.

—

"Trixie?" Twilight called as she knocked on the trailer door titled "Gimmi C.K." As she expected, Trixie didn't answer. Twilight used her magic to open up the door and let herself in slowly. She took a few small steps into the room and closed the door behind herself. Trixie was sitting off in a corner, staring at the point where the wall and the floor met. Twilight stepped toward her. "Trixie—"

"[Leave me alone](#)," Trixie said immediately. Her voice was noticeably angry, but it hinted at a certain, very deep sadness. "You and your friends have dragged my reputation through the mud once, and now you've revealed who I am and destroyed my name yet again. Haven't you done enough?"

"Look, Trixie, I'm very sorry about what my friends did," Twilight said, coming a little closer. "I knew they were looking for you, but I had no idea they would go as far as they did. They stepped way out of line, and you didn't do anything to deserve it." Twilight paused for a moment and looked around the trailer. "I have to wonder, though...what's all of *this* about? The trailer, the name change..."

"Isn't it obvious?" Trixie responded, still facing the wall. "Ever since that fiasco that went on the last time I was here, my reputation has been in shambles, and I've been booed out of every town I visited after. When word got out that I lied about my Ursa Major story, I completely lost all credibility. All the fame I ever had was turned into infamy, and I suddenly became an outcast everywhere I went.

"My cutie mark is a magic wand," she continued, her voice having softened from anger into sad and self-reflective. "It shows that my special ability has to do with magic *tricks*. How do you think I felt when I discovered my life's calling was to perform mere parlor tricks suitable only for entertainment? I

couldn't do anything really useful. Honestly, I felt rather cheated, and so, I tried to make myself feel better by putting on all those grandiose, one-pony shows I used to do. Getting all of that attention and showing off my tricks made me feel like my magic was actually useful. And then, the Ursa Minor incident occurred, and everypony discovered that my special brand of magic really was useless. I learned that my magic really was useless. And what's worse, I left nothing but enemies behind me when that little secret became known. I had no one to go to after I was proven to be a fake.

“So, I figured I should try to embrace my special talent instead of pretend it was something it wasn't. I hardly believed that I, the Great and Powerful-...” she paused and quickly cleared her throat. “I never thought I would be working for a *circus* of all places, but this was the only company that would take me after hearing how negative my reputation was. No pony wants to go see a fraud after all. To help cover my true identity, though, my employer came up with a stage name for me. Ever since, I've been known as Gimmi C.K. A real testament to who I truly am: a gimmick. Nothing but a one-trick pony. ...Well, I know a multitude of tricks, but you know what I mean. My entire life was ruined that day, and now that everypony has seen who I really am, it looks like history might just repeat itself.”

With the last word, Trixie let out a sigh and laid down on the floor. Twilight stepped closer and could hear Trixie trying not to cry.

“Trixie, I-”

“Please, leave me alone,” Trixie cut Twilight off. “The show starts in just a few minutes, and I need to get ready to perform.”

“But, Trixie-” Twilight began before Trixie's horn lit up. Twilight was scooted right out the door, which was slammed in her face the moment she got outside. Twilight sighed. “I have to make this up to her somehow...”

—

The big top was packed with every single pony who attended the circus. Twilight and her friends were sitting together somewhere in the middle of the mass. All of them would have been more excited about the show if they didn't have what just happened on their minds. Applejack was sitting next to Twilight, and she leaned over to have a word.

"Look, Twi, we thought about what you said, and we all really are sorry about what we did," she said. "You were right, we shouldn'ta treated Trixie like we did."

"Tell that to her," Twilight said with a sigh. "I tried to talk to her a little while ago, and she was completely devastated by what happened. We have to apologize to her as soon as we can."

Just after Twilight finished, the lights all around the tent dimmed, and a spotlight illuminated the stage. Standing there was the ringmaster, dressed in a top hat and a flashy red vest. Everypony in the audience quieted down immediately, and the ringmaster spoke up, standing on his hind legs.

"Welcome, one and all, to the Flying Ponies Circus's main event of the evening!" the ringmaster announced. "So, please, sit back, relax, and prepare your emotion sensors for shock and awe for the next fun-filled hour of fantastical performances!"

Once the ringmaster said the final word, the audience started to applaud and two unicorns, one of them Trixie with her mask back on, appeared in a puff of smoke on either side of the stage and shot multicolored beams of light into the air in an arch. They met in the middle, right in front of the trapeze, and exploded into an impressive flash of bright color.

