

Thunder and Lightning

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Chapter 1

"Dash? Dash!" Twilight called out, standing on the path below Dash's cloud home. She stamped her hooves in frustration as the silence dragged on. She had been at this for several minutes, and the situation called for a bit more urgency than her friend was showing. Or not showing, as the case may be. So far she hadn't shown up at all.

"Dash, am I going to have to get Fluttershy to go up there?" Twilight asked of the clouds. She finally heard from above, a low groan making its way down to her.

"Alright already." Rainbow Dash complained, rolling onto her front and over to the edge of her cloud home, where she could look down on Twilight. She blinked slowly a couple times at Twilight. "Can't a pony get some shuteye?" she complained.

"It's nearly afternoon Dash!" Twilight retorted. Dash just looked around lazily at the bright day she had somehow slept straight through until now. She gave a yawn.

"And why were you asleep outside?" Twilight asked, her curiosity overcoming her sense of urgency. Rainbow had her actual house at her back, lying on the surrounding cloud, near her rainbow river.

"I'm tired." Dash said, explaining nothing. "Whatcha want?"

"The weather patrol sent me to fetch you." Twilight explained. Her friend still didn't look all that concerned. Or conscious, given her drooping eyelids.

"My shift isn't until the afternoon." she managed after a moment.

"There's been an accident. One of the pegasus ponies flew into a mountainside, somehow."

"It...happens" Rainbow replied, giving a wavering smile. "So why are they bugging me?"

"Because, the other two members of the team had to help her back." Twilight explained, "Which means the thunderstorm they'd been redirecting is now almost on us, and they need it cleared fast. And not just fast, but the fastest - Rainbow Dash fast." Twilight ended with a smile, knowing the effect that would have on her brash friend. Rainbow Dash, sure enough, began to perk up.

"Well, I guess you've got that right." she replied, blinking rapidly until she seemed more focused.

"Come on Dash, please?" Twilight asked. Rainbow wasn't stupid; she could tell when she was being buttered up, so Twilight didn't want to go overboard. Still, she needed to lay it on a little to motivate her lazy friend. "Who else but you could we turn to?"

"Alright, alright." Dash said, now on all fours. She stretched out like a cat, flared her wings, and lifted effortlessly into the air. "Only 'cause you guys need me." Twilight smiled as Dash took off towards Ponyville. She chuckled and shook her head, trotting along behind.

Dash yawned every other minute on the way to Ponyville. She barely paid any attention to the ground underneath her; she really wanted to be back in bed, or at least on her cloud. Neither unicorns nor earth ponies really got it; when you lived your whole life on a cottony, fluffy surface, 'beds' were really just for the fun of it. Plus, after last night, Dash was just glad she had found her way back to her own cloud at all.

Dash reached Ponyville, noticing that it wasn't as bright as it should have been anymore. She saw the pegasus ponies that made up the rest of Ponyville's weather patrol waiting for her near the edge of town. Normally, Dash would go on solo duty, just kicking away any stray clouds as she came across them. For there to even be a small team assembled meant that there was probably something bigger to take care of, not that Dash paid any attention to the weather until she showed up for her shift. Still, if she remembered right, there had been something from Cloudsdale a couple days ago alerting them to a stray system moving their way.

Even more asleep than awake Dash made flight look easy, coming in for a smooth landing in front of the group. Shaking her head awake, she looked

over to the weather patrol.

"Who was it this time?" she asked the brown stallion in the center. He nodded over to his left, to the white mare with a teal blue mane.

"Rainy? Let me guess....you left your glasses at home." Rainbow saw her fellow weather-pony cringe.

"I'm sorry...they keep fogging up!" she argued back weakly. "I don't know how I missed that mountain." Rainbow sighed. She wasn't close friends with the other pony, but understood why Rainy Day never went around with her weather-resistant, thick-rimmed glasses.

"Hey, no problem, it happens to the best of us. Trust me." her enthusiasm wasn't entirely genuine, but it did bring a little smile to the pony's face.

"Think you can manage, Dash?" the brown stallion interrupted. "We'd come out and help, but uh, we kinda need a rush job here." he nodded over his shoulder. Rainbow looked up and groaned. She now knew why it was so dark for this time of day. It was worse than she feared; there was a major thunderstorm barreling down on them, just minutes away from Ponyville. Already a number of ponies were worriedly looking at the sky and the coming clouds.

Dash sighed; the rest of the team could have gotten a start already, but were apparently relying on her to get the job done. Why hadn't Twilight told her it was important? Well, no matter, she figured. She was the best there was after all.

"I'm on it. I'll have this storm cleared up in ten seconds flat." Dash said with a grin. The stallion rolled his eyes, but she ignored him. She took to the air with such force that it sent up a thick cloud of dust around the other ponies.

"Okay Dash." she thought to herself. "Time to strut your stuff." she veered away from the storm. She couldn't just kick away something of this size, not in time. She needed strategy, she needed technique. So she began to circle the storm, picking up speed as she went. It was difficult to lap, but not too hard so long as she was extra quick. She wasn't used to making whirlwinds of this size, but knew what she was doing.

"Just gotta..." her vision blurred and she had to shake her head clear. At the speed she was going, it wasn't a particularly pleasant experience. She wobbled off course just enough to make her grit her teeth in annoyance. She'd need an extra lap to make up for that.

Focusing, Dash began to lap the cloud again and again, dragging the air along, changing its current. She began to whip the wind up, creating a wall of flowing air that corralled the storm in. When she was just short of creating a tornado, Dash implemented phase two of her plan.

When she was sure she was on the far side of the storm from Ponyville, she veered out of her circle and flared her wings. The drag would slow her down quickly but would also force a lot of air in behind her. She was dragging the whirlwind with her, at least a little. She let herself slow to a drop and began to fall. The storm was spinning around and around thanks to the near-whirlwind, and was beginning to change course, dragged away from Ponyville. Dash implemented phase three, first losing altitude quickly as she folded her wings in. Getting low enough to the ground to scare a lesser flier than she, she flared her wings and pumped them hard, keeping her momentum, so close that the grass tickled her tucked hooves. When she was back to the other side of the storm she veered up, doing a vertical u-turn. She was upside down as she headed for the clouds again. Being upside down didn't particularly bother her. What came next, however, was a bit of a headache.

Dash cocked one wing just slightly. That little imbalance was all she needed. She began a controlled spin around and around as she hit the storm. A pegasus didn't just pass through a storm cloud - after all they could walk on them, shape them, and kick them. She hit the storm hard, and spinning around like she was, all she had to do was buck her legs and clouds went flying off from the main storm in every direction. Her momentum helped her kick her way through, flinging clouds as she went. Once on the other side, she dropped out of the wind stream and looked up at her handiwork. The storm was cut clean in two by her path, and the two halves were spinning away from each other thanks to the shifted whirlwind. The two storms were headed away from each other and away from Ponyville, just as planned. Rainbow Dash yawned and nodded at the results. The smaller storms she had created were less stable, and would move farther faster. She could split them up some more to truly get rid of them, but decided that was enough. It would be easier to let them play

themselves out. So Dash winged it back to Ponyville, noticing Twilight and Fluttershy chatting in the town square. Both ponies noticed her coming in.

"Great job Rainbow Dash. I knew you could do it." Twilight told her. Dash beamed.

"You were so...fast..." Fluttershy smiled.

"Ehhh, it was nothing big. I think the patrol owes me one though." Rainbow yawned again. "Now if you excuse me, I need a nap." she trotted off instead of taking flight, deciding to give her wings a rest.

"Boy, does that pony do anything other than nap? Well, besides...you know." Twilight shook her head, sparing a glance to the retreating storm.

"It's so funny." Fluttershy said softly, "She, um, was always up bright and early in camp."

"Huh?" Twilight blinked and looked over at the retreating form of Rainbow Dash. "Hmmm."

Applejack was so used to bucking apples that she really didn't have to think about what she was doing. In a single glance she could size up a tree, figure out where to hit it, and know exactly how much force to put into the kick. She wasn't much for contemplation, but her mind did tend to wander as she gazed at the morning light coming through the trees.

'Apple Bloom tried real hard yesterday t' help Big Mac with his chores,' she thought, "Ah should let her pick out tonight's dinner. Ah wonder why Ah haven' seen Pinkie Pie in a couple days? Maybe Ah should bake her a pie or two. Nah, she's prob'bly got enough 'f that. Ah wonder if'n we could make apple smoothies. Grannie Smith wouldn't like noise none, that's for sure. Ah hope Apple Bloom got her all settled for her afternoon nap w/out hassle. Rainbow Dash is in this tree. Now is it three weeks until winter or-'

"Rainbow Dash!" Applejack called out in surprise, looking over her shoulder at the tree she was about to buck. Rainbow was in fact lying balanced on a lower branch, her left legs dangling over the edge, her head propped up by her right foreleg. She didn't respond to Applejack except to turn her head

slightly, an ear twitching - she was fast asleep.

"Rainbow Dash!" Applejack called again, slightly cross at the sight. "What've Ah said about sleepin' on mah trees? Yur bending th' branch!" Rainbow still didn't respond. The earth pony snorted and eyeballed the pegasus pony for a moment. Then, shifting to the right, she gave the tree a swift kick.

"What the- woah!" Rainbow Dash woke up as she toppled off the branch. Before she could react, her short drop ended and she landed square on Applejack's back.

"Ooof." It was less a statement and more the wind being knocked out of her. She slid off of Applejack slowly, shooting the earth pony a disgruntled glare.

"What'd you do that for?" she asked, visibly irritated as she rubbed her side. Applejack just returned her glare, ire for ire.

"Honestly Dash. Ah don' understand how anypony as lazy as you could still be half as good a flier, or athlete."

"I'm not lazy!" Rainbow Dash said, her response interrupted by a yawn. "I just had a late night."

"Oh? Doin' what exactly?" Applejack asked, clearly not buying Rainbow's words for a moment. Rainbow Dash blinked at her, her eyes widening. She finally looked fully awake.

"Uh...I gotta go." Rainbow Dash said quickly. Applejack just shook her head as the cyan pony took off right away, finding a gap between the apple trees into the clear sky.

"That pony wouldn' know hard work if'n it saddled her up an' rode her like a show pony" Applejack said to herself before getting back to work.

"How hard is it for a pony to get a little peace and quiet?" Rainbow Dash muttered as she flew away from Sweet Apple Acres. It seemed she hadn't made it home this time, and was paying the price. Her sides still ached - Applejack was definitely not a soft landing spot. Dash couldn't imagine

what had the earth pony so upset. So she had napped in a tree? She couldn't fall asleep on a stray cloud lest she wanted to end up halfway to Appleloosa by the time she woke up.

"Hey Rainbow Dash!" A peppy voice called out below her, interrupting her thought process. Rainbow Dash sighed at the sound of it. She knew that voice, she knew its owner, and she knew that her instinct to run wasn't actually going to help. Her entire body collapsed in tired defeat, hanging from her wings. Couldn't she just get home?

"Hello Pinkie." she said flatly, looking below her.

"Hey, hey!" Pinkie bounced excitedly on the road below, eyes straight up at Dash. What, did she think she could jump up to Rainbow's height? She certainly looked ready to try. "I've been looking for you! I have an amazing, spectacular, pinktastic idea for a prank! We're gonna need five gallons of paint, a raincloud, and-"

"Pinkie, not now." Rainbow Dash complained. "I'm too tired to play."

"Aww, but Dash, I can't do it without you."

"Maybe later." Dash replied, anything to get to her bed. Pinkie Pie stopped following her, but didn't look deterred or upset.

"Okie dokie lokie! Later!" she said. With a wide Pinkie Pie smile she turned around and trotted off towards town. Rainbow Dash rolled her eyes. Great, there went her afternoon. She dragged herself through the air to get home and finally get some decent shuteye.

That afternoon Pinkie Pie giggled in the bushes that grew just beyond Rarity's shop, while above Rainbow Dash hovered over Rarity's door, a wide smile on her face. This had turned out to not be a half-bad idea, especially for Pinkie Pie, and Dash was a bit more enthusiastic about it now that she had gotten some rest. She positioned a small rain cloud over the door to the shop, lined it up, and gave Pinkie Pie the signal. The pink earth pony nodded and rushed to Rarity's door. She rang the doorbell, and was back in the bushes before it finished its chime, trying to stifle her giggling.

"Hello?" Rarity asked, stepping outside and looking around. Rainbow Dash kicked the storm cloud right away. With a small clap of thunder it released its payload upon the unsuspecting unicorn. However, instead of simply getting Rarity wet, the storm cloud released a torrent of lime green down upon her. Rarity shrieked as she was turned green from horn to hoof.

"Wwaaaaah!" The vain unicorn began to cry and ran straight inside, the door slamming shut behind her. Pinkie Pie and Rainbow Dash turned to each other, and then simultaneously burst out in laughter. Dash leaned against the cloud as she clutched her sides, rolling around and laughing up a riot.

