

***THE CUPCAKE CHRONICLES***

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## Table of Contents

<i>A Precious Rainbow</i> .....	3
<i>The Cupcake killer</i> .....	44
<i>Apple of Her Eye</i> .....	60
<i>Confessions of Love</i> .....	67
<i>Investigations of a Nightmare</i> .....	73
<i>The Journal of the Cupcake Killer</i> .....	80
<i>Rainbow After the Storm</i> .....	112

***A Precious Rainbow***

***By milespower06***

## Chapter 1

### 1.1 - THE RESCUE

"Dash. Daaash. Wake up." Rainbow Dash managed to give her a modicum of weak acknowledgment.

Pinkie reached into the medicine bag and produced a large syringe.

"Alright, time for the last round."

Dash looked at the needle, and Pinkie took that as a question as to what it was.

"Something to take the pain away." she informed as she walked around to Dash's ruined back side. She stuck the needle into the lower part of her spine. Dash flinched.

Coming to the front again, she told her friend, "In a few minutes, you won't be able to feel anything below your ribcage. Then you'll be able to stay awake to watch the harvest."

Dash started to cry again.

"Pinkie." she trembled out.

"Yeah?"

"I want to go home." she openly sobbed.

"Yeah, I can see wanting to do that." the party pony replied.

"Sometimes, I just wanna give up, say 'I'm done with this mess' and go to bed. But you know what? You can't shrug off your responsibilities. You got to pull yourself up and meet the challenges head on. That's the only way you're gonna get ahead in life."

Dash cried.

Minutes passed and the drug took affect. Dash was numb from her chest to her flanks. Aware of this, Pinkie approached with her scalpel.

Suddenly, the door to the room burst open, and Pinkie whipped around to face the intruder.

Applejack burst into the basement, and took a split-second to take in scene that greeted her. The room reeked of urine, blood, and death, and there were pony skulls, medical knives and needles all around. And at the center of it all, was Rainbow Dash restrained to wooden planks, and Pinkie, eyeing her with the scalpel.

"Pinkie, 'ah don't know what you're thinkin', but I'mma give you one chance to drop that knife, now."

Pinkie looked dumbstruck for just a moment; as if AJ was out of line for giving her orders in *her* basement. After a couple seconds, she blinked, and gave an enraged scream as she charged AJ with the scalpel.

Applejack, remaining collected, took a small leap forward, swiftly rotated 180 degrees on her front legs, and gave the insane Pinkie a full force buck to the chin with both back hooves. The move sent Pinkie airborne, back-flipping wildly towards the back right corner of

the room, where her head slammed into a wooden table with knives on it. The momentum broke her neck on contact, and the pink pony landed limp in a heap on the floor, completely motionless.

Dead.

As several knives on the table clattered to the floor from the crash, AJ quickly approached Rainbow, growing more wide-eyed the closer she got.

"Oh, Equestria..." she said disbelievingly. It seemed that Rainbow wasn't aware of anything that had happened in the last few seconds, her eyes wandering aimlessly.

AJ grabbed the dropped scalpel, and went immediately for the leather straps restraining Rainbow to the planks. First the legs, then the arms, and Rainbow collapsed onto the cobblestone floor, where her body began to go into shock.

"Rainbow? Dash? Stay with me, Rainbow, ya hear? Stay with me. Rainbow!"

Applejack desperately fought back the panic. If she didn't do something, and fast, her friend was going to die. Answers for this horrific sight would have to wait. Rainbow needed help, now. Before dropping the scalpel, she quickly cut through the copper wires that were wrapped around nails that had been hammered into her back hooves and connected to a power box on the far wall. Spotting a discarded bucket nearby, she resisted the nausea as best she could, and placed Rainbow's dismembered wings and cutie marks into the bucket before placing the unconscious Pegasus on her back, taking the rope handle of the bucket in her mouth, and raced out of the basement as fast as she could.

She came bursting out of Sugarcube Corner into the black of night. Making sure to keep her friend balanced on her back, she galloped as fast as she could to Ponyville Urgent Care.

Minutes later, she came bolting through the doors of the care center, dropping the bucket on the tile floor and screaming for help. The desk attendant quickly alerted two orderlies, and they rolled out a gurney into the lobby, placing the unconscious Rainbow Dash onto it, and rolled her into the ER, quickly signaling for a doctor's immediate attention. Applejack's eyes were locked on her friend all the way to the shutting ER doors; the last sight of her was blood starting to trickle from the Pegasus' mouth.

The events of the night finally catching up to her, Applejack resisted the urge to vomit one last time, and passed out in the lobby.

PONYVILLE LIBRARY

ONE HOUR LATER

Twilight Sparkle's sound sleep was interrupted by a rapid pounding on her front door. Yawning, she made her way down the stairs to greet whoever wanted her attention at 2 in the morning.

She opened the door to a panicked Fluttershy and Rarity.

"We need to get to Ponyville Urgent Care right now! Something serious has happened!" Fluttershy quickly told her.

"What's going on?" Twilight asked, still waking up, and her concern growing.

"We don't know. The messenger pony didn't say anything specific. Just that two of our friends were at the care center, and one of them had been admitted to the ER. I went to get Rarity and then you. Come on, we need to hurry!"

Together, the three of them raced to Ponyville Urgent Care to see what the trouble was. When they ran into the waiting room, it was empty, save for Applejack, sitting in the row of chairs next to the doors to the ER, with her hat resting on the chair next to her. She looked like she had seen a ghost.

"Applejack? What's wrong? What's happened?"

The farm workhorse turned to her friends with tired, desperate eyes. Tears pricked the corners of her eyelids, and her lips trembled.

"It's Rainbow..."

"What's happened to her?"

"I... 'ah don't know for sure..."

Twilight looked around the waiting room again.

"One of us should go find Pinkie Pie."

"No...no ya don't." Applejack answered.

"Why not? What's going on?"

AJ swallowed hard, and prepared to do her best at describing what she had just seen earlier that night.

By the time she had finished explaining the last hour or so to her three friends in the waiting room with her, each of them looked as confused and horrified as she.

"Wh-why would she do such a thing?" Twilight shakily asked.

"Ah haven't the faintest idea, Twi'. I didn't mean to kick her so hard either. I just saw Rainbow, and when Pinkie came at me with that knife, I just made a split-second decision. And judging from what was in that room, I don't think Rainbow was the first victim. Not even close."

"I just hope they can help her..." Fluttershy said softly.

"Ah really hope so, too, Fluttershy. She didn't look good when they took her in there. Not good at all." AJ said.

It was another 30 minutes before a nurse pony came quietly trotting out into the waiting room. The 4 friends were immediately on their feet, anxious for any news.

They prayed it was good.

"Well?" Applejack asked.

"We managed to stabilize her. You got her here just in time." the nurse reported.

"Oh thank Celestia..."

"But I'm afraid it's not looking good. She was clearly tortured. We removed the nails from her back hooves, and administered antibiotics. Hopefully that will stop any infection. Her heart's been jolted by prolonged electrocution, so we're keeping a very close eye on that, to see if there's any permanent damage to her heart. As for what you...brought in with her...we were able to sew her cutie marks back on. Hopefully those will heal up, and be no worse for wear, and the muscle tissue that was removed from that area will hopefully heal too. But...I'm afraid we weren't able to do anything about her wings..."

"No...are you sure?"

"I'm sorry, I don't know what to say. We smoothed down the jagged edges from where they were broken. If her skin heals up, they'll just be small stubs on her back. She might be able to pass for an earth pony, but...I'm sorry, we've never dealt with anything like this before. We did the best we could. Aside from the doubtless psychological harm, she'll carry some of these physical scars for the rest of her life. But...but at least you got her here alive."

AJ collapsed onto her back haunches, looking like she was about to break down into tears.

"Can we see her?" Rarity asked.

"I wouldn't recommend that. At least not until morning. She's asleep. Once we're sure she's stable enough, we'll move her out of Intensive Care to a private room tomorrow, and then you can see her. And as far as I know, Royal Guards have quarantined off Sugarcube Corner, so hopefully we'll get some answers soon."

"Th-thank you, nurse." AJ shakily said.

The nurse nodded. "Again, I'm so sorry." She then walked back into the ER, and left the four friends alone in the waiting room.

The events of the night finally coming to a climax, AJ's shoulders heaved, and she quietly wept. With there being no words to say yet, Twilight, Rarity, and Fluttershy gathered around her, put their arms around each other, and held each other silently.

## 1.2 - SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS

### PONYVILLE URGENT CARE

#### 7 HOURS LATER

The next morning, Applejack awoke to a gentle touch on her shoulder, and looked up to see the nurse.

"Rainbow's been moved to Room 104. She's still sleeping, but you can go and see her if you want." she quietly said, as the other three were still sleeping.

"Thank you, ma'am."

"And I thought you'd like to know that the investigation at Sugarcube Corner is now underway, and Pinkie's body has been moved to a secure location to be examined. Hopefully they'll get some answers for these atrocities."

With that, the nurse returned to her rounds, and Applejack went about waking her friends, and they immediately made their way down the private wing to Room 104.

Upon entering the room as quietly as they could, they shared a hushed gasp as they looked at their friend.

Rainbow Dash lay silent in the hospital bed; chest slowly rising and falling. An oxygen mask was strapped around her muzzle, and was connected to a wheezing respirator next to the bed. Her mane was still unkempt and frazzled from the electrocution. Suction-cupped wires went from her chest to a slow but steadily-beeping heart monitor. Her entire midsection was wrapped in gauze bandages, joined with her flanks, back hooves and calves.

Applejack slowly approached the side of the bed.

"Oh Sugarcube...if only 'ah had gotten there sooner..."

Twilight came up next to her and placed a hoof on her friend's shoulder.

"You got her out of there alive. That's the best you could do."

"Thanks, Twi'. Would one of y'all mind letting Big Macintosh know to try and do what he can at the farm? If he can't, just put it on hold. I ain't leavin' her side until she's on her feet."

"We'll get another messenger. I don't think any of us want to leave her."

And so they sat there silently, waiting for their friend to come to...and wondering what was next.

Feeling slowly returned to Rainbow Dash's body. Her vision faded in and out, and by the time it cleared completely, she found herself staring at a pasty white ceiling, and she heard a raspy wheezing sound, and steady beeping.

"Hey everypony, I think she's waking up." she heard a familiar voice say.

Rainbow very slowly lifted her head off of the pillow, and saw four of her friends around the bed. She noticed the heart monitor and respirator next to her bed before returning to the pillow. She didn't utter a word yet. No doubt everything was still a haze.

"How ya feelin', sugar?" Applejack asked. Rainbow turned her head to the left side of the bed and locked eyes with her friend, slowly reaching a hoof up and removing the oxygen mask and allowed it to hang around her neck.

"Wh-what...h-happened?" Rainbow asked, her voice hoarse, not even above a whisper.

"Well, ya told me you'd come by the farm for some apple pie last night, and when you didn't show up, I thought somethin' was up. I asked around Ponyville at sunset, and no one had seen you or Pinkie all day. I went to Sugarcube Corner, and found the place dark and empty. I was about to leave when I heard a faint scream



come from under the floor. It sounded like you, so I found the trap door under one of the rugs, and I got to you as fast as I could..." Rainbow took it all in, and shuddered at the all-too-fresh memories of the horror she just experienced.

"P-Pinkie...? Is...she...?"

AJ silently shook her head.

"She's gone, Dash. When I saw what she was doing to you, I took matters into my own hooves. I just hope my hasty decision doesn't keep us from getting answers to why she was doing this."

Rainbow shakily exhaled. She rolled over on her side towards Applejack, and immediately noticed what they were all afraid she'd notice.

"M-my...my wings..." she said, her eyes tearing up.

Applejack swallowed hard, placing her front hooves gently on Rainbow's.

"Ah'm so, so sorry, Rainbow. They did everything they could for ya."

Rainbow's eyes widened at the horrifying, life-changing realization. She shuddered, and rolled onto her other side, looking away from her friends and revealing her bandaged back. There were two round red stains on the gauze where her wings should have protruded from her body. She covered her mouth and tried to suppress a sob, her shoulders heaved.

"Rainbow, ah'm...a'hm so very sorry..." AJ softly said, her voice uneasy, placing a hoof on Rainbow's shoulder, gently rolled her back over and pulled her into a hug.

Rainbow returned the hug, threw her front legs around Applejack, and burst into an uncontrollable sob, burying her face into AJ's shoulder, clinging to the workhorse as if for dear life.

"Now don't you worry none," Applejack shakily told her, beginning to cry herself. "We'll find a way through this. It'll be okay, ya hear?" Fluttershy, Rarity, and Twilight stood by silently, tears flowing down their cheeks, all of them collectively sharing this pain, watching as the two friends held each other and cried.

When the nurse came in a half-hour later, and suggested that they let Rainbow get some rest, Rainbow was the first to refute her, claiming they could stay for as long as they wanted, and she'd rest easier with them there.

The nurse pony gave in, and said that if all goes well, Rainbow would be out of the hospital in a day or two, and be able to recover abroad.

When that night came, the time came for her friends to insist that she be left alone for some rest, but assured her that they'd be just out in the waiting room, and that they weren't going anywhere.

Fluttershy was the last one out, and Rainbow softly called her back.

"F-Fluttershy?" Rainbow softly called her.

The light yellow Pegasus turned, and walked to her friend's bed.

"Yes, Rainbow Dash? Do you need something?"

"I'd like you to do me a favor, if you can."

"Of course, Rainbow. Anything. What do you need me to do?"

Fluttershy was the last one to join her friends out in the waiting room for the night, and they noticed the slightly concerned look on her face.

"What is it, Fluttershy?" Twilight asked.

"Rainbow just asked me to move some stuff out of her home, and have the Cloudsdale movers take it back up.

"Well, that was certainly fast." Rarity commented.

"Maybe she's trying to accept it and move on." Fluttershy offered.

"Or maybe she doesn't want to have to see it when she gets outta here..." Applejack stated.

Rainbow Dash trying to live the life of an earth pony. No one could fathom it yet. But they were going to have to, and quickly.

Then Rarity was hit with an idea.

"Twilight, could you help me with something?"

"Sure, what do you need?"

"I know one of us should be here at all times, but I just had a brilliant idea that would lift Rainbow's spirits when she gets out of here. If Fluttershy is going to be busy at Rainbow's house, could you take the first watch, Applejack?"

"Don't y'all worry. I ain't leavin'." AJ answered.

"Fantastic. Twilight, I'm hoping you could get me a meeting with the Princess!"

"I...suppose that can be arranged. But what can she do?"

"She can set up a meeting with someone who can help me."

"So...you want me to set up a meeting to ask if you can set up a meeting?"

"I know if anyone can do it, it's you, Twilight."

### 1.3 – GET WELL SOON

#### PONYVILLE

#### THE NEXT MORNING

Fluttershy silently walked through the living area of Rainbow Dash's cloud home above Ponyville. She spotted her golden tiara from the Grand Galloping Gala in its polished oak display box. She picked it up, examined it thoughtfully, and gently closed the box and put it in her saddlebag, joining her neatly folded gala dress and a few Wonderbolts posters.

Rainbow had asked her to gather up a few sentimental items from her home, and then allow the Cloudsdale Movers to take the whole cloud formation back up to Cloudsdale.

She couldn't help but continue to question her friend's decision to do so. It felt like she was giving in. Flying was her passion,

her *life*; it was *who she was*, and Pinkie had taken it all away, for reasons that were still unknown.

She took one last glance around Rainbow's former home, and exited through the front door. Before taking off from the front step, she took one last item from her saddle bag, an empty glass jar. She took off the lid, and walked over to the gently flowing rainbow fountain, and placed the open jar under the flowing spectrum of colors until it was three quarters full, and then closed the jar and flew back to Ponyville.

CANTERLOT

1 HOUR LATER

"I'm certainly impressed that you were able to schedule a short meeting on a night's notice, Twilight. How do you do it?"

"Being the Princess' protege has it's perks sometimes. But what exactly do you have in mind?"

"Oh, I don't want to spoil any surprises, or get anypony's hopes up."

The two unicorns strolled into the Princess' castle, and were immediately summoned to her audience chamber, where she was waiting at the top of a short staircase lined with a red carpet. They approached and gave a bow.

"Twilight, Rarity; a pleasure to see you two again. I wish it was under better circumstances. My complete sympathies to you and your friends, and especially Rainbow Dash. It seems we've found our source of the disappearances in Ponyville over the past few months. I've got my top investigators working on it."

"Actually, Princess, Rainbow is why we're here. Rarity has a favor to ask."

Rarity stepped forward.

"Your highness, I'm not sure how much you know of what's happened to her, but her life will never be the same. I'd like to make a garment for her to hide her...deformity, and also to lift her spirits. But I need permission to use the pattern, as well as a little help. I'm wondering if you could put me in touch with a certain someone."

"I'll certainly see what I can do, Rarity. Who do you need to see?"

PONYVILLE URGENT CARE

Big Macintosh walked into the main lobby of the care center just after dawn, with a picnic basket, and gave it to a waiting and yawning Applejack.

"Thanks, Mac. I know she'll like this better than the food they're wheelin' around in here."

Macintosh nodded at her sister.

"Eeeyup. Hope she gets out of here soon. We don't want things to start backing up at the farm."

"Well, let it back up, brother. As long as it doesn't get as bad as last year's Applebuck season, Rainbow is the priority right now."

The siblings parted, and AJ headed for Rainbow's room.

The rainbow-maned pegasus looked half-depressed, yet half-grateful to be alive.

"Appplejack, you don't have to do this." Rainbow said, not wanting to be a bother.

"Nonsense. What better way to get you on your feet sooner than to get you some farm-fresh breakfast?" AJ responded, opening the picnic basket on the nightstand, and coming up with a plate of apple cinnamon crisp, and a shiny, freshly picked red delicious apple.

"Did ya sleep well?" AJ asked her friend as she started into the tart.

"No, not really." Rainbow said, taking a second bite of the tart.

"I'm scared, AJ. What...what am I gonna do now?"

"*Anything*. Anything you want, Sugarcube. Now I know it ain't the easiest thing to do right now, but try and think on the bright side. A fresh start. Try not to view things as how you lived as a true Pegasus. I hope you don't take that the wrong way. I know this is devastating for you."

Rainbow didn't reply to that, and merely continued eating her breakfast.

"Also, Rainbow, where are ya gonna stay when you get outta here?" AJ asked.

Rainbow shrugged, popping the last bit of crisp into her mouth.

"I...I hadn't really given it any thought. I'm sure there's a inn somewhere in Ponyville that'll give me a night or two."

"I just want you to know, that my door is open anytime. Anytime, Rainbow. I'd be honored to have you as my guest. I don't think this is nowhere near a good time for you to be anywhere alone. There'll always be a room available for you. Just keep that in mind, alright?"

Rainbow nodded.

"Thanks, AJ. I will."

CAROUSEL BOUTIQUE

6 HOURS LATER

Twilight watched Rarity as she expertly fed fabric through her sewing machine, preparing her new garment for Rainbow.

"I'm surprised the Princess made it happen so fast. I'd be thrilled if I could finish this in time for Rainbow getting out of the hospital. I don't want everypony looking at her bandages. She'll need to be able to relax, and not worry what all of Ponyville is thinking of her if she's going to make a speedy recovery."

"Even if she's the most relaxed pony in Ponyville, I doubt her recovery will be anything but speedy. Who knows what happened to her down there..."

"Which is why I'm hoping that this will help lift her spirits and make the emotional recovery a bit easier."

"I can't imagine why it wouldn't, Rarity. I know she's gonna love it!"

PONYVILLE URGENT CARE

2 HOURS LATER

Applejack hoped that Rainbow was released from here soon, because she looked bored, depressed, and annoyed by the constant beeping of her heart monitor. She hoped a friendly face would help, when Fluttershy walked in to see how she was doing.

"Hey Rainbow. I gathered up what you wanted me to. I put it at my house until you figure out where you're going."

"Thanks, Fluttershy. I appreciate it."

"Hey, where'd Rarity and Twilight run off to?" Applejack asked.

"They went up to Canterlot this morning. They haven't been seen since."

A nurse on her rounds came in to check up on Dash.

"Heart rate's slowly getting better...blood pressure is normal. If everything stays good, I'd say you could be out of here sometime tomorrow morning. I'll be back in a few hours, let us know if you need anything."

Dash sunk her head back into her pillow with a sigh.

"I want to know what happened to Pinkie. What caused her to do this..."

"I hope they find something," Fluttershy began. "The fact that she did this without any kind of explanation, to so many ponies, is frightening."

"I wonder..." Rainbow began, looking deep in thought for a few moments.

"What is it, Dash?" AJ asked.

"Remember when we threw that surprise party for her a few months ago?"

"Yeah."

"When I went to go get her, something...wasn't right. She had placed all these inanimate objects at the table, and were talking to them and making up their own voices like they were alive. It was just...creepy. I wonder if that had anything to do with it. I'd never seen her like that before."

"At least it's over. Even if we don't get any clear answers, she'll never hurt anypony else." Fluttershy said.

"There had to have been something wrong. She acted like her normal happy and joyful self when she was doing those...things to me..." Rainbow recalled, shuddering, not wanting to think about it. As evening came, Applejack and Fluttershy were asked by the staff to return to the waiting room, and they encouraged her to try her best to rest, and if all goes well, they'd help her get going in the morning.

But as she left the room, AJ couldn't get that depressed look in Rainbow's eyes out of her head.

## 1.4 – RAINBOW RELEASED

### PONYVILLE URGENT CARE CENTER

#### THE NEXT MORNING

When Applejack woke up in the waiting room the next morning, Fluttershy was at the desk, making sure everything was good for Rainbow leaving the hospital today, and sitting in the chairs across from AJ, were Rarity and Twilight. Rarity looked like she hadn't gotten much sleep.

In her hooves, was a white gift box.

"Ya got it done that quickly?" Applejack asked, giving out a yawn.

Rarity returned one.

"Yes indeed. It took most of the night, but I wanted it to be done in time for her getting out."

Fluttershy returned from the reception desk.

"They just have to do one more check-up, and then she's good to go. I just hope she can walk out of here. Especially with those back hooves..."

"I'm sure she'll do fine. She's stubborn like that." AJ reassured.

A half-hour later, a nurse came from around the corner from the private wing, and behind her, came Rainbow, walking uneasily, but gave her friends a small smile as they came over to her.

"Miss Dash, I still don't know why you won't take a wheelchair for the first few days." the nurse said.

"I can walk just fine, see?" Rainbow responded, wincing at her next step.

"Rainbow, maybe she's right. Maybe a chair would be best until-"

Twilight began, only to be interrupted by the Pegasus.

"If I can't walk out of here, then I'm not leaving yet. I'm not letting all of Ponyville see me roll through town in a wheelchair. The bandages are bad enough..." she mused.

"Well then Rainbow, I've got just the thing for you!" Rarity chimed in, presenting her the gift box.

Rainbow gave a small, friendly sigh.

"Rarity, if you've made me another frou-frou, lacey outfit that I have to-" Rainbow began to protest, but then Rarity slowly opened the box, and Rainbow stopped mid-sentence.

Inside the box, was a neatly folded navy blue hoodie, with a yellow lightning bolt pattern going down the back and chest. Rainbow immediately noticed it as the pattern for the Wonderbolt flight uniforms.

On top of the hoodie, was a pair of silver goggles, with a lightning bolt between the two lenses.

"Twilight and Princess Celestia pulled some strings, and got me a meeting with Spitfire. We explained what had happened, and she decided to make you an honorary Wonderbolt!"

Rainbow bit her bottom lip, as tears quickly filled her eyelids.

Dash was absolutely speechless. She looked at Rarity, before tears ran down her cheeks, and she began quietly and joyfully weeping. Rarity handed the box to Twilight, and she came in and gave her a gentle hug.

"You don't need to say anything, darling. I was happy to do it, and so was Spitfire."

Releasing Rainbow from the embrace. Rarity grabbed the shoulders of the hoodie and lifted it from the box, it unfurled as she lifted it, and together with Applejack, they got it over her head and on her without causing any pain to her bandaged areas, and once it was on completely, her back and chest were completely concealed. Only her bandaged back hooves and part of her flanks were visible. Then Applejack gave the goggles black elastic a stretch, put them over Rainbow's head, and let them hang loosely from her neck.

"Perfect. Now, if everypony stares, it'll be because of how amazing you look!"

But the nurse still had a job to do, and instructions to give her newly released patient.

"Now Miss Dash, you need to be back here in 2 days so we can replace all your bandages. And stay off those back hooves as much as you can. Drink plenty of fluids, and get some rest."

Rainbow finally acknowledged the nurse, nodding. But all her friends knew that Rainbow didn't like to sit still for very long. And if she wouldn't be flying, what *would* she be doing?

"So where are you staying, Rainbow?" Twilight asked as the group exited through the front doors of the Care Center, out into the morning sun. It was the first rays of light Rainbow had gotten in 4 days.

"Well, tonight I'm staying at the Ponyville Traveler's Inn. After that, I...I really don't know where I'm going yet."

"Well, Applejack told us about her offer, and each of us are extending it. You can stay with any of us, Rainbow. We don't care who you stay with, but we don't think it's a good idea for you to be alone." Rarity said.

"Thanks guys, but now that I'm out of there, I need some time to myself, to figure out where I'm going to go from here."

Each of her friends silently disagreed, but it was her choice. They weren't going to force her. The four of them walked her to the Traveler's Inn, and the innkeeper gladly gave her a room for the night free of charge. News was starting to spread throughout town that Rainbow was the first to come back after mysteriously disappearing the past few months.

Then, deciding to honor her request for time alone, they each gave her a hug, and said goodbye, reminding her that she could come to any of them if she needed anything.

Outside the inn, before they went their separate ways to go about their day, her four friends were all still concerned about her well-being.

"It's not a good idea for her to be alone." Applejack protested.

"We all know that, AJ, but we can't force her to spend time with us. No doubt she's still devastated by what's happened to her." Twilight replied.

"Don't worry everyone. She'll come around. I...I hope." Fluttershy unconvincingly said.

PONYVILLE TRAVELER'S INN

THAT NIGHT...

Rainbow rested her chin on her hooves, leaning on the windowsill. The room was a very simple rustic style. Not too many furnishings. A table, nightstand, bed, bathroom and shower.

She had done nothing all day. She was still physically and mentally exhausted, and literally did not know what to do with herself. She felt so limited; felt like she was in the wrong body. Here she was, watching the sun slowly dip below the horizon. She glanced back at the twin bed, neatly made with a red comforter. She might as well try and get some sleep.

All throughout Ponyville, neither Twilight, Fluttershy, Rarity, or Applejack fell asleep easily that night. Before retiring for the night, Applejack stood outside the front door of her farmhouse, as the sun dipped below the hills, offering a stunning silhouette of Ponyville a few miles down the road.

"Rest easy, Rainbow. We're here if ya need us."

PONYVILLE LIBRARY

11:30 PM

Spike was having trouble sleeping soundly due to the constant rapping of hooves on the floor, as Twilight paced by her bedroom window.

"Twilight, honestly, just *lay down*." he grumpily said from under his blanket.

"I can't sleep, Spike. I'm worried about Rainbow."

"I'm sure she'll come to us if she needs help" the dragon mumbled, still trying to doze off.

"Well, I'm not sure about that. We all know how stubborn she can be. Even with the horrors she just went through..."

After another 15 minutes of pacing, and keeping Spike up, she decided to go down to the ground floor and read a book, as at least that way, Spike could get some sleep.

PONYVILLE TRAVELLER'S INN

"No! Ahhhh!"

Rainbow shot up in her bed, frantically looking around, and realizing where she was. She clumsily went to turn on the lamp on the nightstand, but in her haste, knocked it over, and it hit the floor



with a clang, forcing her to sit in the dark until her eyes became acclimated to the dark, the only light available being the moonlight coming in from the window. She curled up in her bed and shivered. She felt worse here than she did at the hospital. She thought for sure that it would be better once she was out on her own, but it was just worse. The nights were even more sleepless now; there were no sleeping aids the nurses could give her. The nightmares were unfaltering, and every time she woke up in a sweat.

As her eyes adjusted to the dark, she began to cry. She felt so cold...so *alone*. Then, something in her head clicked.

What was she *doing here*? Every single one of her friends had offered her a place to stay, and each told her it wasn't a good idea to be alone.

She threw the covers to the side of the bed and got up, and walked to the window, looking at the full moon illuminating Ponyville.

She made up her mind, slowly and carefully tugged on her new hoodie, and left her room, leaving a few bits on the front counter as a thank you for the generosity.

#### SWEET APPLE ACRES FARMHOUSE

Applejack woke up to a ferociously-barking Winona. After gaining her composure, she realized her dog was barking at a knocking at the front door. She walked down the hall to the small foyer, where Winona finally calmed down now that her master was present. She opened the door, and at her doorstep was Rainbow Dash, tears pricking her eyelids, and overall looking like she had a very rough night so far.

Several seconds passed without a word between the two friends, and Rainbow finally broke the silence.

"I-I'll take that room if it's still available." she said softly, with a small, greeting smile.

Ignoring the fact that Rainbow had walked nearly 2 miles from the inn to the Acres with her bandaged hooves in the middle of the night, Applejack chose not to chastise her recovering, broken friend, and simply smiled in return, and not saying anything, gently embraced the rainbow Pegasus, and welcomed her inside.

## Chapter 2

### 2.1 – THE SLEEPOVER

#### SWEET APPLE ACRES FARMHOUSE

#### THE NEXT MORNING

Applejack was up bright and early at the crack of dawn. She went straight to the kitchen, and began preparing breakfast. Twenty minutes later, she quietly came into the guest room, where Rainbow was just getting up with a yawn.

"Rise n' shine, Rainbow. Got ya some breakfast here." Applejack greeted, setting a tray of hay, oats, a fresh apple, and apple juice on the nightstand next to her bed.

"How'd ya sleep?" she asked.

"A little here, a little there. Just tossed and turned all night."

Rainbow replied, starting into her breakfast.

"Also, when you're done eatin', here." Applejack said, setting a hairbrush next to the tray on the nightstand.

"A brush?" Rainbow inquired.

"Yeah. Your hair's a mess. Might want to fix that." AJ answered with a chuckle.

"I'mma get Apple Bloom off to school. Give a holler if ya need anything."

As Applejack left the room and left the door open, Rainbow took a sip of apple juice, grabbed the hairbrush and got out of bed, walking over to the dresser and sitting in front of the mirror, slowly brushing her unkempt mane. Over a few minutes, the random, tangled spectrum of colors got sorted out, and her mane looked much improved, and Rainbow gave a small smile at herself. It felt a bit better, to look halfway decent. She returned to her breakfast, and ate heartily.

Down the hall in the kitchen, Applejack was getting Apple Bloom her breakfast and getting her ready for school.

"Applejack, why is Rainbow here?"

"Why Apple Bloom, if I wanted you to know that, I would've told you, now wouldn't I?" her older sister said, in a feigned astonished voice.

"Seriously. Is she alright?" Apple Bloom asked.

"You mind your business. She's here to rest. That's all you need to know. Now finish your breakfast and get off to school."

With that, Applejack left Apple Bloom to her breakfast, and went to check on Rainbow, who was now back at the night stand nibbling on some hay, her mane now clean and kept. She gave a soft smile.

"Well, I'mma go get some chores done, let me know if you need anything at all, okay?"

"Will do, AJ. Thanks."

Applejack noticed how Rainbow was trying her best to fake contentment and happiness. She'd give her the time and space she needed, and hoped she would slowly improve as the days passed. It wasn't too long before Twilight was walking around the Acres looking for Applejack.

"Howdy there, Twilight. What can I do for ya?"

"Looking for Rainbow. I checked the Traveler's Inn this morning, and she wasn't there. I checked with the others, and no one's seen her."

"Yeah, she's here. Walked all the way here in the middle of the night with those back hooves, if you can believe it."

"How's she doing?" Twilight asked, walking with AJ around the Acres as she tended to various aspects of the farm.

"Well, she's not sleeping well. Ya can tell that just by lookin' at her. And I know she's trying to look happy, but I can see right through it. I'm...well, I'm trying my darndest to be patient with her. I know this is gonna take time. At least she's here."

"I think that's all we can give her at this point, is time."

Twilight went in to visit with Rainbow for a few minutes, who just sat at the window, staring out at the orchards. Twilight knew she must be going crazy following the doctor's orders; staying off her feet as much as possible, especially considering her long walk last night. Rainbow again tried to put on a smile for Twilight, but she, just like the farm workhorse, saw right through it, and played along for now.

Throughout the morning and early afternoon, the others came by. Rarity was thrilled that Rainbow was still wearing her hoodie, and Fluttershy came by with some of her animals. They both shared Applejack's concerns, and likewise decided to give her time. They were all confident that Rainbow's loyalty to her friends would bring her around sooner or later.

By the time afternoon rolled around, Applejack was relaxing in the kitchen, when there was a gentle but frantic knock at the door. Going to answer it, she was greeted by the cheesy grinning faces of Apple Bloom, Sweetie Belle, and Scootaloo.

"Oh no..." she mused.

"Time for the CUTIE MARK CRUSADERS SUPER SLEEPOVER! YAY!" the three Crusaders said in obnoxiously loud unison.

"That was today...?" Applejack asked.

"Of course! I told you about it earlier in the week, remember?" Apple Bloom told her.

"Yeah, *now* I remember." she muttered.

"Look, y'all. You need to keep it down around the house. I've got a guest resting."

"A guest? Who?" Sweetie Belle asked.

This astonished Applejack, who looked at Apple Bloom.

"You mean you *didn't* tell'em? For once, you kept something to yourself?"

"Oh yeah! Rainbow's staying here, guys!" Apple Bloom blurted out. Applejack facehoofed.

"Rainbow Dash? Really?" Scootaloo asked, her eyes widening with excitement.

"And you three are to *leave her alone*, is that clear?" AJ sternly instructed.

"Huh?" Scootaloo gave a puzzled look.

"Y'all don't need to know why she's here except that she's here to rest. Stay away from her, that's the end of it. Now go out to your clubhouse and stay out of trouble, ya hear?"

She got slow, puzzled nods from the three Crusaders, who made their way around the west side of the farmhouse to the forest patches, where the old clubhouse was.

Throughout the last few days events, AJ had completely forgot about the sleepover the Crusaders had planned for tonight. She wasn't entirely comfortable with three fillies running around the Acres when she had a wingless, depressed Pegasus recovering in the guest room. She didn't consider Rainbow a burden at all, but it wasn't something fillies needed to see at their age. She hoped, for once, that Apple Bloom and her friends would mind what she told them.