Once the flash disappeared, the trapeze artist Spike and Pinkie saw behind the tent swung down. Once he reached the end of his swing, he backflipped through the air and caught on to a second stuntpony, who started her swing a little after he did.

The two of them came back up onto the second artist's platform as a second explosion of light conjured by the two unicorns illuminated the entire tent. Once everything was cleared again, the lion tamer could be seen balancing on the tip of a stick, which itself was being balanced on top of a lion's nose, which *itself* was balancing on its hind legs on a large ball. Meanwhile, a clown was riding a unicycle around the lion, juggling five red balls as she did so. Quite impressed, the crowd erupted into even louder applause. The ringmaster bowed, the lion and its tamer and the clown all hopped down and joined his bow, and the two unicorns followed suit. As

the applause wore on, everypony but the ringmaster stepped upstage and stood in a row.

“To open up our show, we'll start with the mysterious magician of our traveling troupe!” the ringmaster announced. “Everypony, please put your hooves together for our very own Gimmi C.K.!” The ringmaster stepped back as Trixie came forward and took his place. She stood up on her hind legs and took a bow, but was met with nearly no applause, for most of the audience recognized her from the incident earlier. Twilight stomped her hooves as hard as she could, though, and cheered.

“Yeah! Woohoo! Alright!” she shouted. Everypony around stared at her, wondering why in the world she was encouraging the pony who nearly destroyed their town. Fluttershy soon joined her in the applause, though.

“Yay,” she said with a smile, though the encouragement was barely audible. The rest of the friends reluctantly began to clap.

“Thank you! Thank you!” Trixie said with a smile, trying her hardest to ignore the utterly pathetic response. “First and foremost, we at the Flying Ponies Circus just *love* to encourage audience participation, so, before I begin, I would like to ask one of *you* to join me here on the stage floor!”

Complete silence. Everypony simply stared at Trixie as she looked around, a nervous smile on her face.

“Come now! No need to be shy!” she said, the strength in her voice beginning to wane a bit. She could see the disdainful looks from the crowd. She started to sweat a bit, and her smile started to waver. “Anypony! ...Anypony at all!”

Nothing. Rainbow Dash shook her head.

“This is brutal,” she muttered. Silently agreeing with her, Twilight stood up and stepped past her friends, making her way for the aisle.

“I'll do it,” Twilight called out, attracting everypony's attention. Much of the audience began to whisper amongst themselves, surprised that the very pony who showed up Trixie in the past was volunteering for her. Trixie herself seemed quite shocked.

"Oh! Uh, well, ahem. Everypony, give a round of applause for our volunteer!" Trixie stammered as Twilight got to the stage. The audience slowly began to stomp their hooves, and Trixie whispered to Twilight, "What do you think you're doing?"

"I'm just trying to help," Twilight responded.

"I don't need your sympathy!" Trixie hissed. Twilight frowned at her.

"Well, I could always just go back to my seat," Twilight said. Trixie quickly shook her head.

"No, no, no!" Trixie let out a sigh. "I'll let you help me, but don't think doing this makes up for what happened. Thanks to you and your friends, this may be the last show I ever do."

"Not if you have a really good act," Twilight said. "Everypony dislikes you because you bragged about abilities you didn't have and you pretended to be better than them. If you just put on an honest show without insulting anyone, I'm sure you'll be fine."

"Um, Gimmi?" the ringmaster said, having approached the two ponies, who were still talking after the applause died down. "Everypony's waiting."

Trixie looked back at the crowd and chuckled nervously. All eyes were on her, silent, and she cleared her throat as the ringmaster stepped back.

"Well! Why don't we open our show with a classic trick?" Trixie said. Her horn glowed and a table with a pony-sized box on top of it rolled onstage. It came to a stop just behind the two ponies. "Before we begin, though, let's meet our assistant for the night," Trixie said as she turned to Twilight.

"Could you please give us your name?"

"My name's Twilight Sparkle," she said. Trixie nodded.

"Thank you very much for volunteering, Twilight! Now, all you have to do is follow my instructions!" Trixie turned to the table behind them and used her magic to open the box, which was hinged to split in half. "Now, if you would, climb right on in!"

Twilight did as told and laid face-up in the box. A hole was carved into the box's top side for her neck, and the bottom side had two openings for her hind legs and one for her tail. Trixie closed the box and walked around to the back side of the table. Her horn glowed once again, and a guillotine blade emerged from the table's underside. Trixie levitated it to the top of the box and lined it up so it was in place with a slot carved into the middle of the box, and the crowd began to murmur nervously.