"That was a good one Dash!" Pinkie Pie called from below as she tried to calm her giggles. Dash grinned at her and pushed herself off the cloud. She decided to just shove it away for now, figuring it'd break apart in the sun; it was spent anyway so there was no real harm.

"Yeah, it was. Hey Pinkie, you sure this stuff comes off?" she looked at the retreating cloud. Just in case...

"Yeah, I mean, pretty sure." Pinkie Pie replied with a tilted head. Rainbow Dash shrugged and lowered herself to the ground, landing next to Pinkie Pie. The two began to walk away from the Boutique lest they get caught by an enraged unicorn, still occasionally giggling.

"Okay. Hey, let's go grab something to eat." Rainbow suggested as they walked away. Pinkie Pie nodded enthusiastically and they made a beeline for Sugarcube corner.

A few minutes later, Rainbow was smiling and sipping a hay smoothie, sitting alone at a table in Sugarcube Corner. Pinkie Pie had been going to join her, but Mrs. Cake had dragged her away as soon as they had come in; something about an entire day's stock of cupcakes going missing before they had even opened shop. The Corner was moderately busy, but Dash had managed to grab a table near a window where she could ponywatch. She noticed an exasperated-looking Twilight Sparkle enter the shop, look around, and head straight for Dash. Rainbow waved a wing at her,

signaling that Twilight had her attention, but didn't stop drinking her smoothie.

"Hello Rainbow Dash." Twilight greeted her, her tone unusually curt. "Having a good time?"

"Just fine, thanks for asking." Dash said after releasing her straw, "What's up with you?"

"Oh nothing, nothing, I was actually having a good time studying. Until I got a call from Rarity a few minutes ago, that is. Apparently somepony managed to dump green paint all over her from a raincloud." Twilight said, stressing 'somepony'. "And it's not coming off."

"What?!" Rainbow startled. "Uh, uh, wow...that sucks for her..."

"Looks like whoever it was got your wings too." Twilight told her flatly. Rainbow Dash craned her neck and found that her wings did in fact have a smearing of green paint over them. She thought back to when she leaned against the cloud while laughing at Rarity.

"Ooops..." Rainbow Dash said.

"Rainbow..."

"Pinkie Pie said the paint would come off!" she blurted, knowing the jig was up.

"And you didn't think to check?" Twilight asked with a stamp of her hooves. Her tone was that of an angry mother, and Rainbow Dash cowered just like a scolded child before her. Her wings folded tight and her ears flattened, and she just kicked at the ground with a guilty look.

"Look Dash, we can put up with pranks from Pinkie and you. They're usually even fun! But thanks to you, I need to spend my afternoon figuring out how to get paint out of a coat and mane. We can only hope there's no permanent damage either. Meanwhile Rarity is devastated! Not to mention she can't open shop like this. She's a busy pony Dash!"

"I didn't mean it!" Dash replied, defensive but too guilty to really argue back.

She looked up at Twilight with wide rose-colored eyes. "Look, we, we screwed up, okay? I'm sorry."

"Good. And that means you can help me and Rarity fix this mess."

"Me? What can I do?"

Several minutes later, Rainbow Dash found herself with brushes on her front hooves, scrubbing away at Rarity's floor and the green hoofprints all over it. She hadn't seen Rarity yet, let alone spoken to her - Twilight had brought her here, provided the cleaning equipment, and got her to work.

"What about Pinkie Pie!" Rainbow Dash complained as she got started, half not wanting to do the work herself and half just wanting to see Pinkie Pie punished for getting her into this mess. Some afternoon this turned out to be.

"Oh don't worry." Twilight responded, watching Dash get to work. "Who do you think will be going through a library's worth of books with me, as well as gathering supplies?"

Rainbow Dash sighed. It hardly seemed fair, but she wasn't going to argue with Twilight in this mood. Apparently satisfied that Dash was really going to help, Twilight nodded and headed out of the boutique. Dash waited for her to leave and then looked over the floors. Tracks from the front door to the back room, out of there and across to what Dash was pretty sure was the bathroom, bathroom to the next door over, her workroom. From there they went back to the first room and finally out the front door. Dash sighed at the amount of running around Rarity had managed to do.

"Okay. Come on! No problem for the fastest pony in Equestria!" she told herself. She splashed the brushes on her hooves in the bucket's soapy water. Looking at the tracks in front of her, she walked over and lined herself up near the door with one set of prints. She crouched down like at the starting line to the race, wriggled her bottom as she looked down the prints, and took off across the shop, using her wings to propel her forward, keeping the brushes in contact with the floor at all times.

It was several minutes and a couple dozen dashes across the floor that Rainbow realized that the paint wasn't going anywhere fast. It hardly looked like she had done anything at all except make the floor wet. Frowning at the stained floor, she headed over to one pair of prints and gave them a serious scrubbing for about thirty seconds, seeing what came of it. To her annoyance and surprise, the hoofprints didn't budge. Thirty seconds more, she decided. Pristine green hoofprints mocked her when she was done. Getting frustrated, Rainbow gritted her teeth and pumped her forelegs back and forth, back and forth, building up blurring speed and friction. After a full five minutes of this she stopped. The hoof prints were faded and flecked now, but still there, still mocking her. She let out a groan.

The afternoon dragged on as Dash worked. She took the bucket to a set of hoof prints, spent as long as it took on those prints to clean them off, and lacklusterly picked up the bucket to move a few inches forward and repeat the process. She made it less than halfway across the floor in an hour, and that was just on one line of many, albeit the longest one, stretching nearly the length of the shop. After about an hour, Twilight came by with her saddlebags full. Rainbow Dash looked up, but the purple mare walked right past, knocked on the bedroom door, and entered. She left the room after several minutes with her bags emptier. Dash gave a sullen glance as Twilight exited and caught her eye. The magician's gaze softened, but with a shake of her head she continued out the door.

As time went on, Rainbow began to look out the window more and more. She barely noticed Twilight come and leave twice more, nor did she notice it when the back door opened and a moment later the bathroom door opened and shut. She began to pensively watch the sun go down more than she watched her work, trying to rush things along as she scrubbed.

"Late for something, dear?" a high, slightly sarcastic voice asked. Rainbow jumped, turned around, and found Rarity stepping out of the bathroom covered in towels. Her hair was wrapped up too, but Dash could see a little Rarity's pale white coat, looking quite ruffled up but at least its natural color.

"Rarity!" Dash nearly ran up to the unicorn, before remembering just what had gotten her so excited to see Rarity's coat. She lowered her head, her ears going flat.

"I'm really sorry Rarity. We, uh...screwed up."

"Yes, I'm aware." Rarity said, sounding distracted. Instead of looking at Rainbow she looked over the floor, inspecting it for a moment and then sighing. Finally she turned to Dash "You've done an exemplary job Dash, and I know this was mostly unintentional. Besides, it isn't easy for you to stay cooped up for so long, is it?"

"I... I'll finish the floors... if you want..." Rainbow replied, biting her own tongue. She tried to put on a brave smile, but it wavered. Rarity just tilted her head slightly, giving her a curious look.

"And here it looked like you had some place to be."

"Well...no, of course not." Rainbow said. "I mean, it's just late and junk."

"Mhmm." Rarity arched an eyebrow. "Well, either way, you're free to go. I'll see about hiring cleaners in the morning, I think you've been punished enou-"

"ThanksRaritygottagorealsorrybye!" Rainbow Dash was out the door in seconds. Rarity shook her head and went back into her room.

Chapter 2

It was late morning, sunny and bright but not yet too warm. Rarity and Twilight sat at the outside table to the local eatery, looking over their menus and enjoying both the weather and one another's company. Applejack trotted up to their table from the road, but neither unicorn noticed her over their menus.

"Pardon me." she said. "But Ah think we've got a problem." she got both Twilight and Rarity to look up.

"Oh, hey Applejack, what's the matter?" Twilight asked, her face immediately breaking into a troubled frown. Applejack nodded over her shoulder.

"This." with that she turned, showing both unicorns Rainbow Dash slung like a bag of flour over her back, fast asleep and lightly snoring.

"Ah found 'er in th' barn this time." Applejack told them. "Won't wake up for th' end of the world. And this ain't the first time."

"Oh, hmm, maybe we worked her too hard last night." Twilight worried, turning to Rarity as she spoke.

"I let her go at sunset." Rarity replied, looking surprised at Twilight's words. "She was going simply stir-crazy, and I felt she had learned her lesson."

"Tastes like.....so blue...." Rainbow muttered in her sleep. Applejack raised an eyebrow at her.

"Well somepony needs t' talk some sense into her. Or at least get her t' stop sleepin' on mah land." she was clearly looking at Twilight as she said this. The purple pony sighed and nodded.

"Alright, leave her here, maybe she'll wake up soon." Twilight told her. Applejack shook the young speed-demon off of her, letting her slump onto the ground. Dash just muttered in her sleep, ending with a giggle.

"Now Ah like that pony more than th' next gal, but sometimes she seems a few apples short 'f a bushel." Applejack told them, pointing her hoof at Dash for emphasis.

"I don't see what's so upsetting about it." Rarity said, leaning over to see Dash on the ground, legs splayed out. "She's almost cute like this, in her own tom-coltish manner."

"Well now, y' wouldn't see, would ya?" Applejack said, more than a little irritated. However, when Rarity shot her a look, Applejack backed down with a shake of her head.

"Naw, Ah'm sorry. Ah guess Ah'm juss jealous. All this un seems t' do is laze about or goof off. That's juss not how Ah was raised."

"I think there may be more than just Dash's laziness going on here." Twilight said, scratching her chin. "She wasn't always this bad, was she?"

The question made Applejack think, and after a moment she gave a nod. "Ah reckon yur right. Ah only started findin' her on mah land a few months ago. Ah mean she was always a mite bit lazy, but this...." she nudged Rainbow with her hoof.

"....like a cloud..." the comatose pegasus murmured.

"And now that I think about it, she rather clearly had some place to be yesterday evening." Rarity added. "Though I can't imagine why she wouldn't admit to it."

"Hmmm." Twilight looked deep in thought. "We'll talk to her. Thanks for bringing her here AJ."

Applejack nodded. "Now, if'n y'all pardon me, Ah've got apples t' sell." she turned trotting away. Twilight's horn glowed with a pale purple light, and Rainbow Dash's unconscious form was lifted off the ground. Twilight brought her on to a pile of hay next to their table, even going so far as to put the cyan pony in a sitting position, positioning her like a doll.

"Huh, what?" Rainbow stirred awake as she was moved. 'Awake' wasn't

quite the word for it, but she was at least semi-conscious. She looked around, found Twilight, and just blinked at her, clearly confused. The glow around Twilight's horn faded, and Dash jolted a little as she suddenly found herself sitting under her own power. It woke her up enough to speak.

"Oh hey Twilight...when did you get here?"

"Dash, do you know where you are?" Twilight asked. Dash looked around.

"Woah, I really didn't make it home this time." she said, more to herself than anypony else.

"Make it home? From where? Were you out or something?" Twilight asked. Rainbow turned back to her, and her eyes widened.

"What? Oh, uh, sorry, I guess I'm still asleep. I... Ignore me."

"Uh huh." Twilight responded, Rarity just looking on. "Actually, Applejack brought you here. You were asleep in her barn."

"Oh, heh heh."

"Dash, what's going on?" Twilight asked, her expression softening. "Are you okay? You're completely out of it. Are you sleeping okay? Are you sleepwalking?"

"It's nothing, I'm fine. Look, I'll be more careful, okay."

"More careful about what?" Twilight pushed. "Come on Dash, we're your friends. Is there something you need help with?"

"Come now." Rarity picked up where Twilight stopped. Dash jumped and turned to her, apparently unaware of her presence until that moment. "We may have our disagreements, but we'll always be there for you."

Rainbow Dash bit her lip, and would not meet either pony's gaze as she thought this over.

"Well, it's..." she sighed. "It's nothing. It's nothing! I guess I've just been practicing too hard. Been giving these babies a work out." she flared her

wings, putting on a false smile.

"Rainbow, I-" Twilight began, but didn't have time to continue as Dash sprang up into the air.

"Gotta go guys! Sorry, maybe later!" Dash was away before either pony could stop her.

"Well, she can be more uncouth than Applejack, and that's saying something!" Rarity said in a huff. Twilight frowned.

"I don't get it. She's keeping something a secret from us."

"So it seems, so it would seem... but what can we do about it?"

"Hmm." Twilight thought this over. That was when the waiter trotted over to them, reminding both ponies that they were still having lunch. They ordered and tried to enjoy their meal. The whole time, however, Twilight's mind was turning, planning.

"Twilight, I do not approve of this!" Rarity hissed. It was almost dusk, just getting dark, and five ponies were crammed together, hiding in one small bush. Rainbow's cloud home was right above them.

"Well then y' can leave." Applejack replied over Twilight's other shoulder. "Ah don' like it none either, but Ah also don' like being lied to!"

"Girls, girls, quiet down or she'll hear us." Twilight told them. Pinkie Pie giggled from somewhere else in the bush while Fluttershy stayed silent, peeking out with her eyes steady on her friend's home.