She went to the fridge and fetched another cool bottle of apple juice, and took it to Rainbow, who seemed slightly annoyed at being waited on hoof and flank.

"Remember, plenty of fluids." AJ reminded. Giving in, Rainbow sipped at the straw poking out of the bottle.

"So, why did you come here when everyone offered you a place to stay?" Applejack asked.

"Huh?"

"Don't worry, I'm thrilled you're here, but out of all the places, you walked 2 miles out here to the Acres."

"Well, for a number of reasons. I didn't want to disturb Fluttershy's animals, I would've been Rarity's living mannequin, and I'd be even more bored to tears in the library with Twilight. You have a lot of space out here, fresh air, and well..."

Applejack waited for her to continue.

"You saved my life, Applejack. When I recover enough to be a little more active, I'd like to help you around here. It'd give me something to do, and it seems you always need more help. I owe you."

"Aw, Sugarcube, I appreciate the offer, and you're welcome to once you recover, but 'ah want you to know, you don't owe me anything."

CRUSADER CLUBHOUSE

LATER THAT NIGHT

"Alright, where can we get a giant slingshot?"

"Scootaloo, if a cannon didn't work last month, why would a slingshot work?" Sweetie Belle rebuked.

The Crusaders' attempts for Cutie Marks had grown sillier and more obscure as time went on. It made much of Ponyville wonder whether "talents you're good at" had really sunk into any of their heads.

"I keep on wondering what Rainbow is doing here." Scootaloo stated.

"Well, maybe it has to do with her cloud house above Ponyville."

Apple Bloom offered.

"What about it?"

"Um, it's not *there* anymore?"

"Maybe there was something wrong with it."

"Then why is she resting? Why is Applejack telling us to not even go near her?"

"Well, why don't we find out for ourselves? Find out what more and more ponies are talking about in town?" Scootaloo said.

Apple Bloom started to agree, but Sweetie Belle wasn't so sure.

"But, we were told to leave her alone."

"And we will. We'll just peek inside her window and come right back here." Scootaloo said.

"Come on, let's go!" Apple Bloom said, and they set off, Sweetie Belle still a little uneasy about playing around what Applejack told them.

FARMHOUSE

10 MINUTES LATER

Owls and crickets could be heard throughout the Acres as night set in for the next several hours. Applejack made her checks around the house, making sure everything was just so, before heading towards her room down the hall.

Passing the closed guest room door, she heard a muffled commotion on the other side.

Silently opening the door, she quietly came up to the bed, as Rainbow shifted uneasily in her sleep.

*She found herself restrained to the planks again. Fear crept into every vein in her body.*

*No. No! No no no no no not again!*

*"Time to get started." she heard a cheery voice from nowhere.*

*Black was all around her as she tried to fight against her restraints.*

"Dash...Dash. Rainbow, wake up." Applejack said, gently shaking Rainbow's shoulder.

"No...please no..." she mumbled in her sleep.

*"No! Please no!" she pleaded.*

*She felt a presence behind her, stretching out her right wing, ready to bring down the knife...*

Rainbow's uneasy shifting became more apparent. Suddenly, her sleeping body jolted, the covers rippling. She gave a short scream. "No! Please!" she yelled from the dream world beyond.

"Rainbow! Wake up!"

*Pain shot through her back as her right wing fell into the blackness, and her left wing was stretched out. She felt the teeth of the hacksaw grind against her bone.*

*"No!" she screamed in pain.*

*"Rainbow Dash!" a voice from beyond called her in the darkness.*

"Rainbow Dash!" Applejack yelled to snap the Pegasus out of her nightmare.

Rainbow bolted up with a scream, frantically looking around.

"It's alright, it's alright. It's me!" Applejack quickly said, attempting to calm her frightened friend.

Then, came another scream, a muffled one, from outside her bedroom window. Both ponies looked in surprise.

When Scootaloo saw the red bloody areas of Rainbow Dash's bandaged back, her pupils contracted, and her whole body went cold as she let out a blood-curdling scream, and immediately turned tail and ran back into the forest towards the clubhouse, followed quickly by Apple Bloom and Sweetie Belle.

Tears pricked Rainbow's eyes, and it only took a split second for Applejack to put the pieces together, seeing the three fillies run back into the darkness of the forest, and her face became one of disbelief and anger.

"Wait here, Rainbow. I'll be right back, promise."

With that, she left the room, and was quickly giving chase back out to the clubhouse.

Scootaloo was cowering in her sleeping bag, and the other two crusaders were confused and scared as they stood in the safety of their clubhouse.

It hadn't even been a minute since they got back before the door slammed open, getting a startled scream from each of them.

There stood Applejack in the doorway, a furious look in her eyes.

"How...dare...you." she said, just above a whisper.

"W-we're sorr-" her younger sister began to apologize, before being harshly cut off.

"Shut it! You think I tell you these things for no reason at all? That I tell you 'no' for fun?"

The Crusaders looked at her, frightened.

"W-we were just curious why Rainbow-"

"I *told you* to leave her alone. I *told you* to not go near her! A lotta good your 'curiosity' did you tonight!" she yelled at them.

Not another word came from the three fillies.

"I don't want to hear another peep. If there's another hoof out of this clubhouse for the rest of the night, you'll be out of school before the next sleepover. Understood?"

All she got in return were teary-eyed nods from them. Scootaloo shuddered in the corner. AJ left without another word.

FARMHOUSE

10 MINUTES LATER

AJ returned to the farmhouse and brought a cool glass of water to the guest room, where Rainbow had her back to her, sitting on the bed, sobbing openly.

Saying nothing, Applejack gently set the glass on the nightstand, and when she took a seat next to her on the bed, the Pegasus got up and went to the window.

"I-I...I can't take this anymore...I can't even look at them anymore..." she sobbed, looking at the starry sky from her window.

"The fillies?"

"No..." Rainbow sniffled. "No, the stars, the sky, my Cutie Marks. Every...everytime..."

She turned to Applejack with something of a frustrated, scared look in her eyes.

"I'm tired of being reminded of who I was! What I loved doing! What Pinkie took away from me! How...?"

She collapsed onto her back haunches, in tears.

"How am I ever gonna be able to move on if that reminder is always there...?" she sobbed, her tears and gaze falling to the floor.

Applejack stared at her friend for a moment, before getting off the bed and sitting next to her, putting her front leg around her friend.

"Sugar...do you think it's gonna be that easy? Just...just throw away all of who you used to be and start new? Well, that's not gonna happen, hun. You have to remember who you were, and adapt to your new life. That doesn't mean you have to change who you are entirely, or forget who you used to be."

Rainbow continued to cry, but it let up a bit.

"What did she do to you, Rainbow?"

The Pegasus sniffled and shot her a bothered glance.

"I don't think I'll ever be ready to talk about that. Besides, you of everypony should have the best idea."

"It was all a rush, Rainbow. I didn't really take it all in when I got you out of there. But maybe you're having these nightmares because you're keeping it all inside."

Nothing more was said for a minute while AJ continued to silently comfort Dash with merely her presence.

"She drugged me."

"Drugged you?"

"Yeah. With something in her cupcakes. I woke up restrained to planks, and all around the room were these...decorations...of parts and bones and organs of ponies."

Applejack said nothing, just listening to her friend.

" She said that she needed more special ingredient for her cupcakes, and that my number came up. She started with my Cutie Marks. Cut both of them off of my flanks. Then she took off my wings."

Rainbow shuddered again, fresh tears rolling down her cheeks.

"The first thing she did was take away what made me special. What made me, 'me'."

AJ continued listening intently.

"Then she...she...ate part of me. Part of the muscle in my right flank. It didn't even phase her. Like it was normal."

Another few moments passed while Rainbow tried her best to keep herself composed and recalled that horrific night all too recently.

"I blacked out several times, and she'd just inject me with adrenaline. Then...then came the nails. Burning hot; hammered right into my back hooves...attached to copper wires. She electrocuted me until I blacked out again. It...it felt like every inch of my body was on fire..."

"Then...then she gave me a painkiller, and I couldn't feel anything below my ribs. She said it...it was time for the last round, and I'd be awake to watch the harvest. And then...then you showed up."

Applejack held in her horrified reaction, and simply wrapped her arm tighter around Dash's shoulders, tears began to fall from her eyes as well.

Rainbow began weeping again.

"Ap-Applejack...if you hadn't shown up when you did...I..."

There were no more words to say as she just sat there, head lowered, crying.

AJ wrapped both arms around her friend, crying with her.

"Rainbow...I...I'm so sorry you had to go through that. And mark my words, sugar. I swear on my life, if there was any way..."

She searched for the right words.

"I would give up the farm; my livelihood; I would give all I am if it meant making you whole again."

## 2.2 - HEART-TO-HEART

### SWEET APPLE ACRES

#### THE NEXT MORNING

None of the Crusaders got a lot of sleep after the incident last night.

At the crack of dawn, Applejack was at the clubhouse, rising the three fillies, still shaken from last night.

"Apple Bloom, go back to the house. I'll be taking your friends home." she said sternly.

"But why-" she started to protest.



"I don't think you want to be questioning anything I tell you right now. Go to the house and stay in your room. Is that clear?" Apple Bloom simply nodded, and began to make her way out of the clubhouse.

"Come on, you two. Hurry and get up."

Applejack had other motives for going into town today. Other than getting the Crusaders back and explaining last night's incident to their parents, she also remembered that the nurse had instructed Rainbow to return and get her bandages changed, and she didn't want her to go two miles back and forth, and she had dealt with farm injuries before, so changing gauze was no big hassle.

FARMHOUSE

Applejack returned an hour later with a saddlebag. Big Macintosh was busy making breakfast.

"Apple Bloom in her room?"

"Eeeyup."

AJ made her way to the guest room, where Rainbow was just beginning to get up, due to her restless sleep last night.

"Good news, Rainbow. I went and got the gauze, so you don't have to walk all way back to Ponyville to get'em changed. And we can see if you're starting to heal up, too."

Rainbow gave AJ a small smile.

"Applejack...thanks for last night. I think that helped."

"No problem at all, sugarcube."

Rainbow tossed the covers aside, and sat up. Applejack set her saddlebag beside her, and began to unwrap the gauze around Rainbow's mid-section. She was relieved to see that the stubs where her wings used to be were no longer the bloody, oozy mess that it was when she was first treated. The first layers of skin had now formed.

"Looks to be coming along well enough." AJ commented, gently applying some ointment, and then wrapping them up in fresh, sterile gauze.

She then moved down to her flanks, and unwrapped the area around her cutie marks. Again, there was much improvement. Her cutie marks had reattached where they had been cut off; fresh scar tissue formed a circle around them, but they appeared to be healing.

"I don't think I even need to re-bandage that area." Applejack happily said. She moved to her right cutie mark, where part of her muscle had been removed by Pinkie, and she gently pressed with her left hoof.

"How's that feel, sugar?" she asked.

"Still a little numb, but I can feel it." Dash replied.

"Good sign."

Then, Rainbow turned around in a sitting position, her back legs half-dangling off the bed. Applejack carefully unwrapped the gauze around her back hooves, and inspected the healing areas.

"These look the best of all. I'd say you'll be good to go in a week at most, Rainbow. And I'll even go one further right now, and won't insist that you stay in bed." Applejack said, replacing the bandages on Rainbow's back hooves.

"Good, 'cause I want to go talk to Apple Bloom."

"And what do you need to tell her?"

"Something that'll only work coming from me."

For the first time since arriving, Rainbow Dash joined Applejack, Big Macintosh, and Granny Smith out in the kitchen for breakfast. Both Big Mac and Granny Smith were equally optimistic about the rate of Rainbow's recovery. After breakfast, Rainbow took a tray of food down the hall and gently knocked on Apple Bloom's door.

"Come in." she said somberly, expecting her big sister and some more chastising. Instead, Rainbow walked in.

"Oh, uh...hi Rainbow. Look...I'm...I'm really sorry about..."

"Relax, Apple Bloom. I'm not mad. Applejack has every right to be mad because you disobeyed, but I just want to talk, that's all."

Rainbow reassured her.

"I brought ya some breakfast." the recovering Pegasus said, setting the tray next to the filly laying on the bed, resting her chin on her hooves.

"We were just curious as to why you were staying here. She didn't have to yell at us like that." Apple Bloom pouted.

"Look, Apple Bloom. I was your age once, and I hated being told no too. But...what you three saw, fillies your age really shouldn't have seen. Curiosity isn't always the best thing to have."

"But she's always bossing us around! Telling us that we can't do things, and not telling us why!" the young yellow filly complained.

"Apple Bloom, AJ's trying to protect you. You should be grateful that you have her. I...never had any siblings to grow up with. And I'll tell you something..." Rainbow said, taking a seat next to her on her bed.

"If not for your big sister, I wouldn't be here right now. She saved my life, Apple Bloom. So I know it's not fun being punished, but you need to appreciate the fact that you have your sister here."

Apple Bloom didn't answer, just stared silently at her twin bed's comforter, and began to eat her breakfast that had been brought to her.

"Well, just think about it. I'm headed into town."

"To do what?"

"Talk to another Crusader. I imagine we have one freaked out and frightened Pegasus on our hands right now."

Rainbow went one door down to her room, and tugged on her hoodie, and told Applejack she was going into town.

"Just take it easy on those back hooves, alright?"

"Don't worry, I will."

And with that, she left the farmhouse, and trotted to Ponyville.

PONYVILLE OUTSKIRTS

30 MINUTES LATER

Rainbow, with her Wonderbolt hoodie, walked up to a brick home in one of the outskirt neighborhoods of Ponyville, and knocked on the door. Seconds later, a light-purple Pegasus opened the door.

"Rainbow...nice to see you." she said, trying to hide the surprise in her voice.

"Thanks. I know Applejack probably told you about what happened last night. I was wondering if I could talk to Scootaloo."

"Yeah, that probably would be best. She's in the back yard with her scooter. Take it easy, she's still a bit...shaky."

Rainbow nodded, and walked around the house to the back yard. Scootaloo had a screwdriver in hoof, adjusting the back wheel of her scooter.

"Hey there, Scoot." Rainbow greeted as she walked up to her.

Scootaloo turned to her nervously.

"Uh...R-Rainbow. What are you...doing here?"

"I came to talk to you." Rainbow replied, taking a seat on the sidewalk next to her and her method of transportation. Scootaloo still looked uneasy.

"Scoot, I'm not mad. I just wanted to see how you were doing. I know what you saw last night must have been pretty...scary."

"I know I should've left you alone. But all I've been hearing around town the last few days is how you 'survived', and everypony wondering how you're doing, and how the investigation is going."

"Well, it's not really for filly ears. But since you already saw what happened to me, I'll answer whatever I can if it helps put your mind at ease."

Scootaloo nervously glanced at her back, covered by the hoodie.

"D-does it hurt? Or feel weird?" she shakily asked.

"It doesn't really hurt anymore. And of course it still feels weird, considering I had wings all my life."

"But a-aren't you...scared?"

"Absolutely." Rainbow said softly, placing a hoof on her fan's shoulder.

"Scoot, I was very scared when I realized what had happened; that they couldn't fix me. When I laid there in the hospital at night; even when I moved in with Applejack, I cried myself to sleep because I didn't know what to do with my life anymore. It's something I'm still figuring out. There are still times I'd give anything to just fly again...or just feel like I'm flying. But it's something I'm going to

have to accept eventually, and move on. Right now, I'm just grateful that I'm alive. And life has those scary moments, where you don't know what to do or where to go next. So sometimes...I can't believe I'm gonna say this...sometimes you just have to look at what scares you, and laugh."

Scotaloo's nervousness was still apparent.

"And I'd say you're never too young to learn life lessons, so I guess here's one right now. Don't take anything for granted, Scoot.

Because hardly anypony realizes what life would be like without the things they take for granted. When you finally find your life's calling, and your cutie mark, just don't embrace your talent with all your heart, but embrace everything you do. Every day. Because tomorrow, it may not be the same. It can all change in an instant. And I'm not trying to scare you, but with what I went through, I'm viewing life more and more as a gift not to be wasted."

Scotaloo looked up at her and gave her a smile, and hugged her.

"Thanks, and I'm sorry, Rainbow."

"It's alright. Just don't let curiosity get the best of you next time."

"No, I mean...I'm sorry that this happened to you."

"Yeah...me too. But it's something I have to learn to live with, and I certainly don't want everypony going around pitying me. So chin up, okay Scoot?" she said, tipping the filly's chin up with her hoof.

"You got it, Rainbow Dash!" she said confidently.

Rainbow smiled, said goodbye, and right before she departed, Scoot called her.

"Hey Rainbow!"

"Yeah?"

"Well, have you tried diving?"

"Huh?"

"When me and Apple Bloom and Sweetie Belle tried to get our cutie marks several months ago, we tried diving and swimming. It felt like flying to me, moving through the water. Well, I think it feels like flying. Guess I'll find out when my wings grow enough. Maybe if you want that flying feeling back, you could try swimming."

Rainbow smiled.

"Maybe I will try that. Thanks, Scoot."

And with that, she departed.

Rainbow wasn't quite ready to depart the town yet. Before heading back out to Sweet Apple Acres, Rainbow stopped at Fluttershy's tree home, and gently knocked on the door. Her quiet, gentle childhood friend answered the door.

"Oh good, you're here. Thought you might be out with some of your animals." Rainbow greeted.

"I was about to be," Fluttershy replied, smiling upon seeing her friend.

"What can I do for you, Rainbow?"

"I just came for my stuff, then I'll be on my way."

"Oh?" Fluttershy asked, glancing back inside. There was a saddlebag sitting neatly next to the couch.

She walked over to the couch and slung the saddlebag over her back.

"I'm not about to have you walk all the way back to the Acres carrying this. I'll go with you."

"Fluttershy, it's alright, I've-"

"Nope, I won't hear it. You're recovering."

"Fine, Fluttershy. You win."

The two of them set out, heading out of Ponyville with a small handful of woodland creatures in tow.

"So how are you liking it over at Applejack's farm?" Fluttershy asked.

"Well, I'm glad she finally gave me permission to move around and actually do some stuff. I was going insane in that guest room.

Especially after what happened last night."

"Oh? What happened?"

"Apple Bloom and two of her friends saw what happened to me last night."

"Oh...oh my."

"That's partly why I came into town, to talk to Scootaloo and see how she was doing. I think she'll be alright."

"I hope so. She always looked up to you as a role model."

"So how do you do it, Fluttershy?" Rainbow asked, after they got out of Ponyville, halfway back to the farm.

"Do what?"

"Spend so much time on the ground? You never did take much to flying. Didn't you ever think it was part of who you are?"

"Well, the animals just mean a whole lot more to me than flying, Rainbow Dash. I know flying meant a lot to you, but maybe that's what you have to do – find something that means just as much to you as flying did."

"Well, that's the thing. My cutie marks symbolize my love for flying. So how can I find something that means just as much to me?"

"Rainbow, there's something undeniably special about the cutie marks. With what's happened to you, if your cutie marks were only about flying, I don't think they'd be healing so quickly."

Rainbow considered this.

"So what do I do?"

"For now, I'd just think back to how your cutie mark appeared. That's the best place to start, I think."

When they arrived back at Sweet Apple Acres, Fluttershy greeted AJ, and then took Rainbow's possessions into her guest room.

"Thanks again, Fluttershy."

"Oh, not a problem at all, Rainbow Dash. Good luck. See you later!"

For the better part of the day, Rainbow sorted through her possessions that Fluttershy had gathered from her home. Hanging her dress in the closet, setting her gold tiara from the Best Young Fliers Competition on the dresser, followed by the jar of liquid rainbow, and lastly, her hooves came up out of the saddlebag with a very precious item; her Harmony Necklace; gold, with a jeweled, ruby lightning bolt in the center. She gently set that down on the center of the dresser.

She began to think back to the day she got her Cutie Mark, after racing the two bullies at Summer Flight Camp. How she had been shoved off course, and made up for it by going faster than she ever had before, and hit the lowest checkpoint loop going so fast she made a Sonic Rainboom, that hadn't been seen in generations. On her way back up to the finish line, her Cutie Mark appeared.

"So if it's not flying, then...what is it?"

### 2.3 - A RAINBOW IN WATER

SWEET APPLE ACRES

ONE WEEK LATER

Rainbow stood at the shore of the small lake, about a half-mile from the farmhouse. The sun hadn't even come up yet, and it looked like rainclouds on the horizon.

She didn't mind. She was going to take Scootaloo's suggestion, and give this a try. After all, it had been nearly a week since she had bathed, and this would prove to be refreshing.

She turned her head and looked at her back. Her stubs had begun to heal, the first layers of skin forming. She was sure they'd be fine. She'd removed all her bandages for this swim. Slowly, she stepped into the water.

The water felt cold on her back hooves, but she quickly adjusted to the temperature, stepping deeper in, the water now halfway up her legs. Her hooves glided on the pebbles and wet sand on the bed of the lake, and she began a slow trot deeper into the water.

Now it was up to her chest and belly, almost up to her flanks. She grabbed her silver goggles hanging around her neck, and strapped them on over her eyes, took a deep breath, and leaped forward, diving into the water.

She went under with a splash. She looked at the clams and pebbles on the bottom of the lake, and went deeper. She reached forward with her front hooves, and pulled back, propelling her body through the water.

It felt so refreshing. With a grin, she repeated the stroke, and spun in the water. The world above was muted and muffled. It wasn't the wind rushing through her mane, around her body; but Scootaloo was right, this was a lot like flying. She let her legs go limp, lazily lifting up as she let herself list in the depths. This was a peace she hadn't felt all week. With a gurgled, bubbly laugh, she pushed up

with her hooves a few times, and her head broke the surface of the lake, and she took a few deep breaths. She tread water for several moments before taking in another deep breath and going under again.

FARMHOUSE

1 HOUR LATER

When Applejack rose out of bed an hour later, the weather had changed considerably. With the rush of rain pelting the roof and windows, she got out of bed with a yawn, and went to check on Rainbow, only to find the bed empty, and her bandages in the waste bin next to it.

She immediately went to the kitchen, where she found Big Macintosh at the stove making breakfast.

"Hey Big Mac, where's Rainbow?" she asked.

"Said she was going swimming out by the lake. That was about an hour and a half ago."

"What? It's pourin' rain out there!"

"Wasn't pourin' when she went out. Still, if she was gonna come back when it started raining, I think she'd be back by now. It's been coming down like this for a good 45 minutes now."

AJ sighed.

"Oh, what am I gonna do with her?"

With that, Applejack went out into the thunderstorm, making her way to the lake.

LAKE

15 MINUTES LATER

With no more than an hour in the lake, Rainbow Dash had turned into a fish with legs and a mane.

She had tried all kinds of strokes, and so far, her favorite one was swimming up fast enough to where she almost had her whole body out of the lake before splashing back in again. She had seen a variety of fish and sea life at the bottom of the lake. It was a whole world she hadn't been familiar with.

She dove deeper and deeper. Brushing past a patch of seaweed on the bed of the lake, she angled herself up, and swam as fast as she could to the surface. When she came up for air the next time, she heard a voice over the splashing.

"Rainbow! *What* are you *doing* out here?"

She turned and saw Applejack at the shore some 30 feet away, and gave her a smile.

"What does it look like? Swimming." she greeted.

"It's rainin' cats and dogs!"

Rainbow just giggled.

"Yeah, so? I'm already entirely wet."

Applejack halted her chastisement of Rainbow when she noticed her entirely carefree demeanor. For the first time since arriving, she didn't seem depressed and down.

"So you just decided you'd come out before a thunderstorm and take a swim?"

"Yep!" Rainbow replied happily, taking a short dive under and immediately coming back up again, her rainbow mane soaked and flat against her forehead and neck.

"I went into town to talk to Scootaloo, and she suggested swimming if I wanted to feel something close to flying again."

A rumble of thunder rolled over the lake area, and lightning flashed the hazy morning sky.

"Besides, I've spent years making thunderstorms. About time I got wet in one, if ya ask me." Rainbow said with another giggle.

Applejack was so astonished that Rainbow had suddenly returned to something resembling her former self, and all it took was a dip in a lake.

"Besides, I've been doing some thinking out here." Rainbow said, coming out of the lake onto the shore, dripping wet, with still more rain coming down. Lifting her goggles up onto her forehead, Rainbow started taking a long route back to the farmhouse, through one of the Acres' apple orchards, with AJ right beside her.

"Thinking about what?"

"About my Cutie Marks. Fluttershy told me that they're more special than I think, and that they still have meaning in my life. They're healing pretty fast, so I'm wondering if they reflected my love of flying at all."

Applejack pondered this as well, looking at her friend's flank.

"A cloud and rainbow lightning bolt. What else could that mean?"

"I don't know just yet. But maybe what I needed was some time out in the rain."

"Why, so you can catch a cold?" Applejack half-jokingly asked.

"No, to grow." Rainbow replied.

"Huh?"

"Well, your trees need an equal amounts of sunshine and water to produce these apples. So maybe in order to grow and move past this, maybe all I need is some rain. Who says plants are the only things that need a little rain now and then?"

The farmhouse came into view, and the rain began to let up. It didn't quit completely, but came down to a light drizzle. The clouds began to part, and rays of sunshine began to descend on the acres, and coming to the front door, the pair of ponies saw a rainbow materialize in the parting rainclouds.

"Well whad'ya know..." Applejack said, staring up at the rainbow.

"What is it, AJ?"

The workhorse motioned up to the rainbow.



"Maybe that's what you're cutie mark represents. That no matter what storms you go through, you'll always come through. I'd say this is sure a fine example."

Rainbow took another look at the sparkling rainbow, and then over to her friend, and they gave each other a hug.

"Thanks, AJ."

"No problem at all. Now let's go get dried off."

## Chapter 3

### 3.1 - A CRACK IN THE CASE

*Two sets of hooves raced down the dirt path towards the finish line. One set light brown; the other set cyan blue. Neither was giving an inch. The uproar of cheers from all around grew louder as the finish drew ever closer.*

*"I'm not gonna just give this to ya, Rainbow. I respect ya too much to do that. You're gonna have to take it."*

SUGARCUBE CORNER

ONE WEEK EARLIER

When Twilight walked into Sugarcube Corner, she was surprised to see a few ponies making purchases.

"Oh, why hello there, Twilight. What brings you here today?" Mrs. Cake greeted.

"Well, I heard the crime scene investigation is complete, they got everything cleaned up, and that they allowed you two to open shop again. Just thought I'd stop by and see how everything's going."

Mrs. Cake finished the transaction of the current customer at the pony and bid them a good day.

"It's been a little slower than usual, which I suppose is to be expected. But the general belief around town is that we didn't have anything to do with what Pinkie was doing down in the basement, and for that, we're very grateful. We were afraid all week that we'd have to close up shop. But that's not going to be the case."

"I'm so glad. Ponyville wouldn't be the same without your sweets."

"I just wish there were signs of what Pinkie was up to. She was flawless at inventory, so we just left her in charge of keeping inventory in the basement. So many lives could have been saved."

"Don't trouble yourselves with it. None of us saw this coming. At least it's over. Anyways, I'd like to place an order for tomorrow morning. Can you do it that fast?"

"Absolutely, dear. What's the occasion?"

SWEET APPLE ACRES

THAT NIGHT

The starry night sky hung over the Acres, providing the lake with a rich, ambient moonlight. The only sound that could be heard above the crickets was the sloshing of water, as the cyan Pegasus went from one end of the lake to the other, uneasily floating on her back.

"Somepony certainly seems to be out late." came a tender female voice from above.

The voice out of nowhere surprised Rainbow, causing her to flail and sink momentarily before her head popped up again above the surface of the water. She looked up, and above the lake hovered a grayish-purple Alicorn pony. Rainbow swam to the nearest shore,

and her visitor floated down and landed to meet her. Rainbow gave a short bow.

"Princess Luna, what a surprise." Rainbow said, dripping from her late night swim.

"How have you been, Rainbow Dash?" the younger royal sister asked.

"Improving, slowly day by day."

"I see you've taken to swimming."

"Yeah, I need a little more practice. But I couldn't sleep tonight, so I came out here to try and relax. So what brings you here, your highness?"

"I wasn't going to come by until tomorrow, but I was flying overhead, and saw you swimming, so I figured, why not now?"

Rainbow waited for Luna to continue.

"I'm leading the investigation into what happened, Rainbow, and we think we've come to the most logical conclusion."

"Really? Why did she do this?"

"Our coroner analyzed Pinkie's brain with a cat scan, and determined that she had developed a split-personality within the past few months."

Rainbow's eyes widened.

"Did we cause this?" Rainbow asked.

"What do you mean?"

"A few months ago, we had planned a surprise birthday party for her, and in order to keep it a surprise, we had to lie to her about coming to one of her parties. Right before the party, I came to get her and bring her to the barn, and she was...different. Very different."

"How so?"

"Her poofy hair was all flat, she talked to inanimate objects as if they were alive, and it didn't change back until she realized that the party was for her birthday."

"Yes, when her 'happy' side resurfaced, I don't think that other side simply disappeared. In fact, I think it slowly, unknowingly resurfaced. I think that's why she didn't seem to think she was doing anything wrong to you, or her other victims. To her, it seemed normal. So to put it bluntly, burying that other side of her caused her to slowly go insane."

"So we did do it." Rainbow realized, a look of sadness overcoming her.

"No, please don't look at it that way, Rainbow. You couldn't have known what would happen. Just a string of coincidences. No one is to blame for this."

"A-alright...thanks for telling me this, your highness." Rainbow replied.

"So what will you do now?" the royal night mare inquired.

"I'm...I'm not sure yet. I've been thinking about it a lot, and I might stay here. Help run the farm with Applejack. Seems appropriate enough. She's one of my best friends, she saved my life, and she could always use another set of hooves to lighten the workload."

"Well, whatever it is that you'll do, I'm sure you'll be great at it. Have a good night, Rainbow Dash."

"Thank you, your highness, and I'll tell my friends what you found out."

Luna nodded with a smile, and gracefully ascended into the starry night.

Still dripping wet, Rainbow shook herself off as best she could, and headed back to the farmhouse to try and get some sleep.

SWEET APPLE ACRES FARMHOUSE

THE NEXT MORNING

Rainbow awoke with a yawn, and was startled to see her 4 friends around her bed.

"W-what's going on, guys?" she said, fighting off the grogginess of the morning.

"Well, you don't actually think we forgot, did you?" Twilight asked.

She got up, and followed her friends into the kitchen, where a three-layer cake was front and center on the table. It was decorated with an entire spectrum of colored frosting, and had an arrangement of candles on top, along with the words "HAPPY BIRTHDAY, RAINBOW DASH."

"Oh wow, I can't believe I forgot!" Rainbow exclaimed happily.

"Well, that's why ya have us around, Sugarcube."

Rainbow looked at the colorful cake, and proceeded to blow out the candles. None of her friends or the Apple family present seemed to object to having cake for breakfast.

"Thanks guys, I guess with everything that's happened, it kinda slipped my mind."

Slices of cake were served up, and everypony ate heartily.

"Hope you didn't have any plans today, Rainbow." Twilight said in between bites of cake.

"Why? You guys have plans for me?"

"You could say that." Rarity added.

Applejack gave a short whistle, and four uniformed ponies came into the kitchen doorway.

They all wore goggles on their foreheads, and wore light blue swim trunks.

"The Ponyville Swim Team!" Applejack announced.

"Their competition season is over, so we asked if they could come to the farm and give you some swimming lessons. They were happy to." Fluttershy said.

"Yeah," one of the swim team started, a turquoise earth pony.

"You've been through a horrible, life-altering experience, and we're thrilled that you've taken to swimming to help you relax and adapt. And we're here to help you enjoy it even more, Rainbow Dash!" The turquoise pony stepped forward, and shook the overjoyed Rainbow's hoof.

"I'm the Team Captain. They call me Torpedo."

Torpedo motioned to the other three, an Earth pony and two Unicorns.

"That's Surf, Tidal Wave, and Fin."

"Wow guys, I...I don't know what to say!" Rainbow replied to her friends, as well as the new guests.

"Well, Applejack showed us where the lake is, so whenever you're ready, we'll meet ya out there."

After the swim team left the farmhouse out to the lake, Rainbow took the last bite of her cake.

"Thanks, everyone. I can't tell you what this means."

"Well, quit burnin' daylight, and get out there and get wet!" AJ encouraged. Rainbow nodded, and happily trotted out to the lake.

### 3.2 – REMATCH

#### SWEET APPLE ACRES

#### ONE HOUR LATER

"Your technique is coming along great, Rainbow. But you're just pulling yourself along with your hooves. You'll get farther per stroke if you put your whole body into it." Torpedo instructed, before showing her how to maneuver her body along with her strokes. Twilight, Applejack, Fluttershy, and Rarity were relaxing on the shore of the lake, soaking up the sun, while Rainbow and the Ponyville Swim Team were busy in the lake.

"She sure has taken a liking to it." Fluttershy observed her friend's new hobby.

"That's for sure. If I didn't know any better I'd say she's part fish." Rarity added.

"What got her into this in the first place?" Twilight inquired.

"Apparently Scootaloo suggested to her. She said it felt like flying, even though she'd never done any flying of her own yet, heh. I'm just thrilled that it's gotten her out of that emotional rut she was in that first week." Applejack answered.

"Wonder if there's something in the water." Fluttershy joked, giggling.

#### LAKESHORE

#### THAT NIGHT

Applejack walked into the clearing, and saw Rainbow sitting on her haunches, staring up at the night sky. Coming to her side, she saw her friend with a lighthearted smile.

"Today was quite the day."

"That's for sure. Thanks, it means so much to me."

"Well, don't just thank me. We all had a hand in getting those guys here."

"Well, not just for today. For your hospitality. For being here. Because...well, the real reason I came here..."

Applejack waited for Dash to continue.

"You cared enough about me to come looking when I didn't show up for something as simple as a slice of pie. If you hadn't, I wouldn't be here right now. You're one of the most caring, loving friends I've ever had."

Rainbow leaned into AJ and rested her head on her shoulders, closing her eyes.

"That's why I'm here. I feel safe around you. I know when I go to bed every night, you won't let anything happen to me."

Applejack gently put an arm around her friend.

"If my Cutie Mark really symbolizes making my way through the storms in life, well, I don't think I'm out of this storm yet. It's still sinking in that I'm never going to fly again for the rest of my life. And yet, I still feel like I have to prove myself. I'm just really, *really* glad that I have you to help me through this."

Applejack gave the cyan Pegasus a soft squeeze.