“Now, watch and be amazed as I chop my assistant clear in half, but bring no harm to her whatsoever!” Trixie announced. Several members of the audience shrunk back in fear, Twilight's friends most of all. Twilight herself bit her lip and started to sweat a bit. She closed her eyes. All she could do was trust that Trixie knew what she was doing.

Trixie let the audience squirm in the anticipation for a while, and once she felt the time was right, she plunged the blade right through the box. Everypony let out a hushed gasp, and Twilight had her eyes closed tighter than ever. After the deed was done, though, she opened up her eyes and looked around. The blade had gone all the way through, and yet, she didn't feel a thing.

Trixie proceeded to use her magic to split the two halves of the box. They wheeled away from each other, and everypony was stunned as they saw Twilight looking out at them, perfectly okay, despite the two halves of her body being in different parts of the stage.

“Why don't you give the audience a wag of your tail, Twilight?” Trixie said. Twilight did so, and the audience was even more surprised that Twilight still had control over her bottom half. Trixie brought the two parts of the box back together and removed the blade. She opened the box up, and Twilight hopped out, perfectly fine. Admittedly quite impressed, the crowd slowly began to applaud, now a fair bit more enthusiastically than earlier. Trixie wheeled the table back offstage and took a bow. “Thank you! Thank you!”

“Dear me, I was positively frightened for a moment there,” Rarity commented with a sigh. “I could do without ever seeing such a trick again.”

“But it was so cool!” Pinkie said, hopping in excitement. Rarity looked at Pinkie, then back at the stage.

“Well, I can't deny that I am impressed,” Rarity admitted. Once Trixie was done taking her bows, she stepped out toward the audience.

“Now that you've been thrilled and amused, prepare to be dazed and confused, for now it is time to play a little guessing game!” Trixie turned back to Twilight and her horn glowed again. A large cloud covered the area for a moment, and once it cleared up, Twilight was quite shocked at what she saw. There wasn't just one Trixie standing there anymore. Or two. Or even three.

Twilight looked around herself, and twelve copies of Trixie were looking back. The crowd erupted into hushed whispers again, and Trixie – or rather, the Trixies – spoke up.

“Twelve Gimmi C.K.'s stand before you, but only *one* is the real deal!” the Trixies announced in unison. “Can you figure out which is the true Gimmi? Don't worry if you can't; I'm sure the audience could try to give you a little help, too!” she said, nodding to the crowd, hinting another opportunity for some participation. Immediately, the audience started talking louder, actively trying to figure out which of the Trixies was real. Twilight looked at all the Trixies herself, trying to determine how to possibly tell the difference between them all.

As the audience continued to try to help, Spike suddenly noticed what was different about the duplicate Trixies. None of them had a cutie mark. That fact was hard to determine considering they all wore capes that partly covered their flanks, but if Spike's hunch was right, the real Trixie would still have her mark.

“Twilight!” he called, attracting the unicorn's attention. “Look for the one with the cutie mark!”

Taking Spike's advice, Twilight looked at the flanks of all the Trixies, and she eventually located the one with the cutie mark.

“She's right here!” Twilight announced. The crowd quickly silenced itself, and Trixie spoke up.

“Very good!” Trixie said, and thusly, all of her imitations disappeared into thin air. “Everypony, let's give Twilight a big round of applause for picking

the real me!” The audience applauded again, this time even louder than before. Twilight was happy to see that everypony was really getting into the act. She looked over at Trixie with a smile. The performer was smiling back, and even though she was pretty much required to have a smile on while she put on the show, Twilight couldn't help but feel that a large part of the grin came about due to sheer happiness. Even during Trixie's one-pony shows, she never received that amount of applause for anything. Now, it seemed that everypony was starting to really like her.

Trixie looked back at the ringmaster, and the pony came forth. “So, you were able to point out the real Trixie, *but*, do you think you can tell who's the real...” Trixie's horn glowed, and light enveloped the stage for a moment. Once it dimmed away, everypony in the audience gasped once again. “...*Twilight?*”

Trixie had transformed herself into an exact copy of Twilight, and the two identical ponies began to walk around each other. Twilight herself was rather stunned that Trixie could pull something like that off, and smiled at Trixie as the two of them continued to move around in an attempt to trick up the audience. Trixie smiled back at her. Despite what happened earlier that night, the show was going very well.