"There she is!" her meager voice was barely audible, but it made the rest of them crane their necks. Rainbow Dash was flying slowly out of her home, and even by the meager light of dusk it was clear to make out a few changes in their rambunctious friend.

"Oh, now look at her..." Rarity cooed. "I didn't even think she owned a brush." she was referring to Dash's smooth mane, which was flowing down

her neck in a manner quite unlike her usual scruffy hairdo. Her tail was equally eloquent, looking like a pure rainbow trailing behind her. She had also clearly applied a bit of polish to her hooves, enough it was visible even in the low light.

"Now what's she going gettin' all gussied up for?" Applejack asked. Rarity responded with a laugh.

"My my, this I must see."

"Come on, we need to follow her." Twilight whispered. She did her best to sneak from bush to bush along the road, each pony in turn following along with various levels of stealth - from Applejack's cautious yet clumsy tip-hooves to Pinkie Pie's carefree yet completely silent hops. They followed Dash into town, replacing bushes with alleys and stands to hide behind. Rainbow didn't seem to notice them, always facing where she was going, a smile on her face the whole way. They successfully followed her right up until she took a sharp turn into a narrow alley.

"Quickly!" Twilight hissed, afraid to lose Dash in the failing light. The group galloped towards the alleyway. Twilight only just spied a closing door as she reached the alleyway, light spilling out of it as Dash entered. The five of them looked at each other. Twilight went ahead and approached the door, cocking an ear to it.

"I can hear music." she told the others. They all got closer, showing various levels of surprise and intrigue.

"I didn't think Ponyville had any sort of night life..." Rarity muttered. Twilight looked around at her friends.

"Do I..."

"Well, we can't turn back now, can we sugarcube?" Applejack replied. Twilight nodded, took a breath, and opened the door.

"Woah." the five ponies said in unison. Inside was a large, warehouse-like room. It was fairly dim, lit only with sparse colorful spotlights that illuminated a floor full of dancing ponies. The only clear spaces were near the door and across the room from them, where on a small stage a white

unicorn with wild blue hair thumped her head in time with the music, one hoof on a turntable in front of her. Her goggles shimmered as her head bobbed, reflecting the brightest spotlight in the room trained on her. Rainbow Dash was talking to a mare by the entrance, and the group's vocal surprise caught her attention. She did a double take and turned around.

"Guys! What are you all doing - you guys gotta get out of here!" she shouted over the music, immediately nervous. The five ignored her, too curious, and trotted further away from the door, spreading out slightly.

"Oooh, is this a party?" Pinkie Pie asked, beginning to bounce for the dancing ponies. "Without me?" Rainbow rushed over and tried to block her.

"No, guys, listen, I don't know how you found this, but-"

"My my, so hip, so fashion nouveau!" Rarity said, gazing around, looking up at the stage. Rainbow tried to keep Pinkie Pie in check yet still reach over to Rarity.

"Look, stop, don't..."

"Rainbow, what is this place?" Twilight asked, her eyes wide and her jaw slack.

"It's, see, you've got to-"

"Heeeeey Rainbow Dash!" an orange mare with a pink mohawk of a mane approached the spectrum-maned pony from the crowd, putting a hoof around her in familiarity. "Good to see you again. Listen, now, it ain't me, but there's a sweet little filly over there who I think's been crushing on you since last night. You and Scratch are still going steady right? Because if you could just let her know, maybe Candy can show her something sweeter, heh heh. Oh hey, did you bring friends? Oooh, purple...hey sweet stuff, want me to show you around?" the flirtatious mare ended with a wink to Twilight. Every one of the five had stopped as the pony had gone on, and as she finished five sets of wide eyes were trained on her.

"Theywerejustleaving!" Rainbow blurted, her wings flaring. In a multicolored blur, every one of her friends found themselves shoved out the door before

they could react. They were back in the alley, bunched together and pushed into a sitting position. Dash hastily kicked the door closed behind her, muffling the music.

"What are you guys doing here?!" she asked, clearly angry. Twilight was the first to get her brain working again.

"Uh, Dash, you see...what was that exactly?"

"Why's that club got nothing but mares innit?" Pinkie Pie chimed up. The rest turned to her.

"What? No one else noticed?"

"Oh great" Rainbow Dash said, sitting down and bringing a hoof to her face. "I...wait, no! I'm not explaining- why were you guys here? Were... were you spying on me?"

"Um..." was all Twilight could say. Applejack looked at her hooves, Rarity hung her head, and Fluttershy seemed to have spaced out.

"Yep!" Pinkie Pie said innocently, smiling at Dash.

"We, we were worried about you, Dash!" Twilight tried, her voice wobbling. "Do, do you spend all night in there? Were, was that..."

"It's a...girl's club." Rainbow Dash said. She sighed, took a deep breath and looked up at them, suddenly determined. "I'm a fillyfooler. This is a club for mares like me. So yeah, there it is."

"Dash, I..." Twilight tried before another pony cut in.

"Why didn't you tell us?" Applejack stood up straight. The others turned to her. Applejack's nostrils flared. She stood firm and looked Rainbow square in the eye, but the pegasus didn't falter.

"I was going to. I thought I could trust my friends. Maybe I was wrong."

"And you were just waiting for what exactly?" Applejack argued back.

"P-please don't fight..." Fluttershy mumbled, looking like she was finally coming to.

"Maybe some time when I wasn't getting bugged by everypony!" Rainbow retorted.

"Darn it Dash! We bugged you because we were plum confused! We thought somethin' was wrong! Here ya are leadin' some second life - wi'out us!"

"Maybe because I was afraid of, I don't know, something like this!" Dash yelled, wings flaring in anger. "Maybe I didn't want to risk it, huh? Maybe I knew you wouldn't understand!"

Applejack looked like she had been struck, leaning away from the angry pony, her own anger falling away. She tried to reach out to Dash.

"N-now hold on there pardner, it ain't like that."

"Oh yeah?" Dash challenged, stamping one hoof. "Look at you! You all look like I just turned into a bear, or lost my wings, or something!" she glared at each of them in turn. Fluttershy hid under her hooves, Rarity looked away, Pinkie Pie's smile disappeared and Twilight wouldn't look her in the eye. Then she met Applejack's gaze and saw honest regret.

"Now, Dash..." Applejack tried, "We've all been right foals here..."

"Yeah" Dash agreed, not letting up. "You have." she turned around, opened the door, stepped through, and slammed it shut. The five ponies were left feeling sorry for themselves in the deepening darkness of the night.

"Now...now this ain't as bad as it..." Applejack sighed. She couldn't even lie to herself. "Darn it Dash! Ahh....Ah need to get out of here before Ah do somethin' somepony will regret."

"I agree." Rarity replied. "A lot of emotional things were said tonight, but it will all work out in the end. We can't just stay here all night." she began to walk away, and Applejack took her lead.

"But...I don't get it." Pinkie Pie complained. "Isn't she still Rainbow Dash? I

was just surprised because nopony ever pulls a fast one on me! I was impressed!" she sounded sincere, making Applejack stop and smile.

"Well you tell her that in the morning, I'm sure she'll listen. Fluttershy?" she turned back around. The yellow pegasus had started staring at the door, looking as still as stone. She blinked once.

"...I....I, um...." she blushed. Applejack sighed, walked back and got behind the timid pony, nudging her forward with her head.

"It's okay sugarcube. Come on, Ah know you've got Angel waiting for you." slowly she began to get Fluttershy moving. She glanced back to Twilight, finding she hadn't budged either. She looked lost in thought, staring down at her hooves.

"Twi?"

"Huh? Oh." Twilight looked up. "Just give me a minute, okay?"

"Well alrigh', you get home safe." Applejack replied, realizing that Fluttershy had stopped moving as soon as her nudging had stopped. With a sigh she got to work pushing the pony along out of the alleyway. Rarity was at the alley's mouth now and stopped to wait for the others. Pinkie Pie passed by and walked on, for once not skipping or bouncing. Rarity focused her attention on Twilight.

"Poor girl." she said lowly to Applejack as she passed by with Fluttershy. "She's still very sheltered in some ways."

"She's got a good head on her shoulders. She'll be fine." Applejack said, realizing Fluttershy was walking on her own now. Rarity nodded slightly and followed them out. Meanwhile, Twilight continued to stare at her hooves.

Chapter 3

Twilight awoke with a groan. She felt like she was being prodded with a stick. One eye cracked open reluctantly. Not a stick she realized, but a certain cyan hoof.

"Twilight? What are you doing here?" Rainbow Dash asked, looming over the unicorn. "Did you....were you here all night?" There was only the dull light of the pre-dawn to go by, but the purple pony was clearly completely out of sorts. She was curled up against a wall in the same alley Rainbow had left her friends in last night, mane disheveled and coat grungy thanks to her less than sanitary sleep.

"I...ugh..." Twilight yawned and blinked her eyes. Rainbow stepped back and let Twilight get herself upright.

"I didn't mean to fall asleep, and I- oh, hello." Twilight noticed for the first time that she and Rainbow Dash weren't alone.

"Yo." a white unicorn with hair like blue fire responded calmly. Twilight could barely see her eyes behind great big amethyst goggles. She had a musical note as her cutie mark.

"Twilight, this is Vinyl Scratch. Scratch, this is Twilight."

"Hey, everyone knows 'the' Twilight Sparkle." Vinyl said with a little grin. "S'up?"

"Anything you can say to me you can say to her." Rainbow told Twilight sternly. Twilight rubbed her eye and nodded.

"I just....I didn't want to wait. I...I'm sorry Dash. This was all my fault. I convinced the others to join me. Rarity, the others, they didn't want....this really was all my fault Dash. I'm really sorry."

"She talking about your little tantrum last night, light bulb?" Scratch teased, talking to Dash. Twilight left her confusion show on her face.

"Hehe, I'll explain that later." Scratch told her, noticing her expression. Rainbow Dash was blushing hard through her coat.

"Look....I'm sorry. I was kinda tough on you guys last night. It's just...that was not how I expected things to go."

"Heh, you nearly chewed Candy's ears off." Vinyl said. Seeing Twilight's face again, she added, "Kiddo, it's an expression."

"Look, can we trot and chat?" Rainbow asked. "It's nearly dawn, we shouldn't be hanging around here."

"Yeah, hey, she lives by your home, right?" Scratch asked, nodding to Twilight but talking to Dash.

"Well, it's on the way. But..." Rainbow bit her lip. Scratch grinned and gave her a hip bump.

"Tough luck light bulb. I thought you were big on loyalty?"

"Yeah.... okay. Twilight, come on. Let's take you home." Dash said with a nod. Twilight gave an unsure nod of her own, still befuddled with sleep. They began to walk out of the alley, three abreast with Dash in the middle.

"I really am sorry Dash." Twilight said, unsure what else to say.

"Me too" Dash replied. "Maybe AJ was right. I should've told everypony by now."

"Aww, but I like it when you try to be all secretive." Scratch teased.

"Where's the fun in making you do this if everypony knows?" she leaned over and grabbed Rainbow Dash's ear in her teeth. Dash yelped, but to Twilight's surprise, rather than pull away Dash let the gnawing continue, a giddy look spreading over her face. Then, unexpectedly, her wings popped straight up, nearly taking out both ponies. Scratch stopped to chuckle, while Dash turned bright red, snapping back to reality. Twilight blushed a little at their antics and looked away.

"Scratch.... look, don't, Twilight's not very....um, I mean.... she's.... nerdy."

Rainbow didn't know how else to put it. Vinyl nodded and chuckled.

"I hear you. So Twiddles, this your first time seeing a pair of real live fillyfoolers up close?" she asked, craning her neck to see behind Dash's head. Rainbow rolled her eyes. Twilight's steps faltered, both at the question and her apparent new nickname.

"Well...actually, it kinda is. I mean as far as I know." she replied meekly. "Dash, that, um, that was kinda the other thing I wanted to talk to you about, actually."

"Oh..." Rainbow Dash said lowly, ears drooping.

"No, no." Twilight turned her head to face her friend. "Not like that. Look, Rainbow Dash, you're my friend. I don't really see how it affects me if you date stallions or...." wheels turned in Twilight's head, and she leaned over to stare wide-eyed at Vinyl Scratch for a moment. She quickly remembered herself and looked away with a blush.

"Just clicked now, huh Twiddles?" Scratch asked, not bothered at all. She actually looked outright pleased at something.

"Sorry..." Twilight hung her head. They had managed to get to the edge of the main town by now, though it was still a way before they got to the library.

"So then, did you want to talk about it?" Dash tried to get the conversation back on track.

"It's just...see, once I got into Princess Celestia's school for the gifted, I really never saw much of my parents. I, I sometimes felt like Princess Celestia was like a second mother to me, but, well, there's some things you don't talk about with a Princess." she chuckled nervously. Both ponies had their eyes on her, waiting on her to finish. Twilight swallowed and continued.