"Sugarcube, you have got to be the most stubborn, determined, thick-skulled pony I've ever met. And that's what 'ah love about you. And you don't have to prove yourself to no one. Not no more. Because whenever life knocks you down, you get up and keep on running, even after all that's happened."

The lightbulb above Rainbow's head clicked on.

*Running...*

"That's it!"

She sprang to life, leaping up from her sitting position.

"That's it that's it that's it!" she exclaimed excitedly.

"What's it?" AJ asked, honestly clueless.

"That's what I have to do! The Running of the Leaves! It's next week! I'm gonna run it again, and this time, I'm gonna win it!"

"Are you sure that's a good idea, Rainbow? You're still recovering."

"AJ, I have to do this! It's how I can prove to myself that I can make it without wings. And you and I can have a rematch!"

"Say what?"

"Last year we tied for last, remember? Well this year, we'll have a good clean race, and I want you to give me all you've got!"

"Ah'm not so sure about this, Rainbow. I'd rather you make a full recovery first..."

"Please, Applejack? Make this another birthday present to me. Promise me you'll give me all you've got!"

Loving to see Rainbow once again so full of life, Applejack gave in, and smiled.

"If it means that much to ya, Rainbow, you're on."

## SWEET APPLE ACRES WEST ORCHARD

### THE NEXT AFTERNOON

"Come on, AJ! Just let me buck a couple'a trees! I gotta learn how to do it if I'm gonna help you run the farm!"

"For the third time Rainbow, NO. Letting you run in the race next week is as far as I'm budging. I ain't having you slammin' those hooves against trees while you're still recovering. When you're back up to 100% and fresh as a daisy, THEN I'll teach you about applebucking."

Rainbow got a pouty look on her face from losing the argument, muttered "Fine," then resumed doing laps around the orchard that Applejack was currently bucking.

On her third lap around, she passed Twilight, who gave an astonished look at the galloping Pegasus, and then went into the trees to find Applejack.

"Hey AJ. What's Rainbow up to?" she asked.

"Training." the workhorse replied.

"Training?" Twilight repeated in question form.

"Yep, for the Running of the Leaves next week."

"What? She's *running* in that?" Twilight was surprised.

"Apparently. Got the idea in her head last night, and she's determined to prove something to herself."

"And you think that's a good idea?"

"Well, no. Not really."

"So you're gonna just let her do it?"

"Well, I'm racing her in it."

"So you're encouraging her to do this."

"Twi, I voiced my objections, but her mind's made up. And you know Dash, once she makes her mind up about somethin' ain't nothin' gonna change that girl's mind."

"Well, if you're sure she'll be okay..."

"What about you? Gonna try for 4th place this year?"

"Oh no, I'm helping Spike announce it this time. He asked me to."

"Yeah well, good luck with that, Twi."

"I just hope you two aren't gonna need the luck."

### 3.3 – IN HER MOMENT OF DOUBT

*"I'm not gonna just give this to ya, Rainbow. I respect ya too much to do that. You're gonna have to take it."*

*The two ponies ran neck-and-neck, closer and closer to the finish line. Applejack took one last glance over at her friend, and the look on her face was one of pain.*

*"Rainbow, are you okay, sug-"*

*One of Rainbow's back hooves made contact with the ground the wrong way, and she let out a scream and went down, the rest of the racing herd was too close behind, and Applejack lost sight of the grounded Rainbow in a cloud of hooves, dust, and dirt.*

"Rainbow!"

Applejack woke up in a sweat, found herself short of breath, and her heart pounding. She must have been tossing in her sleep, because Winona was whining at the foot of her bed.

"I'm alright, girl. I'm alright. Just a bad dream, that's all."

AJ got out of bed and quietly made her way to the guest room, where Rainbow was sleeping soundly.

She was more unsure than ever of her decision to allow Rainbow to enter the race, which was now less than two days away. That dream instilled the fears even deeper that Rainbow might badly injure herself in the race. Applejack wasn't a doctor, but Rainbow was here, at her farm, and was undoubtedly in her care. She was Applejack's responsibility for now.

"Rainbow, this is *not* a good idea." she whispered, so as not to disturb the sleeping Pegasus.

THE NEXT MORNING

Rainbow Dash rose the next morning and came to the kitchen in her hoodie to find Applejack making breakfast in the kitchen.

"Hope you're making something hearty, AJ. We gotta eat good for tomorrow!" she said happily.

"Rainbow, about tomorrow..."

"It's gonna be so awesome! I can just feel it! This is what I need!"

"Listen, Rainbow."

Rainbow held in her excitement to allow AJ to speak.

"Rainbow, I...I don't think this is such a good idea after all. I mean, I know you want to enter the Running of the Leaves to prove you can make it without wings, but...the truth is Rainbow, you're still recovering from serious injuries. If you're in the middle of the herd when and if something happens, you could get trampled."

"AJ, I know you're worried about me, but...but something inside is just telling me that I have to do this! I can't really explain it, but I'm running in that race, and means the world to me that you're doing it with me."

Applejack realized that this was not going to be easy.

"Rainbow, knowing the risk you're taking, I cannot support your decision to run by doing it with you. I'm sorry, but I'm dropping out. As long as you're here, you're my responsibility."

That last statement hit Rainbow hard. Her eyes widened, and Applejack could tell that she had been immediately hurt by what she said.

"I...I can't believe you. You...of all ponies..."

"Rainbow, I'm sorry, but your health comes fir-"

"No! I don't want to hear it! I guess asking you to trust me and have faith in me is too much to ask right now!"

Tears quickly filled her eyes, and the Pegasus turned tail and ran out the front door.



"Rainbow, wait!"

Rainbow didn't stop, or look back, and just galloped out past the front fence of the Acres, back towards Ponyville.

Applejack sat down at the kitchen table with a heavy sigh. Rainbow was too stubborn for her own good.

Later that morning, before high noon, Applejack went into Ponyville to look for Rainbow, instead running into Twilight outside the library.

"Hey Twi', you seen Rainbow around?"

"Not since this morning, when she told me what happened, in tears."

Applejack gave a frustrated sigh.

"Can't she see that I'm looking out for her best interests?"

"Maybe not, when you decided to support her decision a week ago and wait until the day before the race to change your mind."

"Then what do you suggest I do, Twilight?"

"Run with her in that race tomorrow."

"But that would show her that I agree with her running in it, when I clearly don't!"

"No, it shows you care enough about her to support her even when you don't agree with what she's doing."

"I...I don't know if I can do that, Twi. If she gets hurt in that race..."

"Then there'll be nothing you can do about it. It's her choice, and unless you're willing to drag her back to the farm and tie her to the bed, I doubt you'll be able to change her mind."

Applejack exhaled and shook her head.

"I...I just can't. I stand by what I said earlier this morning. It's not a good idea."

"Well, then you have until tomorrow at noon to figure out what you're going to do, AJ." Twilight said, and then was on her way.

SWEET APPLE ACRES

THAT NIGHT

Applejack was making her rounds of the house, making sure everything was tidy and picked up, and started down the hall to her room, when she came to the doorway of the guest room.

The bed was still unmade from that morning, and Applejack walked over to the dresser where a handful of Rainbow's belongings rested. Her eyes paused at the shimmering gold necklace in the center, with the ruby lightning bolt emblazoned on the crest.

*"And Rainbow Dash, who could not abandon her friends for her own heart's desire, represents the Spirit of Loyalty!"*

Thinking back to the Element of Harmony she represented, she suddenly realized where she had gone wrong today.

*"Applejack, who reassured me when I was in doubt, represents the Spirit of Honesty!"*

Honesty.

She had made Rainbow a promise to run with her in that race tomorrow, and this morning she had just gone back on that promise. Applejack realized that she could use someone to reassure her when she was in doubt herself.

"Maybe it's time I showed Rainbow some loyalty of my own..."

Applejack said to herself, picking up the Harmony Necklace, admiring it in her hooves.

That settled it. It was Rainbow's choice, and Applejack decided she would be there to support her no matter what. Regardless of how she felt, a promise was a promise, especially when it came to one of her absolute best friends.

"I'll see ya at the start line, Rainbow Dash."

THE RUNNING OF THE LEAVES OPENING CEREMONY

THE NEXT MORNING

"Good morning, Ponyville, and welcome to the opening ceremonies of the Annual Running of the Leaves! This is your eye in the sky, Spike! Along with my new co-host, last year's fifth place finish, Twilight Sparkle!"

"Thanks, Spike. It certainly looks like this year's Running of the Leaves will be one to remember. In no small part to a generous donation by the Cloudsdale Weather Factory!"

"That's right, Twilight. This morning, the Pegasi factory workers brought down an entire cauldron of liquid rainbow to the opening ceremony, and the race's spectators and participants alike have dipped a hoof in the cauldron to show their support for Rainbow Dash!"

"Ever since what's now being known as the Case of the Cupcake Kidnappings having been closed, everypony attending the Running of the Leaves are showing their gratitude that the last victim managed to make it out alive. And despite some concerns about her recovery, Rainbow Dash has decided to enter the Running of the Leaves again this year, and she's determined to win it!"

While Twilight and Spike commented on the pre-race festivities above, Rainbow Dash was making her way through the crowd, mingling with spectators and other racers, thanking them for their concerns and support. Everypony around had a rainbow spectrum on one of their front hooves. Rainbow was quite touched, although she was trying her hardest to keep her composure, and stay focused on the approaching race.

"Ready for a good, clean race?" a familiar voice asked, approaching from behind.

Rainbow turned, and saw Applejack. Her front two hooves had been dipped in liquid rainbow, and there was a racing number on her flanks.

"Change your mind again?" Rainbow asked with a small smile.

"Yes. I'm still worried, but it's your choice, and it was wrong of me to go back on a promise that I made you. I'm here, and I'm giving you all I got."

Rainbow and AJ shared a hug, and then during the next few minutes, the racers got situated on the starting line.

"On your marks, racers!" Twilight announced.

Applejack and Rainbow, right next to each other, put their hooves on the starting line, and bent down, ready to bolt off with all the others.

"Get set..." Spike continued.

Rainbow licked her lips, and the two friends gave each other a short glance, and nodded at each other.

They were ready.

"GO!"

***The Cupcake killer***

**By milesprower06**

***In collaboration with Ace2401***

## Prologue

### A Conscience Guilty

SWEET APPLE ACRES

ONE WEEK AFTER RUNNING OF THE LEAVES

12:30 AM

Rainbow Dash sat on the porch of the Apple Family Farmhouse, under the canopy as a midnight autumn shower moved across the Ponyville area. The wingless Pegasus had a somber look about her tonight. Rain didn't usually make her sad, but combined with the thoughts present in her mind tonight, the weather certainly wasn't helping.

"Hey there, Sugarcube. Can't sleep?" asked a friendly voice from behind, as the screen door quietly squeaked open, tapping shut as Applejack came up next to her recent house guest, and it looked more and more like it would become permanent resident, if Rainbow had made her mind up about staying on the farm.

"Nope. I've been tossing and turning for three hours." Rainbow answered her friend, not taking her gaze off of the hazy shower. Applejack took a sitting position next to the rainbow-maned pony, subtly looking her over.

She was almost entirely healed from her traumatic, torturous experience a few weeks ago. The scars were still apparent, and one of her back hooves was a bit sore, but other than that, she was quite anxious to start work around the farm and get her mind off what had happened.

"So what's on your mind, hun?"

There was a moment of silence, broken only by the pelting rain on the roof.

"Pinkie."

Applejack thought back to their former friend. Due to her central role in the horrific murders in the past months, most of Ponyville had come to call her 'The Cupcake Killer.'

When she had come looking for Rainbow after she missed a date for pie, Applejack stumbled upon the basement of Sugarcube Corner, where Pinkie was committing these atrocities. And there had hung Rainbow, at death's door. Applejack knocked Pinkie back in self-defense, giving her a blow to the chin so hard that her neck had snapped when she collided with a table.

Acting as quickly as she could, she rushed Rainbow to Ponyville Urgent Care, and it would turn out that she did so just in time. Sadly, Rainbow's wings could not be saved, and it was a loss that Rainbow was having trouble coping with. After spending a couple nights in the hospital, Rainbow was released, and after a restless

half-night alone, she made her way to Applejack's farm, where she had been staying for most of her recovery.

And now her mind was on Pinkie. Applejack wasn't sure how to view the whole situation yet. That night she found Rainbow was a shock, and helping her through her recovery, she hadn't really gone back to think about it.

"Oh? What about her?" Applejack asked.

"I...I can't help but wonder if we're to blame for what she did."

Applejack put her arm around her friend.

"Sugar, we all heard the conclusion Princess Luna came to, but that doesn't mean-

"No, Applejack." Rainbow began, tears pricking her eyes.

"Maybe you don't get it. What she did to me, I will remember for the rest of my life. And she did it to at least a dozen other poor ponies...and...and..."

She got choked up as tears ran down her cheeks.

"...and if what we did had *anything* to do with it..."

"Rainbow, if you keep thinking like that, you'll never sleep at night."

"You can? You don't think for one second that our surprise party might've been the cause of this?"

"What you went through, hun, I don't want to put into words. And the last thing you need right now is a guilty conscience."

"So...what do I do?" Rainbow asked her with teary eyes.

"Whatever you have to do to clear your mind." Applejack said, giving her a reassuring squeeze around the shoulders.

"Because Pinkie is gone, her victims are gone, and nothing will change that or bring them back."

## Chapter 1

### Remembrance

#### PONYVILLE OUTSKIRTS

#### THE NEXT MORNING

As the first rays from the rising sun began to shine on Ponyville, Rainbow Dash walked somberly up the dirt path towards the town, her Wonderbolt hoodie snug around her body as the crisp morning air moved past. She was still very conflicted inside; Applejack was right. Pinkie and her victims were no more, and that was why she wasn't quite sure how to deal with that feeling. Was she supposed to talk to someone? Just wait for everything to feel...right?

As she came into the first parts of town, she passed a turquoise unicorn sitting on a bench. She was holding something small in her hooves, and she looked as if she was quivering. Rainbow came closer, and realized she had seen this pony around town before.

"Hey there. Lyra, was it? How're you doing?"

Lyra looked up at Rainbow, with golden, watery eyes.

"Oh, h-hi Rainbow Dash. Glad to see you're recovering well. That was...was quite the race you ran last week."

Her voice was shaking, and it seemed like she had done a bit of crying recently. Rainbow took a seat next to her on the bench.

"What's wrong, Lyra?"

Lyra turned her hooves towards Rainbow, showing she was holding a small gold pendant necklace.

"It's...it's Bon-bon..." she said, sounding as if she was on the verge of tears again.

Suddenly, a flashback hit Rainbow.

*In the basement – strapped to the planks – Pinkie – her dress – sewn from all the cutie marks of her past victims...*

*One of them was three wrapped candies...*

'Oh no...' Rainbow swallowed.

"She left for a candy fair and convention over in Hoofington several weeks ago. She was supposed to be back last week, but no one had any idea where she was. I started to fear the worst, as those disappearances had been happening for months and...and..."

Tears streamed down her cheeks, and she took in a staggered breath.

"They just told me last night. This was found in the basement of Sugarcube Corner, and her cutie mark was on that psycho's dress..."

Lyra fell into a sob, and Rainbow felt helpless. She had been just seconds away from the same fate.

Rainbow felt the subtlest sense of irony. Through her recovery, she had been the victim, brought through her ordeal by very dear

friends. And now here she was, trying to figure out how to help someone else, who had lost a very dear friend. She put her arm around the shuddering figure of Lyra.

"I...I know it's hard, losing someone very special. Thinking that life will never be the same. But if anything, I know she'd want you to be strong, Lyra. At least it's over."

Lyra gave her a teary nod.

"Thanks Rainbow, you're right. I have to find my way through this, just like you are. I can't imagine it's easy for you. Always being on the ground now."

"I'm finding ways to adapt. It hasn't been easy in any sense, but I've been doing a lot of thinking. And the Running of the Leaves was something of a distraction, as well."

"Rainbow...I – I have to know. What happened to you? What happened to Bon-bon?"

Rainbow went wide-eyed for just a moment.

"You don't want to know, Lyra."

"Rainbow, I saw you when you first came out of the hospital. I see the scars on you-"

"And if those don't give you enough mental images, I'm not going to give you any more." Rainbow said gently, but sternly. "You don't want to do that to yourself, Lyra."

"I-I just don't want to think that she suffered..." Lyra said shakily.

"Then don't think about it. Remember her for who she was. Don't focus on what happened down there, okay?"

It didn't look like Lyra was satisfied, but she sniffled and nodded. Rainbow gave her a comforting hug, and was on her way into town. Honestly, the Running of the Leaves *had* been a distraction. She needed something to focus on other than those lingering thoughts in her head, and AJ wouldn't let her do any chores yet, so that's why she ran.

But now those lingering thoughts were back. She couldn't help but feel partly responsible for what Pinkie had done...

SEVERAL MONTHS AGO...

"Thanks a lot for coming, guys! It was a blast! Happy Birthday Spike!" Pinkie yelled out, waving from her bedroom window on the second story of Sugarcube Corner. She had just thrown Spike a surprise birthday party.

Spike sheepishly waved back up at Pinkie, and thanked her for the festivities.

"See ya tomorrow, Pinkie!" Rainbow waved goodbye to her along with the others, then they were on their way.

With Spike happily munching away on a bowl of leftover gems, Rainbow looked up at the starry sky as she glided above her friends.

"Guys, I have an idea I've been thinking about." she announced.



"Oh? Go on." Twilight encouraged.

"Well, Pinkie's birthday is in a couple weeks. I know she always plans and organizes the parties around Ponyville, but I thought it would be awesome if we could throw *her* a surprise birthday party!"

"Rainbow, that's a great idea! She'd never expect it!" Applejack heartily agreed.

"But where could we organize it? Pinkie's all over the place." Rarity inquired.

"How about the barn over on the Acres? There's not much in there right now, plenty of space!" Applejack offered.

"And I'm sure the Cakes could keep a secret if I placed an order for a birthday cake for her."

"I could decorate the barn! It'll look fabulous!" Rarity chimed in.

"Fluttershy and I could bring you decorations from around town, and Cloudsdale." Rainbow offered.

"What about Spike? Wouldn't he want to help?" Fluttershy asked.

"Puleeze. He can't keep a secret for 10 whole minutes. You want him to try and keep a secret for weeks?"

"So that settles it. Surprise party for Pinkie!" AJ proclaimed.

PRESENT DAY

*She* had been the one to initially suggest the surprise party that had caused Pinkie to snap. But how was she supposed to know? It was supposed to be a friendly gesture, and because Pinkie had been so determined to find out what they were up to, she had convinced herself that her friends didn't want anything to do with her anymore.

*'So how can it be my fault? If matters were completely out of my hooves, why am I feeling this way?'* Rainbow thought to herself as she made her way into Ponyville.

It just wasn't the fact that Pinkie had snapped into a schizophrenic episode; Rainbow kept linking her surprise party to the lives that were lost. And for every pony that Pinkie had butchered and mutilated down in the basement of Sugarcube Corner, there were friends and family members who were now affected. And for some reason, she felt responsible.

Her first stop was the library, where she told Twilight those exact thoughts.

"Rainbow, you had no control over what Pinkie did in that basement. It wasn't your fault."

Twilight's reassurances weren't doing a whole lot of good.

"Why is this coming up all of a sudden?" her bookworm of a friend asked.

"I-I haven't been sleeping well. I don't know why, but I'm feeling guilty for the lives Pinkie took away." Rainbow answered.

"I wonder if it's survivor's guilt?"

"Huh?" Rainbow cocked her head to the side quizzically.

"When you make it out of something a whole lot of other ponies didn't, sometimes you feel guilty and responsible for the lives that were lost. They call it survivor's guilt."

"No, Twilight! I'm not talking about me being the only one making it out! I'm talking about, what if we could've stopped this? Helped Pinkie when we realized what had happened to her! I..."

Tears welled up in her eyes again.

"I never told you guys what I saw right before the surprise party. I didn't tell anypony until it was too late..."

SUGARCUBE CORNER

SEVERAL MONTHS AGO...

As the sun set behind the horizon, Pinkie woefully cleaned up the mess in her bedroom. It had been a very trying day. She had led herself to believe her friends wanted nothing to do with her anymore and then...

...then...*this* happened.

Pinkie righted the stool next to the table when there was a soft knock on the door. She turned to see it open, and reveal Rainbow.

"Hey there, Pinkie Pie. How're you doing?"

Pinkie looked at her friend with a sad look on her face, and looked around the room. The majority of Gummy's after-birthday cake was still on the table, joined by a slice on the floor next to the stool Pinkie had set up on it's legs just now. The bucket of turnips were still where they fell when Rainbow and Pinkie had gotten into that short scuffle.

'Sir Lintsalot' and 'Madame LaFlour' were still at their places at the table. 'Rocky' was still on the floor in front of the table where Rainbow had tipped the stack of rocks.

The surprise party had been very delightful. It had just put a downer on the whole day having to come back to this mess, remembering what had happened.

"Just...just cleaning up, that's all." Pinkie replied sheepishly, trying to convince herself that the events in this room earlier today never took place.

"Listen, Pinkie. I wanted to talk to you, make sure you're okay."

"Well sure, why wouldn't I be okay?"

"Well, because of this for one." Rainbow replied, motioning to the mess around the table.

"I...I really don't know what came over me. I was so afraid of losing my friends..." Pinkie admitted.

Rainbow came up to her and put a leg around her friend's shoulder.

"Maybe you should see a doctor, Pink. Just make sure that, you know, everything's alright up there."

"No no, I'm fine. That side of me is gone as far as I'm concerned. As soon as I get this mess cleaned up, I can forget all about it."

"Are you sure, Pinkie? You're my friend, and I want to know you're alright."

"I'm alright, Rainbow Dash, honest. I know now never to doubt my friends again." she said with a smile.

"Well, alright then."

PONYVILLE LIBRARY

PRESENT DAY

Rainbow began to cry.

"I never told anyone. I knew something was wrong and I just lied to myself, convinced myself that it was over, just like she had.

And...and look what happened to her..." she said, sobbing.

Twilight set her book down and came over to her friend.

"Rainbow..."

"I could've stopped it. I could've stopped this all from happening."

Twilight rubbed Rainbow's back in an effort to get her to calm down.

"Rainbow, what you did wasn't wrong. You were being a friend to Pinkie. You didn't want to hurt her feelings or your friendship by insisting that she get help. If you keep on going over past events like this, believing it could have been different, you're going to drive yourself insane."

"It's not just that...I don't..."

She swallowed and sniffled, and tried to get back her composure.

"How am I supposed to remember her? How are all of us supposed to remember her? As one of the most energetic full-of-life friends ever? Or as this...'Cupcake Killer'? Is that the best way to honor her memory?"

Twilight didn't answer Rainbow's question right away. Rainbow and Pinkie had been closer friends than the rest of them, which was understandable. In any group of friends, some were closer than others.

"I just...just need to find some peace. Some closure to all this..."

"Well Rainbow," Twilight began, motioning to the library's front door.

"It's a beautiful day out there. I'd say take a walk around town, get some fresh air. Talk to some of our other friends, get more perspectives, or maybe go for a swim. Just let your mind wander, maybe it'll solve this problem all on it's own."

Rainbow wiped the tears from her eyes and nodded.

"Thanks, Twi."

The two friends hugged each other before Rainbow made an exit into the bright Ponyville morning.

## Chapter 2

### The Fountain

CENTRAL PONYVILLE

30 MINUTES LATER

Rainbow wasn't headed in any particular direction, she just walked where her hooves took her. It was getting a little frustrating; this feeling of guilt over what Pinkie did, and she didn't seem to be any closer to solving it, and she wasn't sure that her mind would solve this problem on it's own if she just went for a stroll. Rainbow wasn't the most patient of ponies, and with how her patience was tested at times with other ponies, she doubted she could tolerate waiting on *herself* to get over the guilt.

The conflict within wouldn't go away. She didn't want to remember Pinkie as 'The Cupcake Killer', but she couldn't just ignore what she had done and remember her as a friend. It was a bubbly feeling deep in her stomach, and it wasn't pleasant.

Pinkie Pie had done terrible, unspeakable things to her in that basement, and to a dozen other ponies as well. Rainbow Dash couldn't help but wonder which groups of friends and families were now mourning a lost loved one like she had found Lyra doing earlier that day. Rainbow Dash shuddered at the thought of the fate she had been spared, 'the harvesting', Pinkie had called it, right before Applejack came to her rescue.

Rainbow Dash began to reflect on her memory of the nightmarish experience. It wasn't easy, but she needed to if she wanted to move on with her life. Pinkie Pie had done more than physically torture Rainbow Dash, she took away Rainbow Dash's identity and sense of self. Rainbow Dash was still trying to find her place in the world, for what was she without her wings? Flying had been her life. A small part of her wanted to hate Pinkie for what she had done and the pain she had caused, but she couldn't.

She wouldn't, for her wings weren't the only thing Rainbow Dash held dear that had been cruelly taken from her that night. She had lost a friend, and to Rainbow Dash, the Element of Loyalty, her friends were just as much a part of what made her whole as flying was, and Pinkie Pie had meant just as much to her as Applejack before that fateful night. Rainbow Dash couldn't hate Pinkie Pie any more than she could forget about her love of flying. She could only feel like she failed Pinkie as a friend for letting such a terrible transformation take place within her soul. In Rainbow Dash's mind, Pinkie was as much a victim as herself or anypony else. Rainbow Dash felt a responsibility as the lone survivor to do something for the victims, so they could be remembered. Even Pinkie Pie.

She came to the stone fountain near the center of town, and stopped to look at her reflection in the ripples. She also saw bits scattered around the bottom of the fountain, obviously some ponies used it as a wishing fountain. She followed the ripples to their source, as they fell from the 2nd story bowl, and the smaller yet 3rd bowl. It reminded her of her liquid rainbow fountain back on her cloud home.

Twilight, her ever-knowledgeable, well-read friend was right, because right then, watching that fountain, something clicked, and the lightbulb blinked on above her head.

"That's it! That's what I can do!"

She quickly galloped towards Carousel Boutique, and barged through the door, startling the design shop's proprietor, who was currently sewing a garment.

"Hey Rarity, I just got a fantastic idea, and I wanted to bring it to you first and get your opinion on it. I think you could appreciate it most."

"Oh? Do go on, Rainbow." Rarity replied, retrieving from the floor the thread and needle she just dropped.

"What if we made a memorial? For the victims."

Rarity developed a small smile.

"Well, I'd say it's a wonderful idea. Where are you thinking of making it?"

"I was thinking the fountain. Dedicating the fountain to the victims. We could decorate it, and carve a eulogy into the stone..."

"Well, you're certainly down the right path, Rainbow. Have you talked to the mayor about it?"

"No not yet. I wanted to get my friend's opinions."

"Well, you have my approval."

"And Rarity...I was thinking...of Pinkie, too."

This brought the conversation to an abrupt but short pause.

"What about her?"

"I'm wondering if we would include her in the memorial."

Rarity sat on her back haunches next to Rainbow.

"Rainbow..."

"I know what you're going to say, Rarity."

"Well, you're going to hear it anyway. Darling, you're heart's in the right place. She was a friend, no doubt. But...she hurt a lot of ponies, darling. Yourself included. And even though Pinkie was my friend too...I'm sorry, Rainbow, but you don't memorialize the killer along with their victims."

Rainbow was silent for a moment after that, and Rarity didn't want it to seem like she had discouraged the idea more than supported it.

"But other than that, I believe it's a splendid idea."

"Thanks Rarity. Once we get support from the mayor, I was hoping you could help with the décor."

"Absolutely."

"Alright. I'm headed over to Fluttershy's."

"Alright, good luck. And think about what I said."

It was a 5-minute walk through Ponyville to the edge of town closest to the Everfree Forest, where Fluttershy lived in her cottage. Rainbow came up the front walk, gave a gentle knock, and her Pegasus childhood friend answered moments later.

"Oh, hello, Rainbow Dash. How are you doing today?"

"Just spending a while walking around town. Trying to clear my head."

Rainbow spent the next several minutes about the idea for the memorial at the fountain, and Fluttershy was equally optimistic. This time around, however, Rainbow omitted her idea about including Pinkie.

"I could plant some lovely floral arrangements around the fountain! Well, that's if the mayor allows it."

"I don't know why she wouldn't. The victims, as well as the friends and family members, deserve a place to remember them by."

There was another knock at the door, and Rarity came in.

"Rarity, long time no see." Rainbow joked, getting a small giggle out of the fashion pony.

"Rainbow, Fluttershy, could you follow me? There's somepony who'd like to talk with you."

"Oh, alright. Where are we going?"

"Sugarcube Corner."

## Chapter 3

### Loyal To The End And Beyond

CENTRAL PONYVILLE

5 MINUTES LATER

Rainbow's curiosity had been piqued, absolutely. Who wanted her at Sugarcube Corner, and why?

She hadn't been there since...

Rarity led the way, with her and Fluttershy in tow, and they came to the now-infamous sweet shop, which had miraculously managed to stay in business, despite the horrors that had transpired in the basement. The trio entered the shop, and were greeted by Mrs. Cake and Twilight at the front counter.

"Twilight, what are you doing here?" Rainbow asked, surprised.

"Well, Rainbow." Rarity began, "When you finished telling me your idea, I went to find Twilight. Spike was the only one at the library, and pointed me to Sugarcube Corner. When I got here, she told me to go get you, and the first place I checked was Fluttershy's."

"So, what exactly is this about?" Rainbow inquired.

"When Rarity got here, she told me about your idea, and I was already here because I knew you were being bothered inside by what Pinkie had done, so I thought it would be a good idea for you to come and talk to somepony who was just as close to her as you were." Twilight said, turning to Mrs. Cake.

"Well, if everypony would please follow me. Honey, be a dearie and watch the store while I tend to our guests." Mrs. Cake called to her husband before taking everyone through the kitchen upstairs to the second floor. At the top of the stairs, there was a door with a heart-shaped window. She slowly opened it, and led everyone into Pinkie's old bedroom. Rainbow, greeted with recent memories of trying to convince her friend to get some help, seemed uneasy.

"I thought this would be the most appropriate place to discuss this, Rainbow."

"Discuss *what*?" Rainbow said, her patience being tested just by being in this room.

"Rainbow, I support your idea of a memorial. But it has to be for the victims, sweetheart. To include the killer would be-"

"She wasn't a killer! That...pony that committed those murders down in the basement...it may have been the same body, but not the same mind. Not the Pinkie I knew. She was cheerful, joyful, a high-on-life party pony. She could have never done this, deep in my heart I know that."

"Rainbow, you're right, and your heart is in the right place, truly it is. But there are a lot of ponies in town that feel differently. Ponies

who have lost loved ones because of what she did. It wouldn't be right, but I think I know what you're looking to do."

Rainbow said nothing, and waited for Mrs. Cake to continue.

"Pinkie was like a daughter to me, and if you, just like me, are looking to honor her memory, who she used to be, I think I know the perfect way for you to do that."

Mrs. Cake made a brief exit to across the hall to her bedroom, and came back with a small box on her back, with holes lining the sides and lid, and presented it to Rainbow.

Rainbow took it, and a little green scaly nose poked up out of the lid for a moment before darting back under.

Gummy.

All these feelings that had been slowly stirring inside the past few days finally came to a head, and erupted. Rainbow fell on her back haunches, collapsing against the wall, and she broke into an uncontrollable sob, nearly dropping the box, managing to set it on the floor next to her before burying her head in her hooves. Her friends came in and held her tight as she wept. These mixed feelings deep inside were now straight in line.

She brought her face up out of her arms and looked at each of her friends, her shoulders heaving, and tears streaming out of her eyes.

"I...I..." Rainbow began, trying her best to get a hold of herself.

"I...d-don't care. I don't care what she did. I don't care that she hurt me, that she brought me within an inch of my life, or what she did to anypony else. I just...just...*I miss my friend!* Alright?

Okay? *Is that so wrong?*"

"Of course it isn't wrong, Rainbow. After all, you represent the Element of Loyalty. So it only makes sense that you'd care about your friends and stand by them, no matter *what* they do. That says so much about you, Rainbow Dash, that through thick and thin; through the worst of circumstances, you will never let that love die." Twilight said.

Rainbow sniffled, and wiped the tears from her eyes, and gently opened the lid of the box, and those big purple eyes stared up at her. She picked up the toothless baby alligator, and held him close.

"I figured he'd be happier with you on the farm, is all." Mrs. Cake chimed in.

"Yeah," Rainbow looked at him with a smile, then at Mrs. Cake.

"Yeah, I think he will."

SWEET APPLE ACRES

THAT NIGHT

Rainbow walked through the front gates of Sweet Apple Acres as the sun began to dip below the horizon, and Luna began to bring out the stars and moon. She had saddlebags on her back, and Gummy rode contently on top of them.



The day had improved immensely after her visit to Sugarcube Corner. Together with her three friends, they had approached the Mayor with Rainbow's idea for the fountain memorial, and she was ecstatic. She said she'd be delighted if work began on it as early as tomorrow. After everything had been set in motion, Rainbow had made her way back to the farm.

As she approached the farmhouse, Applejack came out and greeted her on the porch.

"Hey there, Sugarcube. Have a good day?"

She was quite surprised when Gummy poked his head around Rainbow's neck. Rainbow looked at him with a smile.

"Yeah. Yeah I did."

Applejack's reaction wasn't immediate.

"Uh, sugarcube, why in Celestia's name is he with you?"

"Oh, you mean Gummy? I, uhh, didn't want the poor little guy to go lonely"

"But doesn't he remind you a bit much of her?" AJ responded.

"You mean Pinkie? Well, yeah. But I don't want to forget our friendship."

"Sugar, she hurt a lot of innocent ponies. She hurt *you*."

"I know, I just...I just can't dwell on that anymore. I want to remember her for who she used to be."

"I know it's easy for you to forgive Dash, but for me... not so much. It just hurts me to see what she did to you."

"I'm not talking about forgiveness, AJ. I'm talking about separating the Pinkie we all knew and loved from that monster that carried out the horrors in Sugarcube Corner's basement."

"That's just what I mean Dash, it's not as easy for everypony else to make that separation."

"I know. That's why I decided to take Gummy. So I can leave everypony else out of it and honor Pinkie my way."

"Well, if that's what you have to do Dash, I suppose I can support that."

"Thanks, AJ. That means a lot to me."

## Chapter 4

### Memorial

#### PONYVILLE FOUNTAIN

#### 2 WEEKS LATER

A good portion of Ponyville was gathered at the newly-decorated fountain in the center of town. Planted all around the base were the most beautiful and exotic types of flowers, thanks to Fluttershy. On the edge of all three flowing bowls, glimmering gemstones had been encrusted into the stone. When the sunlight hit them, the sight was almost magical. Thanks to Rarity, who had spent a great deal of time in the past couple weeks perfecting her choice of gems to be included in the memorial.