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Once the entire show had come to an end, Twilight and friends decided to visit Trixie in her trailer so they could formally apologize to her. By the time they reached the trailer area, though, they found Trixie surrounded by dozens of ponies who saw and loved her show, clamoring to take pictures with her and get her autograph. She smiled brightly, soaking up the attention she never thought she would get once her true identity was known.

Twilight and her friends made their way through the crowd and managed to meet with Trixie face to face. When she noticed they were there, her smile suddenly disappeared.

“And what would you all like? Another attempt at ruining me?” she said, glaring at the group. Most everypony suddenly adopted rather ashamed looks in response, but Twilight kept her composure and spoke on behalf of her friends.

“Actually, everypony would like to apologize for what happened earlier,” Twilight said. “It was very rude of us to expose you like we did, especially when you were just trying to make an honest living.”

“Yes, well, you should be sorry,” Trixie scolded. She quickly dropped her gaze though and let out a sigh, almost as if she was disappointed in herself. “And...I suppose I never did apologize for the trouble I caused last time I was here, so I'm sorry about that,” she muttered. The group was rather surprised to hear her say that. “And really, when I think about it, I suppose I owe my current success to you, Twilight,” Trixie continued. Twilight's eyes widened.

“To me? But, how? All I did was volunteer to help,” she said.

“Not that,” Trixie began. “I actually meant that if you hadn't proven to everypony that I was truly nothing more than an entertainer, I most definitely would not be here right now. I still have trouble coming to terms with the fact that I'm part of a circus, but this is the first time I've had real fans who actually liked my performance. Not to mention the relief I feel over not having to keep up with all those lies I perpetuated in the past. And now...this is the first time I've ever actually felt pretty good about myself.”

Everypony in the group smiled at this, and Trixie couldn't help but smile back. The moment couldn't be shared for very long, though, for more fans were clamoring to get to Trixie. Figuring they shouldn't hold the performer up any longer, Twilight and friends left her to her devices.

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“Dear Princess Celestia,

“Tonight, I learned just how life-changing friendship can be. You could say that the pony I learned this lesson from isn't exactly a friend, but, in an odd way, it was thanks to me and my friends that she figured out how to cope with her special ability. I discovered that this pony used to be very hard on herself because she felt that her calling in life was useless, so she lied and told everypony that her skills were a lot more advanced than they really were. When those lies were exposed, she was shunned by everypony, and had a hard time getting back into doing what she loved. Tonight, though,

she realized that, if she applied her skills to putting on honest performances, she could succeed at entertaining anypony who watched her and bring them happiness. In the end, even though my friends and I brought her into a pretty hard time, if it wasn't for that, and some self reflection on her own part, she wouldn't be where she is today. And I'm willing to bet that we could all benefit from rethinking our talents and what we want to do in life.

*"Your Faithful Student,
"Twilight Sparkle"*

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[The next morning](#), the circus was fully packed up in preparation for moving on to the next town. Before the troupe left, though, Trixie tracked down Twilight's place of residence. She stood in front of the door for a while and gave out a sigh. She raised a hoof and knocked on the door. A while later, Twilight answered, and her eyes widened when she saw who it was.

"Trixie?" Twilight said. Without a word, Trixie held out a hoof.

"The Great and Powerful Trixie declares a truce," Trixie said, her old, familiar voice and attitude ringing through. "With this new occupation, the Great and Powerful Trixie has decided that she should make an attempt at being an entirely new pony. And so, she wishes to begin by forgiving and forgetting what happened in the past." Twilight chuckled, and she shook Trixie's hoof.

"Forgiven and forgotten," Twilight said. Both ponies put their hooves back on the ground and Trixie gave a smug smile.

"Just you watch, Twilight Sparkle," she began, "Someday, I'll leave these humble circus beginnings behind and become a true, shining star. I was born to entertain, and that is exactly what I intend to do. Before you know it, you'll be saying my name in admiration, gushing over the fabulous star power of the world's greatest performer, the Great and Powerful Trixie!"

Twilight smiled as Trixie conjured a puff of smoke and, once it was gone, she had disappeared. Twilight chuckled to herself. "She's getting better at that." She went back inside and closed the door. A bush next to the

entrance ruffled a bit, and Trixie's head popped out. She smirked, then hopped out and ran back to her trailer to get ready to leave.