"So, what I'm getting at here is, no one exactly explained...I mean I never heard...what I'm getting at is....how...what exactly makes you a fillyfooler?"

"Uh...liking other mares?" Rainbow Dash responded, face blank with a

complete lack of comprehension.

"Hold on Rainbow." Vinyl told her. "I think I get what she's after." she dropped back and came up around on the other side of the young unicorn.

"Kiddo, would you say you picked out your friends? You chose 'em on purpose?" she asked. Twilight was confused by the question, but after a moment of thought, shook her head.

"No. To be honest, I didn't even want them at first...though I was definitely in the wrong."

"Yeah? Right, see, it's kinda like that. Now you can drive someone away, or you can buddy up to someone, but at the end of the day you don't pick who you like, do ya?"

"Well, no, I guess not."

"Well, same way. One day you just see another mare and go 'dang, I'd like to get to know her!'...or however it goes." she flashed a brilliant smile at Twilight, winking at her from behind her goggles. "It's as much a part of me and light bulb as the marks on our flanks."

"Y-yeah." Rainbow added. "That's...kinda why I wanted to be careful about telling everypony else. Not everypony gets that."

"Huh?" Twilight asked. Scratch blew lazily at a tuft of hair in front of her face.

"Twiddles, there's a reason we get together like we do, at night. This ain't San Franciscolt, or even Manehattan. Now a lot of ponies are cool with it, don't get me wrong, but not everypony. Lyra and Bon-Bon aren't all that popular around town, y'know?"

"I...didn't even know about..." Twilight trailed off, feeling like a little foal. Rainbow smiled at her.

"Hey, no worries. You weren't here when they came out. They're more public than most, but even they don't exactly go out of their way... unlike someponies" she ended with a glare at Scratch behind Twilight's head.

Scratch let her tongue peek out for a second in response.

"Okay. Thanks Dash." Twilight said with a slow nod. "Are you still mad?"

"Nah. I never really lose my cool." Rainbow told her. Twilight heard Vinyl snort, and Dash lowered her high head a little.

"Heh, actually, thanks Twilight. I guess I'll have to talk to the others..." she sighed. "But I guess I owe them."

"Don't worry Dash. You're a good friend, and no one will really be upset."

"Thanks, I hope so."

"So, light bulb, what does this mean?" Scratch asked, looking past Twilight. Dash sighed again and shook her head.

"I'm not sure Scratch. Give me some time to think, okay?"

"Heh, so what, a few years?"

"Oh you make such a great fillyfriend." Dash said with a roll of her eyes. Vinyl smiled.

"You know Dash...I could get used to hearing that."

Rainbow Dash blushed the slightest bit at that. "Not if you keep up like this." she muttered.

"Hehe. Don't worry, I won't let anyone know you're going soft." Scratch teased. The light was picking up, and her goggles seemed to gleam with every movement of her head. She noticed Twilight, in between them, pretty much a spectator to their back-and-forth.

"Oh, and by the way. So around the club they know me an' Dash. They figure I'm DJing all the time so I bring the noise, and junior speedster of the month here brings the light show. Plus with that little stamp on her flank, that makes me thunder and her lightning, see? Me? I think she's a little too big-headed as is, so I call her light-bulb instead."

"Oh. That's....clever!" Twilight said, putting on a smile.

"Well, here we are." Rainbow Dash said. Twilight looked up and realized they were outside her library.

"Spike's going to be worried sick." she said with a groan. "Again, I'm sorry Dash. I've learned my lesson, I promise."

"Ahh, don't worry about it."

"And it was very nice to meet you." Twilight continued, turning to Vinyl Scratch.

"Heh, right back at ya. See you around, Twiddles."

Twilight gave one last weak smile and hurried towards her house. Rainbow Dash and Vinyl Scratch waited and watched until she got inside.

"I like her."

"Be nice."

"No, I mean it." Scratch insisted. "I thought you were the only one crazy enough to stay in an alley all night just so you wouldn't miss out. And she doesn't even get to go home with somepony."

"It was just one time..." Dash said. "Okay, I guess she's cool." she looked skyward and let out a sigh. Scratch didn't say anything for a few minutes and they walked on in silence.

"You gonna be okay, Rainbow?" she finally asked. "I still have the club, but you barely know anypony there. I know your real friends are on the outside."

"I'm fine. Heh, come on, this is me we're talking about." Rainbow replied, holding her head high, practically puffing out her chest. Scratch didn't look convinced, somehow managing to give Dash a look despite her glimmering goggles. Dash kept her head up this time.

"I mean it. Yeah, I got shaken up, so what? I'm going to do it the only way I

know how. Headfirst and with style!"

"That mean you're coming out to everypony or what?"

"Well...." Dash backed down a little at last. "Let's call my friends a 'practice run'. If things go well, I'm golden."

Scratch smiled, but her goggles hid her worried eyes. "You don't have to, you know. I'm cool with what we got."

"Scratch" Rainbow Dash smiled weakly. "Thanks, but Rainbow Dash does not back down from a challenge."

"Heh" Scratch's smile widened. "Alright light bulb. Just let me know."

"I will." Rainbow leaned her neck over and briefly rested her cheek against Scratch's as they walked. Scratch's wide grin faded into a small, sincere look of content.

"You know, I think this is the first time I get to see your pad." Scratch said as Rainbow righted herself, hiding her contentment from Dash with a smirk.

"There's kinda not much to see. I mean, not much you can..."

"Yeah, yeah, maybe one day."

"Oh yeah!" Dash perked up. "Now that Twilight knows, I can ask her about that cloudwalking spell. Maybe even some temporary wings!"

"You got some cool friends, Dash." Scratch said, chuckling to herself.

"Show 'em to me sometime, won't you?"

"No problem." Dash saw Scratch was looking up, and realized they were well within sight of her home by now.

"Nice pad." Vinyl said, eyes going to the rainbow river. Dash looked a bit embarrassed.

"I promise I'll show you around some day." she said. Scratch smirked again.

"There's only one room I need to see." she replied, making Dash giggle like a schoolfilly.

"Now get some rest, light bulb. You got a big day ahead of you." Scratch told, punching Dash on the shoulder.

"Alright." Dash flared her wings and took to the air.

"Yo light bulb!" Scratch called. Rainbow turned around.

"Where you think you're going?" Vinyl asked with a tilt of her head.

"But you said - oh." Dash gave an apologetic smile. She flew back down, and hovering just above the ground, she leaned in towards Vinyl. They shared a simple but long-lasting kiss.

"Go get 'em Dash." Vinyl said once they parted.

"Thanks." Rainbow pressed her nose briefly against Scratch's and flew back off.

Chapter 4

Dash yawned and slowly woke up after a long nap. Her bed was so much more comfortable than what she had found herself sleeping on the past few days, she was glad Scratch had walked her home for once. Usually, it went the other way with Dash leaving Scratch's place exhausted. Hopefully the musician didn't have any problems heading back across town alone. Then again, Scratch was just going home after a long day's work, not trying to be awake day and night like Dash found herself doing.

Rainbow knew she still had to get up and face the music, however comfortable her bed was. Fears swarmed through her head. What if her friends had already blabbed about it? What if they weren't even her friends anymore? She wanted to just stay here and wait for the storm to pass, but she knew that wasn't an option. Reluctantly she picked herself up and stretched awake.

"What the hay?" she asked, looking around her. Her room was filled with balloons! Well, perhaps not filled, but well over a dozen floated about, of every color in the rainbow and a few besides. Each one had a string, and at the bottom of the string was some sort of small gift. They were almost exclusively sweets, from cupcakes to tarts to two balloons together holding up a smoothie. Rainbow looked down. The floor of her room (cloud, naturally) was pockmarked with holes, one for each balloon. She got off her bed and stuck her head through the nearest hole.

"Heya Dash! Does this mean you're up? Up up up?" a certain cheery pink pony asked, bouncing in place on the ground below.

"Pinkie! You put holes in my house!"

"Well duh." Pinkie Pie replied, stopping her bouncing. "How else could I get your gifts up to you? Do you like them?"

Dash sighed and pushed herself through the hole, flying down to the pink pony.

"Pinkie Pie, you don't need to try to send me apology gifts."

"Apology?" Pinkie Pie asked, blinking rapidly. "Those weren't apology gifts! They were gift gifts!"

"Huh?" As usual, Rainbow Dash found herself trying to figure out what was going through Pinkie Pie's head. It was a futile task. "Then why'd you-"

"For pulling a fast one!" Pinkie Pie interrupted. Dash just stared at her, making Pinkie giggle.

"I know everypony, but I didn't know my own friend had a fillyfriend! Or, that that fillyfriend was Vinyl Scratch!" Pinkie Pie's expression dropped for just a moment. "I guess I shoulda been a better friend."

Rainbow smiled slightly. "Nah, you're a great friend Pinkie. Heh, I shoulda figured it wouldn't bother you. I was the lousy friend. Forgive me?" she leaned over and ruffled Pinkie's mane.

"Hmmm." Pinkie Pie looked deep in thought, scratching her chin. She seriously mulled over Dash's question, by the looks of things. "Okay!" she replied with happy eyes. Before Dash could say anything, Pinkie Pie had her squeezed in an overly enthusiastic hug.

"Thanks...Pinkie...Pie." Rainbow Dash wheezed. Luckily Pinkie let go of her just seconds before she blacked out.

"We should have a party!" Pinkie said, bouncing around again. Dash rubbed her neck, which she was pretty sure was going to bruise.

"What? Why?"

"Why not?"

"Um..." it was next to impossible to talk Pinkie Pie out of a party. Dash had her suspicions as to the real reason behind it, but kept that to herself for now. No sense spoiling this thankfully easy conversation.

"Why don't we wait until I talk to all our friends, okay?" she tried. Pinkie Pie took a moment, then nodded, her head bobbing rapidly.

"Okie Dokie Lokie! After all, it wouldn't be a party unless our friends are coming!"

"Yeah" Rainbow said without an iota of Pinkie's enthusiasm. "And, uh, thanks for the gifts." she looked up and sighed. She'd need to find just the right kind of cloud to patch that up.

"No problem! See ya Dash!" Pinkie was already bouncing off. Rainbow shook her head with a smile.

"So random"

Rainbow Dash rang Rarity's doorbell. There was no prank this time, that was for sure. As she waited for Rarity to answer, Dash wondered how well she could even hope for things to go - only two days ago she had upset Rarity badly, and while the fashionable mare seemed to have gotten over it, there was no telling what her mood towards Dash would be now. Rainbow had to admit to herself, even after how things had gone with Twilight and Pinkie, she wasn't exactly excited to talk to everypony else. There was no telling what would happen; it had just never come up before now.

"This is a shop you know, you can- Rainbow Dash!" Rarity brightened when she saw the cyan speedster outside her door.

"Yeah, sorry, I forgot you'd be open by now." Rainbow replied, looking off sideways.

"Never mind that, come in, come in." Rarity said, turning around. Rainbow followed her into the shop.

"Now, I know why you're here..." Rarity told her, not turning to face her.

"Oh?"

"And you needn't worry..." she continued, "...I have a cleaning crew on the way."

"What?" Rainbow blinked. Rarity turned a little and pointed to her half-scrubbed floors before walking deeper into the shop.

"I won't need your help with that any more, though I must say you put in a fine effort."

"Oh, that's - hey wait!" Rainbow trotted up to see Rarity face to face. "That's not why I'm here. Don't you remember last night?"

"Well what is there to talk about dear?" Rarity asked, turning away slightly and continuing to trot through her shop. She looked over a rack of dresses. "To be honest it's not any big surprise, really, once one thinks on it. I mean, given your coltish mannerisms and such."

"Not all fillyfoolers are like that." Rainbow Dash said defensively. "We're no different from anypony else."

"Of course not dear" Rarity replied, now idly regarding some cloth she had laid out.

"You're not listening." Rainbow accused, glowering at her friend's back. "Have you even met a fillyfooler before?"

"Well, I mean, there's a few..." Rarity said, her voice faltering. Rainbow Dash walked up beside her.

"Rarity-"

"Oh Dash, how could you do this to me!" Rarity suddenly bawled, throwing her arms around Dash.

"What are you talking about?"

"I mean I worked so hard to find Prince Charming! I was sure I would be the talk of the town, the 'it' couple. Now I find not only has one of my best friends found somepony else first, but how can I compete with such a pair?"

"W-what?"

"I remember what that talkative mare said - Scratch, as in Vinyl Scratch?"

As in the foremost DJ from Manehattan?" Rarity got off of Dash and began to collect herself (by Rarity standards). "I may prefer a more refined company, but I know the power of the chic - and she was the essence of chic in Manehattan. Combine that with Ponyville's own champion speedster - why, if you make it into the Wonderbolts, you'd be the kind of celebrity couple that every magazine this side of the Everfree forest would want to cover!"

"Look, Scratch doesn't really talk about her life in Manehattan." Dash said, her mind boggled at Rarity's priorities. "That's why she moved here, to Ponyville."

"Oh?" Rarity's interest was piqued.