On the bottom most bowl, where most of the water was at all times, the names of the victims had been expertly carved into the outside wall all around the circumference. It had taken Twilight up until 2 nights ago to get them all carved in.

The mayor came up to the podium that had been set up in front of the fountain.

"Now if everypony would bow their heads for a moment of silence." All ponies present lowered their heads, closed their eyes, and were silent. Just the wind moving through town could be heard. After several moments, the mayor thanked the crowd, and gave the podium to Rainbow Dash.

"Thanks so much for coming out today, everypony. When I first got this idea in my head a couple weeks ago, I never anticipated this outpouring of support. I'll be honest, I wasn't particularly close with any of the victims of these killings, but many of you were, and every day I thank my lucky stars that my name isn't carved into this fountain."

Rainbow ducked underneath the podium, and came up with her jar of liquid rainbow from her cloud home, and untwisted the lid.

"So let this fountain be a reminder of what Ponyville has lost. Of the joy and happiness these ponies brought into our lives."

With that, she slowly poured the liquid rainbow into the fountain, every last drop, and within seconds, the spectrum had worked through the entire waterlines, and the fountain was now a brilliant display of colors reflected in the sunshine.

The next hour was spent with several family and friends of particular victims coming to the podium and telling of happy times with their lost loved ones. After which, another moment of silence was given, and the ceremony ended.

As the crowd began to disperse, Rainbow looked at the shooting streams of rainbow as they fell into the two tiers into the bottom

bowl, and was touched at what her friends and her had managed to accomplish.

"It's very beautiful. I can't wait to see how it looks under the moonlight."

Rainbow turned, and saw Princess Luna behind her, and she gave a short bow.

"Thank you, your highness. What can I do for you?"

"Actually, I just thought I'd come and let you know something. This isn't for everypony's ears, but it concerns Pinkie."

Rainbow listened intently, and her friends saw Luna lean down and whisper something in Rainbow's ear. Rainbow then nodded with a soft smile, and Luna ascended into the sky towards Canterlot.

PONYVILLE ROCK FARM

2 DAYS LATER

Rainbow Dash sat near a large oak tree next to the silo near the farmhouse, with Gummy on her shoulder. She sat in front of a fresh mound of dirt, where a pile of rocks had been set up, with a wooden cross perched out of the center of the pile, with a name carved into it.

'PINKAMENA DIANE PIE'

"Look...I don't think everypony will ever be able to agree on how to view what you did. Whether it's right to remember you and the way you were before all this happened. I don't honestly know what I'd say to you, had you survived. I'm trying my hardest to cope with what you did to me, Pinkie. You were one of my best friends, and I think I'm the only one out of our friends who's ready to move on. You're gone now, and I can't feel about you the way the other victims do. You didn't take anyone from me, except...yourself. We'll never know if you had any idea what you were doing, if there was something seriously wrong with your mind. I'm sorry if anything we did caused this."

Rainbow fumbled with the dirt for a moment, trying to figure out what she wanted to say next.

"I guess what I'm trying to say is...I don't know if I'll ever be able to forgive you for what you did. I'm going to find a way to live with what you did to me, and I'll be stronger for it. But...you were a great friend, regardless of what happened to you in the end."

Rainbow just sat there, looking at the simple grave. By looking at her, a pony wouldn't be able to tell if she was waiting for a response from beyond the grave. She sat there for several more minutes, in silence, before whispering goodbye, and began to trot home back to the farm, with Gummy on her back.

Her mind was finally clear.

***Apple of Her Eye***

***By milesprower06***

## SWEET APPLE ACRES

### ONE WEEK AFTER FOUNTAIN MEMORIAL

Rainbow Dash slowly came to, laying in her bed in the guest room, or rather, *her* room, in the Apple Family Farmhouse on Sweet Apple Acres.

"Rise an' shine, an' up'n at'em, Rainbow Dash!" Applejack cheerfully said, rousing the groggy former Pegasus.

All she got in return, at first, was an annoyed moan, as Gummy nibbled on her forelocks.

"Who gets up this early...?" she whined.

"Well, if you want to help with chores, this is the time of day that we get started."

With that, Rainbow bolted up in bed, her blankets nearly flying off the bed.

"Really? You mean it? I can finally, *finally* help?" she said excitedly.

"Yes, Rainbow. You've been quite patient these past few weeks, and I think you've recovered enough to the point where you're ready to learn about Applebuckin'!" Applejack proclaimed.

"Wahoo!" Rainbow leaped up in the air, coming back down on her bed and bouncing off to the floor, screeching to a halt with her face inches from AJ's.

"So where do we start? Huh?"

"Well, first off, you're gonna need this." Applejack said, before plopping a brown cowpony hat down on Rainbow's head, nearly identical to hers.

"Make sure you keep this on your head while you're workin'. Otherwise the sun'll bake you to a crisp and you'll be overheated and worn out before the day's even half over." AJ instructed.

"You got it!"

"And before we get started, I'd say we both need a good breakfast. So come on out to the kitchen, Big Mac's got a hearty start to the day for us!

And indeed he did. Eggs, fresh apples, and orange juice.

"Better eat up, Rainbow. Mah' sis is gonna work you good today."

"Ah don't be like that, Mac. He's just pullin' yer hoof, Rainbow.

Listen, if you feel you need to take a break at all today, you just let me know, alright?"

With that, the duo made their way out to the front porch. Rainbow adjusted her hat to block the slowly rising sun, and after AJ had gone and gotten an apple cart, they made their way to the closest apple orchard, whose trees were ripe for the bucking with big, juicy, Red Delicious apples.

"Now, considering you've never done this before, I imagine you think it's as easy as walking up to a tree and giving it a kick. But you have to be careful." AJ instructed, she walked up to the first

tree, turned her back, and gave it a solid whack from both back hooves. Apples came falling down from the branches.

"You've gotta set the right distance. If you're too far away, you'll miss, and if you're too close for a full force buck, you might pull a muscle or sprain something."

After they had gathered up the first tree's apples into the cart, they moved on to the next closest one. This time, it was Rainbow's turn.

"Now, don't give it your all the first time. Do it slowly, judge the distance from where your front hooves are and how far stretched you are when your back hooves hit the tree."

Rainbow did as she was told, slowly leaning on her front hooves and stretching back with her rears, making small adjustments, until AJ figured she had it right.

"Alright, now, it doesn't matter how long your hooves are on the tree. Just one good smack should do it. Go on and give it a try."

Rainbow threw her weight onto her front legs, and then shifted, bringing her back hooves down and back, and bucked the trunk of the apple tree, it's branches shuddering in response.

As a few apples fell to the grass, Rainbow was rewarded from her first bucking with an apple to the head. She giggled, thrilled that she had managed to shake some apples loose on her first try. She repeated the kick a few times, and all the apples were down.

"Alright! I did it!" Rainbow joyously announced. AJ chuckled.

"Well, lets see how ya feel after you do a couple dozen of these."

And that's exactly what she did. Twenty apple trees later, the cart AJ was pulling was full.

"Alright, ya feel like pulling that to the apple cellar underneath the barn?"

"Sure thing!"

Rainbow went to the front of the cart and got herself in the harness, already knowing what to do from her time helping Rarity haul gems out of those underground caves, except that this was considerably heavier. But she managed nonetheless. Slowly, she made her way to the apple cellar, which now had two entrances; a set of stairs, and a longer inclined ramp, so the apple cart could now be wheeled down below.

Unsure of her ability to go in forward and keep her self from getting rolled over by the cart, Rainbow positioned herself with the back of the cart at the door, and backed it into the cellar, where there was a small pit dug in the center, with a large wooden basket, where a few cartfuls of apples already were. With the back of the apple cart at the pit, Rainbow got out of the harness, unlocked the back end of the cart, and gave it a tip. The 21 trees worth of apples tumbled out into the basket, and afterward, she righted the cart, and went back for more. Already, she was feeling a bit of the strain.

"Whew, the life of a farm pony." she commented to herself.

And that was the routine for the first half of the day. By 2:00, Rainbow, with a little of AJ's help, took six carts of apples to the cellar, where they waited to be cooked into all manner of treats and sweets and then loaded onto Applejack's apple stand for her market days in Ponyville. On her latest load to the barn, AJ met her outside.

"Alright, Rainbow, I'd say we've earned ourselves a nice meal, wouldn't you say so?"

"You bet. I'm starvin'!"

The two of them went into the farmhouse, and were soon joined by Bic Mac, coming in from plowing, and they began with making lunch. Daffodil and daisy sandwiches, hay fries, apple juice, and apple cobbler for desert. During the meal, Rainbow sat across from AJ, and Big Macintosh and Granny Smith were on the adjacent sides.

Applejack was finished before Rainbow.

"Alright, I'mma pull another apple cart out so you and I can work on separate orchards afterwards. I'll see ya out there." Applejack told her, as the cyan Pegasus was finishing with her cobbler.

"I'd best be back to it too." Big Mac said, swallowing his last bite of dessert, leaving only Rainbow and the elderly Granny Smith at the table.

"Ya look like you got somethin' on yer mind, Sugah" Granny commented.

"Really?" Rainbow asked, slowly nibbling at her cobbler.

"It's rather obvious, what with the way you're lookin' at her."

Rainbow's cheeks turned several shades redder.

"Uh-um, I don't know what you're getting at."

"Honey, I may be old, but ah'm certainly not dim. Now maybe you don't know you're doin' it, but your eyes were locked on her the whole time."

Rainbow Dash gulped, looked like she was about to panic.

"I...I..."

"Now now, I don't want you frettin' none. I didn't mean anythin' by it. If you have any feelings for AJ, that's your business. I won't judge you or her for whatever you two feel for each other. You've gotta follow your heart. I've always figured love is a complicated thing."

Rainbow sat there silently, not able to touch the rest of her dessert. There were far too many butterflies in her stomach now.

"She doesn't know." Rainbow began, staring at her plate of crumbs and half-eaten cobbler. "How...how do I tell her? I mean, how I feel?"

"You'll find a way. Don't worry. But when you figure out how to say it, how to tell her, you'd best do so. It's not something you want to keep bottled up inside, hun."

With that, Granny left the table to go take a nap, leaving Rainbow alone at the table, who slowly finished her cobbler. She was glad that Applejack had started on another orchard by the time she got back outside. She figured that just looking at her right now would turn her into a bumbling mess. For the rest of the day, she couldn't focus her mind or heart on applebucking. She couldn't, because they were focused on Applejack.

THAT NIGHT

SWEET APPLE ACRES – LAKE

The moonlight glistened off the surface of the lake, distorted by the ripples as Rainbow swam in the cool night. Something had even been added in the past week. A simple dock had been built out close to the center of the lake, so she could do a little diving.

Rainbow was so deep in thought, still confused about her supposed feelings for AJ, that she didn't hear the hoofsteps on the dock.

What she did hear immediately afterward, was an all-too-familiar farm pony yell "Geronimo!" followed by a large splash right next to her, causing her to flutter and sink momentarily, as she regained her composure, and looked over at a laughing Applejack.

"Boy, I tell ya, it's been quite awhile since I've been in this swimmin' hole. It's quite refreshing, I'll give ya that."

Rainbow smiled nervously at her friend.

"Ya did good today, Rainbow! I thought a swim would be nice, and I brought you some apple juice, thought ya might be thirsty." AJ motioned toward the dock, two bottles of apple juice with straws had been set on the edge of the dock.

"Thanks, Applejack. I could use a drink."

She swam over to the dock, climbed up, and sat on the edge, followed immediately by AJ. Together, they sat there on the dock, sipping their apple juice.

"Besides, it looks like you got somethin' on your mind, Sugarcube."

Rainbow laughed at the irony.

"Hahaha, ohhh, I guess that must run in the family."

"What are you talkin' about?"

"It's nothin, really. But yeah, I have had something on my mind."

Rainbow sat silently for a moment, and made up her mind.

"Yeah. I have been thinking. About you. A lot."

"A-about me? How come?"

"I-I can't really explain. It's this feeling deep inside, and I can't deny it. You've done more for me than any other pony ever. You saved my life, you cared for me night and day, and...and I really really appreciate that, Applejack. And I'm trying to figure out a way to show that appreciation."

Applejack could see the flustered feelings Rainbow was having as she stared at her dripping wet friend.

"Rainbow, I-"



Applejack didn't get to finish her sentence, as Rainbow leaned over, and her lips connected with Applejack's. The moment they touched, she felt as if a surge of warmth surged through her body, moving down her spine to the tips of her hooves and back again. She closed her eyes, while AJ's eyes widened. Time seemed to slow to an inexorable crawl.

The kiss seemed like forever, yet in reality, only lasted two seconds, when Rainbow broke it, and opened her eyes, staring into Applejack's; those beautiful, apple green eyes. When Applejack's shocked expression didn't change in several seconds, Rainbow's expression changed from ecstatic to shocked and ashamed.

"I-I'm so sorry, AJ...I'm-oh!"

Rainbow held back the tears as she got up and galloped back to the farmhouse, leaving a stunned Applejack alone on the dock.

FARMHOUSE

10 MINUTES LATER

Rainbow paced uneasily in the foyer of the farmhouse, tears running down her cheeks.

*'What was I thinking? Acting that fast...? When I don't even know if Applejack shares these feelings! What if...what if I just blew it? If she can't look at me aga-'*

Rainbow's panicked thoughts were interrupted by the front door opening, and Applejack came in.

"Applejack, I...I..."

"Rainbow..."

"I'm so sorry. I-I wasn't thinking."

"Rainbow-"

"I just...I like you a lot. I...I *love you*, AJ. I-"

Applejack came up and placed the tip of her hoof on Rainbow's lips, silencing the jibbering Pegasus. They stared into each other's eyes, and AJ smiled at her friend.

"Now, I will admit. You caught me a bit by surprise there, Sugar. Maybe if you had let me know about these feelings earlier, it wouldn't have shocked me all that much."

Rainbow said nothing, tears still in her eyes.

"Now, that being said..." Applejack said, before coming in close and kissing Rainbow again. They gently probed each others mouths for those few precious seconds as the warmth wrapped around them. To Rainbow, it tasted like the sweetest, most succulent apple she had ever had. To Applejack, it was every sweet and tangy fruit she had ever tasted.

Again, slightly longer than last time, the kiss broke, leaving Rainbow as the surprised pony this time.

"Let's see where this goes, alright, Sugarcube?"

Rainbow, fighting through her daze and ecstasy, slowly nodded.

"Where do we go from here?" Rainbow asked, wiping the tears from her eyes.

Applejack came forward, and gently pressed her forehead to Rainbow's.

"Stay with me tonight." she whispered.

Rainbow's heart skipped a beat, and then regained her composure once again, and nodded.

Together, the two best friends walked side-by-side, melting into each other, and retired to AJ's room for the night, to see if that friendship could evolve into something more.

# ***Confessions of Love***

***By milesprower06***

## SWEET APPLE ACRES FARMHOUSE

Applejack tapped her bedroom door shut with one of her back hooves, and it clicked shut as she made her way over to her bed with Rainbow Dash. They both had the inner conflict; of resisting their lust because of the nervousness, or giving themselves completely to the other.

Applejack laid down on the bed alongside Rainbow, their eyes locked with one another as they slid under the sheets. Once they were situated, Rainbow snuggled in closer, resting her head on Applejack's chest. AJ kissed the wingless Pegasus on the forehead before wrapping her front legs tightly around her in a hug.

Then, with a shudder, she began to quietly cry.

"Applejack...w-what's wrong?"

"Ah...ah'm so sorry Rainbow. This might seem so sudden to you, but...I was so scared that night. I've...I've had these feelings for you for awhile now, and when you didn't show up for that apple pie that night...with those disappearances happening, it scared me half to death..."

## PONYVILLE

### ONE MONTH AGO

It was a peaceful night. Not many ponies were out around town this time of day, so the only sound over the crickets was the sound of galloping hooves over the wooden bridge into the market.

A panicked Applejack looked frantically around, and ran up to the first pony she saw.

"Excuse me, ma'am, have you seen Rainbow Dash around at all today?"

"Last I saw her, she was headed to Sugarcube Corner to do some baking with Pinkie Pie. Haven't seen her since."

AJ thanked her and ran as fast as she could to Sugarcube Corner. Due to the hour, it was locked up and closed for the night, the only lights on were the door lamps at the entrance.

Applejack was about to look around the building when the lamps began to flicker, and she heard a faint, barely audible scream emanate through the sides of the door frame.

*Rainbow...!*

That settled it. Applejack whipped around and gave the door two hard bucks, splintering the wood around the deadbolt lock. It finally gave way on the third kick. She burst into the store's lobby just as the prolonged scream gave out. It was coming up from the floorboards.

Applejack kept her wits about her, and thought quickly. Sugarcube Corner occupied one of the oldest buildings in Ponyville...the basement would most likely be...

A trap door! Running around the corner to behind the stairs, AJ came to a wooden door built into the floor. She took hold of the iron

handle in her mouth, and yanked it open, and galloped down the cobblestone stairs down to the cellar. She was nearly to the rearmost door when the lights stopped flickering. With another deep breath, AJ prepared to hit that door as hard as she could, and get Rainbow to safety...

PONYVILLE URGENT CARE

ONE HOUR LATER...

The current shift's receptionist trotted up to Applejack, who sat in the chairs next to the emergency room. She gave the shocked and exhausted workhorse with a glass of water.

"We sent a messenger out for your friends, Applejack. They should be here shortly."

AJ silently took the glass and merely held it, still in a state of shock.

"Try and breathe. I know this is a shock, but it'll be best if you remain calm." the receptionist advised.

Applejack turned her head towards the blurred windows on the ER doors, as doctors moved about the room hurriedly. She took in a staggered, shuddering breath.

"Ah can't lose her...ah can't. She's my best friend..."

The receptionist put a hoof gently on her shoulder.

"Everypony on the other side of that door is doing everything they possibly can."

The receptionist returned to the front desk, and Applejack finally took a sip of water.

"Oh, Dash..." she whispered to herself. "Why? Why do you have to be within an inch of your life for these feelings to surface, and make me want to pour my heart out to you? I've wanted to tell you how I feel, but if I have to bury these feelings for now, to help you recover, so be it..."

Suddenly, Twilight, Rarity, and Fluttershy came rushing into the lobby in a panic, and immediately spotted her sitting near the ER doors.

"Applejack? What's wrong? What's happened?" Twilight asked.

Applejack looked at them with tired, desperate eyes.

"It's Rainbow..."

SWEET APPLE ACRES FARMHOUSE

PRESENT DAY

Rainbow held the shuddering form of the workhorse that she was sharing the bed with.

"Ah'm sorry Rainbow. I should've told you. I just...just felt that I had to be strong...to help you recover, to help you be strong again..."

Rainbow squeezed the workhorse, and rolled her onto her back, not releasing her from the embrace. Now, AJ on her back, and Rainbow on top of her, Rainbow released her from the hug, and used the tip of her hooves to wipe the tears from her eyes, and then drew her

into a long kiss, sliding her tongue into AJ's mouth, the tip sliding over AJ's, then probed her gums, her cheeks, and then, Rainbow slowly broke it.

"Applejack..." she whispered, their faces just millimeters apart.

"Tonight, I don't want you to be strong."

With that, Rainbow slid down her body a few inches, and began licking and kissing Applejack's neck.

Applejack took in another one of those staggered breaths, but this one wasn't of stress or fear. It was of passion. Of love. She let her front and back hooves go limp and relax, and sunk her head into the pillow as Rainbow began to show her affection.

The wingless Pegasus kissed all over AJ's neck, slowly making her way down to her collarbone and chest, leaving behind a thin, shiny layer of saliva on her neck. For every moan of pleasure she gave out, AJ gave out two, louder and longer.

She had never felt anything like this before. As Rainbow slowly made her way down her chest to her midsection, she began to lose her train of thought, and her body began to slightly tingle. She gasped as Rainbow's mouth reached her stomach, and the tingling increased tenfold, and she began to feel a warm wetness between her thighs. She couldn't even think as waves of pleasure echoed through her body. Rainbow passionately went lower still, closing in on the most sensitive area on a mare's body.

Right before she went down between her legs, Rainbow lifted her head and looked at Applejack, almost gasping for air. Seconds later, Rainbow leaned down, breathed in that sweet scent, and went to work.

As soon as Rainbow's lips made contact, there was no going back. Applejack dug her hooves down in the sheets as her mind ceased to function. The pressure and tingling in her stomach only grew, and soon, sought an exit.

Nearly shaking, AJ gave one final gasp.

"R-Rainbow!" she said just above a whisper.

The feeling was indescribable, and Rainbow's tongue and mouth received their just reward.

Every muscle in Applejack's body tightened as she climaxed, her eyes nearly rolling up in their sockets, her body convulsing.

When it was over, AJ went limp, as her ears lazily heard Rainbow make a slurping sound between her legs, then brought her head up, and slowly made the return trip, moving up her body, and giving her lover another kiss on the lips.

"R-Rainbow...th-that was...that was..."

"Incredible." Rainbow finished, a bit short of breath herself. She snuggled into AJ, and in turn the workhorse wrapped her front hooves around her.

Both mentally spent and still physically exhausted from the work today, as well as their lovemaking just now, they welcomed the world of dreams.

*Rainbow opened her eyes with a flash. She couldn't move.*

*Blackness hung all around her.*

*Her breath quickened. It was happening again.*

*"Oh Rainbow, that was incredible." a familiar party pony's voice echoed, in a mocking manner.*

*Pinkamena came through the blackness with a knife.*

*Rainbow's pulse skyrocketed.*

*"Ready for round two, Dashie?"*

*The insane murderess closed in, but instead of using the knife, she licked her lips and bent down, going between her legs.*

*Rainbow gasped as the insane pony's tongue made contact, and then anger came over her. She wouldn't let Pinkie openly mock what her and AJ had just shared.*

*With a burst of energy, she broke the leather straps holding her legs to the planks and kicked Pinkamena in the chin, knocking her against the far wall. Her legs free, Rainbow used her weight to slip out of the top straps, and she hit the cobblestone floor.*

*Picking up the scalpel, she charged Pinkie as she recovered, ramming into her, and pinning her against the wall by her neck.*

*"Lets see how you like it..." she said hatefully, and then dug the blade of the scalpel into the skin around Pinkie's cutie mark.*

*But she didn't scream. She didn't even flinch. She simply stared with those contracted, sky blue eyes.*

*"Knock knock Dashie."*

Rainbow's eyes shot open. She was in Applejack's bed, her friend and lover sleeping peacefully next to her, their bodies having drifted apart in their sleep.

Then she heard a very soft rapping on the window. Loud enough for her to hear, but soft enough as to not disturb AJ or Winona.

"Psst."

Rainbow looked to the window.

A Shadowbolt floated there. It pointed to the front door of the house, and then dashed off.

Rainbow gently got out of bed, and went down the hall to the foyer, and gently opened the door.

There stood the Shadowbolt, whose uniform and features slowly began to dissolve, and reveal a dark purple alicorn with a simple brown leather saddlebag.

"P-Princess Luna?"

"Sorry about the late hour, Rainbow Dash, and the disguise. It attracts less attention. But I have something to tell you. It's...it's important."

"Come on in, your Highness."

The pair of ponies quietly made their way to the kitchen. Rainbow turned on the light above the table, sat down, and Luna sat down next to her.

"Rainbow, part of me wonders why I waited so long to bring this to you, but...I didn't want any more damage to be done. If this got out, it would spell doom for Sugarcube Corner, and Mr. and Mrs. Cake didn't have anything to do with this. They don't deserve that. But I still think you deserve a look. I...withheld...it from the evidence of the investigation."

Rainbow was silent, only for a few seconds.

"What is it?"

Luna's horn glowed, opening the flap of her saddlebag, and pulled out a leather-bound, hardcover book. There were splatters and droplets of blood all over the cover.

Luna set it on the table.

"It's her journal. Of the killings."

She pushed it towards Rainbow with her hooves, and the Pegasus stared at it in silence.

TO BE CONTINUED...



***Investigations of a Nightmare***

***By milesprower06***

***In collaboration with Ace2401***

PONYVILLE  
SUGARCUBE CORNER  
2:01 AM

The two Alicorn ponies flew down from the night sky and landed majestically inside the circumference of the yellow tape barrier that had been set up by Ponyville's local law enforcement. The commotion had roused some of Ponyville's inhabitants, who kept a curious watch outside the barriers. They silently looked around, and walked up to the entrance, where the captain of the royal guards was directing his ponies.

"Captain." Celestia greeted.

"Your Highness. The scene is down in the basement. The trap door under the stairs."

The pearl Alicorn nodded, and made her way into the building with her sister. A couple of investigators were looking around, but everything seemed to be in its place. Save for the front door having been splintered from the deadbolt. The pair of royal sisters made their way around to the trap door down to the basement. Their hoofsteps echoed off the cobblestone stairs, walls and floor. Old light fixtures dimly illuminated the corridor, and they came to the rearmost door, that had again, been splintered by force.

Here, it got interesting.

Three crime scene photographers flashed away with their cameras. If Celestia and Luna were at all surprised or shocked by the grotesque scene before them, they hid it well. The scene had yet to be disturbed in the slightest. The photographers were merely capturing the scene as it was.

The room, 20 feet by 20 feet, reeked of blood and excrement. There were a couple tables set up by the right wall, next to a power box. All manner of knives and surgical blades were either on the table or scattered on the floor around them; all of them had blood on them. On the other table, baking trays and utensils. Copper wiring went from the power box towards the center of the room, where they had been cut, the tips still smoldering.

On the left side of the room, were two more tables. This pair of tables had skulls, bones, and all sorts of pony remains, not to mention the entrails that had been strung up on the wall and ceiling. It looked like the most grotesque form of party decorations imaginable.

At the center of it all, was a rotary plank table, now in a nearly vertical position. It was here where most of the blood was. Severed leather straps were hooked on the top and bottom of the planks. Luna followed a trail of fresh droplets of blood leading from the planks to the door, and as she did so, she noticed the lifeless figure slumped against one of the table legs.

It was a pink pony, her hair all poofy and wild. Not to mention blood-stained. Her eyes, blue irises were contracted almost completely. What Luna found most disturbing, however, was the attire of the pony. A garment sewn of cutie marks. Different Pegasus wings were sewn up the back, and around her neck, was a crude necklace of unicorn horns.

"Dear child, what have you done?" Celestia asked somberly.

The only reply was silence, Pinkie's lifeless eyes staring into infinity.

"I'm going to find out." Luna declared.

"Hmm?"

"Yes. I'll take command of the investigation."

"Are you sure, Luna?"

The night Alicorn nodded firmly.

"These disappearances happened for months, during *my nights*. I'll do everything in my power to get to the bottom of this, and hopefully help the citizens of this town sleep peacefully again."

Celestia stared at her younger sister, and accepted.

"Very well, Princess Luna. The investigation is yours. I hope you bring a quick end to this. Best of luck."

With that, Celestia left the basement with a pair of guards. As she approached the stairs, she heard a commotion in the lobby.

"I'm not leaving until you tell me what's going on here!"

Celestia ascended the stairs to see the guard captain struggling with Mrs. Cake, her husband also trying to get his wife to calm down.

"It's alright Captain, release her."

The captain immediately did as was commended by the familiar voice, and as soon as Mrs. Cake realized who she was, she gave a quick bow, but was still determined to get answers.

"Princess Celestia, your Highness, *what* is going on here? Why are your guards surrounding my business?"

"Mrs. Cake, something terrible has happened."

"What are you talking about your highness? Where's Pinkie?"

"It seems we've found the source of the disappearances in the past months."

Mrs. Cake looked like she had just seen a ghost.

"Oh...oh, in all of Equestria...*here*? It happened *here*?"

"Down in the basement." Celestia replied solemnly.

Mrs. Cake fought to keep her composure, as well as keep herself on her feet, and in her silence, her husband stepped up.

"Your majesty, you have to believe us, we had no idea. We had nothing to do with it."

"I *do* believe you, Mr. Cake. And what you can do right now, is try and remain calm. It's over. Please, go back upstairs and try to rest. Princess Luna and our investigators will do everything they can to get answers."

The two bakers nodded confusingly, and Mr. Cake led his wife back upstairs, and returned to their room.

#### BASEMENT

Princess Luna took another look around the room, and one of the investigators came up to her.

"Where should we start, your Highness?"

Glancing left and right, Luna settled on the lifeless Pinkie against the table.

"Get that dress and necklace off of her." she instructed to one detective.

She then looked at the drops of blood leading out of the room.

"Did somepony escape?"

"More along the lines of rescued, your majesty. Rainbow Dash, just tonight. One of her friends came looking for her. That's how we were alerted to this. She was taken to Ponyville Urgent Care, and is being treated as we speak. They're...they're not sure if she's going to make it yet."

Luna looked back at the lifeless pony as her attire was carefully removed. She recognized her; a holder of one of the Elements of Harmony, that helped her let go of her jealous and selfish alter ego when she escaped the moon.

She looked to the rotary table. It was not easy to look at. The entire piece was covered in blood; some weeks and months old, some just hours. A few cyan feathers were scattered around the contraption. On the left wall, was a still-burning cobblestone coal furnace. If that wasn't on, the basement most likely would've proven to be quite chilly. Hanging out of the burning coals was a set of iron tongs, with an aluminum can on the end.

"Have you photographed this?" she asked another detective. After they nodded, she carefully took hold of the tongs and took it out of the coals, and set it on top of the cobblestone furnace, and opened the lid.

Burning, red-hot nails.

Dropping the tongs, Luna's eyes, for the first time, went wide, as the night princess showed her shock, looking back again at the lifeless Pinkie.

The detective had removed the dress and necklace, Luna pointed to the table of baking trays, and the pony went over and laid it out on the table next to them. Luna studied it carefully.

"Pony fur and skin. Thirteen...thirteen cutie marks and three different pairs of Pegasi wings." she said, studying the dress. She looked briefly at the center piece of fabric, which had a moon crescent, but was not a cutie mark or piece of skin at all. She then turned her attention to the black leather strap that had served as a necklace band, with...

"Four unicorn horns."

After she had looked over the nauseating garment, she turned to the small team of investigators.

"Alright. We have at the very least, 13 victims, maybe more. At least three Pegasi, four unicorns, and the rest may be Earth ponies. Who's versed the best in anatomy?"

One of the investigators on the left of the group raised a hoof.

"Sort through those bones. See if we can match up skeletal remains. And you, bag the body, take it to our lab in Canterlot. The first thing I want is an MRI of her brain."

She got nods of acknowledgment from the small team.

"Gentlecolts, we have more than a dozen victims whose loved ones are fearing the worst. Lets bring them some answers and closure. Let's get to work."

The ponies set to work, and Luna slowly and silently trotted over to the rotary planks again, reeking, red, and sticky with blood. She closed her eyes in deep thought for a moment.

"Laughter..." she whispered to herself.

"I remember ponies telling me about you at the Gala. How you were one of the most lively. You giggled harmlessly at my trees in the Everfree Forest."

She turned to Pinkie one last time, looking into her dead eyes just as one off the investigators was zipping up the black bag.

"You held the Element of Laughter, and yet you tortured these poor souls...why, child? Why did you do this?"

Only silence answered her.

CANTERLOT ROYAL PALACE

THE NEXT MORNING

Luna came over the drawbridge into the main hall, yawning.

Celestia floated down beside her, just finishing rising the sun.

"How goes the investigation, sister?" she asked. Luna yawned again.

"We've gotten started. The body is here at the lab. I've requested a brain analysis. Something can't...can't be right. She was one of the keepers of the Elements of Harmony. Laughter. I can't imagine how someone like that could do this..."

"Hopefully you'll get an answer in your search, dear sister."

"What about the last victim? Rainbow Dash. Is she going to make it?"

Celestia nodded, and Luna breathed a sigh of relief.

"Yes, I just heard. But unfortunately, she's badly scarred. They weren't able to save her wings. I hope Twilight and her friends can cope. Both Pinkie and Rainbow were close friends."

"Sister, our search warrant was for the entire building, right?"

"That's correct. The entire property is yours to cover."

"Alright. I just don't want to focus too hard on the basement, and possibly miss something elsewhere. But right now, I need some sleep."

"Alright. And don't worry about the proprietors, Mr. and Mrs. Cake. I'm giving them accommodations here in Canterlot until the investigation is done."

With that, Luna retired to her personal quarters for the day.

PONYVILLE

SUGARCUBE CORNER

SIX NIGHTS LATER

Luna gracefully landed just inside the yellow tape barrier around Sugarcube Corner. Activity had died down considerably since the investigation began three nights ago. She had spent the last five nights in Canterlot, focusing on Pinkie, and probing the coroner with questions. As far as they could gather, Pinkie had very slowly developed a severe split personality over the past months.

The papers and Ponyville may be satisfied with that much, but Luna wasn't. Not for one of the ponies that had saved her from herself.

The watch had been reduced to just two royal guards, who she acknowledged upon going into the building.

After the investigation team had gotten everything they could over the past 72 hours, they had begun the process of cleaning up the basement. Mr. and Mrs. Cake depended on this place to support themselves, and they wanted to allow them to open the business again as soon as they could.

Luna had just finished a late night visit to Sweet Apple Acres, where Rainbow Dash was currently living and recovering. She gave her the information that she and the coroner had gathered from the MRI, and Rainbow was somewhat satisfied, but also seemed very concerned that she and her friends had done something to cause this.

But Luna wasn't quite done. Instead of going down to the basement, she went up the stairs, and at the top, looked at the end of the hall to the door on her left, with a heart-shaped window carved through the wood. Her horn glowing, the door opened, and she walked into Pinkie's room.

For the most part it was clean. A queen-sized bed took up much of the left side of the room. On the right side, there was a table that was big enough to seat six ponies. Luna turned her attention to the left side of the room. There were all sorts of party supplies neatly stacked underneath the bed.

The night princess then turned her attention to the closet next to the bed. Opening the doors, she let out a gasp at what she saw.

Four short stools. Each with an odd item on them.

A pile of rocks, a hunk of lint, a bucket of turnips, and a sack of flour.

On the floor, at the center of the stools, was a 2-foot by 2-foot polished wooden lockbox.

Picking up the box, Luna brought it over to the dresser. Her horn glowed brightly, and the lock mechanism clicked open. She slowly opened the lid, and her eyes widened.

There was a book. A hardcover, leather-bound book. There were bloodstains all over it.

On top of the book, was the Element Necklace of Laughter.