"I mean, most of her music goes out under an alias these days. Ever heard of DJ Pon-3?" Rainbow Dash asked, lowering her voice even though they were the only ones in Rarity's shop. Rarity's eyes widened.

"Well...but what about you dear? Surely a great member of the Wonderbolts shan't have her love life go unnoticed?"

"You'd be surprised." Rainbow muttered, deciding not to share with Rarity some of the rumors she had heard flying around the club. According to who you asked, anywhere from half to the entire team were fillyfoolers and coltcuddlers.

"Anyway..." she continued before Rarity asked questions, "I mean, I'm kinda in it for the fame, sure, but there's a reason nopony hears about the Wonderbolts except at events. How are reporters supposed to keep up with the fastest fliers in the world? Besides, who already has her face on magazines, huh?" she asked. Sure, it had only been one or two after Hoity Toity had shown up, but her remark seemed to work as Rarity thought this over. Finally she gave a nod.

"Oh, and there I go being overly dramatic again. I am deeply sorry Dash, I suppose I let my emotions get the better of me for a little there. Could you forgive me?"

"Heh, I think so." Rainbow replied with a grin. "So...you're not upset that I'm a fillyfooler?"

"I can't say I fully understand it, Dash." Rarity admitted. She saw Dash's gaze drop and so reached out, pushing Dash's chin up with her hoof. "But you're still my friend. So I suppose I'll simply have to learn."

"You mean it?" Rainbow asked.

"If you say you're happy, I'll believe it." Rarity said with a nod. She wasn't prepared for the quick hug Rainbow gave her.

"Thanks Rarity."

"Yes, well...you're quite welcome." the dressmaker said, giving an awkward pat on the back to Rainbow, who luckily for her let go soon enough.

"I suppose you've still got to talk to the others then." Rarity guessed.

"Yeah, some..." Rainbow admitted. "I shouldn't put it off either. See ya around, Rarity. Thanks."

"Good luck!" Rarity called as Dash left her shop. She sighed, shook her head, and got back to her fabrics.

Applejack was spending her day heaving hay bales through the barn and into a nice tidy stack. Not everything about the farm was 'easy work' by her standards, like planting season or applebucking, and even she struggled to lift each hay bale individually and sort them. However, her head wasn't where it needed to be to work her best, so she had decided it best to leave the fields to Big Mac while she did what were typically his chores. They were a bit more menial, not that her brother tended to mind, and Applejack could perform them without so much concentration. She was just stacking up another bale when she heard the barn door creak open behind her.

"Apple Bloom, are you- oh." Applejack turned and saw Rainbow step into the barn. Dash paused halfway in.

"H-hi." she grinned. Applejack didn't say anything and turned back away.

"Look, Applejack-

"Ah don' have nothin' to say to you." the farm pony replied.

"Oh, is that how it's going to be?" Rainbow asked, trying to sound angry but coming across as hurt. "I get it. Nice knowing you."

Applejack sighed. "Rainbow - wait." she turned around to see the pony backing out the door. Tentatively, Rainbow paused, finally stepping back inside. She looked around nervously, lightly kicking the door closed behind her.

"So...what?" she asked. "You hate me or what?"

"Ah don' hate you, Dash." Applejack said with a slow shake of her head. "This past year, heck, Ah thought ya were my closes' friend."

"Me?"

"Yup. So you'll pardon this pony for bein' a mite upset t' find her friend's been keepin' secrets from her."

"I..." Rainbow Dash looked away. She glanced back up as she heard Applejack approach.

"Just answer me this." Applejack told her as she walked closer. "Were you really planning on telling us or not?"

"Yes! Eventually....maybe..." Rainbow Dash said, one hoof fidgeting around on the ground. Applejack got beside her and sat down, prompting her to do the same.

"I was maybe, just a little scared what you'd think. Kinda" Rainbow Dash admitted.

"Me in partic'lar or juss all of us?"

"...Both."

"And Ah can't rightly say Ah blame you." Applejack sighed, eyes closed as

she spoke. "We country pony's don' have the best reputation, now do we?"

"..." Dash couldn't find anything to say, the guilt clear on her face.

"Y'know ol' Granny Smith was big on Pony Rights in the day? The other fillies were goin' about wi' ribbons in their manes, but she had to work the fields right alongside her brothers and sisters, just like me and Big Mac. So she didn' take lightly t' it when she was told t' juss settle down with a nice stallion an' let him have th' farm." Applejack opened her eyes and turned to Rainbow Dash. "She taught me not t' judge anypony fer how they live their life. Sure, she meant whether they were work ponies or show ponies or city folk or country folk, but it's th' same thing, ain't it?"

"But....then why were you mad at me?" Rainbow asked.

"Ah am mad at you." Applejack told her, though she was smiling. "Fer not talking to yur friends 'bout this." she shoved Dash lightly. "Fer thinkin' you couldn't trust me."

Dash thought this over. "You're right, I-"

"Now don't you go sayin' yur sorry." Applejack interrupted. "We've done enough feelin' sorry fer ourselves t' last a lifetime."

"..Then what should I say?"

"Say you'll be back here t'morrow so we can play horseshoes once Ah'm done workin'. Say you'll trust me from now on if'n you need to talk. Say you'll still be mah friend." Applejack smiled at her, eyes wet. Rainbow Dash wasn't sure how to respond for a moment. Her first instinct was to reach out and hug Applejack, but given their position she settled on leaning against her instead.

"I promise."

"Atta girl" Applejack leaned back, pressing against her cheek-to-cheek briefly. "And don' y' go easy on me at horseshoes either."

"Heh, I won't." Rainbow replied, righting herself. "Thanks AJ."

"Alright now. Don' mean you can go gettin' all mushy on me."

"Now that, I definitely promise." Rainbow said with a smirk. "Hey, can I...just stick around a little?"

"Oh, want t' help me move hay bales, do ya?" Applejack asked with a smirk of her own. Rainbow stood up.

"Uhhh, no thanks. I just remembered I still have friends to talk to."

"Ah though' so. Go and get 'em, pardner." Applejack told her. Rainbow paused, nodded, and left. Applejack got back to work, but figured maybe she could talk to Big Mac about getting her chores back. Her head was a bit clearer now.

Dash had to admit, she felt a bit better, was a little more uplifted than when she had first set out. She felt the worst was over, and it hadn't been bad at all. She had been over thinking it. These were her friends, and they were just as loyal to her as she tried to be to them.

The day was getting cloudy, reminding Rainbow Dash she'd need to get to work later. It wouldn't be particularly hard, but it wasn't something she could put off either. Still, she was sure she had enough time to head over to one last place. Fluttershy's hut was well away from the rest of Ponyville, but close to Sweet Apple Acres, at least by comparison. Dash looked around as she approached, and seeing that Fluttershy wasn't out in her gardens, walked up to the door.

The door opened just a crack at her knock, but nopony appeared on the other side. Rainbow Dash tried to peek through, confused, before she noticed Angel below her, standing at the door.

"Oh, hey Angel, is Fluttershy here?" she asked, bending down to him. He frowned and opened the door a bit wider. He beckoned to Rainbow Dash, signaling her closer. Just as she stepped in - wham, the door shut hard on her head. Dash fell back, ears ringing.

"Why you-"

"Angel" a timid voice came from inside. "It's okay. Don't do that."

The bunny frowned, and shook his head.

"Let her in, Angel." Fluttershy said from somewhere out of sight. Angel just crossed his arms in defiance.

"You heard her." Dash said with a growl, getting back on her feet. Angel shook his head.

"Why you!" Rainbow Dash bent down, preparing to charge. Just as she leaped at the door, however, it opened wide on its own. Fluttershy stood in the doorway, eyes wide as she saw Rainbow incoming. Angel jumped to the side.

"Ahh-ooof!" Dash went tumbling into Fluttershy, sending them rolling into her house. She got up with a jump as soon as they stopped moving and looked around.

"Fluttershy!" she heard a squeak below her. She immediately fluttered off of her friend, who was sprawled out on the floor.

"I'm sorry! I'm sorry!" Rainbow stammered. "Are you okay? I was just trying to-"

"Rainbow, it's okay." Fluttershy said, her voice whisper quiet. She picked herself off the floor.

"Are, are you alright? I wanted to say I'm sorry."

"I'm fine Rainbow Dash. It's okay."

"Are...you're not mad at me, I mean for last night, right?"

"No Rainbow Dash." was all Fluttershy said. Dash noticed Angel hopping up on an end table. The bunny was staring her daggers. She turned back to find Fluttershy was walking over to her couch.

"You, you sure you're not mad at me." Dash repeated, still unsure.

"I'm...not mad at you for being a...." Fluttershy mumbled so quietly Rainbow Dash couldn't make it out. Still, she knew what Fluttershy was saying.

"Whew. That's good. Because I was afraid..." Rainbow Dash walked alongside Fluttershy, but saw her turn away. Frowning she got around to the other side of the pony. "I thought maybe..." Fluttershy turned away again. She got onto the couch and promptly faced the back of the seat, away from Rainbow. Angel hopped up onto the windowsill behind the couch and pointed Dash to the door. The spectrum-maned pegasus sat down, confused. She eventually began to piece it together.

"If...you're not mad for me being a fillyfooler, then, why are you mad at me?" she asked with a gulp. Fluttershy didn't say anything, but curled up tighter, as if expecting an attack. Angel had disappeared, and suddenly there was a thump at Rainbow's feet. She looked down to see the bunny had dragged out a thick book from somewhere.

"A photo album?" she asked. Angel opened it for her, and she began to idly flip through it, confused and intrigued. There was the gang at the Grand Galloping Gala, in all their sparkling dresses. There were a few candid shots of them at Winter Wrap up last year too. Some from each celebration and a few more besides. Dash got back to about a year before Twilight had come. The gang wasn't as close back then. There were a few shots of Rarity and Fluttershy together, more of Rainbow and Fluttershy. Like traveling back in time, Dash watched her and the others get smaller, shorter. Fluttershy had had such spindly legs as a filly. The earliest pictures, and pretty much the only from that time in their life, were their flight school class pictures. Year four, Rainbow Dash and Fluttershy had sat together. Just like in year three, year two, and year one, when they had met. Rainbow Dash could barely look up she felt so heavy with guilt.

"I didn't know you kept these." she said, getting no response from Fluttershy. "You're my best friend, Fluttershy." her voice croaked.

There was another slam as Angel closed the book. He just stared crossly at Rainbow Dash.

"I..." Rainbow Dash got up and began to back away, Angel's glare like a physical shove to her. She couldn't even look at the bunny anymore, let

alone Fluttershy. She found herself turning to the door.

"Fluttershy, I'm..." she tried to lift her head, but met Angel's gaze again. Her throat seized up and she just walked out the door. It slammed shut as soon as her tail was beyond the threshold.'

Chapter 5

Ponyville was in a bit of disarray. It hadn't been scheduled to rain today, and when the drizzle had started many a business owner or shopper had been left scrambling. Only one pony now walked the soaking streets, a curious look on her face and an even more curious hat on her head.

"Rainbow Dash? Rainbow Dash!" Pinkie Pie called, peeking this way and that as she bounced along. Her umbrella hat kept her view clear, but didn't do much for the rest of her body, and she was getting soaked. Even the peppy pink party pony didn't relish the trek she had ahead of her, but she had poked her head inside every building, rain barrel, and animal hole, flipped over every rock, and had still not found her friend. This left her with only a few places left to check, and that meant a trek slightly out of town.

By the time she got to Twilight's house, Pinkie Pie was soaked to the skin, and her normal smile was interrupted by chattering teeth. She knocked on the library door, glad when Spike answered just moments later.

"Pinkie Pie?!"

"H-h-h-hello Sp-p-pike." she tried to smile.

"What are you doing in the rain?! Here, come on."

"Spike, did I hear - Pinkie Pie!" Twilight was coming down the staircase as she saw Pinkie Pie enter.

"H-h-hey T-T-T-T....T-Twilight."

"I'll get a blanket." Twilight's expression was of deep concern. "Spike, help her warm up." With that she rushed back upstairs. Spike turned to face Pinkie Pie.

"Stand still." he told her. He took a deep breath, and with a soft 'fwoosh' green flames went all around Pinkie Pie. They evaporated the water in an instant, and Pinkie looked herself over to find she was mostly dry. For a

moment, her hair remained matted down as it had been by the rain, and then popped up as curly, if not curlier, as it always was. She giggled.

"Thanks Spike." she smiled at him. A shiver ran through her, proving she was still cold on the inside, but at least now she was dry.

After a moment, the three of them - Twilight, Pinkie, and Spike - sat in the middle of the library floor. Pinkie Pie had Twilight's blanket around her and was all smiles once more.

"What brought you out here in this kinda weather, Pinkie?" Twilight asked. "You looked half-dead!"

"It wasn't so bad when I started." Pinkie Pie told her. "I was looking for Rainbow Dash. Have you seen her?"

"Not since really early this morning." Twilight admitted. "Didn't she talk to you?"

"Uh-huh. She did! And I thought we were going to have a party!"

"A party?"

"Yes! But she didn't want to until she talked to all our friends. But now I can't find her!"

"Hmm." Twilight gave Pinkie a look. "A party, as in... a coming out party?"

"Well, it didn't have to be." Pinkie said with an insincere smile. "I wanted her to feel better again."

"Uh-huh." Twilight said, half-believing her friend. "Well, where'd she go after you talked?"

"Into town, I think she was going to talk to the others."

"Well..." Twilight was interrupted by another knock on her door.

"I've got it." Spike said, quicker to rise than the ponies. He opened it to revealed a very wet, nearly indistinguishable pony in a big yellow raincoat.

"Uh, hello?" Spike asked, standing aside. The pony stepped into the light and raised her head.

"Ms. Mayor!" Twilight realized, seeing the half-moon glasses. Spike helped the pony with her hat and it was indeed the town mayor. She was wet but not as bad off as Pinkie Pie had been.

"Hello Twilight Sparkle, Spike. Pinkie Pie." she said with a formal nod of her head. "Sorry to bother you on such an afternoon."

"It's quite alright. Are you cold? Spike, get her some tea, if you'd please." Twilight was up and already fretting over the mayor.

"No no, it's quite alright," the mayor assured her, "I won't be staying. I just need to know if either of you have seen Rainbow Dash."

"Are you throwing her a party too?" Pinkie Pie asked gleefully. Both Twilight and the mayor ignored her.

"I'm sorry mayor." Twilight said. "Last we saw of her was hours ago, and we have no idea what she did since then."

"Oh, that's not what I was hoping to hear." the mayor admitted. "She was supposed to be on weather control today. I've sent pegasus ponies to her home, I've been checking with everypony who might know her whereabouts. The rest of the weather patrol weren't prepared for this, and we're left scrambling - Cloudkicker's out of town, and Rainy Day has her day job."

"I'm sorry to hear that. We'll be sure to let you know if we find her." Twilight said. The mayor nodded sadly.

"Alright, I still have a few places to check. I can't very well ask anypony else to go out in the rain." she donned her hat again.

"Good luck. Be careful!" Twilight called as the mayor stepped back out into the storm. She turned to Pinkie Pie.

"Dash may be a bit of a goofball, but she never shirks work. She prides

herself on being the best weather pony in Ponyville. Well, she prides herself on a lot of things..." Twilight shook her head.

"But what are we going to do? It sounds like the mayor's checked with everypony!" Pinkie Pie asked. Twilight rubbed her chin and thought this over.

"Everypony...she knows to check." she said slowly. "Pinkie, you know everypony in town, right?"

"Yep! I know Carrot Top and Rarity and Bon-Bon and Mr. Cake and Roseluck and-" Pinkie Pie stopped only when Twilight jammed a hoof in her mouth.

"Okay. Grab my spare coat from the closet; I'm going to need your help."

The two ponies tried to hurry through town, hampered by the weather and splashing through puddles as they went. The storm wasn't getting any harder, but also showed no sign of letting up. It was as nearly as dark as night, even though the sun wouldn't set for another hour or so. Pinkie Pie stopped before a tiny house on the edge of town.

"It just had to be as far away as possible, didn't it?" Twilight huffed, well out of breath. Pinkie Pie nodded giddily to the rhetorical question.

"You sure she's here?" she asked. Twilight took a couple of deep breaths.

"I've got a hunch." the purple pony replied. She reached up and knocked on the door. It took a minute before anypony responded. Twilight and Pinkie Pie both gasped at what they saw.

"Oh good." said the biggest, brightest pair of sparkling sapphire eyes either of them had ever seen. "I was hoping someone would come by for her." it took them a moment to see the pony beyond those dazzling eyes.

"Come on in." Vinyl Scratch said with a nod of her head. "Don't worry about the carpet."

"Um, yes, thank you." Twilight remembered herself, stepping in. "Sorry." she realized she had been staring

"No worries Twiddles." Scratch replied. "S'why I got these." she glanced up, her goggles resting on top of her head, and with a slight glow of her horn they moved onto her face, shielding her deep blue eyes.

"You have a nickname?" Pinkie Pie asked of Twilight. Twilight ignored her, curious at Scratch's statement.

"What do you mean?"

"Eh." Scratch shrugged. "Kinda got tired of that reaction, you know? It was always 'ahhh, what a cute little filly' and later, 'what a sweet young mare'. With these, it's 'Yo, Scratch, what's up?'. You know how it goes. I've even got contacts in case I know they'll be off. Ruby red." she grinned.

"Can I call you Twiddles?" Pinkie Pie asked.

"No." Twilight responded, immediately getting back to Scratch. "I'm sorry you feel that way. Also, I'm sorry to bother you like this..."

"Nah, I know what you're here for." Scratch smiled, a shake of her head sending her mane everywhere. The front door led directly into her living room, which consisted of an off-white couch, a coffee table, and barely enough room besides for the three ponies to stand. There were piles of papers about the table, tapes and CDs all around the floor, bundles of wires the size of shrubberies, and at least three different instruments propped up here and there, including a red electric guitar. Twilight stepped around the mess as best she could.

"Sorry, not used to this 'housekeeping' thing." Scratch said, chuckling at her own comment. "I swear this junk just grows to fill wherever I'm at. Anyway, she's upstairs, see if you can pry her off my bed before I get home tonight. Or at least talk her out of her funk. You can definitely keep her in my bed in that case." Twilight blushed at Scratch's candid comments. The staircase Vinyl nodded to was at the back of the room, behind her. Pinkie Pie seemed to effortlessly find her way through the junk without even looking at her feet, and so got to the stairs ahead of Twilight. Then, as Twilight passed by Scratch, the wild-maned unicorn leaned in, making her pause.

"She's in a bad place, kid." she said lowly, face expressionless behind her goggles. "You do what you can, but don't beat yourself up over her."

"I, o-okay." Twilight said, swallowing hard. She followed Pinkie Pie upstairs. There were only a couple of doors to choose from in the short hall they found themselves on, and one was slightly ajar. Pinkie pushed through and Twilight followed.

Scratch's bedroom was slightly less disorganized than downstairs, but not by much. A keyboard was propped against the foot of a king-sized bed with pale blue covers. Posters covered almost every inch of the walls. A few were of Scratch herself, clearly cover albums, but they were mostly of other artists, including a lot featuring two ponies in very strange robotic get ups. There was a desk with paper, pens, and headphones on it. However, both ponies were really only focused on the bed that dominated the room. There, curled up so tight she was nearly a perfect circle, Rainbow Dash lay on top of the sheets. She didn't react to their entry.

"Dash? Are you doing okay?" Twilight asked, though she knew the answer. There wasn't a lot of room, but she managed to squeeze by Pinkie and stand beside the bed, as close to Dash as she could get. She tried to keep her mind off of why Scratch had invested in such a large bed. It was easily two ponies long and just as wide.

"Dash, come on. Say something."

"Buzz off."

"Okay, that's something." Twilight muttered. "Look Dash, we're not leaving until we find out what's going on."

"Isn't that what started everything?" Dash snapped. Twilight began to say something and then stopped. Dash was right.

"That's not what I meant. Dash, something's wrong. You can't keep pushing us away. We're your friends, whether you like it or not." she meant this in all seriousness. On the bed, Dash seemed to deflate a little.

"You wouldn't get it."

"Try me." Twilight challenged. "Look Rainbow, there's a lot of things I don't get. Like when it's appropriate for friends to hug each other, and for how long. Or how to talk to somepony when you're trying to keep a secret. But I want to be a good friend. And if the elements of harmony have taught me anything, if you have taught me anything, you don't leave a friend hanging."

"Twilight?" Rainbow Dash asked, raising her head.

"Yes?" Twilight asked hopefully, leaning forward. Dash looked up at her, and Twilight met her listless, puffy eyes.

"Go home." Dash croaked before lowering her head. Twilight slumped.

"And take Pinkie with you." she added. Twilight looked over to see that for once in her life Pinkie didn't look like she had any reason to smile. She just kept her worried gaze on Rainbow Dash. Twilight turned back to the pegasus.

"Did something happen with one of our friends? Did...did you have a fight?"

Rainbow Dash just took a deep breath and sighed. Twilight waited, but nothing came.

"Was it...was it Applejack?" Twilight tried, remembering how angry the earth pony had been after last night.

"Applejack..." Rainbow Dash muttered. "She had a right to be mad. We've been friends for so long, for years."

"So it was her?" Twilight asked.

"No."

"What? Then who was it?"

Rainbow Dash grunted and rolled over.

"Years..." Pinkie Pie murmured, looking deep in thought (something else that unnerved Twilight). "So what about somepony you've known... for a life

time? Would they have the right to be even madder?"

"A life- Fluttershy..." Twilight whispered in realization. "You fought with Fluttershy?" she could barely imagine it.

"No." Rainbow Dash said. "We didn't fight." her words made both ponies sigh.

"She hates me, just like she should." Dash's voice was so uncharacteristically quiet that Twilight could barely believe it was her. Her heart sunk like a stone.

"I, I'm sure she doesn't hate you. I don't think Fluttershy has the ability to hate another living creature."

"She hates me. She hates me and I deserve it."

"Dash, don't be like that. I, I understand that it must hurt, but you can move past this."

"No, you don't understand."

"I mean, just because you've known her for years doesn't mean you've been hiding this the whole time...right?" Twilight tried weakly. She saw Rainbow twitch, her wings tightening briefly. She let the silence drag on, but when her friend didn't seem ready to say anything she began to speak. Then Rainbow let out a whisper.

"She was my first crush." the words hung in the air. Twilight's jaw fell open.

"Come again?" she managed to stammer.

"It started way back in flight school. Not right away, but as we grew up...I always just figured it was 'cause she was my best friend. And, well, my only friend." Rainbow Dash rolled back around, uncurling slightly. She finally looked at Twilight and Pinkie as she spoke.

"Then I went to the junior speedsters camp. The other fillies didn't like me. I didn't get why, I didn't know....I didn't care! Gilda and I met because they didn't like her either. I was okay, because I had Gilda at camp and when I

got home....Fluttershy was always around. She must have been so lonely, but she smiled every time." Rainbow Dash sighed, her eyes unfocused as she stared into the past.

"It was Gilda who explained it to me. About how my wings went straight up whenever a cute filly went by. About how I kept staring off at them and not knowing..." Dash blushed. "And that's when I figured out that this whole time, when I thought I just liked Fluttershy as my best friend, I actually..."

"When did...how did you get over it?" Twilight asked. Rainbow Dash grunted again.

"Who said I did?" she asked, closing her eyes. Twilight's eyes widened. When Rainbow looked at them again, her eyes were brimming with tears.

"I knew I could never tell her how I felt. And I knew if I brought...this...up, it'd come out. I tried, but I couldn't get her out of my head. I thought maybe, if I dated someone like Scratch..." Rainbow Dash's voice trailed off. Twilight didn't know what to say. Then they heard the door creak.

Chapter 6

In the low lighting, Vinyl Scratch's purple goggles looked black, lifeless. No emotion showed on her face.

"Vinyl..." Twilight began. Dash had curled up again.

"Would you girls excuse us?" Scratch asked, measuring her words carefully.

"Um, no thanks, we-" Pinkie Pie began, trying to smile, but stopped as Twilight nudged her. She looked back, and seeing Twilight's worried look she dropped the smile. Twilight on her tail, they walked around the bed and out the room, brushing by Vinyl. Scratch entered and shut the door behind her with telekinesis. Rainbow Dash shivered, though the room was quite warm.

"I should get off your-"

"Stay." Scratch's voice was commanding but level as she walked slowly around the bed. Dash stopped moving. Vinyl climbed carefully onto the end of the bed, and there she sat.

"You never mentioned Fluttershy." she said. "What's she like?"

"She, uh..." Dash's throat was suddenly dry.

"She a pegasus?" Vinyl prompted. Dash nodded.

"She's, uh, got a yellow coat" Dash offered. "She's...really quiet. Long pink mane."

"And?" Scratch asked, removing her goggles. Dash closed her eyes.

"Blue eyes. Big, blue eyes." she peeked one eye open as she heard a shuffling sound. Scratch was moving up to her on the bed.

"That first night, Dash. When I told you to wait for me - and you actually did. Out there in the alleyway, of all things. You were going to say something. You thought I didn't notice, did you Dash? What were you going to say before I kissed you?"

"I was....you already know..." Dash said.

"Yeah, you stayed outside to turn me down. You were just too much of a nice girl, and didn't want me to wonder. So I am wondering. Why'd you come home with me?"

"I thought...I thought maybe if I was with you..."

"You'd stop loving Fluttershy?" Vinyl asked. "It doesn't work that way Dash. Tell me, I wanna know. Who do you see when you look at me?" her voice was cold and quiet. Dash wouldn't look up.

"Who do you see? Look at me!" Vinyl shouted. Dash began to cry.