For just a moment, Luna wondered if Pinkie's element played a part in why she did this.

Luna gently set the necklace aside, and picked up the book.

"What's this...?" she asked herself, in the otherwise unoccupied room.

Glancing once more at the four stools with the items on it, she turned her attention back to the book.

And opened it...

TO BE CONTINUED..

# *The Journal of the Cupcake Killer*

*By milesprower06*

*And Ace2401*

NOTE: This story Continues where 'Confessions of Love' and 'Investigations of a Nightmare left.



## Chapter 1

MAY 4TH

TWO DAYS AFTER MY PINKIE BIRTHDAY

Hey there Pinkie Pie, you crazy party pony. This is your wild partying brain! You see, there's been a lot of weird thoughts floating up around in here lately, so I thought it'd be a good idea to start keeping a journal of how I feel. Things...haven't been so happy-go-lucky lately.

Just the other day my friends threw me a surprise birthday party, but to do that, they had to avoid me all day! It made me all kinds of paranoid. I'm talking whoopdy-doopdy paranoid! I thought they didn't want to be my friends anymore! And I don't know what I'd do without my friends. They mean so much to me, I could just die! If only there was a way I could keep my friends with me forever and ever!

Pinkie, great news! You know the other day when Dashie came to see you? She thought something may have been wrong! Well SHE was wrong! There's something RIGHT! Guess who came to see me today? That's right! Rocky, Mr. Turnip, Sir Lintsalot, and Madame LaFlour! They wanted me to throw another party, so that's just what I did. After all, who needs a reason to throw a party?

Well, the party lasted several hours, and Rocky and the others gave me a great idea of how to improve my parties so my friends would never leave!

First they asked me: "What is the essence of every party?" Why the guests, of course! The happy party ponies! So they told me to figure out a way to make the ponies part of EVERY bit of the party! This is a hard one! I've got some thinking to do! How can I make a pony part of the ENTIRE party?

Okay, well, first off, what parts of the party can a pony become a part of? There's the decorations, oh! And the sweets! Those would be the best tasting party sweets ever!

This would be the most fun parties I've ever done! I...I simply can't invite everypony at once! But how would I know who to invite to such a fun party? I know! I'll draw numbers! Yeah! I'll give everypony a number, then randomly draw one out every time I throw a party! That way it'll be fair and nopony will feel left out! NO! NO NO NO NO NO! GET OUT OF MY HEAD! I WOULD NEVER HURT ANYPONY LIKE THAT! I'M A GOOD PONY! WITH WONDERFUL FRIENDS WHO I WOULD NEVER HURT BY DOING SUCH TERRIBLE THINGS!

What is wrong with you Pinkie?

MAY 7TH

My Pinkie head hasn't felt good or happy at all the past few days. I've been too busy at Sugarcube Corner to spend time with my

friends the whole week, and I keep hearing this crazy voice in my head. Crazy? What could be crazy about wanting to throw the most fantastically fantasterific parties ever? Nothing's crazy about that! I know, but some of your party ideas aren't really very fun for everypony. Maybe Dashie was right... Maybe I do need some help. Oh, silly filly, you don't need help, you just need to be happy like me! But you're why I need help! I'm just too afraid to go get it...

MAY 10TH

I finally got a day off! I was able to spend today with my bestest best friend Rainbow Dash, and we went around pulling pranks and having all sorts of silly fun! I wish the day didn't have to end so soon. I'm feeling so much better after today though, and that scary voice in my Pinkie head has been gone all day! I'm so glad I didn't have that voice giving me bad thoughts while I was hanging out with Rainbow Dash, that would have ruined my fun. I don't like the things that voice says about my friends, and what that voice wants to do with the ponies here in little old Ponyville. I hope that that bad voice just leaves me alone, then I don't have to worry about getting help and my friends hating me for all the bad things that voice in my head tells me.

MAY 11TH

The voice! It's back! Oh no no no! And when it came back, I decided to go find my element necklace, because I thought my Element of Laughter would make that horrible voice go away. When I got out the necklace, it started to glow for a minute and I thought it was going to help me, but then all the color faded from the necklace until I set it back down. It only looked normal when I wasn't touching it. That can't be any good at all.

I'm so scared, and I just want this scary voice to leave me alone, but it feels like it's trying to take my whole body over, like it wants me to be the voice in my head. I had figured out how to keep it from messing up my writing in my journal, but now it's getting too strong. What if I can't stop it? What will it do?

I think I need to go for a walk tonight, maybe that will help me clear my head.

MAY 11TH, AFTER MY WALK

I... I just... WHY DID THIS HAVE TO HAPPEN? IT'S NOT FAIR! It's not fair... especially to her. She was a little filly named Noi... I was out on my walk, when that voice, that evil presence in my head, tried to take over. I ran to hide behind a bush in the park, and I just began crying. I was terrified, and nothing I could do would make that feeling go away, make the the voice in my head disappear. I guess this is the one ghostie I can't giggle away... When I heard somepony coming up behind me, I struck out in pure terror. I heard a crunching noise, and turned around to see the body of this sweet little filly. I kicked her so hard that I must have

snapped her neck. She probably just saw me crying and wanted to come comfort me, since she's helped me in at Sugarcube Corner before. But I killed her...

I hide her in the bush. I needed to move the body, to hide what had happened. I waited until later this night and moved her body back here with me. She's up here with me right now, still in the bag...

I know I should just tell everyone what I've done and face the consequences, but I'm too afraid... I can't bear the thought of my friends hating me, and there's no way they wouldn't after what I've done. I'm too weak to face that. What do I do?

I know what you can do Sadie Pie! You can t- no GET OU- Don't interrupt, that's rude Sadie Pie! I'm just trying to help! You don't want your friends to hate you, right? No... Well then OBVIOUSLY you need to get rid of the body! And I know just how to do it! It even matches little Noi's cutie mark! OH NO NO NO NO NO- ujnngfty What did I tell you about interrupting? As I was saying, her cuite mark is a cupcake! And I LOVE cupcakes! Wouldn't it be so perfect if we made her into cupcakes? You don't have to worry about ponies finding her body, and I get to make some special decorations and party treats! Everpony wins!

MAY 11TH OR SHOULD I SAY 12TH? OH SILLY PINKIE DOES IT MATTER?

I brought that little filly down into the basement of Sugarcube Corner. I think it would be the perfect place to have my special parties with the ponies of Ponyville! The Cakes let me keep track of all the inventory, so they never even come down here! I thought I would use my journal to talk about all my special parties as well, starting with this one, even if it's not really a very good party since my party guest is dead. Oh well! Let's see, do I have everything I need? Knives? Check! Vegetable mincer? Check! Pliers? Check! Oh goody, let's get started then!

*'This is it,' thought Rainbow Dash, 'This is how it all started.' Where that entry resumed, there was what could have only been that filly's blood staining the page. Rainbow Dash fought the urge to vomit and continued reading, for it was the only thing she could do at this point.*

After My First Special Party!

Oh, I had so much fun playing with Noi's body! It's like seeing all the things that make a pony tick! I removed all her guts, and I think I'll decorate the room with them! Maybe I could also use her skeleton as decorations too! In fact, I think I'll go set her skull on that shelf.

Okie dokie lokie, now I think I'll use her guts as streamers, and her bones to decorate the walls! They'll be the best party decorations ever! Now I have enough meat that I've minced to make so super special cupcakes to sell to everypony in Ponyville for at least a

week! As for little Noi's cutie mark, I saved it to remind me how fun these parties are and how delicious these special treats will be! Oh, I know! I should save the cutie mark of everypony I have a special party with! That way I'll be sure to remember each and every one for forever! Now to give everypony a number...

MAY 12TH

I lost the fight with that voice, that other self. She took over for all of last night, and there was nothing I could do to stop it, I could only watch, trapped inside my own mind, as poor little Noi was butchered, and made into cupcakes. That monster even sold them in the shop this morning. I couldn't get out then either. Now I really can't tell anypony about what's happening... I only hope I can stop it from hurting anypony else, but Noi's blood is still on my hooves.

MAY 18TH

Everypony has been wondering why I've seemed so not Pinkie lately. I told them I'm not just feeling good, and so I got the next few days off work. That should at least stop that monster in my head from selling anymore of those cupcakes for a few days. I can't stop it otherwise, because every morning I wake up at the shop counter with a fresh batch of those disgusting cupcakes already ready for sale. The worst part is that somehow nopony has even noticed!

I even told Rainbow Dash I was feeling too sick to go pranking with her. I feel so terrible that I can't go spend time with my friends, but what's the point if I'm not the happy go lucky Pinkie Pie they want to be around? Who am I even now? I don't know anymore...

MAY 20TH

I go back to work tomorrow, but at least my plan seemed to work. That voice in my head sure has been mad about it, but I think it knows not to act suspicious. I don't know if I should think that that's a good thing or a bad thing. I feel so weak and afraid. I've lost my laughter, and I feel like I'm nothing without it.

But you're laughter's here in your head with me silly, you just won't let it out! I think you need to let me out so you can feel laughter again! No, you don't cause laughter, only pain! Haven't you seen what Noi's parents are going through? They don't even know what happened to their little girl! I wasn't in control when she died remember? That was you! Oh Celestia, you're right! I... if... if you promise you won't hurt anypony...

I don't hurt ponies, I party with ponies!

MAY 25TH

OH CELESTIA THE NUMBERS I FORGOT ABOUT THE NUMBERS!

Calm down Saddle Pie! It's not like it's anypony you know! Oh wait, it is somepony you know because you know everypony! Isn't that funny? I ran out of my special ingredient for my party treats and I need some more, so I had to draw a number to see who was going

to come to my next special party! And the lucky pony was Cotton Cloudy! I have to let her know she's invited, so let's go!

MAY 25TH PARTY TIME!

Hi there Journal! Are you ready for my first special party with a live party guest? I have little Cotton all strapped up and ready to PARTY! It was a little hard getting her ready when she started to fight after I brought her down here, but that's okay. She's being so silly, I keep telling her this is a party but she keeps saying that she must be having a nightmare. Oh well, that's okay! It can be a NIGHTMARE PARTY! It's going to be so funtastic! Why am I still here writing about it? it's time to start!

AFTER MY FIRST REAL SPECIAL PARTY!

Wow, that was so much fun, I don't even think I can call last time a real party! Cotton didn't last as long as I would have liked, but she sure was a joy while she was here! My favorite part of the party was when I took my vegetable mincer and put her little wings inside of it, then they came out all stringy like cotton candy! It was so funny, because Cotton Cloudy sounds like cotton candy! Hmm, I wonder if I can make cotton candy out of her! That would be so yummy! Anyway, after that, I tried to harvest her guts while she was still alive, but I think she bled out. I'll have to find a way to fix that problem for my future parties, because it's no fun when your guests have to leave before the party's over. Oh, and I also saved her cutie mark! That was the first thing I did! I think I might sew her cutie mark together with Noi's so I can keep them together. You know what? I should do that for everypony's cutie marks!

MAY 26TH

Why? Why did this happen to me? What did I ever do to deserve this monster invading my head and making me a cruel killer? I must be in shock or something, because I cannot feel anything at all. I watched as my hooves tortured and killed a little filly, and I could do nothing to stop it. Is this what Princess Luna felt like when she was taken over by Nightmare Moon? Trapped in her own mind, being forced to watch her body being corrupted and used to commit horrible deeds?

I was able to claim one small victory against this monster though. I destroyed the part of it's numbering system that kept track of all the foals. I can't bear to see that happen to a child again, through some cruel stroke of fate I've already killed two children. I would have destroyed the whole thing, but the voice wouldn't let me. It told me that it was very rude (like it has room to talk!) to destroy other's property, and if I destroyed the whole thing it would just remake it. It was a miracle that I managed to keep her from just remaking what I destroyed anyway, so I didn't want to stretch my luck.

Ha! I'm so pathetic, letting myself be told what to do by a voice in my head. My closest friends are in the numbering system too, and I can't save them. I can only hope that this madness is somehow stopped before one of them gets hurt.

I took another look at my element necklace, and just holding it made me want to vomit. I felt some some strange magic coming from the necklace. Maybe if I could ask Twilight about this, she could do something about it, since magic is her special talent, but I'm afraid what she might find out.

No... it doesn't matter. I need to stop this before anypony else gets hurt. I'm heading to Twilight's right now. If anyone can understand what's wrong with me, it will be her.

JUNE 3RD

I have not been in control of my body for the entire past week! I guess the shock from... well, I don't want mention it, but I guess I lost the will to fight back for a while after that. I don't even remember anything from the past week, I only noticed the date a few minutes ago! And it's already nighttime.

Wait... I remember trying to visit Twilight. I even wrote down that I was going to visit her immediately in my last journal entry. ARRGH! If that monster can keep me from controlling my own body at will, then what am I supposed to do? It must have taken over all week, and I was stuffed so far down into my own head that I wasn't even aware that I wasn't living my own life.

I bet no pony could even tell something was wrong with me. All I have is my journal, and even then I only have part of it. At least I didn't find any new entries detailing the slaughter of another innocent pony. It seems that's the only thing it uses my journal for anymore. If things don't change soon, I may have to kill myself just to stop this. Yes, me, the Pink Premier Party Pony of Ponyville, committing suicide. Crazy, right? But after killing two fillies, it doesn't seem so crazy after all.

JUNE 8TH

And now there's another crime to add to my growing list. I'm still fading in and out of reality, but today I've been able to keep control of my body for the first time in I'm not even sure how long. It's hard to tell time when you don't even know time is passing by. When I was checking Sugarcube Corner's inventory, I found stolen medical supplies in the basement. I don't even know when or how that monster managed to get my hooves on those... are they even my hooves anymore? Do I even want them to be?

I fear for whatever poor pony is next if I can't stop it from happening again...

JUNE 10TH

Oh no. I think it's time for it to draw another number! I have to do something! I-

Not so fast Saddle Pie! I won't let you be a party pooper when I have a one of my Super Special Pinkie Parties to throw! You've already been enough of a party pooper, especially after getting rid of so many ponies' numbers. But I guess you were right, maybe foals wouldn't appreciate my Super Special Pinkie Parties. But enough about that, let's see who tonight's special party guest is! Time to draw a number!

I drew Carrot Top's number! This is gonna be so fun with all my new party toys I got from the hospital! It'll be just like I'm a surgeon! Oh, and I found an old furnace and old tools down in the basement! There's these really big nails that are SO HUGE! I bet they'll be all sorts of fun during my special parties!

Well, it's time to send out the invite! It should be so much easier than last time with these drugs I borrowed from the hospital, since I can use those to make her a pre-party favor that puts her to sleep until the real party starts!

JUNE 10TH, A LULL IN THE PARTY

Wow, all that fun stuff from the hospital is really helping me keep the party going! Carrot Top is unconscious right now, but I can still keep her here at the party! I just thought that while I wait for her to wake up, I'd tell my journal about my party! So remember that furnace and giant old nails I mentioned? I had a thought telling me that if I put those nails in the furnace, they'll turn orange like carrots. It was like planting carrots in Carrot Top! Though wasn't able to plant as many as I would have liked because I was afraid of planting them through something important inside of Carrot Top and ending the party too soon. Still, I found good places for five of them! One through each of her knees, and one between her hind legs, tee hee hee! It's been a rather loud party since I started planting those, though. That's not normally a bad thing, but Carrot Top is just a little TOO loud. Oh, I think I hear her waking back up! I'll let you know how the rest of the party goes Mr. Journal!

AFTER THE PARTY!

That was a super funtastically fun party! When Carrot Top woke back up, she got so excited she trashed around enough to rip one of her front legs totally apart! It made a bit of a mess, but part of what's so fun about these parties is that I don't have clean them up, and then the next pony I party with will get to see what all my previous parties have been like! I also had so much fun having Carrot Top stay with me while I was gutting her! She cried and cried the whole time and kept calling me a monster, which was a little rude. Almost as rude as Saddle Pie, actually now that I think about it. Saddle Pie always calls me a monster too when she's not just calling me 'it'. That's really not very nice at all. But why am I talking about that mean-mcmeanie pants when I should be talking about my party?

Since all that medicine was able to keep Carrot Top alive for s much longerr, I was able to watch what happened to Carrot Top as I harvested her guts for my special party decorations. One of the things that was funny was when I pulled out her stomach, she was throwing up, so I got to see what her vomit did when it spilled inside of her chest! It sure made Carrot Top scream! It was also really cooltastic when I took out her intestines and saw that carrot-spike I planted from the other side! Pinkie, you've out done yourself. I think I'll remember this as one of the best parties ever! It was just to bad that Carrot Top eventually had to leave, but that's just the way things have to be. Oh well, but now I can remember her by making her into new party treats! I think I'll make a new carrot cake recipe in honor of our party!

JUNE 11TH

Ha! I always seem to have control of my body for the day after it uses my body to cruelly butcher another pony. I woke up at four this morning and spent the next 3 hours just throwing up, though I guess I ran out of stuff to throw up after the first hour. I couldn't do anything to stop the monster yesterday. I can't believe I let myself forget what was going to happen. It's my fault Carrot Top died for not stopping this monster.

I know what I have to do now, what I should have already done. I've spent today making the preparations. All in all I've had a good day really, after I recovered from this morning. I was able to spend time with all of my friends today, like I haven't been able to experience myself for almost a month now. I even was able to have fun and feel like I was my normal Pinkie self for one last time. I've made sure Gummy has plenty of food, I got some extra work done for the Cakes, and I wrote letters telling all of my family how much I love them. There's only one thing left to do...

Ha, would you look at that, I just got some of my own blood on the page! Yes, I'm committing suicide. I just stabbed myself, and with any luck I'll be dead within the hour.

My friends, I'm so sorry that I have to do this to you. Leaving you five is the worst part of all of this... But if you've found this journal you know why I had to do this. I can't let my body be taken over by the monster within me., it's already hurt so many. It's more than just those three ponies, it's all of there friends and family that have to suffer from this as well. I can't let that happen to anypony else. I hope you can forgive me for what I've done, both for the ponies' who's blood is on my hooves, and for leaving you all with seemingly no explanation. Though with any luck this will seem like a horrible freak accident., if only so you don't have to deal with knowing I committed suicide on top of coping with my death. I just hope you know that I love you all, and I am so glad I was able to spend the



time with you that I did. I can die happy knowing that I am protecting you all with my last act.

I feel my strength slipping away... I don't think I can stay conscious for much longer. If you find where I will place my journal before I'm gone, then do me one last favor. Tell the families of the ponies I've killed that I'm so sorry... That I wish they could come back to them just as much as they do.

I'm starting to feel myself slip away...

Goodbye my friends... I love you all.

## Chapter 2

June 12th

That was an awesome fantastically fantasteriffic prank! Silly Saddle Pie, you should know that knives can take a really long time to kill a pony after seeing my parties! Of course, I was the one who gave you the idea of using a knife, tee hee! It was SO FUNNY watching you try to commit suicide, there's no way I would have stopped that show until I had to! And the feeling of the knife going in, that was amazing. It felt SO GOOD! Maybe that was just because I was having so much fun watching only thing that could have made it even better was popcorn, but you can't eat popcorn while you're just in somepony's head. It was a little sad when I had to stop the show and take over, but I couldn't let you leave our friends now, could I Saddle Pie? That really would be sad, and I can't let sadness take over! I have to stay happy to throw all my parties, whether they be my special parties or regular parties with lots of ponies. And if I couldn't throw parties, how would I stay happy?

June 23rd

It's that time of the month again! Let's see who gets to party with me today... Aha! Sparkler! Ooo... A unicorn! Now I'll be able to find out which kind of pony tastes the best! Though I'm not sure Cotton Cloudy would taste the same as an adult pegasus. Noi tasted pretty different from Carrot Top. Hmm... We'll just have to see-hee! Anyway, I better go give Sparkler her special party cupcake, complete with an extra ingredient for unicorns!

Unicorn Party!

That drug that keeps unicorns from using magic works SO WELL! When Sparkler woke up and couldn't use her magic when I began slicing into her flesh, she screamed the most delicious screams! Well, the most *delicious* screams until I sawed her horn off, the screams then were even better! Oh, slowly sawing through her horn and seeing her reaction has to be the most fun I've had so far! So fun, I think I'll have to make a necklace out of her horn to remember it! I think unicorn horns have extra sensitive nerve endings, since Sparkler seemed to be in more pain from that than from anything else I've done to anypony so far, and there was a thick clump of yellow spaghetti stuff in the middle of the horn that connected right into Sparkler's brain. It turns out that unicorns have a special clump at the front their brains for magic. And guess what? That brain clump even TASTES magical! It was so deliciouriffic, I couldn't even make myself save any for the cupcakes I'm going to make later! I did share some with Sparkler though, and she said it tasted good! She's little loopy though since I might have *accidentally* cut into the rest of her brain (which doesn't taste as good, but oh well), so I don't think she really knew what she was

eating, or even where she is anymore. I wonder if that means I can do the harvest with out drugs!

Baking Time!

Well, that was interesting. While I was harvesting Sparkler's guts, she was fading both in and out off consciousness and in and out of reality. There were times where she would talk normally to me with me while I was removing her insides and setting them aside for later, and sometimes she would snap alert and start screaming as loud as she could! There was at least one time, when I was ripping out her stomach from her body, where she screaming and then suddenly stopped and asked me how I was feeling today. The whole time wasn't as fun as I had with Carrot Top, sometimes it was actually a little boring even though she lasted longer like I hoped since I didn't give her any drugs like I did Carrot Top. Guess I should be more careful when I mess with ponies brains! Oh well, the cupcakes I'm gonna bake now will be worth it!

June 30th

Hi Mr. Journal! I thought you might be getting a little lonely since Saddle Pie has been awfully quiet since that prank I pulled on her. I usually don't have anything to say now besides the times I write about my parties, but since you're getting lonely I thought I'd brighten up your day by telling you about how the decorations in my special party room are coming along! I thought the room could use some more decorations, since the innards of just four ponies isn't enough to really fill the room.

I went to the party and prank supplies store the other day, and I found a whole ton of fake pony skeletons! It's not as good as the real thing, but they really add something to the room! And I used some of the leftover skin from my previous party guests to make them party hats! They look so partyriffinic! I also wanted to do something with all those organs I had lying around so I wondered what I was still missing but then I realized I needed BALLOONS! It's hardly a party without balloons, so I asked if I could buy one of the helium balloon inflators, but they said no, so I just came and took one in the middle of the night! Nothing will keep Pinkie from keeping her parties as fantastically perfectly partytastic as possible! So anyway, I inflated all those stomachs and bladders I had sitting around and painted them all different colors. It isn't much for now, but I'll always get more! I'm so happy that my special party room is so much more festive!

Oh, and one more thing. Unicorns taste mostly the same as earth ponies (unicorns are a little bit less salty), but I think pegasi taste different, because Cotton Cloudy tasted different from Noi. I can't wait to taste an adult pegasus!

July 2nd

I had the funnest day with my friends today! Me and Rainbow Dash

started the day by going around pulling some awesome pranks, and then the rest of the girls got together with Rainbow Dash and we had a veggie burger barbecue party! We ate and played games and danced to some sweet jams and just had the best time together! And for desert, I brought some of my latest batch of special cupcakes! My friends all loved them too, and that made me SO HAPPY! I have the best bestest friends ever!

July 3rd

Oh dear, it seems that I'm already all out of my special ingredient! I guess I went through Sparkler super duper quick! That's okay, that just means I get to throw one of my special parties even sooner!

Time to go draw a number!

Blues! The music stallion! Oh this is gonna be fun! It always seems that there aren't very many stallions in Ponyville. I'll just have to have extra fun with him then!

Music Stallion Party!

Ribs make great drumsticks! I thought since Blues' special talent is music, I'd get him to play some music for the party, so I gave him some drugs that let me open up his chest cavity without making him bleed out too super fast and tore out a couple of his ribs to use as drumsticks, and got some skulls lying around to use as drums! He kind of started screaming incoherently for a minute but I told him not to worry since I heard a doctor say once that ribs grow back. I also might have threatened to stab his eyes out with his own ribs if he didn't play me some music. That got him to play me some music! I even danced for a minute even though the wasn't very good. After he stopped I did tell him that if music really was his special talent, I hope he could play better than that, I mean come on! I was able to make better music by banging the ribs I took out against the ribs he still had inside of him! So I decided to stab out his eyes with his ribs anyway. It was hilarious when I told him I had eyes for him after that, ha ha ha!

After that, I decided to get dirty! Not the kind of dirty that means messy, these parties are always that kind of dirty, it's hard for them not to be when blood is getting everywhere! No, I mean the other kind of dirty! I figured since I was partying with a stallion, then why wouldn't I try having a different kind of fun with him? It was so fun and funny when I could tell Blues couldn't decide whether he should be screaming in pain or moaning with pleasure, tee hee hee!

Anyway, time for the last round!

Cupcakes!

That was so fun! Since Blues couldn't see anymore, I made sure to describe every detail of what I was doing to him. I was even able to let him feel his stomach after I ballonified it! All those guts, so fun! He lasted for a really long time, too! He didn't leave the party until I cut all his insides in half! Well, it's time to get baking! Blues gave

me so much of my special ingredient that I think I'm going to have to throw a special dessert eating party just to use it all!

July 7th

I see why Saddle Pie always wrote in you journal, it's kinda fun telling you all about what I've been doing! So I threw a Super Duper Special Dessert Party for everypony in Ponyville that used up all of Blues, and it was so fun! The treats were all so delicious, and everypony loved them! Not that I was worried that ponies wouldn't like my treats because everypony always love my Pinkie Party Treats so I knew they would love my Super Duper Special Pinkie Pie Party Treats! Though I don't think anypony but me had them with hot sauce, but oh well!

I love partying with everypony! Big parties where I can party with everypony at the same time is almost as fun as my special parties with only one party guest! Speaking of my special parties, there are some ponies whose numbers I would love to see come up, like Bonbon, who always appreciates a good party treat and would make a sweet (get it? haha!) party treat herself, Doctor Whoof, who's an ACTUAL doctor (I mean, he's called a doctor so he must be a doctor, right?) and could totally tell me how good I am at my special party game, there's Colgate, the local dentist pony who's teeth would make such a pretty decoration in for my special party room, Derpy Hooves, because I wonder what makes her eyes cross all the time and I wonder if it's something I could find out by cutting open her eyes or something, oh, and my friend Vinyl Scratch who could totally tell me what kind of music to play for my special parties because I don't play any music at my special parties so I should fix that and it would be so fun to find a way to torture her with a stereo or a record player or a turntable something ! Whew, that's a lot of ponies I want to party with just off the top of my Pinkie head! I hope I can keep throwing my special parties forever and ever!

July 8th

I'm such a silly pony, I already need to collect more of my special ingredient for my special party treats! That party was SO WORTH IT though, I need to throw another Super Duper Special Dessert Party soon! Anyway, what was I doing? Oh yeah, drawing a number so I get to see who my party guest for tonight's special party is! And the lucky pony is Ms. Tropical Storm! Now I'm gonna be able to find out what kind of pony tastes the best for sure! Time to prepare my party invitation!

Oooo Pegasus Wings are Oatmeal! Crazy!

First things first! Pegasus meat is the best! Especially meat from the wings! It's so yummy it's yummeric! Speaking of the wings, I've been seeing how they work using Tropical Storm wings! She's a pretty strong flier too, even though she's not nearly as strong a flier

as Rainbow Dash, but then nopony is as strong of a flier as Rainbow Dash! Rainbow Dash is totally the best most awesomely amazing flier in Equestria! I hope she becomes a Wonderbolt someday! But anyway, I sliced open her wings to take a look-see at them, and I found out that they are made of really tough muscle with that rubbery-not-quite-bone stuff instead of bones. What's that stuff called again? Oh yeah, cartilage! It's super flexible and super strong too, which I guess explains how pegasi can crash into stuff without breaking their wings! I thought that was weird at first, since I thought they would have hollow bones like birds (I even checked myself that birds have hollow bones) but they don't and I thought that didn't make sense with how they fly but then I saw that there is some sort of magic gland thing next to the wings that gives the wing muscles the power to fly and stuff! I tried to ask Tropical Storm about all that stuff because I thought she would know more about it since she's a pegasus, but she was too busy crying to talk to me, which I thought was kinda rude since I was asking her a question but oh well! Oh, and when you squeeze that magic gland, some really sweet and tasty liquid stuff comes out! And it makes Tropical Storm scream really loud, not that that's a bad thing! After I had my fun I sewed the wings all back together, and then hacked them off with my butcher's knife so I could save them and add them to my special party dress made from all my party guest's cutie marks I've been working on. But I'll talk more about that later, Tropical Storm is waking up after I accidentally let her lose consciousness from blood loss, so time for some more fun! Om Nom Nom!

As my more fun version of that old saying about days and bits goes: Another party, another pile of pony guts! Hmm, that sentence doesn't make as much sense on paper as it did in my head. Oh well! Anyway, I had such a fun night! When Tropical Storm woke up, she started screaming and screaming about her wings, so I slashed her throat (not deep enough to kill her, of course, what would be the fun in that?) I didn't really do it because I thought her screaming was too loud, I don't mind that, I just did it because I thought it would be funny! And it was! Tropical Storm started making the silliest moaning and gurgling sounds I've ever heard, it was so hilarious I fell down laughing and was rolling around on the floor! After that I decided to smash her hooves to pulp with a BIG hammer (hooves are tough!), then I slowly and probably painfully (tee hee!) skinned all of her legs and face. Ah, good times. That caused more bleeding than I thought it would, but nothing's wrong with making a little mess, especially when you don't have to clean it up!

I took my time dissecting Tropical Storm tonight, and every once in a while I'd take a break and just snack on her tasty flesh; it's so

good I don't know how much I want to share! Oh, and a little fun fact for you Mr. Journal: Tropical Storm wet herself the most of any of my party guests so far. I guess she felt awfully stormy tonight! When I finally ripped out her bladder it was all empty and deflated. It looked kind of unhealthy, really. Not that it mattered any more, haha! Anyway, I got some cupcakes to bake, and I think I'm gonna make some punch out of the yummy wing gland stuff! Talk to you later my good friend Mr. Journal!

July 11th

HELP ME! I'M TRAPPED INSIDE MY OWN HEAD AND I CAN'T DO ANYTHING SHE WON'T LET ME OUT AND I PROBABLY DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME AND OH NO SHE'S NOTICED I'M IN CO

Silly me, I didn't mean to open my Journal! Me and my silly Pinkie Pie head!

July 19th

I got a visit from Twilight today! She didn't really have time to talk to me about any fun stuff though, which was kinda lame. She was just asking me about all the disappearances that have been happening in Ponyville the past few months, which I guess was funny, because all the ponies that have disappeared were all my party guests! Oh, don't worry, she doesn't know anything about my special parties, she was just asked to start investigating after two ponies disappeared the same week (oppsies, silly me!) so she said she was starting by just asking the ponies she trusted the most if they knew anything, and I didn't tell her anything of course because half the fun of my special parties is they are SURPRISE parties! I don't even get to know who's invited to the party until just before!

July 23th

My Pinkie head has had some weird Pinkie aches the past few days. It's like this crazy pounding feeling inside of my brain! It normally wouldn't bother me, but today it was bad enough that I had to take a break from work, and I can't make any of my special treats any good! How lame is that? I guess I'll wait to use the rest of Tropical Storm until I'm feeling better, because it's my Pinkie creed to make all of my treats as good as can be!

I was able to finish sewing together my party dress for my special parties though! It's made out of all the cutie marks of my previous special party guests sewed to a dark blue apron with a crescent moon on it since all my special parties take place at night, and I also attached Tropical Storm's wings to the dress since I think they really add that special something that makes the dress work! Oh, and I also decided to make a necklace out of Sparkler's horn. It's the best necklace ever! I'm so happy with my special party dress (it's fantastically fantasteriffic!), and I can't wait to more to it!

July 27th

I'm FINALLY over my headache today, which is great because it's

time to throw a special party! Well it really was time like almost a whole week ago but that stupid mean old headache made it so I didn't feel any good! Isn't that so terrible Mr. Journal? Anyway, time to draw a number!

YAY! Colgate! I remember thinking a few weeks ago what fun it would be to invite her to one of my special parties! Oh, and I would love to have her teeth as a decoration for my special party room since her teeth are so pretty since she's Ponyville's local dentist pony! Well, better go invite her, don't want the party to start too late!

Dentist Party!

As much fun as it was cutting off Sparkler's horn after she was awake, I decided to try something new since I love trying new things so I cut off Colgate's horn before she woke up so I could see her reaction when she woke up without a horn! What happened was kinda a funny story: So there I was wearing my new party dress and sucking on her horn (horn marrow is super duper tasty!) when she woke up, and the first thing she said when she woke up was "Is it Nightmare Night already?"

I think she was feeling a bit funny since the drugs I gave her probably hadn't worn off yet but she's used to that feeling since she hangs out with Berry Punch a lot, so I told her, "No silly, Nightmare Night isn't for like three more months! You hang out with Berry Punch too much!" After I said that she said something about a really bad headache that was getting worse and then she realized she couldn't move. After that I think it finally hit her where she was a what was going on and then she screamed and screamed and screamed! I think most of all that was her head hurting since her head must've realized that her horn was gone after she saw me sucking the marrow out of her horn!

After that, I went straight to work! Since Colgate is a dentist, I thought I may as well ask how pony meat is on the teeth, so I got out my scalpel and cut a nice chunk of meat out of Colgate's shoulder for her to try. When she wouldn't eat it at first, I literally shoved it down her throat! She threw it up right after though, so I decided we needed to try again with a new piece of meat from the other shoulder. I think Colgate figured what she need to do after that, since she chewed and swallowed the meat like a good girl! In fact, she only gaged like twice when she swallowed it! I even got her to suck on her horn to taste her horn marrow, though she was crying like a little filly the entire time, and when I asked her what all that does to the teeth, she only whimpered, which was lame because I was really wondering if pony meat does anything weird to pony teeth but my teeth have been fine so I guess it doesn't matter. Still, since she didn't tell me I decided to get out a drill (not a dentist's drill though sadly) and drilled her tongue until all it was



was a bloody gooey mess, which I made her swallow too, tee hee! If she wasn't going to use it, what was the point of keeping it? It was so much more fun doing that than listening to her whimpering! Except she passed out after that, but that just gives me time to tell you all about it Mr. Journal!

YAY More Unicorn Brain Goodies!