"It's not like that!" she shouted back through her tears. "That was the first night. A-and maybe the second. But then, but then..." she picked herself up, sitting opposite Scratch. "It changed! I love you Vinyl!"

The blow sent Dash spinning, even if it wasn't actually enough to knock her down. Vinyl Scratch sat there, teeth gritted, one hoof still extended where it had struck Dash's face.

"Don't you dare say that! You don't have the right!" she growled.

"It's t-true!" Dash cried, tears streaming down her face.

"Why? Is it these ol' baby blues? Do I look enough like her for you?"

"No, it's not-"

"Then why? Am I cool enough for you Dash? Do I make it easy for you to forget? Or was I just convenient, just some filly who came along? What is it Dash?"

"It's....it's...."

"I thought so-"

"Yes." Dash said quietly, staring at her hooves. Vinyl paused.

"What?"

"It's all that. You wanted me. No one had ever...but you wanted me. And not because I was cool, or fast, or champion of the junior speedster's competition or anything. You just said you liked me." she sniffed. "It was like there was this whole other world, where I could forget them and be with you. And you were 'cool' enough Vinyl. You were cool enough to understand. And when I wouldn't...when I stopped you, the first night, and wouldn't go all the way...and the next and every night, you were cool enough then."

"Dash, that's still no reason-"

"Shut up, I'm not done." Dash said, color coming back into her voice. "You were cool, you were calm, you always had something to say. You're right - I do have a big head, kinda. So you helped me, I guess. You made me slow down and listen to you." she leaned forward, catching Vinyl off guard.

"And there's still a million reasons." Dash continued, looking Vinyl straight in the eye. "I hated myself after the first night. And the second, and every night. And I hated you too. I didn't get why I kept coming back. Until one day..." she was leaning forward so far that Vinyl had started to lose balance. She toppled onto her back and Dash stood up over her, maintaining eye contact. Vinyl felt a splash on her face and realized tears were still leaking down Dash's cheeks.

"One day I realized I didn't care. I still like Fluttershy. I still love her, I guess, I don't care. I didn't want her anymore - I wanted you. And I wanted to love you. I-I don't care if Fluttershy came through this door right now. I don't love her like that. I don't love her like I love you."

"Rainbow..." Vinyl breathed the word. "Say it again."

Rainbow Dash bent down, and pressed her lips to Scratch's. She had kissed Scratch plenty of times before, but this time she was in charge,

instead of just letting the unicorn do as she pleased like always. She bit lightly on Vinyl's lower lip before moving on, reaching inside with her tongue and guiding Vinyl's out to play.

After several moments, Dash finally stood back up. Vinyl took a breath, no doubt her first in a while judging by her dazed expression.

"Vinyl, I love you." Dash said, eyes wet but no longer crying.

"And I love you Dash." Scratch replied.

"Really?"

"Yeah. You were supposed to be a fling," she smiled, "then you went getting me to care about you and all, ya idiot". Dash bent down to nuzzle against Scratch briefly.

"So you forgive me?"

"Oh, I wouldn't say that." Scratch teased. She stopped when she saw Dash's worried frown.

"I'm kidding, light bulb." she laughed, nudging Dash's face playfully with a hoof. Dash winced.

"We should get you some ice for that." Scratch said with a frown. "Now that one's my fault. I'm sorry Dash."

"Hey, no worries" Dash told her with a smile, stepping back to let Scratch up. "Ponies have wanted to knock some sense into me for years. They'll be jealous of you."

"Pffft, when they see what I have to put up with they won't be so jealous." Scratch replied, getting up. "Hey...I mean it, you know."

"What- oh." Dash looked away briefly. "I do too. But...I wish I didn't feel anything for her."

"Now don't say that. You don't mean that."

"I...guess. How can you love me Scratch?"

"You want a sonnet? Come on Dash. We're both just crazy enough for each other. Now, let's get off this bed before I decide not to let you leave at all." Scratch told her, hopping off. Dash followed her with a nervous laugh.

Scratch opened the door and heard a small yelp. She looked around as she exited and saw Twilight and Pinkie sitting a little off in the hall. They were still scrambling to get into place as Scratch exited. She gave them a calm little smile.

"You were right not to want to leave her alone, Pinkie." she said, voice quiet. "I'm surprised you didn't jump in there and take me down."

"Rainbow can handle herself." Pinkie Pie replied. Instead of her usual bubbly smile, the grin on her face was a more knowing smirk. Twilight said nothing, looking conflicted.

"Well, you two can come while we get ice on Dash's face before it swells up like a balloon."

"Heh, don't kid yourself. You don't hit that hard."

"Hit? I'm talking about stopping your swollen ego." Scratch teased as they headed downstairs.

"Hee hee, Dash you'd make a funny balloon!" Pinkie said, apparently back to her old self. Twilight lagged behind.

Vinyl's kitchen was off from her living room, and was the tidiest room yet. Only a sink overflowing with dishes and yet more electronic equipment piled on the table keeping it from true cleanliness. At the least, there was room for the four to sit as Dash held a bag of ice to her face.

"Dash, you know this is your last chance." Vinyl said slowly. Dash tried to give her best questioning look with half her face numb.

"To back out, I mean. I'd understand."

"Heh. I'd hit you for that if I thought you had more ice." Dash replied,

making Vinyl smile. Pinkie Pie tilted her head.

"You guys are both so silly." she told them. "Don't you know you're supposed to kiss it better?" she asked of Scratch. Scratch grinned from ear to ear (a disturbing feat for a pony).

"Heh, Dash, show me where it hurts so I can kiss it better."

"Oh, yeah?" Dash grinned back. "Well it really hurts right about-" she began to shift in her seat.

"A-Hem" Twilight cleared her throat loud enough to derail Rainbow's remark, as well as get all eyes on her.

"This is... an interesting development. But Dash, what does this mean about Fluttershy?"

"I...I don't know..." Rainbow admitted. "I don't know if I can talk to her."

"You can't let that one go, Dash." this came from Scratch. "Not if I'm to believe half of what she means to you."

"What if..." Rainbow looked away. "What if I start to love her again?"

"Dash, and what if that happened?" Scratch asked. Dash gave a sad smile, eyes downcast.

"I don't know if I could see her again."

"Sometimes I wonder if you're soft-hearted or just soft-headed." Vinyl replied, shaking her head. "I appreciate it, but that answer tells me you don't need to worry. I mean it girl, I don't want some downer around all the time."

"I think you really should try talking to her, Rainbow." Twilight added.

"But, what would I say?"

"Duh!" Pinkie Pie piped in. "The truth." all three ponies looked at her for a moment. Across the table, Scratch and Twilight's gazes met.

"You know..." Twilight began.

"That's not a half-bad idea." Vinyl replied, getting a nod from Twilight.

"What?! The truth?" Rainbow asked frantically, "No, see, that's exactly what I couldn't tell her."

"Dash, come on." Twilight said. "Keeping secrets is what started this whole mess."

"Besides" Scratch added "Could you live with yourself?"

"I guess you're right...." Rainbow Dash said. "Maybe tomorrow"

"Rainbow..." Twilight and Scratch said in unison, and in the same tone of voice at that.

"Argh, now I get it twice?" Rainbow complained. "Alright already"

"Oh, and one last thing" Twilight said. Rainbow Dash gave her a flat look.

"Well since you're going out anyway....is there anything you could do about this rain?" she asked.

"Oh, that. Yea no problem" Dash put down the ice bag.

"Hey now, no one said it had to be this second." Scratch told her, reaching out towards Dash. Rainbow began to head around the table.

"Yeah, but you know me. I'll be back before you have to leave for the club." she reached Vinyl and leaned in. They shared a meaningful kiss, stopping just shy of making out.

"That's how you're supposed to do it." Pinkie Pie whispered, leaning over to Twilight. The purple unicorn had decided she was very definitely going to look anywhere else, and was currently studying the ceiling with great fascination. She looked down only once she heard Dash's hoofsteps again. The cyan speedster was already out the door.

"Aww, I didn't ask her if that meant the party was on!" Pinkie Pie complained.

"Pinkie-"

"Party?" Scratch turned to her. Pinkie Pie nodded.

"I wanted to throw it to make Dash feel better. About who she is."

"Now ain't that sweet. Tell you what Sprinkles, why don't you wait until tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow?" Pinkie Pie asked.

"Sure. Tomorrow's my day off."

Pinkie Pie gasped. "You wanna come too?" her face lit up in saccharine joy.

"Would ya have me?" Scratch asked.

"Of course! Oooh, ooh, this is so exciting!" Pinkie Pie was bouncing where she stood, looking ready to explode with glee.

"I think it'll be a bit different from the club, you know." Twilight offered.

"Yeah yeah." Scratch shook her head, still smiling. "Hey, I DJ some normal events too. I know when to tone it down."

"Alright, well, I hope to see you there. Come on Pinkie Pie, we should leave."

"Oh, okay." Pinkie Pie bounced around to Twilight. They trotted towards the front door, Vinyl following just behind.

"So, just one last question." Twilight tried to sound nonchalant. "Do you give nicknames to everypony or what?"

"Nah" Scratch said. "Just the ones I like." she gave a wink to Twilight, making the young mare blush.

"We'll see you around, I guess." Twilight said as they headed for the front door.

"You know Twiddles? Something tells me we'll be seeing a lot more of each other in the near future." Scratch had a coy look about her. Twilight was about to say something when she heard the door open and Pinkie Pie gasp. Both unicorns looked towards her.

"Wow." they said in unison, eyes skyward.

Minutes ago, Rainbow Dash stepped outside with a mission. The rain was still coming down steadily, and it was pretty dark out by now. She had places to be. So this storm cloud? It was kinda in the way. She didn't have time to rope it in or spin it away or anything. There was only one thing she could think to do. Drastic times called for drastic measures.

She took flight in the rain, step one being to get above the clouds. She eyeballed the center of the storm from there and took off towards it. She veered slightly around the center point in a curved path, and then with just the slightest twist of her wings managed a near hairpin turn. She again swerved slightly off center. Then she did a wider turn and came around again. Again and again, she didn't quite hit the center but came at it from every angle. She pumped her wings the entire time, gathering enough speed that she began to leave a multicolored streak in the air behind her. Soon her loops became so fast that she doubled back on her own streak, criss-crossing it in the air. She was disturbing the air, sending it in every direction, and the winds began to collect in the middle. Her constant dodging of the center created a pocket of swirling winds, circling around and around on itself, each pass added momentum. The multi-colored streak she created began to collect as well, creating a rainbow sphere, churning constantly. It was only the size of a small apple cart, but Rainbow knew it'd be enough if she just gave it enough oomph...

"Here we go." she said to herself, gritting her teeth. Pouring it on, she gathered altitude, streaking straight up until her wind-sphere was a speck below. She turned around and shot back towards earth. The wind rushed past in her ears as she headed straight for the sphere.

With a low whoomph and a thunder-like rumble, Dash hit the concentrated winds. The force of the impact was so great it actually knocked her clean sideways in the short time she was inside it, meaning her exit path was parallel to, but off from her entry. The winds dispersed themselves with great force from Rainbow's hit and quickly spread out through the sky. Like ripples in a pond the winds spread out through the storm, creating waves in the system.

The effect of these winds, however, was much greater than that of mere ripples. The storm was pushed out from the center, forcing a hole of clear sky. As the clouds' momentum pushed them against other clouds, more gaps appeared, and soon the entire thing began to break apart. Dash smiled and flew off, not observing her handiwork. So she didn't notice how the broken orb had left a faint ring of rainbow in the sky, or how her path into the sphere had left a much brighter zig-zag cutting clean through the circle. With the fading light making the sky dark, it looked rather eerily like a record with a lightning bolt struck through it.

Dash slowed down as she got to Fluttershy's house. Only the last rays of sunlight remained to give her light to see by. Fluttershy might not even be up, she realized, and she faltered. However, all Dash had to do was think back to Vinyl Scratch to know she had to go through with this. Honestly, the unicorn's eyes were different. They were deeper, more knowledgeable, the eyes of a pony who had seen the wide world. And combined with her wild blue-fire mane, her pale coat over her lithe dancer frame...Rainbow nodded, resolve returning, and knocked loudly on the door. She had to do this.

"Fluttershy! Fluttershy, we need to talk." she called. She heard nothing in response, not even Angel came to the door.

"Fluttershy look. I know you're mad. And you should be. You're my best friend. As in are, not were. I know I can't just fix this, but will you at least let me talk to you?" she shouted at the door. There was silence for a moment before the door cracked open.

"Fluttershy?" Rainbow peeked in. The room was dim, the lights off. She

stepped in, spying Fluttershy just getting back on her couch. She didn't do anything to acknowledge Dash as she entered.

"Look. I'm...sorry's not enough." Dash said, walking over and sitting down on the floor in front of her friend. "I was stupid, I was foalish, and...I was scared, okay? I was afraid of what would happen. Because you meant too much to me." she poured her feelings out, and couldn't stop what came next.

"I love you Fluttershy." the words came so much easier then she expected. Something inside of her of just clicked. Her words weren't false, but....something changed as she said it.

Fluttershy had said nothing however... so Dash kept talking.

"I guess it was when we were still in flight camp. You had the best smile, and you always loved to hug. Or, maybe it was because you thought I was cool before anypony else did. I don't know." she swallowed before continuing.

"And then, after school...I came to Ponyville because you did. Sure, we made friends, but....I just still wanted to be with you. I knew by then that you weren't like me. That you didn't like me back, not like that. But I couldn't stop liking you. So I just figured I'd keep my mouth shut. Because it'd be awkward, and you'd hate me, and I couldn't be your friend. And the longer it got....the worst it got. How could I do anything? You were my best friend."

"Well....I'm done." Rainbow Dash said with a sharp nod. "If I really loved you...I should have told you. I should have done something. But Fluttershy. I...I was wrong. I really am a fillyfooler, and I really do love you....but I was being stupid. You're my friend, my best friend, and that's all you're supposed to be. That's all I want you to be. So, what do you say? Are we....still friends?"

Fluttershy shifted slowly, until she was resting on her underbelly, head up. She looked into her hooves.

"Rainbow?" she asked. If there had been any noises about, Rainbow was sure she couldn't have heard her friend, but everything seemed dead silent except for the two of them.

"You....I don't understand. You love me? But...."

Rainbow walked up closer, sitting just by her. She was smiling. "I do love you. I thought I wanted you to be my fillyfriend." she wished she could think half as quick as she could fly, because she barely understood what she was getting out. "Turns out, I just didn't know....like how....clouds!"

"Clouds?" Fluttershy was only more confused.

"Yeah clouds. Look, you know how to an earth pony, a cloud's a cloud? But we know all the different clouds there are, and which ones make rain, which ones form at which height? It's like that."

"You love me...like a cloud."

"No no. I'm saying I'm a fillyfooler, and like an earth pony with clouds, I thought that meant that if I loved you, that meant I wanted to be your fillyfriend. That there was only one type of love. But I know better. There's different kinds of clouds, just like there's different kinds of love. And I love you....but not like a fillyfriend or anything. You're my best friend, and that's just as special."

"Rainbow Dash...." Fluttershy closed her eyes. "I believe you. I understand."

"You...do?"

"Yes, because I love you too." Fluttershy said. She opened her eyes. "I thought, I thought you didn't tell me because you didn't trust me. I thought I had done something wrong. I thought...I wasn't your friend anymore."

"No. I wish I could do it all over."

"I don't." Fluttershy said, smiling and turning to face Dash.

"Huh?"

"Because, well, now I know how special you are to me. And, um, me to you?"

"Yeah" Rainbow said with a smile.

"I'm, um, sorry I ever doubted you, Dash."

"Sorry? I'm surprised you didn't give me a matching bruise." Rainbow Dash replied, brushing her cheek.

"Oh my gosh!" Fluttershy leaped to her feet "Rainbow, are you okay? What happened?"

"Heh, I'm fine. You can say I finally got the sense knocked into me."

"Let me get you some ice." Fluttershy insisted, getting off the couch.

"I'm fine, really!"

"Stay here." Fluttershy wasn't hearing it. Dash sighed. She glanced to the door, briefly considering making a run for it, but decided it better if she stuck around.

"There we are." a moment later, and Fluttershy was holding another ice bag to Dash's face. Dash flinched away.

"I can do it Fluttershy." she complained.

"Hold still please." Fluttershy insisted, reaching up and pushing against Dash's unbruised cheek to force Dash's head straight. And suddenly, there they were. Face to face, inches apart. Dash stared into her big, innocent eyes, and....nothing. It was just Fluttershy.

"Thanks Fluttershy." Dash said. Her best friend in Equestria blushed and let go.

"I'm sorry."

"Nah, it's fine." Rainbow assured her, taking the ice from her.

"Would you...can you make it home at this time of night?" Fluttershy asked, turning to the window.

"Time of - ahh, it's nighttime! I'm late!" Dash jumped up as she saw the last rays of light fade from the sky. She dashed to the door, froze, and turned around.

"ThanksFluttershylloveyoubye!" she practically tackled Fluttershy into a hug, holding the other pegasus tight. She dashed out the door again, leaving behind the ice pack. Fluttershy reeled, but was smiling brilliantly.

"Great party, Pinkie Pie!" Twilight congratulated her friend as she entered the Sugarcube corner. It was a typical Pinkie Pie bash, and most of the guests didn't even know what it was for. The guest list had been 'sure, come on in', so as far as anypony knew it was a party because it had been more than three days since Pinkie Pie had thrown her last one.

"Thanks! Isn't it nice?" Pinkie Pie bounced along as Twilight trotted inside. "Oooh, and there's the guests of honor!" she turned back to the door right before it opened. Twilight didn't question how she knew, but sure enough in stepped Vinyl Scratch and Rainbow Dash, hip-to-hip, right on cue. Pinkie Pie was upon them before they were all the way through the door. Twilight looked beside her to only see a Pinkie-Pie-sized void where the party pony had just been. She rolled her eyes and trotted up to them.

"Hey Scratch, hey Dash. I haven't seen you pretty much since yesterday." she directed the second half of her comment at Dash.

"Heh. Sorry Twiddles." Vinyl responded first. "I was keeping her busy." She smirked, her goggles glinting mischievously in the light. "Sweet party Pinkie Pie. Thanks for not throwing it any earlier."

"Thanks! There's cake, and punch, and surprises, and, and I hope you like the music!"

"Haha, it's awesome. Come on Dash, you haven't seen me cut a rug, have you?"

"Who actually says that?" Dash teased, following Scratch onto the dance floor. Twilight laughed and shook her head.

"You know, I really think those two are right for each other." Twilight told Pinkie Pie. The pink partier nodded excitedly.

"I'm so happy for them!" with that, she bounced off. Twilight decided to enjoy the party herself and walked around, eventually getting some punch. She came across Rarity at the table.

"Hi Rarity, are you enjoying the party?"

"Hmm? Oh yes, delightful as always." Rarity gave a distracted reply, not noticing Twilight for a moment. Twilight looked to where she had been and noticed Rainbow and Vinyl dancing. Vinyl was as smooth as she claimed, her hooves going in time with every beat, her tail sashaying with perfect rhythm. Rainbow Dash wasn't so experienced, but bopped along well enough besides her.

"It is simply hard to imagine. I mean, I never would have expected this. From Rainbow Dash or Vinyl Scratch, honestly."

"Did you know Vinyl?" Twilight asked.

"Oh, not personally. I do prefer the more...eloquent side of fashion, but I do pay attention to what's considered 'hip'. And according to Pony magazine, Scratch defined hip in Manehattan."

"Oh, I didn't know that. She never mentioned."

"Mhm, I guess she really did leave it all behind. To be honest, doesn't she seem a bit...odd?"

Twilight gave a nervous chuckle. "Rarity, you could say that about all of us, really." upon seeing Rarity's expression, she added, "Oh, except you of course."

Rarity mulled this over. "No, I suppose you're right. I'm sorry dear, don't mind me. I'm sure she's a lovely pony. It will take some getting used to is all."

"Well, that's...understandable" Twilight said weakly. The song ended, and

Pinkie Pie could be seen trotting up to the record player. Scratch intercepted her, leaned in, and whispered into her ear. Pinkie Pie nodded enthusiastically.

"Alright, fillies and gentlecolts!" Scratch called out over the din. "Hope you don't mind a slight change of pace." she walked up to the record player, her horn glowing. Twilight saw the record player change, just slightly. The speaker seemed wider and bulkier than before. Scratch flipped the record over, put the needle to it, and let the music play.

"Oh, what is this noise!?" Rarity asked as Scratch's music began to play. She had clearly done something to the record as well, for it certainly wasn't Pinkie's usual fare. The music was faster, much faster, and Twilight couldn't imagine what instrument would make these noises. And Scratch was still doing something to it - occasionally she would stop it with her hoof, even wind it the other way, interrupting the fast beat with strange scratches and noises.

"If this is hip, she can have it!" Rarity complained, shielding her ears. Most ponies, however, seemed to warm up to it, finding their heads bouncing in time with the rhythm, including Twilight herself.

"I like it!" she retorted, trotting away from Rarity and towards the dance floor. She could see everypony having a good time; in the middle of the floor, Pinkie Pie seemed to have reinvented the robot on the spot. Twilight laughed and looked around for the rest of her friends. She spotted Applejack and Rainbow Dash dancing together to the side.

"Hey guys!" she said, finding her hooves skipping along of their own volition.

"Whooee! Howdy Twilight! Enjoying the party?"

"Ha ha, I sure am! Here I thought Scratch would have wanted a day off from work." Twilight found the skipping wouldn't stop, her hooves demanding she dance to the beat.

Dash grinned as she pranced about. "Hey, music's what she does. You don't take a break from magic, do you?"

"I guess not." Twilight said. "I didn't think about it that way."

"This music ain't what Ah'm used to, but it sure does move yur hooves, don' it?" Applejack asked. Twilight nodded, but realized that it was probably imperceptible from the normal bobs of her head right now.

"I'm really happy for you, Dash. She's a great pony." Twilight said earnestly. Dash beamed, prompting Applejack to give her a quick nudge.

"You're head over hooves, ain' you pardner?"

"I guess." Dash replied, still smiling but with a slight blush to her face. She looked towards Scratch, who was immersed in the music, her horn glowing as the rhythm suddenly changed.

"So what about it, Dash?" Applejack prompted. "You two keepin' it under hat or what?"

"You know what?" Dash trotted away from both ponies without another word. Applejack and Twilight traded a confused glance. Dash made her way towards Vinyl. She waited for the song to end before getting up to her.

"Thank you ladies and gentlecolts. It's a..." she trailed off as she saw Dash approaching, grin on her face. A smile spread across her own face, and her goggles glinted brightly.

"Got something to say, light bulb?" she asked. Dash shook her head, got right up to Vinyl Scratch, leaned in, and planted a soft kiss on her lips.

"Well now..." Applejack said softly, watching the display. A lot of ponies had noticed the interruption (especially as the kiss dragged on) and there were confused and surprised murmurs all about. Then, there was a single little cheer.

"Oh, aren't they the cutest?" Fluttershy asked, clopping her hooves against the ground excitedly. The other ponies around were taken aback - Fluttershy barely talked to her friends, but now she was quite happily turned to any pony in range.

"I'm so happy for them, aren't you?" she asked one pony. "Love is so

beautiful." she told another.

"Excuse me!" a square-jawed stallion said behind her, looking disgruntled.

"Yes?" Fluttershy drew out the word as she turned around. And there it was. Ponies only glanced by her Stare would later recall feeling like they had looked into a starless night, a void so pure it threatened to swallow them. Others simply around Fluttershy felt a sudden chill, finding themselves backing away.

"Good for them." The stallion said, looking as meek as a mouse. Fluttershy's gaze shifted, and with a smile she went about chatting with the other ponies, all of whom agreed (either readily or reluctantly) that it was great to see Rainbow Dash had found someone, how brave they were to come out, and how nice it was that they all lived in a town that understood that love was love.

"You got some amazing friends, light bulb." Scratch whispered as they ended their kiss. She stroked Dash's cheek.

"Don't I know it?"

"Encore, encore!" Pinkie Pie cheered from the dance floor. Scratch grinned.

"I don't think she means the kiss." she said.

"Bring the noise, Thunder."

"You got it, Lightning."

Epilogue

Dash headed over to the drink bar the club offered, which was the farthest from the stage as she could get. While normally a bit of a journey thanks to the crowded dance floor, tonight it had taken her practically half the night to make it. After her little coming out party, every pony in the club had something to say or ask her about. A few were wondering about coming out themselves, figuring maybe it wasn't such a shameful thing to be a fillyfooler. Some just wanted to know how serious she and Scratch were, which was a bit annoying. And a lot, a whole lot of ponies wanted to know about Fluttershy. Half still didn't believe they didn't have a chance. Rainbow rolled her eyes recalling that.

Still, even though Dash had always reveled in attention, it felt a little weird to have everypony's eyes on her. There were a few in the town that didn't seem comfortable talking to her, though no one had said anything untoward. They seemed to know - either first hoof or by word of mouth - that anyone who had something to say to Rainbow Dash would have to go through Fluttershy. Not that the rest of her friends hadn't been there in their own ways.

Rainbow got herself a drink and looked around. She really should get to know some more ponies around the club better. She still had hours to spend before Scratch had her break, let alone was ready to leave. The unicorn insisted that Dash didn't have to be here every night, but for now Dash still wanted to hang around. She could tell that deep down, Scratch was thankful for it. However, that still left Dash several hours with nothing to do. She needed to find somepony in the club to get along with, ideally somepony who wouldn't make a move on her either.

"Haha, thanks for the advice. I don't know I'm ready to try yet, but we'll see." a familiar voice caught Dash's attention from nearby. She turned around, and her jaw dropped at the pony she spotted chatting to Lyra.

"Twilight?!"

~~The End~~