Yum! This stuff is SO GOOD! Oh, right, I need to tell you how the rest of my party went! After she woke back up again, I told her that since her teeth are so pretty, I want to give them their own special spot among all my party decorations, and that I'd like her to help me pick a spot where everypony that comes to party with me can see her pretty teeth! She kinda struggled, but after I got her mouth pinned open, I took my scalpel and started trying to cut out the teeth and gums from her jaw, but that just wasn't working so I had to get out the hacksaw to saw almost her entire mouth out of her face! It was kind of a messy procedure since the hacksaw kept getting stuck, and I had to go through like 3 adrenaline shots just to keep her awake through the pain! It was worth it though, even though I don't think Colgate was thinking very hard about where to put her teeth (well, really the entire lower part of her face, since I wanted to keep her teeth attached to her jaw-hinge!), she just kinda nodded her head to whatever I said.

After that, I could tell Colgate probably wasn't going to last much longer with how much she was bleeding, so I decided to get on with harvesting Colgate's guts. Being the ever curious Pinkie pony that I am, I asked all sorts of questions about bodily fluids and teeth! They all had to be yes or no questions, since I kinda cut out her entire mouth, so I had ask things like whether or not stomach acid can dissolve teeth and if you could use pony intestines to floss. I couldn't tell whether she was answering yes or no, since all she ever did was flop her head around. Oh well!

Now, what treats should I bake her in? Oh, I know! Sugar free! I normally don't like sugar free treats, but since she's a dentist and dentists say not to eat too much sugar how could I not make her into something sugar free?

August 5th

Remember those crazy headaches I was having a while ago? Now they're back, and even WORSE than before! I feel like something's trying to break out of my skull... I'm going to go lay down.

Wait... what's that sound? Am I going crazy?

## Chapter 3

August 11th

Two months. Two months, I've been trapped inside my own head, forced to watch that demon use my body to commit horrible deeds. But no, I wasn't forced to stay and watch. I could have done something, but I was too weak. Their blood is on my hooves, because instead of even trying to escape all that time, I just crawled into the corner of my mind furthest away from that demon as I could find to just lay in self pity. I know I wasn't crying real tears, but the pain of having my psyche, my sense of who I once was, so thoroughly shattered left me as a scared and broken filly crying deep in the recesses of my own mind. That monster wouldn't even let me end it to prevent anypony else from being hurt. Instead, it only let me think I could, just to see me suffer as I tried and failed to commit suicide, even though we share the same body. If anypony finds and reads this journal, you might be wondering how I'm in control now. I guess I was able to slowly regain my strength and presence of mind so I could put up a fight the past couple of days, screaming and pounding for control. I think it got used to me being gone, and so it let down its defenses enough that even my starting to come to my senses weakened it, letting me gain the upper hoof. But this fight for control isn't over, it's just getting started. Even now that demon is only giving me a moment of respite because I'm not doing anything to jeopardize it, or else I would be dead ... death is still the only thing I wish for, but I'll do whatever I can to stop the monster inside me.

I'm just afraid that won't be enough...

August 12th

No... NO!

It craves... I can't stop it. It let me have my day, but now it's pounding to get out. I can feel its cravings taking over, even affecting how my body. I feel like I want to throw up and eat as much as I can at the same time. I feel it trying to reach out to Ponyville... I don't know if I can hold it off much longer. I'm so sorry everypony...

Here I am crying like a little scared filly. But that's what I am, or what I may as well be. All I can feel is fear and sadness... I'll never be the Pinkie I once was anymore. My laughter died long ago, and it will never return.

All I want is to die...

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August 15th

This headache problem has been a DOOZY! It even is making me hear a voice inside my head sometimes, though a lot of the time it's not really a voice it's just a bunch of yelling and screaming, and it really doesn't seem like the pony in my head making all that noise is very nice. Occasionally it even feels like I lose control of my body and somepony else controls it. Wait, wasn't that Saddie Pie? That would explain why she spends all of her time crying and stuff. I wonder why she would be doing that? I think she also knows about my special parties... Oh well, as long as she doesn't spoil any of them!

But that doesn't matter because today I need to make some CUPCAKES! And not just any cupcakes, my special cupcakes made with my secret recipe! Which of course means I need to throw a special party! And to throw a special party I need to draw a number! So let's go! And the winner is... Fluttershy? I mean, uh, Fluttershy! Silly Pinkie me writing the wrong punctuation! But still, drawing Fluttershy's number is giving me a funny feeling.

Umm... help me out here Journal. It's not that I don't want to throw a party, in fact I NEED one of my special parties right now, but I don't think I want Fluttershy to be my party guest. It's not that I don't think she wouldn't be a very fun party guest, I'm sure she would be even if she's always quiet at my normal parties. It's just that, well... This will probably sound really sentimental and I'm not really a sentimental pony, but I love my friends and I want them to be able to do what makes them happy, and I'm pretty sure me torturing and eating them won't help that. Remember how I told you journal that I want Rainbow Dash to be a Wonderbolt? I don't see how she could do that if I kill her. Dash is the best and everything, but I'm pretty sure not even she is that good, ha.

Anyway, I don't think I want to kill any of my bestest friends...

Oh no, now my head is really hurting again! I think I'll just put this number back and go lie down. My party might have to wait until tomorrow. Oh well.

(THE REAL PINKIE PIE)

I... I...

I did it! I saved Fluttershy... I think. That was me, right? All I was doing was just thinking of how much I love Fluttershy, and how I can't let that happen, but... I didn't feel like I was really fighting against anything. It was like that monster made that choice on its own...

That... that thing doesn't actually have feelings for my friends too, does it? But... that would mean...

NO! THAT CAN'T BE TRUE! IT CAN'T!

...that can't be true...

I need to keep fighting it. Maybe I can make a difference after all...

August 16th

Alrighty, I REALLY need some of to throw one of my special parties, especially after yesterday. I mean, how terrible is it to plan a party and then not throw it? That's like the WORST. POSSIBLE. THING!

Haha Rarity is such a silly pony. Even more silly a pony than Applejack! But really, it's true! Nothing could be worse than a party not thrown! So let's draw a number!

Cloud Kicker! Yay, I love pegasus parties! So what am I still here for? I have a party to throw!

THAT WAS THE WORST. POSSIBLE. THING!

My party was RUINED! Before I could even get the fun started, I could feel the other pony in my head freaking out, but I just ignored her because I was ready to have some fun since Cloud Kicker had just woken up and I had finished showing her my special party room. But right after I began to make my first incision, she started trying to take over my body! She almost did too, and had even told Cloud Kicker there was a monster inside of her (that wasn't very nice, I'm a Pinkie Pie, not a monster!) controlling her actions and torturing ponies, but that she had got control for a second and was going to let her go free so she could tell everypony to come get us and lock us away or something

. I couldn't let that happen, so I fought back for control over MY body before she could cut Cloud Kicker free. I think with two ponies trying to control one Pinkie body, we just started trashing about. Just as I was getting full control again, the other pony made one last move and managed to take control just long enough to slit Cloud Kicker's throat, killing her before I got to have any fun! AND SO I WASN'T ABLE TO HAVE MY PARTY! I'm so mad! I wish I could feed the other pony in my head through a wood chipper or something, but she's in MY BODY!

...Calm down Pinkie, being angry isn't any fun. I'm the Element of Laughter, remember? And it wasn't a total loss, I still have a fresh body to make some special party treats with. Yeah, let's focus on doing that. That way I can have FUN! HAHAHAHA!

August 17th

Last night... I wish I could show anypony reading this how I look right now. Then you could just see how I feel, instead of me having to tell you. But I suppose you could probably guess how I feel anyway. I feel the same way I always have for what seems like forever now...

I wonder if tears stain parchment?

Haha, I'm so melodramatic now. Anyway, I wanted to talk about what happened last night. I know that MONSTER already did, so you already know more or less what happened, but I need to get out how I feel, I guess. You see, one of the worst things about all of this is seeing the look in the other pony's eye's as the monster prepares to butcher then. I can see their feelings of betrayal and incomprehension... I was a friend to everypony. The fun loving Pinkie Pie was always there to cheer up anypony that needed their day brightened. And now look at what I've let happen. They're right to look at me that way. I betrayed them, and I've betrayed everypony in Ponyville. But I digress.

When I saw that look in Cloud Kicker's eyes, I knew I had to try and do something, so I fought my way out. I had managed to tell Cloud Kicker that I was so sorry, that something was wrong with me and to run away and tell everypony what was going on. I was about to cut her free, too, but then that demon became much harder to restrain inside of me. I could feel its anger boiling as it saw what I was doing. What happened next is kind of hard to describe. I don't know if there are any words that are about having a battle in your mind over your body. But that's not what I really wanted to talk about anyway.

...Sigh...

What happened next was when... when I killed Cloud Kicker. I knew that I was going to lose the battle, so I killed her before the monster could get its hooves on her. A mercy kill is all it was really, as whatever it had planned for her I'm sure would have been a protracted and painful death instead of the quick and painful I gave had to be done though... and I even said I was so so so sorry, tears in my eyes and everything. Still, killing a pony is unforgivable no matter what, and this time I meant to do it...

And yet.. wouldn't it have been worse to let her suffer? That's why I did it, right? But still, was that the right choice? I feel like killing Cloud Kicker like that destroyed once and for all any of the old me that I still had left. No matter what, I'll never forget the the fear and despair in Cloud Kicker's eyes I saw as I was spilling her lifeblood. Those eyes will haunt me forever, even more so than all the other ponies' I let die eyes, because this time I was the pony that snuffed out the light behind those eyes.

I'm crying again. Is that all I ever do anymore? I was supposed to be the Element of Laughter... and now I'll never laugh again. And I can't get over that, either. If I could laugh one more time... sweet, sweet, laughter... my element. Wait, my element... maybe that has something to do with all of this. My element necklace started acting funny on my birthday, when this all must have something to do with how this all began.

I wish I could tell Twilight about all of this, because she could figure out what's wrong with me. Maybe then she'll even say that it wasn't my fault, and that she can fix me. And if she could fix me, and make it like none of this ever happened, I could be happy again... but that's obviously never going to happen. The monster wouldn't let it, and even if it did, there's no way anypony could ever forgive me for what I've done, for what I've let happen... a mare can dream though, can't she?

Still, maybe if I could get a hold of that book on the Elements of Harmony, maybe I can figure something out. If the monster will even let me do that much... but I'll worry about that later, when I figure out how to get control of my body somewhere that's outside of my room, and for more than minutes at a time. I'm actually kind of surprised that I've had time to write all that I've written just now. I can still feel it watching me though, as if it's waiting to pounce if I even think of stepping out of line.

Well, while I'm still here, I want to make one more apology. The monster has been making and then selling those disgusting things it dares call treats through Sugarcube Corner. It was selling more just today even; made out of Cloud Kicker... When all of this is finally found out, I don't know what will happen to the Cakes. But if anypony has found this book, then please know that they had nothing to do with any of this. I'm so sorry this has been going in their shop. Please tell them that I am so sorry for all of this. I just hope their shop doesn't have to be closed forever...

...Well, I guess that's all I wanted to say for now. I wish I could say venting has made me feel better, but I'm too far gone for that. I just feel broken and sick. As in physically sick. Watching yourself eat abominations disguised as cupcakes will do that to you... I think I'm going to go vomit now.

Vomit? Why would you want to vomit? Those treats were DELICIOUS! So I don't think I'm going to let you do that. And you're always so sad and down (I mean, look at all of that up there!), so how did you even get in my body, anyway? This is supposed to be the HAPPIEST BODY EVER! The nicest, too, and you don't seem very nice since you're always calling me names like "monster", or demon, or even sometimes you just call me "it". Those aren't very nice things to call a pony you know. I would even prefer you call me Pinkamina Diane Pie than any of those things! Of course, it'd be easier to just call me Pinkie! I like that name better anyways. Pinkie has to be like the best name ever, and it's mine! Yay!

Silly me, writing all of that down when I could have just told you!

Oh well, you don't seem to ever listen anyways.

August 20th

Hello Journal! This is the real happy Pinkie Pie! Though this evening

I haven't been feeling as good. I was having fun earlier today with my friends, who I should probably talk about more in this journal, I mean, it can't all be about me right? Well, I do talk about my special parties since those are so special. I don't talk about as many of my regular parties though. I guess after I throw those I just don't feel like writing. Oh well!

Anyway, I was hung out with all of my friends today. Not all at the same time though, but I did hang out with all of them! I watched Rainbow Dash do some really awesome tricks with all these crazy loop de loops and twist and turns and dives and all of that amazing stuff, then I took Gummy over to Fluttershy because he had an achy tummy so I talked to her for a while she helped Gummy, then I went to Applejack's to buy some apples for the store and just for fun I asked if she could teach me how to applebuck because for some reason kicking trees just seemed like a fun thing to try at the time (it kinda was!), and then I went over to Rarity's because I was thinking that I wanted a new fun hat because I love fun hats and I remembered Rarity is really good at making clothes so I thought maybe I should ask her to custom make one for me and she said she would and that I wouldn't even have to pay her for it which was so super nice of her and then after that I decided to go see Twilight because we don't hang out the two of us that much that we should hang out and so I went to the library and Twilight was running these crazy experiments and she said I could help her out and that was SO FUN! I love spending quality time with all of my friends! But when I got home, that other pony that stays in my head (not that I like to let her out, in fact I'm the only thing keeping that crazy wreck inside of me!) had found a way to try and make me feel sad like her! It's no fun at all having a big ball of sad inside of your head trying to make you feel sad too. And I can't get her to stop! I'm afraid she might drive me crazy too, and then I don't know what I'll do!

August 24th

Hello journal. I don't have much to say, but I just wanted to write something so that anypony reading this would know that I'm still in there, somewhere. Or maybe I'm writing it just to let myself know that I'm still real... with what I've been going through, that's easy to forget. Sometimes, I think it would be easier if I just ceased to exist. It's not like I'm in much control anyways. My friends can't even tell the difference anyway...

If that happened though, then it would just run amok in Ponyville, and Celestia knows how long it would take for her to get caught. So I have to be as strong as I can, because I'm the only thing standing between that abomination and the ponies of Ponyville. I've been trying something new to stop it by the way, and to give me some power over it. I found out how to share emotions with it, and it

can't stand feeling sad. It let me out of its own free will momentarily if I promised to leave her alone while I was out. But I won't be out for long. It's still got me on a pretty tight leash, I'm sad to say. But now I have a weapon to fight it with. I just have to refine it further, so to speak. This may not be hopeless after all...

August 27th

HEE HEE HA HA! I DON'T CARE WHAT SHE SAYS, I NEED TO PARTY! AND THIS TIME IT NEEDS TO BE A DOUBLE PARTY! HAHahaha FUN FUN FUN FUN!

Oh, uh, sorry about that Journal. That mean pony is really starting to affect me. Sometimes acting all super crazy is the only way to shut it out! Though it's not fully by choice... but it really is time for another special party, because last time wasn't a party at all! And I really am going to invite a second pony which should also help make up for last time! THE FUN WILL BE DOUBLED! HA HA HA!

Right, drawing numbers. Let's see who I get to party with tonight! Alright, the first pony is... Seafoam! YAY UNICORNS! And the second pony is... Vanilla Skies! OHMYGOSHOHMYGOSHOHMYGOSH! A unicorn and a pegasus! THIS WILL BE THE BEST PARTY EVER!

The only important thing to decide is if I should torture both of them at once, or if I should let the screams of the first be a way to torture the second pony, and then when I'm done with the first I can torture the second AGAIN! Decisions, decisions...

DOUBLE PARTY TIME!

Mmm... party time. I NEED TO PARTY ALL THE TIME IT MAKES ME SOOO HAPPY!

Slicing and cutting, slicing and cutting... oh so fun. Draw the lines, cut the flesh, watch the blood spill. Blood... HA HA HA BLOOD IS SO SILLY HA HA HA

Oh dear... it looks like I already drained all of Vanilla Skies' blood... Her life force is now just a mess on my floor. HOW FUN! I guess that's what happens when you slice a pony's major arteries and then start to gut them! TEE HEE NOW LET'S EAT HER! I EVEN HAVE SOME PONY TO SHARE HER WITH!

ALL ABOUT MY DOUBLE PARTY FUN!

Oh man, I just ate a ton! But that's okay, because I wasn't rude by eating in front of guests. Oh yes, I shared plenty with Seafoam, HA HA HA. I even made sure she chewed and swallowed every last piece I gave her. And if she threw anything up, I made her eat it again, because that's just good manners, right? RIGHT? Why of course that's only good manners, in fact it's just being nice, AND YOU HAVE TO BE NICE TO HAVE FUN. Everypony's being so nice that we're HAVING TONS OF FUN!

And then when I was done doing that, I cut her stomach out and made her eat it! I think the stomach acid burned a hole in her



throat! THAT MUST HAVE BEEN SO YUMMY, AND SO MUCH FUN.  
FUN FUN FUN FUN FUN FUN FUN!

I can tell how much fun Seafoam was having because of all the tears of joy she was crying. Delicious tears... tears and blood are now my two favorite drinks, since they taste so good, and they mean I'm having SO MUCH FUN! HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA...

Well, IT'S TIME TO GET BAKING!

August 28th

Woah... my head hurts this morning, and my vision is all wibbly wobbly. And when I looked in the mirror, I was still covered in dried blood. I think I may have overdone it last night. I went a little crazy there, haha. But I feel better now. I just need to get myself cleaned up! Then I can start selling all of my delicious cupcakes!

I just need to remember not to let her out...

September 6th

i DoN't FeEL tO GOoD...

I feEL kiNDa SaD, AcTUally. it'S tHAT Other PONY iN My hEAd dOinG sOMeThinG tO Me THaT mEaNiE HeAd!

mAYBe she'LL LeAVe mE ALoNE If I jUST gIVE hEr tHE bOdY FOR NoW...

BuT ThEn WHo KnOWs whAT sHE'LL dO!

September 11th

I...

I'm free! That monster is still in here, but I weakened it enough so that it's just laying in my head, not doing anything! Does this mean... I can be happy again? But... but what about the ponies I... killed? Can I be happy knowing how their family and friends must feel? Maybe I should just kill myself while I have the chance, in case it's not really over. Or confess to Twilight...

NO! I WANT TO BE HAPPY AND HAVE FUN! HA HA HA!

## Chapter 4

September 12th

I want so badly to believe that that...monster is gone. I finally feel like myself again! Old happy partying Pinkie Pie! First off, I'm gonna bake some of the best treats I've ever made! Good honest sweets not filled with pony parts. And I'll give out free samples! That'll be a good apology for what that monster did! I can finally be happy again!

September 13th

I've been reading back through this journal, and I can't believe what that murderer did. Those poor innocent ponies. How could anyone, even a deranged split personality think that was fun partying? I know what I'll do. I'll get everypony's mind off what's been happening with an awesome, super terrific party! Nothing raises the spirits like a good party!

September 14th

I told the idea of a Ponyville-wide party to Mrs. Cake, and she wholeheartedly agreed, that this town could benefit from some good fun, friends, and music. It would get their minds off of the disappearances.

I couldn't bring myself to tell her what that monster did. It would devastate her. If word ever got out...it would ruin them! I could never do that to the Cakes! Never ever ever! I'll make sure this party is the most fun Ponyville has had all year!

September 15th

Alright! The party plans are final, and I've asked all my friends to help out decorating the pavilion in the center of town! I'll use so much confetti and streamers and pinatas filled with SO MUCH CANDY! I'll bake the best cupcakes ever! This will absolutely positively help everypony stop worrying about that monster. She's gone, and she'll never hurt anypony ever again.

The party starts tomorrow, and runs all day! I've got work to do! Whoo! It took all afternoon, but the pavilion looks FANTASTIC! Even better than when we threw Applejack that thank you party for single-hoofedly saving the town from that cow stampede! This is gonna be the best party ever!

September 16th

The party is in full swing, and everypony is having a blast! The main festivities are in the pavilion, while the treats and sweets are being served at Sugarcube Corner. Rainbow came up to me and said this was one of the most lively parties I've ever thrown. She's seriously the bestest friend ever! I'm so glad I had the power to stop that monster from ever hurting my friends...

Oh, something just occurred to me that put a serious dampener on this party.

Sooner or later I'm gonna have to go down to the cellar and clean up that...mess. Oh how convenient a carpentry Cutie Mark would be right now. I could just wall off the whole room and forget about it! But I can't. I have to clean it up. Erase every trace of that monster and what she did.

After the party...

September 17th

Whoa, eeezy there Pinkie Pie you crazy partier. I think I've had a bit too much sarsaparilla tonight. I'm feeling all dizzy-riffic! I should probably go to bed and sleep it off, but I really need to get started on that basement...

OH SADDIE PIE YOU CAN'T SAY GOODBYE TO ME FOREVER. AFTER ALL I'M INSIDE YOUR HEAD!

oh dear celestia no no no!

Ah, now isn't that better? Down here where all my super-duper-terrific parties were! Serious little Saddle Pie should've watched how much she had to drink at the party. Too much can really let down those mental barriers, haha!

I can't help but be disappointed in you, Saddle Pie. You really don't realize how fun this is. How you find out who all these ponies really are. All you have to do is just look inside!

In fact, why don't we find out who all our friends really are? Won't that be fun?

I could throw a fabulous party for Rarity. Her mane and coat are quite simply marvelous. Rarity makes some of the most beautiful dresses ever! I bet if I was careful with the knife, I could use her fur for another dress! I could use all her jewels too. It would be oh so very shiny! I could even skin a small part of her and get her opinion on how the dress would look! I need her opinion on any new fashion statement!

Applejack is always such a hard worker. I want to put just as much hard work into keeping her forever! She'd be perfect for the best apple pie ever! That would have to HONESTLY be the best apple recipe yet! HAHAHAHA! Get it, Saddle Pie? HONESTLY? GET IT SADDIE PIE? And she's one of the strongest earth ponies I've seen. Probably because she's a farmer. Maybe I could cut out some of her muscles and show her how strong they are!

And we can't forget about sweet little Fluttershy! Fluttershy is one of the sweetest ponies ever! She's real good with animals too.

Actually, I should keep some of her animals forever too. After all, she'd want it that way, especially if it was that super cute Angel bunny! Ooooo! What if I brought that cute little Angel Bunny to play with me and Fluttershy? We could both see what he tastes like! And then I could play a funny funtastic game where I pretend to be a dragon eating Fluttershy up! I wonder how much of her I could fit it one bite?

And how about that bookworm Twi-Twi? Twilight has a lot of magic. I'll have to be quick to take her horn off before she doesn't want me to keep her with me forever. It'd be a great addition to my necklace along with Rarity's too! And I can't forget Spike either! He's always been the best helper, and dragon scales and spines would make a great addition to my dress. I'd just have to be sure to remove the napalm glands in his mouth so I don't get burned! Oh, this is going to be so great! I'll have all my bestest friends forever!

Oh, but I AM forgetting somepony, aren't I, Saddle Pie? Yes, our bestest friend ever. RAINBOW DASH! Wouldn't she be fun? With how much fun she had at tonight's party, don't you think she'd have even more fun when I throw a party JUST FOR HER? As a matter of fact, I think she'll be the first, Saddle Pie. I wouldn't want to deny you a last sight of your friend before you're so weak that you fade away forever.

But first, Saddle Pie, before I have so much fun with our friends, I think I have to prove a point to you. I have to SHOW you what you were willing to do to us. You were willing to just hide me away, and act like I NEVER EVEN EXSISTED! How could you do such a thing? I think I have to show Ponyville what you wanted to do to me!

How, you wonder? How would I do that without giving away the secret of my fantabulous parties? You know Lyra and Bon Bon, don't you Saddle Pie? They're such a cute couple. They're almost as close as you and I are! Or rather, were. I see now you don't want anything to do with me. So which one will it be, Saddle Pie? Lyra or Bon Bon? Which one do I take away from the other? WHICH ONE DO I SHRED TO PIECES JUST LIKE YOU WERE GONNA DO TO ME? I think I'll try the numbers one more time. For either Lyra or Bon Bon, Saddle Pie. Then all of Ponyville will see how sad and lonely the one left is. And once that's done, I'll move on to your best friend Dashie!

September 25th

Well, I've gotten my opportunity, Saddle Pie. I was able to snatch up Bon Bon just as she was leaving for that candy convention in Hoofington! Here she is, Saddle Pie, all ready for her party! I think I'll give you JUST enough mental capacity to look through MY EYES. Yes, they're MY EYES now, MY BODY now, Saddle Pie. I'll make you watch these parties. You could've just cowered away all Saddle Pie-like in the back of my mind. Now, you're going to watch.

And while I was out, I noticed that a lot of the stores are selling decorations for Nightmare Night! So I went and I bought a fake GRIFFON SKULL! Won't that be fun, Saddle? To make Rainbow think I chased down that meanie Gilda and gave her a party? Then Rainbow will see what kind of party she'll get!

Well, that certainly was a messy party. Probably my messiest yet! As I cut Bon Bon open and took her apart piece by piece, I had to

keep reminding her, rather loudly due to all the screaming, that it's to show all the other ponies what Saddle Pie was gonna do to me! Now everypony will see how lonely Lyra is, just like Saddle would've been lonely without me! As long as she could speak, she called me insane and crazy. Is that any way to talk to me after throwing her a party that showed what Saddle Pie wanted to do to me? As I harvested the last bits of her, her breathing became quicker, and she just kept muttering Lyra's name as the party finally came to an end. Now it's time for more baking!

September 30th

Alright! Everything's just about set for Rainbow's party! I've got all the knives set out, that fake griffon skull set out, and I scrubbed the party table down as best I could, but who am I kidding, nothing's going to get some of that blood out! Okie doki loki, time to go get Rainbow and do some baking!

PARTY TIME WITH DASHIE!

I'm having so much fun playing with Dashie! In fact, this is the most funnerific funnest thing I've ever done, playing with one of my best friends! Maybe I should cheat and not use the numbers, that way I can play with all my bestest friends next!

I know you're watching me do this, Saddle Pie. After all your friends have had their parties, I think I'll get rid of you for good. You could've just had fun with me. We could've partied with all the other ponies in Ponyville. YOU did this to your friends, Saddle Pie.

Well, Dashie passed out after I made her dance with some copper wires and a bit of zapping! Now I think I'll go and harvest the ingredients for what will be the BEST CUPCAKES EVER!

SWEET APPLE ACRES FARMHOUSE

2 AM

The next page was blank. Resting on that blank page, was a bloody quill.

Rainbow slammed the book shut on the table and immediately fell out of her chair and ran for the front door.

"Rainbow!" Luna called.

Dash rushed through the front door out to the porch, and barely cleared the porch and had her hooves on the front lawn before she vomited on the grass.

Luna was quickly on her trail, and the commotion had roused Winona. When she got to the overwhelmed rainbow-maned pony, she was heaving, and her legs were trembling.

With Winona barking at the door, Applejack came to the porch just in time to see Rainbow pass out on the lawn.

"P-Princess Luna? What the hay is going on here? Rainbow! What happened to her?" Applejack nearly screamed, running up to the wingless Pegasus and Alicorn.

"Come on, help me get her inside."

## FARMHOUSE GUEST ROOM

15 MINUTES LATER

They had gotten the unconscious Rainbow situated in her bed, and Applejack, ever the caregiver, set about the finding out what was wrong. First by getting her temperature, and then asking Luna for an explanation.

"Thanks to your midnight storytime, Princess, she has a fever of 103."

"I'm so sorry. I didn't think she would react like that..."

"Then please, tell me how you thought she'd react." Applejack snapped at the royal night Alicorn.

Luna remained silent. Applejack was clearly not happy.

"I mean, she gets tortured within an inch of death, her life is changed forever, she blamed herself for what happened, makes that memorial, even *visited her grave*, and just when she's put it all behind her, then you show up and dig it all back up...why? What were you thinking?"

"I was thinking that she'd like to know that the pony she loves not only saved her, but all their friends, too." Luna replied firmly.

Applejack exhaled frustratingly.

"Applejack, you don't seem to...well, miss Pinkie all that much. Not like Rainbow did."

"You're right, 'ah don't. Rainbow and Pinkie were close friends, and my view of her tended to change when she murdered 12 ponies, and almost a 13th, whether she was a friend or not. You could have just told her that you found out that the rest of us were next, not shove that book into her hooves and have her read it. 'Ah love her with all mah' heart, and 'ah don't want her to dwell on this anymore."

"I am very sorry, Applejack. It just seemed like the right thing to do. I'll be going."

"Take that book with you, please."

Luna shook her head.

"No...no. I think I'll leave it to her to decide what to do with it. I think that's her right."

With that, Luna left the farmhouse, and ascended into the night sky.

Applejack briefly went into the kitchen, and stared at the closed book on the table. Although tempted for a moment, she quickly made up her mind that she wanted nothing to do with what was inside. But she would respect Luna's wishes. She picked up the bloodstained book and took it back to the guest room, and gently set it on Rainbow's dresser.

"Consarn it, Rainbow. Why can't we all just move past this? Why does it always need to be brought back up...? You deserve better than this."

Rainbow Dash continued to sleep peacefully. Rather than retire to her room, Applejack quietly climbed into bed next to Rainbow, and slid under the covers, snuggling into her lover and friend, and slowly drifted back to sleep.

***Rainbow After the Storm***

***By milesprower06***



## Prologue

### Leaving The Nest

CLOUDSDALE

THREE YEARS AGO

The light gray Pegasus Stormcloud walked purposefully through the puffy white neighborhoods of Cloudsdale, now with a warm orange tint given by the setting sun. Needless to say, this was not how he had hoped to spend his evening. The cumulus homes had towering pillars, overhangs, and more of the various architecture of Cloudsdale's Pegasi ancestors. The streets were mostly empty this time of evening, as most Pegasi were having dinner, or tending to their young.

In a way, Stormcloud was doing that just now, giving a stern glance to the teenaged filly walking behind him. The cyan Pegasus had a look of defiance in her eyes, and dried blood was caked on her muzzle, having dripped from her nose hours earlier. Her rainbow tail twitched as her magenta eyes met her father's gaze.

"Anything to say for yourself, Rainbow?" Stormcloud asked. The filly said nothing, remaining silent with a pout on her face. The pair of Pegasi continued into the neighborhood, and stopped at a medium sized, one-story cloud abode. When they entered the front door, the tirade was about to continue, for there stood Rainbow's mother, Firefly. She was a light pink Pegasus with quite the contrasting rich blue mane.

"Young lady, I am very disappointed in you. You have been warned time and again, by us, by your instructors, NOT to get into any more fights. This is the last straw." she said. That was the breaking point for Rainbow, and she lashed out.

"I don't care! I wasn't gonna stand there and let them say those things about me!" she yelled. "Rainbow, it doesn't matter what they say about you. Even if they are calling you a...a...fillyfooler. Why does it upset you if those things aren't true?" her mom asked.

"Because other ponies can believe lies. I'm just supposed to let them spread rumors and lies about me?" Rainbow angrily asked.

"Starting fights isn't the answer." Stormcloud countered.

Rainbow disagreed. They weren't there. They didn't have to deal with it all day. They didn't have to try and block out the laughing, the teasing, the taunting, and concentrate on their flying. Even with her fiery temper and brash attitude; if there's one thing Rainbow couldn't stand, it was a bully.

"You have got to change. Just because your cutie mark means you love competing and winning, you don't have to push ponies around when they do something you don't like. News of your behavior has gotten all over Cloudsdale. How am I supposed to concentrate on

my work at the Weather Factory when ponies in the break room are talking about how my daughter is acting in flight school?"

Stormcloud sternly asked. Rainbow was on the verge of crying, tears pricking her eyelids. Her parents were wrong. She didn't do these things because of her cutie mark. She was fighting because she was sick of the lies being spread about her.

But she knew her parents wouldn't listen.

"I won't let them say anything they want about me." she said defiantly. "Rainbow, you've been expelled. Now what are you going to do? Hmm? I think it'd be best if you offered to apologize to the school, and the ponies you fought with." her father told her.

Rainbow's eye's widened.

"No! No way! They deserved it! Apologizing to bullies is the last thing I'll do!" Rainbow protested.

"Rainbow Dash," Stormcloud sternly addressed his daughter, "this isn't a request. Your future is on the line. Find a way to apologize, or see yourself out of this house."

The ultimatum speared Rainbow in the heart. She swallowed, tears beginning to flow down her cheeks. If that's the way it had to be, then that's the way it had to be.

"Fine." she said coldly, turning on her rear hooves, and made her way out the front door. She leaped up, spreading her wings and taking flight into the Equestrian night. She got some distance between her and Cloudsdale before releasing her pent-up frustration and sadness in mid-air sobs. She didn't know where to go. She had nowhere to go.

But right then, anywhere was better than back home.

## Chapter 1

### Revelations and Love

*Applejack sat alone in the waiting room of Ponyville Urgent Care. The tile floor felt ice cold against her hooves. With every passing second, every pounding beat of her heart, she felt like she was getting jabbed with needles. How long had she been sitting here? Fifteen minutes? An hour? Two hours? It was impossible to tell. It felt like she had been here forever.*

*She longed to be on the other side of those doors. She wanted to be with Rainbow. Her heart longed to be with the Pegasus, to hold her and tell her that everything was going to be okay. That nothing else was going to hurt her as long as she was there. From now on, she would protect her love with every ounce of her being.*

*The doors to the emergency room slowly opened. A doctor approached Applejack, the expression on his face grim.*

*'Oh Equestria...no...please no...'* Applejack pleaded within herself. *Claws began to dig and bite at her chest.*

*"I'm so sorry, Applejack. I'm afraid she didn't make it."*

Applejack awoke with a start, everything snapping into focus in an instant. She was actually surprised she managed to fall asleep there for a few moments. So far tonight, she had been finding sleep exceptionally difficult, laying next to a sleeping, emotionally disturbed Rainbow in the guest room of the farmhouse. It had been a little over two hours since Luna had departed, so unable to sleep, AJ merely kept her friend and lover company. She spent the time reflecting on what they had shared earlier that night. They had confessed their deep feelings for each other. Applejack had kept them in secret longer than Rainbow, but in her life-changing experience, and time of healing on the farm, Rainbow finally opened up to the workhorse, in the form of an abrupt kiss out by the lake. *'Ah wonder'* Applejack thought to herself, *'If she hadn't done that, would I have ever told her how I really feel?'*

Applejack had harbored these feelings for Rainbow for awhile, but she was good at concealing them, partially because she wasn't confident in how strong those feelings really were. She wasn't quite sure when it had started. But rescuing Rainbow from the brink of death made her realize just how precious the Pegasus was to her. Not only that, but they did have quite a lot in common. Rainbow was a hard worker when it came to the Weather Patrol, just as AJ gave her all on the farm every day. Applejack never did have any crushes growing up, or a love life to speak of at all for that matter. So the difference between colt and mare didn't mean much of anything to her.

But was it love?

She had to assume it was. She felt stronger for Rainbow than she did for any other pony. Was she worried about what her family would think? Of course, but for Rainbow, she was willing to face and endure it.

"Mah precious Rainbow..."

Rainbow began to stir in her sleep, and seconds later, her eyes fluttered open, to see Applejack laying next to her. AJ gently placed a hoof on Rainbow's forehead, and was relieved to see that her fever was coming down.

"You alright, Sugarcube? Ya had me worried there."

"Yeah, I'm fine. I guess it just came as a bit of a shock." Rainbow answered. Then she realized that Luna wasn't present.

"The journal, where's the journal?" she asked hurriedly. Applejack motioned to her dresser on the adjacent wall, where the leather-bound book rested on the polished wood in front of the mirror.

"Ah wanted her to take it with her, but she said it was up to you to what to do with it." Applejack told her.

"I'm glad she left it here. I'm...I'm not sure what I want to do with it just yet..." Rainbow admitted.

"What was in there that gave you such a shock, hun?"

"I'm sure Luna told you that it was her diary, her journal of what she did, and, towards the end, what she was planning to do. That wasn't Pinkie, AJ. Not the Pinkie we knew. Through a...a perfect storm of circumstances, a monster had been born. That journal proves that there were two distinct personalities, and Pinkie, the Pinkie we knew, was fighting to get out, to regain control. But...but she couldn't."

Applejack remained silent, feeling Rainbow had more to say.

"Applejack, that night...you didn't just save me. You saved us. You saved all of us from her. I was just the first one out of our friends. By that time, Pinkie was nearly gone completely."

Applejack contemplated this. Since it happened, she really didn't give any thought as to what drove Pinkie to commit those atrocities in the basement of Sugarcube Corner. She was comfortable with putting the blame entirely on the friend she once knew.

"That journal proves our friend was innocent." Rainbow said.

"I wouldn't take it that far, sugar." Applejack said, as gently as she could.

"Why not?"

"Those words in there might clear Pinkie's name in your mind, but I'm purty sure that it won't be as easy for the family and friends of the other victims. It'll take more than words on a page to make Pinkie innocent in their eyes. Because if Pinkie was determined innocent, they'd have nopony to blame. And they need somepony to blame, in order to deal with their loss. I'm sorry I have to be the one to tell ya that, Rainbow. But that's the way it has to be."

Rainbow accepted this. None of Pinkie's other victims had been particularly close to her.

"I'm...I'm sorry, too."

"For what, Rainbow?"

"For reading that tonight. I guess I ruined our very first night together." Rainbow answered sorrowfully.

"Rainbow, you didn't ruin a thing. And I don't want you to fret over what you're gonna do with that book. I don't want you to think about it right now. Because right now..." Applejack began, climbing on top of Rainbow.

"...I want to return the favor."

With that, Applejack drew Rainbow into a long, heated kiss, sliding her tongue into Rainbow's mouth. Their lips remained locked as the farm pony began to grind her body against her lover's, and Rainbow began to softly moan.

Applejack broke the kiss, and moved down to her neck, tenderly licking and kissing her coat. Slowly, the farm pony moved down to her chest, feeling Rainbow's heart pound against her chest.

Rainbow sunk herself into the bed, and let AJ return the affection shown to her earlier that night.

Applejack went lower yet, to her stomach, and Rainbow felt the wetness between her legs increase. She was ready for AJ to have her way with her, but Applejack took things slow. Once at her stomach, she moved to the side, moving her tongue gingerly over Rainbow's right flank. As her tongue swept over her Cutie Mark, Rainbow let out a short, shuddered cry of pleasure, quickly silencing it with a hoof, the scar tissue around her flanks especially sensitive. As waves of pleasure echoed through her body, she made sure to keep in mind to not wake the rest of the household. Applejack, satisfied with the sounds she was getting from her lover, returned to her stomach and continued making her way to between her legs. By that point, Rainbow was quite soaked.

Watching Rainbow's legs quiver for a few moments, AJ started at the bottom, and gave Rainbow's soaked lips one long lick, causing the recipient to cry out in pleasure again. But AJ didn't go back down or deeper in. She slowly made her way back up her stomach and chest, and when she got to her neck, went to the side again, and up her head, licking the tip of Rainbow's right ear and nibbling on it lightly.

"Y-y-you're s-such a...a tease, AJ." Rainbow said in staggered breaths, overwhelmed with desire.

"Oh, don't I know it, Sugar." AJ replied, giving one last lick to the inside of Dash's ear, and then went down her neck again, down her chest and stomach, and then slowly began to kiss Rainbow's inner thighs, and finally slid her tongue into her lover's soaked lips.

Rainbow became nearly paralyzed. She barely place a hoof over her mouth as she let out another, louder, more prolonged moan as Applejack swirled and sucked. She kept the movements of her tongue in a subtle pattern, letting the waves of pleasure overtake her lover. Rainbow quivered uncontrollably; she was Applejack's, completely and utterly, and the workhorse knew it, too. Rainbow felt she could no longer contain herself, and removed her hoof from her mouth, and let out full volume sounds of pleasure into the room and beyond, as the hooves that covered her mouth now dug into the sheets. Rainbow's blissful moans also had their effect on Applejack, as she felt wetness return to her intimate areas as well. AJ felt Rainbow's muscles tighten, and went even deeper, nearly burying her snout into her lover, and this quickly accelerated her journey to the edge.

"A-A-Applejaa...ohhhhhhhh!" Rainbow moaned as she climaxed, her whole body shaking. As the waves of pleasure died down, she went limp, and was as satisfied as she hoped she had made Applejack just hours earlier.

Finishing up, AJ gave her lips a slow lick, and slid back up, and brought her face to her lovers, and held her in a deep kiss, gently rubbing and grinding against her lover's quivering body. She parted from the long kiss, and left Rainbow nearly breathless. Words could not describe the bond they had formed this night.

Without a word, Applejack and Rainbow slid under the covers and snuggled together, wrapping their legs around the other.

'Yes,' Applejack concluded, *'this is love.'*

"Applejack?" Rainbow whispered, finally having caught her breath.

"Yeah, Sugarcube?"

"The second night I was here, when the fillies saw what happened to me. You said you'd give up everything to make me whole again."

"What about it?"

"I just want you to know, that's not necessary."

Rainbow nuzzled her lover's face, and gave her a slow affectionate lick on the cheek.

"Because I am whole. Right here, right now. With you."

Applejack snuggled in closer to Rainbow, taking in the sweet rainy scent of her coat, as the cyan pony continued to give her affectionate licks to her face.

"Rainbow...what are we gonna tell our friends?"

Dash didn't reply to that immediately, giving it some thought, and came up empty-hoofed.

"I...I don't know. I'm, well, I'm afraid of what they'll think of us."

"They're our friends, Rainbow. I'm sure they'll understand. I...I hope."

"I got sick and tired of being called a 'fillyfooler' back in flight school. I'd rather not have that happen again."

"Rainbow, our friends would never do that to us. Not only that, I don't want to be dishonest to them either. And I don't think it'll be good for our relationship if we hide it."

Applejack was right about that. No pony was going to benefit if they tried to hide their newfound love from their friends. Eventually, word was going to get out, and both of them preferred that it be on their terms.

But how to tell them...?

"Tell ya what, hun. Let's not fret over it and just sleep on it for tonight." Applejack concluded.

Rainbow accepted that, and melted deeper into AJ, giving out a satisfied sigh, and closing her eyes, letting the dream world take her for the remainder of the night.

PONYVILLE URGENT CARE

ONE MONTH AGO

The Unicorn Nurse Goodwill and the Earth pony Dr. Wellhoof finished their inventory for the night, making sure all the instruments were accounted for and in their correct place. Nights at the care center were usually quiet. During the day, there were always fillies coming in with scrapes and bruises, and the occasional occupation-related injury. But the night shift was always quiet, and mind-numbingly boring, as well.

But that peace, that boredom, was shattered as the sound of the front doors slamming open emanated through the closed doors of the emergency room.

"Help! Some pony please help!" a voice with a southern accent pleaded. The Ponyville community was somewhat mixed, but the doctor was certain that was Applejack's voice, the co-owner of Sweet Apple Acres. What was she doing in town this time of night? Nurse Goodwill and Dr. Wellhoof were on their hooves as the commotion out in the lobby increased. Within moments, they heard the wheels of an approaching gurney, and sure enough, two orderlies came rushing through the door.

"Oh, by Celestia's mane..." the nurse gasped.

On the gurney, was a cyan pony, mangled and bloody. At first, Dr. Wellhoof thought it was an Earth pony. But then he saw the wooden bucket on the bottom of the gurney, and the contents within.

Matching wings and two pieces of fur and skin. Then her rainbow mane and tail confirmed her identity to the emergency room staff. Wellhoof snapped out of the shock. Questions and answers always were second to saving a life. He and Nurse Goodwill got the Pegasus onto the operating table while the orderlies wheeled in monitoring equipment. Blood had started to trickle from her mouth. Wellhoof checked her eyes, and discovered that the poor Pegasus was currently in shock. Nurse Goodwill took a quick blood sample while Wellhoof quickly got the heart monitor wires attached to her

chest, and the orderlies got wires on her forehead to a brainwave monitor, and got an oxygen mask over her muzzle. Turning the monitors on, his eyes filled with determination.

"Her heart rate is dangerously low." he said, taking in the Pegasus's condition as a whole once more. The most common symptom of shock was a rapid heartbeat, and with a heart rate this low already...

"We don't have much time." he announced grimly.

"Her blood has an insane amount of adrenaline in it. High levels of painkiller, as well." the nurse included.

"First things first, we have to get those nails out of her hooves." Dr. Wellhoof ordered. The most simple and immediate method would seem to be pulling them out. But as Wellhoof grabbed surgical tweezers and pulled, the Pegasus convulsed, her eyelids barely opening, bloodshot magenta eyes rolling up into their sockets. She gurgled up a small amount of blood, and then she fell limp. Then the heart monitor flatlined.

"Paddles!" he yelled, needing the defibrillator.

"We can't use that until those nails are out." Nurse Goodwill alarmingly cautioned. Wellhoof again pulled with the surgical tweezers, but they remained firmly implanted. All the while, precious seconds ticked away.

"Damnit!" he cursed, removing the tweezers and slamming a hoof down on the empty gurney.

Nurse Goodwill removed her cap, horn glowing. "Let me try something." she said, approaching the foot of the operating table. "Be careful, Goodwill. You haven't perfected teleportation magic yet." Wellhoof warned.

"If this doesn't work, she's dead." the Unicorn nurse replied, then closed her eyes and focused. The glowing of her horn intensified, and the doctor stood ready with the paddles. In a single flash of light, the nails disappeared, and the nurse stumbled from the expended energy. "Now!" she said.

Doctor Wellhoof briefly rubbed the paddles together, and placed them on Rainbow's ribcage.

"Clear!"

The electric current passed through the defibrillator into Rainbow, and her body jolted, and the heart rate hiccuped, only to flatline again. "Again, clear!"

The same result. Wellhoof increased the output. "Again!"

Rainbow's body jolted with another shock. Another hiccup, another flatline tone.

"Intracardiac," Wellhoof instructed, and one of the orderlies quickly brought forward an injection needle, and prepared to inject the last resort drug.



"No, wait we got her!" Nurse Goodwill interrupted, grabbing the hoof of the orderly, stopping him from injecting the cardiac stimulant.

The heart rate monitor's steady flat tone gave way to a slowly increasing beeping pattern. Dr. Wellhoof gave out an exasperated sigh of relief.

"Brain waves are steady. She's stable, for now." Nurse Goodwill said, eyes studying the monitors. The doctor slowly and carefully turned Rainbow onto her side, and studied her blood-spattered back. His expression became even more grim.

"The nerves in the bone are dead. We can't save her wings." he said sadly. "I believe we can save her Cutie Marks, but keep her sedated. I don't want to have to try to pull her back from the brink again." the doctor said. Using her horn again, the nurse levitated the two flaps of pony skin out of the bucket, and positioned them as best she could before getting a needle and surgical thread.

"What in the name of Equestria happened to this poor pony?" Nurse Goodwill asked, still checking her life signs on the monitors.

"I'm not sure." Wellhoof said, standing on the other side of the operating table. "But one thing's for sure..."

He studied the light rising and falling of her chest for a moment.

"...she's the luckiest pony in Equestria to be alive right now."

## Chapter 2

### Memories and Meetings

SWEET APPLE ACRES

THREE YEARS AGO

Applejack awoke to the crowing rooster as the sun began to break above the horizon. Rubbing her eyes, she flung the covers off her, and got up to greet the day. There were chores to be done. Making sure her hair was presentable, she went down the hall to get Applebloom up and ready for fillygarten. Once her little sister was up and getting ready, she went down and started making herself some breakfast. As the sunny side up eggs began to sizzle in the pan, Big Macintosh came into the kitchen.

"Uh, AJ, we may have a problem." he said.

"Can it wait, big bro? I just started makin' breakfast." Applejack replied.

"Eeenope. Not if you want your new strawberry bushes to stay intact."

That did it. "What? I just planted those last month!" she objected.

"Then you might want ta' get outside." Big Mac suggested again.

Applejack turned off the stove, and ran to the side door of the farmhouse, and stepped out onto the lawn, where her eyes widened at the scene before her.

At least two dozen bunnies were hopping to and from her new strawberry bushes, snatching the fresh strawberries that had grown through the summer.

"You darn thievin' pests! Get outta here!" AJ yelled, charging the group of bunnies. They scattered as soon as she got close, and when AJ had to pick a smaller group to go after, the rest just re-convened at the bushes. Big Mac had followed her out to her patch of bushes.

"Um, AJ, I'm thinkin' we might need some help on this one. I heard there was some kind of animal handler that moved to Ponyville not too long ago. She specializes in this sort of thing." Big Mac suggested.

"Now hold on there, big brother. This here's our farm, and we can handle any problems on this farm without any outside help."

Applejack protested. Big Mac gave her his usual blank stare.

"Well, alright. If ya change yer mind, just let me know."

Big Mac wasn't even back to the doorstep before his sister gave out her first frustrated yell. He was hoping this wasn't going to take long, but knowing AJ's stubborn streak, it may be awhile before she gave in. Not wanting his sister's eggs to go to waste, he went back inside and turned the stove back on to finish cooking them. By the time he had them fully cooked with sides of toast and hash, and

about to enjoy them at the table, AJ came back through the side door, covered in thistles and brush, and had spots of strawberry stains in her hair.

"Alright, who's this animal handler in Ponyville?" she asked, disgruntled. Big Mac couldn't help but chuckle. He had to admit, he was impressed, it only took 30 minutes for Applejack to see reason this time.

"I'll go into town and get her. Be back before ya know it." he said, leaving the breakfast for it's original intended owner. AJ was only too glad to sit down and enjoy her breakfast.

"Enjoy my crops while ya can, pests." she grumbled, while Big Mac left for Ponyville.

PONYVILLE OUTSKIRTS

20 MINUTES LATER

One of Ponyville's newer residents, a Pegasus by the name of Fluttershy, was also getting started with her day. She was in the middle of getting her animals fed when there was a knock at the door.

"Who could that be this early?" she asked herself. She went to the door and opened it. There stood a solidly built red stallion, with apple green eyes.

"G'morning, Miss..." he began to greet her, prompting her for her name.

"Um...Fluttershy." she replied sheepishly.

"Miss Fluttershy, they call me Big Macintosh. I've heard you're the best animal handler in Ponyville, and we've got a bit of a bunny problem back at our farm." Big Mac explained.

"Oh, my. Um, well, give me a few moments, and I'll have something ready to help." Fluttershy said. It was only a few moments before Fluttershy came out from the side of her tree home pulling a small wagon with a plastic cover on it. Stocked full of delicious looking carrots. With that, she and Big Mac headed back across town to the farm.

By the time they got there, it was high noon, the strawberry bushes had been all but picked clean, and now the bouncing bunnies were trying to get after the apple trees, which were fortunately out of their reach.

"Thanks so much for comin' on such short notice" Applejack greeted the newcomer gratuitously.

"Not a problem at all. I've been working on a habitat for little critters, and these guys will make perfect first residents." she replied.

"Better work fast, by the looks of those clouds, the Pegasi have got one doozey of a storm a'comin" AJ warned.

"I'll have them rounded up and out of here in a jiffy." Fluttershy said, a bit more assertive, compared to when Big Mac showed up.

She briefly opened up her wagon, and took out one of the carrots, and set it on the ground. A handful of bunnies immediately took notice, and rushed over to it, nibbling it to pieces in no time. Then, as expected, they caught wind of the several dozen carrots in the enclosed wagon.

"You seemed to like that carrot, little ones. But you have to make a choice. You can come back with me, and have all the carrots you want, or you can stay here, and eat somepony else's crops." she said. The hopping trespassers were indeed far more interested in Fluttershy's enticing carrots over what they could scrounge up around Applejack's crops.

"Not only that, but you can stay in a wonderful little habitat I've built back at my house, so you don't have to bother these nice farmers again. Now, where are the rest of your friends?" Fluttershy asked, walking around to where she saw another small group of bunnies.

The wind began to pick up, as the afternoon storm clouds loomed ever closer.

"We want to hurry up, my little friends. Looks like we have quite the rainstorm coming." Fluttershy said, pointing to the sky.

Applejack and Big Mac were astounded at Fluttershy's ability to communicate with these pesky bunnies. Once she approached them, they fell right in step around her and the wagon. Within ten minutes, she had them all rounded up.

"I-I'm speechless!" Applejack said, simply amazed. "Uh, so how much do we owe ya?" she asked the light yellow Pegasus.

"Oh, I don't charge for this work. Mayor Mare gives me enough to cover the costs of the habitat necessities. In return, I offer my animal control services to all of Ponyville. I'll give these guys a good home, don't worry." Fluttershy said.

"I'd offer ya somethin' ta drink at least, but at the rate that storm's coming, I'm guessing you want to get back as soon as ya can." Big Mac assumed.

"Yes, you're absolutely right. Come on, bunnies, we don't want to get caught in this storm."

And with that, Fluttershy was off at a quick trot's pace to try and make it home before the storm hit. Sure enough, ten minutes later, the first light drizzles of rain started to pelt the house, just as Applebloom was getting home from school. Within another few minutes, the sky was alive with thunder and lightning, amidst a downpour.

"Whoo-ee. Well, the crops sure needed this, that's for sure."

Applejack commented, looking out the window from the dining table as the Apple family sat down to dinner. After the meal was finished, and the dishes were done, the rain finally died down as the storm completed its pass over Ponyville. The storm clouds parted to show

the stars and moon, with the etching of the Mare in the Moon on its surface. Not even waiting for the grounds to be relatively dry, Applejack went and performed a quick check of the farm grounds. Checking the barn last of all, she was surprised to see the barn's front door open just a few feet.

"I coulda swore I closed that" Applejack mused, hoping no barn animals got out and were panicked in the storm. As she got closer, she heard the mooing of the milking cows. Slowly opening the door just enough so she could get inside, she took a look around, and was surprised to find the source of the disturbed animals, and the cause of the open barn door.

A cyan Pegasus was asleep in a bale of hay in the front corner of the barn. A couple fully eaten apple cores were on the ground in front of her. She was wet from the storm, and judging from the way she was curled up on the pile of hay, and the way her ruffled feathers shivered in the breeze from the open door, quite cold. She looked to be about Applejack's age, and her most striking feature was her multicolored mane. Her bangs were red, yellow, and orange, and streaks of green, blue, and purple went down her neck. Even in its wet, unkempt state, it was beautiful, AJ had to admit. Knowing there had to be a reason this Pegasus had taken shelter from the storm in her barn, Applejack opted not to disturb her for the time being. Instead, she went to one of the far corners of the barn, got a barn blanket, and gently and quietly covered her with it, and sat on one of the stools among the cow stalls, and waited for her new guest to wake up.

## Chapter 3

### Concessions and Consequences

#### PONYVILLE PUBLIC LIBRARY

#### THE NEXT MORNING

Spike was far from pleased when he woke up to the prods of Twilight, urging him to get a move on. Glancing at the clock, he plopped his face back down into his bed.

"For the love of Equestria, Twilight, it's 5 AM." he complained, voice muffled through the padding.

"Yep, and that's never too early to start preparing for the Princess Celestia's visit today. Now come on, let's go!"

With a few more pokes, Spike got up and went downstairs, grumbling the whole way, as Twilight prepared her usually long checklist scroll.

Today had to be perfect.

#### SWEET APPLE ACRES FARMHOUSE

Rainbow slowly came to the waking world, and found herself in the guest room, in the sleeping embrace of Applejack. Her body gently shifted as she stretched, and this roused AJ, her eyes fluttering open, and meeting Rainbow's gaze.

"Morning, Applejack." Rainbow said softly, giving her a quick kiss.

The farm pony smiled, snuggling into her lover, as the smell of eggs and toast wafted into the room.

"Breakfast sure smells good this mornin'." AJ said. Rainbow nodded in agreement, and planted another quick peck on her cheek.

"Thanks for last night, AJ. That was...just, amazing." she said.

"Same to you, Sugarcube." AJ replied.

"Do...do you think we can actually make this work? Us, I mean?"

Rainbow asked, removing the sheets from the two of them.

"Well, Ah'd say there's only one way to find out. Just go with it."

Applejack replied. Together, they got out of bed. Rainbow got her hair brushed while AJ went to her room to get herself ready.

Afterward, they met out at the kitchen table, where Big Mac was setting the table with breakfast. Granny slowly came out of her room and took her place at the table as well.

"So what's on the agenda for today?" Rainbow asked, anxious to continue the farm chores she began yesterday.

"Not to worry, Rainbow. It's not gonna be as hard as yesterday.

Part of the apples we bucked yesterday have to go out to customers now. Sweet Apple Acres supplies a fair amount of grocery stores here in Ponyville. First order is two whole carts, goes to the Feed 'n' Seed. Proprietor is Marty. He's been one of the Acres' best customers for several years now." Applejack said.

"I could help you take it into town." Rainbow immediately offered.

"That's the plan. First cart is large enough where two ponies have to pull it. After that, I can do the second cart myself."

By this time, Applebloom had come and joined the table, having been the last one to get up.

"Hey, did anypony else hear those noises last night? Sounded like they were coming from Rainbow's room." Applebloom asked.

Rainbow nearly choked on her mouthful of eggs, and Applejack nearly spit out her orange juice, but they both managed to remain composed. Swallowing their drink and food, they exchanged glances.

"Why, no. Ah didn't hear anythin', Applebloom. What about you, Rainbow?" Applejack asked, nearly sweatdropping.

"Uh, nope. Slept right through the night. You must be hearing things, Applebloom." Rainbow seconded. Applebloom shrugged.

"Now hurry on up and go get ready for school" Granny Smith told the filly. She did as she was told, and took her last bites and went to go get cleaned up. Rainbow and AJ wanted to breathe sighs of relief, but they quickly noted that Granny Smith and Mac probably weren't gonna be that naive and gullible.

"Now don't you were about Applebloom, you two. She doesn't comprehend these things just yet. Besides, you weren't *that* loud." Granny Smith told them. If it was meant to calm their nerves, it did just the opposite.

"You heard it too...?" Applejack asked, and then gave out a groan.

"Now darlin' it ain't nothin' t'be ashamed of. If you two love each other, and you make each other happy, ain't nothin' more to it than that."

Both Applejack and Rainbow were caught off guard by how casually the Apple family elder addressed the fulfillment of their love for each other last night. AJ turned to her older brother.

"You okay with this too, Big Mac?" she asked nervously. Big Macintosh gave a small smile.

"It don't bother me none. You two kinda add up, to be honest. Ya go well together."

Now the two of them were relieved. Last night kinda let the secret out, but the family was okay with it. Now they just had to watch themselves around Applebloom. Their breakfast finished, Rainbow and AJ took their dishes to the sink, taking a few minutes to wash them, and then went out to the apple cellar and loaded up the larger cart with part of the order going to Ponyville today. Rainbow had the tougher job pulling the full wagon out of the cellar, due to her Pegasus heritage. AJ had no problem helping her along.

With the cart, it was a ten minute walk into Ponyville. The Feed N' Seed grocery store was among the shops on the south side of town, so there wasn't a need to maneuver the cart through the streets

and ponies on their morning errands. Rainbow was surprised at the store's small size.

"Geez, he needs this many apples for a store this size?" Rainbow asked.

"They go quicker than ya think. The Apple Family Apples are among his best selling products" Applejack told her, as they maneuvered the cart to the back of the store, where several empty wooden fruit baskets were waiting to be filled. Marty came out with a checklist to make sure everything was in order, and then headed back inside as Applejack and Rainbow began to empty the cart's apples into the baskets.

"So, Rainbow. Have you thought about how we want to tell our friends? About us?" Applejack asked. She was hoping now that they had slept on it, Rainbow would be a little more susceptible to this discussion.

"Applejack, I know I must sound like a broken record, but I'm...I'm just really afraid of what their reactions will be." Rainbow replied, emptying another bundle of apples into the basket.

"Well, 'ah said it last night, and I'll say it again; they're our friends, Rainbow. Do you really think they're going to scorn us and cast us out because we're now...closer? I'd think our friendships amount to much, much more than that. I mean, fine, I'll humor ya. Who among our friends would have a problem with us being together?" Applejack asked, determined to convince Rainbow that telling their friends was the best course of action.

"Rarity." Rainbow said, with almost no hesitation.

"Rarity?" Applejack repeated, wondering why Rainbow had so quickly given the fashionista as an example. "Why her? I mean, sure, she's a bit more contemporary, and she's been out with a few colts. But I've never heard her make any comments about the, well, 'fillyfoolers' around town, like Lyra and Bonbon."

"But you've never heard her compliment them, either. Fluttershy says 'Aw, they're so cute together,' and Twilight says love has many forms, and probably has a quote from a book somewhere to back that up."

"Exactly. I'd bet most of our friends have no problem with fillyfoolers, especially if it's us. So let's swallow our fears and just tell them."

By this time, the cart had been emptied, so they hooked back into the harnesses, and went back towards the farm. Marty would take the full baskets into the store for selling over the next few days. Hauling the cart back to Sweet Apple Acres was a much simpler affair now that it wasn't full of fruit. While they had gone into town, Big Mac had loaded up the smaller cart with what was left, and Applejack hooked into that one alone.



"I'll be back in time for lunch." she told them, and headed back into town with the last part of Marty's order. By this time, the shop was nearly ready for opening, and Marty was standing at the back door waiting for her.

"Got the last part of yer order right here, Marty." she said, pulling up to the rear of the store.

"I'm sorry, Applejack, I can't accept these. Not anymore."

Applejack was taken aback, and wasn't sure if the proprietor was joking.

"Why, what're you talkin' about, Marty? You've never had trouble selling your entire order before."

"It's simple. I will not be seen doing business with a fillyfooler. Especially on the day when Princess Celestia is coming to visit."

This sent AJ into a stunned silence for several moments.

"Wh-what are you-"

"Don't bother denying it either. I overheard you and Rainbow Dash unloading the apples. I can't believe a hard working farmpony would participate in such disgusting behavior. I think it's now in our best interests to save face, so I'll take the portion of the order you gave me and you'll get payment for that. But beyond that, my business is done with you."

"B-but-" Applejack stammered. Even if she didn't get cut off, she was unable to find the words to defend herself. This was entirely unexpected.

"Now I have a store to run. Good day, Applejack."

Applejack stood there in a stunned disbelief for several moments before managing to get her hooves moving, and pulled the full applecart back to the farm in silence. When the family and Rainbow saw Applejack return with a full cart, they immediately knew something was wrong.

"What happened? Is Marty okay?" Big Mac asked, after Applejack had returned the card to the apple cellar. AJ, tearing up and on the verge of full-on crying, explained what had happened.

Rainbow was beyond words.

In her emotionally distraught state, the family decided that she was in no condition to run the apple stand in the marketplace. Big Mac volunteered to run it for today, and went to go get yesterday's fresh apples ready.

In the commotion, no one noticed Rainbow leave.

PONYVILLE

Twilight hurriedly walked all around Ponyville, making sure everything was in tiptop shape, and that the decorations were holding up. Celestia had arrived just a half-hour earlier, and was enjoying lunch and tea at Sugarcube Corner.

Spike sat on her back, now fully awake, and alert with the checklist and scroll in claw. Twilight had made special notes of the last

preparation's disasters, and paid special attention to them. In the days before, she reminded that the welcome banner had to include the Princess' full name, and not 'Welcome Princess Celest.'

"Flowerbeds, check. Streamers, check. Banner, with full name, check. Whew. It seems everything's coming together flawlessly this year." Twilight happily commented.

"Shouldn't you be with the Princess at Sugarcube Corner? I mean, you are her protege after all" Spike said. Twilight saw right through Spike's ploy to get some food, but then her stomach began rumbling. It had been an awfully busy morning. She hadn't even had time to say hi to Applejack and Rainbow Dash as they carted in some apples.

"I guess it is time for some lunch. Alright, you win, Spike."

CENTRAL PONYVILLE

LATE AFTERNOON

Rainbow sat at one of the many cabana tables set out in front of Ponyville's eateries. She didn't really know how long she had been sitting here, but she noticed the sun begin it's final descent to the west horizon. So simply stayed here, sitting sipping some apple juice and hay fries, trying to eat and drink away this burning ember of anger inside her as she stared at the Memorial Fountain in the center of the small courtyard.

Her magenta eyes gazed at the stones, the names of Pinkamena's victims flawlessly chizzled into the outer sides. The dazzling liquid rainbow water fed through the internal piping and showered back down to the bottom tier in a beautiful spectrum.

She never liked thinking about her past; what her life had been like before she came to Ponyville. It had been a part of her she had buried and kept hidden away for most of her life here. But this morning's events were like a shovel in her heart, digging up what she never wanted to dwell on again.

Rainbow slowly closed her eyes, as tears began to stream down her cheeks. Instead of dousing the anger inside, her tears acted as the fuel to the fire, and she got up from the table, and walked towards the south end of town.

SOUTH PONYVILLE

15 MINUTES LATER

Twilight accompanied Princess Celestia as they concluded their run through the "Taste of Ponyville" that most of the town's food stands had participated in. As late afternoon began giving way to evening, the activity in town showed no signs of slowing. Lines still formed at every stand.

"I must say, this has been quite the visit, Twilight. I may have to walk back to Canterlot, or those Super Duper Chocolate Pastries may go right to my flanks." Celestia joked.

"I'm just glad nothing went wrong this time. No Parasprite outbreaks, no pet kidnappings. Finally, things have gone off without a hitch!"

As if on cue, the Princess and her student heard a slowly increasing commotion. This increasing murmur was suddenly overtaken by the sound of shattering glass not too far away. Celestia heard one of her guards announce "There, it's her!" to those under his command. The commotion again increased in volume as the guards dealt with whoever was the source of the window shattering.

"Me and my big mouth..." Twilight said, as she and the Princess quickly trotted to investigate. To say the least, Twilight was surprised at what she saw.

The storefront window of the Feed N' Seed grocery store had been shattered. The proprietor, furious, was out front inspecting the damage, while a pair of Royal Canterlot Guards were subduing the apparent vandal.

Rainbow Dash.

Who was apparently shouting up a storm as the guards restrained her, as she obviously tried to flee the scene after she did her deed, screaming infuriated insults at the shopkeeper.

"What is going on here?" Princess Celestia's authoritative voice brought a halt to the commotion in front of the store.

"This pony just threw a rock through my window" the proprietor, Marty, reported to the Princess.

"Because you're nothing but a bucking bigot!" Rainbow screamed, still trying to pry herself loose from the guards.

"Rainbow, please, I have to ask you to calm down." Celestia told the frustrated and furious Pegasus, tears still pricking her eyelids.

"Now, why did you do this?"

"He refused the last part of Applejack's order because he overheard me and Applejack talking about...about..." Rainbow paused, half due to her flustered frustration, and due to her hesitation to reveal in front of all these bystanders what she had wanted her and Applejack to keep a secret.

"That they were sleeping together." Marty finished, earning another infuriated glare from Rainbow. "And this is my business, and I can refuse business, or service, to anypony, regardless of whether they think such immoral behavior is okay."

This response caused another struggle from Rainbow, who remained firmly restrained by Celestia's well-trained guards.

"Sir, that is hardly appropriate for public discussion." Celestia sternly told him. Marty however, was unphased.

"And yet they openly talked about it while they unloaded apples."

"It was a personal conversation at the back of your store and you know it!" Rainbow screamed.

"Rainbow, please." Celestia again tried to get the ex-Pegasus to calm down.

"Your highness, she has purposefully damaged my property. Thus, I charge her with vandalism, and I formally request she be placed under arrest."

This finally brought pause to Rainbow's furious tirade.

"You unbelievable hate monger" she said, fresh tears falling from her eyes.

Celestia took a moment to compose herself, and make sure her student wouldn't now burst out in defense of her friend.

"Rainbow, with all these eye witnesses, I'm afraid I have no choice. I urge you to leave peacefully with me, and I'll have the guards unhoof you."

Rainbow said nothing, but Celestia and her guards saw her visibly relax.

"Everypony, please return to your homes. I'm sorry my visit had to end like this. We'll deal with this tomorrow." Celestia announced, and the crowd immediately began to disperse. "Guards, please escort Rainbow out of town with me."

With that, the guards released Rainbow, but remained on both sides, as she followed Princess Celestia out of town, leaving a confused and concerned Twilight to walk back to the library alone.

SWEET APPLE ACRES

FIVE MINUTES LATER

Applejack sat in front of a large apple tree planted in the back yard of the farmhouse. As the sun began its slow descent below the horizon, one could make out the rough stone grave marker in front of the tree, where Applejack now sat mere feet from, staring sorrowfully at the tombstone. It read:

SWEET APPLE

AJ was still growing up when her mother had died from complications during Applebloom's birth. This caused her father such grief that his health quickly deteriorated, and he was unable to continue on without his wife. But his will stated he wanted to be buried back with his family in the outskirts of Manehattan. It was a heavy blow to the Apple family, and the farm, but they endured. Granny Smith was still able-bodied enough where she and Big Mac, who was just learning the ropes, were able to handle the various responsibilities of the farm until Applejack got old enough, at which point she was able to take over.

"What do 'ah do, mama?" Applejack asked, her voice hoarse from the crying she had done on and off all day today. "Ah can't pretend t'know if you'd approve of it. But I can't help it. Not no more. I love Rainbow with all mah' heart. But if it hurts the farm, what do 'ah do? It doesn't feel right to hide it away from everypony. It's love. It

should be celebrated. Embraced. Ah'...ah' just don't know what to do, mama. 'Ah feel so...so helpless."

Applejack sat at her mother's grave as if she was waiting for a reply from the world beyond.

But if she was expecting one, it would never come.

PONYVILLE OUTSKIRTS

SOUTHERN FARM ROAD

Rainbow walked several paces behind Princess Celestia, her guards right at her sides at all times. Several minutes after getting out of town, Celestia turned her head to look at Ponyville, and then motioned to her guards.

"Thank you, gentlecolts. Please leave us." she simply told them.

If they thought the order to be unusual, they didn't show it. Both Pegasi, they nodded, and flew off back in the opposite direction towards Canterlot. Celestia slowed her pace so Rainbow came up to her right side, as they continued to walk south.

"I don't take you for the kind of pony that would be susceptible to outbursts of violence like that." Celestia told her, her tone gentle and non-accusing. Rainbow said nothing, her gaze fixated on the ground in front of her.

"I'd just like to know what's going on here. I want to help you in any way I can." Celestia said, trying to get anything out of Rainbow.

"You wouldn't understand" Rainbow said sullenly.

"Try me" the Royal Sister replied.

After several more moments of silence, Rainbow took a deep breath.

"You don't know what it was like growing up. All the bullies...how cruel they were. They didn't care how much their words and actions hurt me, they just wanted a laugh. The teasing, the ganging up on me, the kissing sounds, the pictures they drew and put up around the school. Back then, all it took was the color of my hair for them to call me a fillyfooler. I even considered dyeing it so they'd stop, but my mom wouldn't let me. She said my hair was what made me unique, and that I shouldn't change it based on anypony else's opinion, and that I shouldn't let teasing bother me if it wasn't true."

"Your mother's right" Celestia reassured. Rainbow sniffled, tears pricking her eyes again.

"So I tried ignoring it. When I did that, they got in my face, made sure I saw them. When I couldn't ignore them anymore, I tried going to my teachers. But they were always too busy, and the bullies always waited until they were out of sight to harass me. So when the teachers wouldn't stop it, I started fighting back. That got me expelled. My dad told me to apologize to the school, and to the ponies I gave some bloody noses to."

"So what happened?"

"I refused. My dad was essentially telling me I couldn't stand up for myself when nopony else would help me. The bullies didn't care, the teachers didn't notice, and my parents wouldn't listen. So I ran away. That's...that's how I ended up here in Ponyville."

Rainbow let tears stream down her cheeks again, and trying to compose herself, continued.

"I don't like thinking about my childhood. And I certainly don't want Applejack to experience anything similar to what I went through. She was the first one to give me shelter when I ran away, and after all this, she saved my life, she gave me a place to live, and last night when we finally let our feelings out in the open, she loved me," Rainbow again paused, not easily revealing all this to the Princess. "And that bigot back there wanted to hurt her farm and business for something that doesn't even affect him! It's just one more bigot getting away with bullying!" she defended.

They approached the gates of Sweet Apple Acres, where they stood as Celestia used her magic to set the sun below the horizon to give way to Luna's moon and stars. Afterward, she continued the discussion.

"Rainbow Dash, I'm afraid that Marty is perfectly within his right to refuse to do business with anypony he wants, as he is in pressing charges against you for breaking his window. And you can't let anypony else's opinion change any aspects of your life. Their opinions are nothing more than opinions, and it ultimately doesn't matter what they think of you. You have to follow your own heart."

After a moment's silence, Rainbow again spoke up.

"Then what do you think?" Rainbow asked.

"What?" Celestia returned, honestly surprised at the question.

"What do you think about me and Applejack, two of the Elements of Harmony, being together?"

"Rainbow, I'm one of Equestria's rulers. Giving my opinion wouldn't be appropriate."

Celestia quickly judged that Rainbow was not going to be satisfied by that answer.

"But I would say that in over a thousand years of rule, I haven't found anything more beautiful than two ponies finding love, whether they be stallions or mares. Love has many forms."

Rainbow gave a small smile.

"So, what are we doing here? I thought I was being arrested."

Rainbow asked, curious as to why they were back at the farm.

"I deem house arrest to be acceptable for tonight."

"House arrest?" Applejack said, and it was then the two noticed Applejack approaching the gates. "I don't like the sound of that. What's happened?" she asked, concerned.

"I, uh...went for a walk after you came back today, and I guess I lost it." Rainbow explained.

"Lost it how?" AJ pressed, afraid of what she was going to hear.

"I broke Marty's window." she said, still defending her actions.

Applejack's mouth was agape.

"Princess, can you excuse us?" Applejack asked. Celestia nodded.

"Please don't get yourselves all worked up. I'll be back in the morning to deal with this. Hopefully I can talk him down and calm this whole situation."

With that, Celestia ascended into the night sky towards the mountain on which Canterlot sat.

"Why would you do such a thing? Why?" Applejack asked, aghast at Rainbow's actions.

"I was angry. And it was a personal conversation that he overheard."

Applejack was so flustered, that she wasn't sure how to react to all this.

"I don't know how to deal with all of this right now. I've been so overwhelmed today by what's happened. I can't think about this right now. I think we both need to relax." Applejack asked.

"Alright, alright. Actually, a swim sounds good right now."

Applejack walked back inside with a silent nod, while Rainbow briefly went inside to get Gummy, and then she went to the lake for a night swim. With Gummy content wading in the shallows on the shore, Rainbow simply did laps up and down the pond, and it truly seemed to help. When she was here, her problems just seemed to ebb and flow around her, not getting in the way. She lost track of time, because she wasn't sure how long she had been here when she heard a familiar voice from above.

"It's been quite awhile since my sister has had any excitement like that."

Rainbow opened her eyes to see Luna come down to the shore next to Gummy.

"Hi Princess. What can I do forrrrrrwhhhhhhat happened to your hair?" Rainbow asked, switching the question mid-sentence when she saw Luna's hair was now flowing, and sparkling as bright as the night sky.

"Oh, yeah. I accidentally used my sister's hair conditioner. It's gonna be like this for awhile." Luna explained. "I just wanted to come and see if you're alright. Celestia told me what happened."

"Then you'll hopefully understand when I say no, I'm not alright. Half of me is ashamed I resorted to vandalism, and the other half is wishing I'd aimed for him instead of the window."

"That probably wouldn't have gone over any better," the night princess commented.

"And on top of all that, I'm still thinking about what to do with that journal. Come to think of it, why did you withhold that from the evidence from the investigation?" Rainbow inquired.

"Because at first I thought it was a ruse; her trump card in case she got caught. It would have made it much easier to plead insanity."

"So what made you change your mind?"

"My own experiences. That millennium ago when my jealousy took control, and I became Nightmare Moon. At that point of realization, I began to reconsider what Pinkie went through. That's when I brought it to you. I thought it was important that you know what Applejack did; all the lives she saved that night."

"I still think Pinkie deserves to be proven innocent," Rainbow said, getting out of the water and sitting next to Gummy on the shore.

"I understand your position, in wanting to restore the public opinion of your friend, but you must be careful with this decision, Rainbow Dash. If you go public with the journal, you will doom Sugarcube Corner, as well as the two ponies who truly had nothing to do with it. You and I both know that Cup Cake and Carrot Cake would never recover if it was revealed what Pinkie did to the confectioneries they sold."

Rainbow shook herself dry, putting Gummy on her head, letting him latch on to her rear locks of hair.

"Well, don't worry. I'm not making a decision on it tonight. There's too much going on right now as it is." she told Luna.

"I highly advise you to try your best to relax. Getting yourself worked up over this won't do you any good. I'm sure Celestia will be able to help tomorrow."

"I sure hope so."

"Have a good night, Rainbow." Luna said, and departed into the night.

"Well, lets go get some sleep, Gummy" Rainbow said to her adopted pet, and trotted back to the farmhouse, both situations still clashing in her mind. She walked through the front door, and saw Applejack resting on the couch in the living room. A question came to her mind, and Rainbow felt as if she had to ask it here and now.

"Do you think we would've ever shown our feelings for each other if it was anypony else? If you had invited one of our other friends over for pie, or rescued anypony else from the basement? What if I hadn't kissed you out on the dock last night?"

Applejack opened her eyes, clearly tired, but still took the questions seriously. After several moments of mulling it over, she looked Rainbow in the eyes and answered.

"Ah honestly don't know, Rainbow. I can't answer that. I invited you over because I enjoy your company, and I want to spend as much time with you as possible. Only last night out on the lake did I see how deep those feelings went."

Rainbow tried to decide if she was satisfied with that answer.

Applejack got up and walked toward her.



"Rainbow, sweetheart please, don't think about this too hard right now. We're both confused and hurting. I really think we just need to try to sleep on this. Alright, sugar?" she asked. Rainbow nodded, and Applejack walked down the hall to her room. Rainbow went to the guest room, and was about to climb into bed, when she got another idea.

AJ was about to fall asleep when she heard rummaging down the hall, and pretty soon, here came Rainbow into her room with her saddlebag of items and possessions.

"What are ya doin', Rainbow?" Applejack asked.

Rainbow set the saddlebag gently on the floor next to the nightstand, and climbed into bed with AJ.

"That's the guestroom, and I highly doubt I'm considered a guest in this house anymore. You know, I've never forgotten the first time I was in there, when I first came to Ponyville. I trespassed on your farm, and you gave me a room for the night in return. Thanks to my recklessness today, half of Ponyville knows about us now, and I suppose it doesn't matter anymore which one of us wants to hide it or express it anymore. So I'd say the best way to prepare for showing everypony we're together is right here, at home, in your room. Our room."

As badly as Applejack wanted to smile, the hurt and sadness of today's events was still too much. Rainbow slipped under the covers with her, and embraced her, as they both began to softly cry.

"Oh Rainbow..." AJ sobbed, and they held each other in bed, and slowly cried themselves to sleep.

PONYVILLE

Lyra was pulled from sleep by a musical noise somewhere downstairs. Annoyed, she put her slippers on and made her way downstairs to investigate, the rich notes becoming clearer. When she got to the living room, she was shocked at what she saw. Her lyre sat on the coffee table in front of the couch, it's strings vibrating by the plucks of what seemed to be air in the darkness. It was playing itself. And the notes were all too familiar to her. It was Bon Bon's favorite song. She moved closer to investigate whatever invisible force was playing her instrument, and as she leaned in for a closer look, she realized just a moment too late, one of the strings being pulled violently out in her direction. There was a sharp snapping sound, and Lyra was unable to react in time. Her scream pierced the silence of Ponyville's night.

## Chapter 4

### Reunions and Regrets

SWEET APPLE ACRES

THREE YEARS AGO

Rainbow slowly came to in the same place she had fallen asleep. But something wasn't right. She quickly found out, as she felt a blanket give way around her as she sat up.

"Bout time you got up. I was startin' to fall asleep here." the barn's other occupant greeted. She was an orange earth pony, with braided blonde hair under a cowpony hat.

"Uh...sorry about barging in here. I needed to get out of the storm."

"It's alright. I'm actually curious as to why you came in here instead of moving some clouds around. You are a Pegasus, after all." the cowpony said.

"Well, I'm not allowed to alter forecast weather, and it was freezing up above the storm, so I was close by, and I came in here."

"Looks like ya did more than that" Applejack said, motioning to the apple cores around the Pegasus' hay bale.

"Yeah, I'm really sorry. I haven't had a decent meal in a few days," the Pegasus apologized.

"No need to apologize. They're just a few apples. Come on, let's get you inside. I've got a guest room with a real bed, and let's get a real meal in your belly, and then you can tell me what's goin' on here. By the way, welcome to Sweet Apple Acres. Nice t'meet ya. Name's Applejack."

Rainbow smiled, just a bit surprised at the farm pony's hospitality after her trespassing. "Rainbow Dash" she replied.

"Fitting name, to be sure. Come on in the house now."

Rainbow followed Applejack out of the barn, and it was no longer the pouring rainstorm it was when she went in. The stars were now out and shining brightly. It was a short walk to the farmhouse. They came in through the side door, quietly, as to not disturb the rest of the family. Rainbow looked around for a brief moment at the kitchen area that they had come in at. She followed the farm pony down the hall to a guest room. It was a bed, a nightstand, dresser, and closet, with a window with a view of one of the orchards.

"There's a bathroom next door down. If ya need anything, I'm the last door at the end of the hallway.

"I...I don't know how to thank you, Applejack." Rainbow replied.

"Ya can thank me in the morning by tellin' me what's goin' on over breakfast tomorrow. For now, just get some more sleep. Have a good night." she said. With a smile, she gently closed the door, and left her new guest alone. With no possessions of any kind with her,

Rainbow had little else to do but climb into the warm, soft bed. Right now, this was better than a cloud. Or a haystack.

She was back fast asleep moments after her head hit the pillow. Morning came quicker than usual, seeing as how it was the middle of the night when she had woken up in the barn. This time, the alarm clock of choice was a wiggling wet nose on her own snout.

"Now now Winona, leave our guest alone! Get down now." she heard Applejack say. Rainbow opened her eyes to see a tiny puppy on her chest, tail wagging furiously.

"That's mah' new puppy. Only had her about a month. Trying to get her trained and ready to help me around the farm."

Rainbow waited for the puppy to get down and scamper out of the room before tossing the covers aside, and got out of bed.

"Sleep well?" Applejack asked.

"Yes, very well, thanks."

"Well, freshen up and come on into the kitchen. Got a fresh hot breakfast made up for ya."

Rainbow again thanked AJ and made her way down to the bathroom to get cleaned up. She took a quick shower which helped deal with the wet fur smell she gained from the storm last night. Once she was clean and had herself completely dried off, she went out to the kitchen, where a very inviting breakfast was waiting for her at the table, accompanied by Applejack, and who appeared to be her grandmother and brother.

"Well, now that we're all settled, how about tellin' us about your friend here, Applejack." the elderly pony said. Applejack nodded to her, and then turned to Rainbow.

"Well, this here's Rainbow Dash. I found her snoozing out the storm in the barn last night, and was hoping she could tell us what she's doing here. Where are ya from, sugar?" the farm pony asked the obviously hungry Pegasus.

"Um...I'm from Cloudsdale. I...I ran away from home three days ago, and no, I'm not ready to talk about it. It's my business, and I have to deal with it. Sorry if that seems a little rude, but...look, I'm still not sure how to feel about it yet" Rainbow replied, short, blunt, and straight to the point, instead wanting to concentrate on her food.

"Well, you're absolutely right that's its your business. You don't have to talk about it with us if you don't want to. But, I just want to caution you, if you're not returning there anytime soon, you'd probably be best off trying to find a way to support yourself. I can tell ya right now that not many other ponies would be as hospitable to you trespassing on their property and eating their crops."

Applejack replied.

Rainbow was about to agree, when the breakfast conversation was interrupted by a sudden, lively barking. Winona, who had been

looking out the window, had spotted something in the yard near the house, and was now bolting out the side screen door to give chase. "Winona!" Applejack called, turning to see what had her dog's attention. Another lone bunny darted into the bushes while Winona frantically circled, waiting for it to come back out, tail wagging furiously.

"Gosh darn it, here I was hoping she got'em all. Mac, ya better get that Fluttershy gal over here again, tell her we've got one more for her."

Rainbow immediately stopped eating at the sound of the name.

"Fluttershy? Fluttershy's here?" Rainbow asked, amazed.

"Eeeyup. In town, rather." Big Mac replied.

"I take it you know her?" Applejack asked.

"Yeah, she was my friend back from Flight School. My only friend...I haven't seen her in six months."

"Well, sounds like a reunion's in order then!" Granny Smith chimed in.

As soon as he was finished with breakfast, Big Macintosh again headed out to Ponyville at a quick gallop.

"Small world, I guess," Applejack commented, ignoring the continuous barking of Winona, who was doing a stellar job of keeping the lone bunny in the bushes. "So how do you know Fluttershy?" she asked.

"She was in my class at flight school. The last time I saw her was the day I got my cutie mark. She's the only friend I've ever really had. I'm glad she's okay."

#### PONYVILLE

Fluttershy was tending the small animals she kept indoors when there was a gentle knock on her door. Going to answer it, she was met with a familiar face from the day before.

"Oh, hello again. Big Mac, was it? What can I do for you?"

Fluttershy greeted.

"Ah'm sorry to bother you again, Miss Fluttershy, but it seems one of the bunnies wasn't interested in coming with you yesterday."

"Oh dear." the caretaker commented, and ran to get a small bag of carrots, and also a few leaves of lettuce. "Sometimes they just need a little more convincing."

"We also have a friend of yours from Cloudsdale." Big Mac told her, as they left the cottage.

"Oh? Who would that be?"

"Her name's Rainbow Dash. Applejack found her sleeping in the barn after last night's storm."

"I wonder what she's doing down here. She's the reason I got my cutie mark."

Ten minutes later, they were back at the farm, and Rainbow came out on the front porch to see her friend.

"Fluttershy!" she said, galloping toward her and embracing her. Fluttershy returned the hug, glad that Rainbow was so happy to see her.

"Awesome, you got your cutie mark!" Rainbow said, eyeing her friend's flank.

"Yes, I did. Thanks to you, Rainbow. We'll have plenty of time to catch up, but these ponies have a bunny problem for me to finish taking care of."

With that, Fluttershy made her way around the house to the back yard, where Winona was growling at a bush. Applejack successfully called her dog away at Fluttershy's approach, and she laid down in front of the bush.

"Now now, sorry about that noisy dog, but you aren't supposed to be here, little friend. Why didn't you come with me yesterday with the rest of your friends?" she gingerly asked, putting a carrot on the grass in front of the bush. When this didn't entice the pesky bunny out, she added a piece of lettuce to it, and this caused a little black nose to poke out and sniff the offering. After barely a second, two furry arms grabbed both and pulled them back into the bush. Sounds of ravenous eating could be heard.

"Now don't you want to come back to my place, and have all the room to run around, and all the lettuce and carrots you want?" This question was answered by the last bit of carrot, stem included, being thrown back out, hitting Fluttershy on the forehead with a thunk.

None of the Apple family could exactly tell what happened next. Fluttershy's pupils seemed to dilate, and she again spoke to the creature, who then cooperatively came out of the bush.

"Now there's a good bunny. Come on, let's go get you set up in your new home." she said to her newest companion, who now followed in step.

She approached the group of residents on her way out.

"You can come along too, Rainbow. You can explain what you're doing down here, and I can give you a place to stay." she offered.

"Yeah, alright." Rainbow said, turning to Applejack and Big Mac.

"Thanks for the bed and breakfast, and um...for the barn and bale too, I guess." she thanked them.

"Ain't no trouble at all. Hope everything works out for ya, sugarcube. Have a good one, now."

Applejack watched as the two Pegasi departed her farm. She was glad to have made a couple new friends, and wished to see them again soon, but also hoped that that was the last of her bunny problems for a good, long while.

"Well, that was quite the exciting night. Not every day a rainbow-haired Pegasus flies into your barn."

Rainbow walked alongside her fillyhood friend along the hilly path to Ponyville, who seemed to favor walking everywhere instead of flying.

'Just like old times,' Rainbow thought to herself, remembering how Fluttershy rarely ever flew in Flight School.

"So what are you doing here, Rainbow? I didn't think I'd see you again after that race knocked me off the starting line." Fluttershy said.

"Yeah, glad to see you're okay. Well, um, in my case, everything's not okay. I ran away from home, and I've been here and there for three days. I don't want to go back. I don't want to give my dad the satisfaction of coming back. But if I don't..."

Fluttershy politely waited for her friend to get through her thoughts.

"Applejack's right. If I'm not going back home, I've got to find a way to support myself. But...what would I do? And what pony would hire a Pegasus that got expelled from Flight School?"

"Well, looking around can't hurt. And you're more than welcome to stay with me until you find something." Fluttershy offered.

Rainbow couldn't find the words to show her appreciation for Fluttershy's kindness just yet.

"Why'd you get expelled?"

"The bullies that were giving you problems were now giving me problems, and when I fought back, the school that wouldn't do anything about them kicked me out, and my parents wouldn't even listen to my side of the story."

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear that, Rainbow."

"Well, if you're gonna put up with me for a bit, then please let me help however I can around your place. What...do you do, anyway?"

"Oh I take care of all sorts of woodland creatures. That's what my cutie mark signifies. I can communicate with animals like no other pony can. And here we are!"

Rainbow looked to the cottage in front of them at Fluttershy's announcement. The two-story home sat atop one of the numerous hills in the meadow. One could see the Everfree Forest on the other side of the meadow, as well as the path to Sweet Apple Acres they had just come down.

A creek ran in front of the house, and a small sandstone arch bridge was built over it, with bushes planted on either side. More than anything, however, it looked like a work in progress. Half-built animal habitats littered the trees and yard, which made Rainbow even more eager to help.

"Well, I just had a good breakfast, so where do I start?" Rainbow asked.

"Well, there's plenty of cleanup to be done in the back yard. This place was owned by a gardener, obviously somepony not very organized. Just pick up whatever tools and shovels you see, and if it

looks like they can be used, set them aside. Just stay out of my shed in back."

"Huh?"

"There's a small shed in back, and right now, it's a death trap. So many things stacked on each other. Moving even one thing might bring the whole thing down on you, so just stay out until I can get somepony who can handle that mess, alright?"

"You got it."

"And if you need a break, just come inside and fix whatever you like. What's mine is yours, Rainbow Dash."

Rainbow felt tears prick her eyes as she smiled.

"Fluttershy...just...well, thanks. You're really the only friend I've had, and you've got to be the most sensitive, kindest pony I've ever met."

"Not a problem at all, Rainbow. In fact, I have you to thank for all this. If it wasn't for you knocking me down here at the start of that race, I wouldn't have found out who I really was. So let's call it even."

Rainbow gave her friend a smile.

"You got it."

CLOUDSDALE WEATHER FACTORY

BREAK ROOM

Stormcloud had found it increasingly hard to focus on his work at the factory. Right now, he was just trying to find the motivation to go back out to the floor for the rest of his shift, as he sipped at a cup of premium roast Canterlot coffee.

"Hey there, Stormcloud." an approaching voice greeted in the Weather Factory break room.

"Huh? Oh, hey there, Cloudkicker." Stormcloud returned the greeting, sipping at his drink.

"You've been rather distracted lately. What's goin' on with you today?" his co-floor manager asked.

"Oh, it's Rainbow. She got expelled three days ago, and when I told her to go apologize to the school, she took off into the night. I haven't seen or heard from her since."

"She'll come around. She's got a lot of spunk, I'll give ya that."

"By the way, whatever happened to your daughter six months ago? She went missing from flight school during some Pegasus race. The day Rainbow got her Cutie Mark."

"Oh, Fluttershy? She's fine. She sent me a letter just a few days after she went missing. Said she plummeted all the way to the ground before she was caught by a group of butterflies, and found she was able to talk to the animals. She got her cutie mark that day too, and has opened up some kind of animal habitat down in Ponyville."

"Wow, that's good to hear. Glad she's okay."

"What'd Rainbow get expelled for, anyway?"

"She kept on getting into fights. Said the bullies wouldn't leave her alone."

"And you kicked her out for that?"

"I told her numerous times to stop fighting, and she wouldn't listen."

"Sometimes kids aren't the best of listeners. And still, you have to try and see things from her point of view, Stormcloud. That's part of parenting. Fluttershy told me the day she got her Cutie Mark was because of a race that Rainbow challenged some bullies to that were making fun of her. I'm not saying what she did was right, but maybe the school does have a bullying problem. Don't you remember our days from flight school?"

Stormcloud scoffed.

"I recall you got into one fight, and they never bothered us again." he admitted, unable to hide the smirk on his face.

"Maybe that was the problem. Maybe they weren't leaving her alone. Maybe there are too many of them. I'm not trying to tell you how to be a parent; I'm only suggesting you try another point of view."

Stormcloud sighed, taking another sip of his coffee. Until Rainbow returned, the advice of his best friend and co-worker weren't going to do much good.

"Regardless of what happened and why, as concerned as I am, Firefly is worrying herself sick. What am I supposed to do? Rainbow could be anywhere. Where am I supposed to look?"

Cloudkicker reassured his friend as best he could.

"She'll come around. Kids always do."

Stormcloud looked at the last bit of coffee in his cup.

"I sure hope so."



## Chapter 5

### Reflections and Refusals

When Princess Celestia received a Spike-delivered letter from Ponyville's Mayor Mare early the next morning, asking her to return as soon as she possibly could, she knew something had gone wrong. She saw the problem from her chariot on approach, even before landing in town. A considerably sized crowd had gathered at the front of the grocery store where the incident with Rainbow had taken place yesterday. Upon landing, she took in the scene as best she could. There were dozens of ponies crowded around the shattered storefront window of the Feed 'n' Seed, some held picket signs with various phrases such as 'Get Out!' and 'No Hatred In Ponyville!' Upon seeing the approaching royalty, the crowd gave her enough room to enter the store, but did not decrease their volume in the slightest. It was obvious why Mayor Mare was concerned.

"This is absolutely unacceptable," were Marty's first words upon the Princess' arrival to the back of the store. "This is my store, and I can rightfully refuse business to anypony I want."

"Sir, in that regard you would be correct," Celestia began, starting the debate off calmly. "You are perfectly within your right to refuse service to anypony. But using that logic, I will also point out that the Ponyvillians are also completely within their rights to protest outside your store. The streets of town are public property, and thus, free for public assembly."

"Further, you need to realize the impact of what you did yesterday. The Apple family founded Ponyville, and you sorely disrespected them yesterday. And what's more, you publicly demanded the arrest of the distressed sole survivor of the worst serial killing spree in our town's history. And the worst part is you don't seem to care." Mayor Mare told him.

"Fillyfooling is disgusting behavior, and I will not do business with one" Marty said defiantly.

"Fine, I'll be more to the point. I do not have enough guards present to protect you from the townsfolk, nor is it my duty to protect you, especially considering your hateful behavior. If you don't begin backpedaling, and I mean right now, you might have to be concerned about more than your business. You might want to be concerned for your personal safety as well."

Marty took a moment to glance out at the mob screaming shouts and insults into his store, and saw that Celestia did indeed have a point.

"What would you suggest?" he asked.

"Diffusing this situation as quickly as possible. Reinstate business with Sweet Apple Acres, drop the charges against Rainbow Dash, and personally apologize to them both" Celestia told him.

The expression that immediately followed on his face was evidence that he didn't like the idea, but he was left with little recourse.

"Fine," he muttered.

Celestia turned and walked back to the front of the store, where two of her guards were waiting.

"Send for Applejack and Rainbow Dash at Sweet Apple Acres." she instructed. The guard nodded and went to carry out his orders.

Celestia addressed the crowd.

"Ponyville, please, I must ask for your patience. We are going to try and put an end to this right now."

*"Hey look guys, it's the lespony!"*

*"Haha! Hey Rainbow Crash, my sister starts Flight School next semester. You have to promise not to hit on her!"*

*"Stop it!"*

*"Ooh, what's the matter? You not get enough kisses from your mommy this morning? Mwah, mwah!"*

*"I said stop!"*

*"Aww, hey guys, look. Candy Vag is getting upset!"*

"Knock it off!" Rainbow shouted, bolting up in bed, blood boiling. She glanced around, realizing where she was. Her nightmare had also roused Applejack from sleep.

"You okay, sugar?" AJ asked, rubbing the sleep from her eyes as the sun rose above the horizon.

"Yeah, yeah. I'm fine. Just...just a bad dream."

Their hooves were barely on the floor when there was a knock on the door. The two of them looked at the clock and realized that they had slept in for once. It was nearly 9 AM. Applejack went to the door, and was greeted by one of Celestia's royal guards.

"Good morning, Miss Applejack. Her Royal Highness has requested both you and Miss Rainbow Dash at the Feed 'n' Seed as soon as possible. They have a situation there" the guard reported quickly.

"Uh, thank you sir. We'll be there as fast as we can." AJ replied.

With a nod, the messenger was on his way, leaving Applejack and Rainbow to try and get ready in a hurry.

"That was fast, ah' wonder what's goin' on." AJ commented.

PONYVILLE SCHOOLHOUSE

"Alright class, lets settle down. Now before we go to lunch, what topic should we have for today's Discussion Time?" Cheerilee asked, standing at her podium, getting the chatty class quieted down and under control.

"Ah know, Ms. Cheerilee! We can talk about all those ponies in front of Mr. Marty's store!" Applebloom suggested. She heard the commotion on the way to school that morning.

"Oh... Ermm... I don't know about that, Applebloom. I don't think that topic is really appropriate for foals as young as you to discuss," Cheerilee explained.

"Why not?"

"Because they're protesting that your sister's a fillyfooler." Diamond Tiara rudely broke in.

"Well, that's not exactly true D-" Cheerilee tried to say, but was cut off.

"What's a fillyfooler?"

"It means that your sister would rather marry a mare than a stallion!"

"That's enough Diamond Tiara." the schoolteacher said, now attempting to get the situation under control.

"Oh. Ah still don't understand why all those ponies would be angry.

"They're angry because your sister is unnatural!"

"Not another word Diamond Tiara!"

"And just what the hay is that supposed to mean?"

"Don't you get it? Your sister is a filthy, disgusting excuse for a pony! She's almost as bad as the Cupcake Killer!"

"Diamond Tiara!"

Luckily, Scootaloo reacted well before Ms. Cheerilee, and leaped up to hold Applebloom back as she jumped out of her chair and lunged at Diamond Tiara.

"That's mah sister you're talking about you stuck-up brat!"

Applebloom screamed. The rest of the class looked on in shock and surprise, and Diamond Tiara, astounded that Applebloom was now intent on knocking her teeth out, held her tongue.

"THAT IS ENOUGH!" Cheerilee shouted sternly, in a tone that the class had never heard before. It brought an end to Applebloom's struggles to get at Diamond Tiara, as well as any murmurs among the class.

"Diamond Tiara, Scootaloo, switch seats, now. Diamond Tiara, for ignoring me, you will stay inside for lunch hour and recess. I am honestly surprised at you; saying those awful things when they are simply not true. I will be having a chat with your father.

Applebloom, you will stay after class."

The situation finally under control, Discussion Time was cut short, and Cheerilee realized her class needed time to unwind, so she let out for lunch early, leaving Diamond Tiara in the classroom to pout with her lunch.

SOUTH PONYVILLE

After making themselves presentable, Rainbow and AJ headed down the path to Ponyville at a quick trot's pace, and they weren't even in town yet before hearing the commotion. Turning from town square

to the south part of town, Rainbow wasn't quite sure how to feel about the scene that was before her.

More than two dozen ponies surrounded the front of the Feed 'n' Seed grocery store. Two royal guards stood at attention at the shattered window, and they noticed Princess Celestia and Mayor Mare inside. The crowd outside shouted all manner of insults and protests towards the store, holding signs, some calling for the owner's ousting from Ponyville. Even if she had a fierce, competitive spirit, Rainbow still didn't want to see harm come to anypony. But still, she couldn't deny the rising feeling of gratitude when she saw how many ponies were in front of the store protesting, angry at Marty's hateful act yesterday. The pair of guards, seemingly there to only ensure the Princess' safety, took notice of the two ponies that Celestia wanted in the store, and made a path for them to enter the front doors. Making their way through the crowd, various ponies urged the pair to make Marty apologize, others telling them to not give into the demands of the mayor just for the sake of peace.

Setting hooves in the store, they found Celestia, Mayor Mare, and Marty at the front register, the last trying to hide his disgruntled mood.

"Thanks for coming on such short notice, you two." Celestia greeted them.

"Indeed. The sooner we can calm this down, the better." Mayor Mare added.

"Marty has something to say to both of you." the Princess continued, motioning to the store owner. Marty cleared his throat, looking at Applejack.

"Applejack, I...I may have acted too harshly yesterday morning. Regardless of the choices you make in life, and whether you think they're right or not, neither of us will profit from canceling business with each other. I'd like to reinstate business with you as a produce supplier."

Applejack nodded. "Apology accepted, Marty. You're right, losing each other's business won't do no good."

Marty turned to Rainbow.

"Rainbow Dash, we all act impulsively sometimes, and sometimes we make mistakes when we do. I'm dropping the charges I had you arrested for yesterday. You've been through a very traumatic experience, and I won't charge you because your judgment was affected.

Celestia and the mayor looked at the pair. Applejack looked satisfied. Mayor Mare was worried, however, when she saw the look on Rainbow's face, clear confusion and resentment in her eyes as she stared at her.

"I don't believe this. You called us back into town to accept this coerced apology? When a town finally doesn't look the other way when it comes to bullying, the first thing you want to do is sweep it under the rug?" Rainbow asked her accusingly, before turning to Marty, with tears in her eyes.

"And you. You disgust me. I know you're only worried about your business. You turned away Ponyville's oldest and best apple supplier, and demanded that I be arrested for giving you exactly what you deserved. Applejack is the only reason my name isn't on that fountain out there, and you wanted to condemn us because we've grown to love each other. I ran away from home to get away from hateful ponies just like you. Ponyville isn't going to tolerate your bigotry. And Princess, with all due respect, I won't be a pawn in calming this mob."

With that, Rainbow turned tail and stormed out of the store.

"Rainbow, wait!" AJ called.

Rainbow didn't look back, perhaps shocked and saddened that the farm pony had so quickly accepted Marty's apology. The crowd outside quickly returned to its protesting shouts and insults, most likely fueled by Rainbow's angry, tearful departure from the store.

"I'm guessing that's not going to be enough." Marty said in defeat.

"Ah don't think so. Not with the way Rainbow left." Applejack replied.

"Applejack, please don't judge her too harshly. You see, I believe some childhood memories are resurfacing, and she's having a lot of trouble dealing with them." Celestia told her.

"This can't go on too much longer. My profit margins aren't big enough to handle this much drop in business."

"Maybe you should have thought about that earlier." Celestia told him matter-of-factly.

Applejack went outside to the front of the store to face the crowd.

"Folks, please think about what you're doing. What is this protest going to solve?" she asked.

Among the mixed shouts and responses, she heard someone yell, "It'll teach bigots we don't tolerate hatred in Ponyville!" followed by shouts of agreement.

"Just, please. We need to calm this down before it gets out of control."

It seemed that no matter what Applejack said, it was just fuel to the fire.

"Get the hater out of Ponyville!"

"We don't want your bigotry here!"

For now, the protestors did not advance on the store, and were content to stand and watch the Feed 'n' Seed bleed to death through the loss of business.

Applejack looked around, and found Rainbow to be nowhere in sight.

"Oh, what do 'ah do?" Applejack wondered aloud, making her way out of the crowd.

"AJ, there you are!" a friendly voice called out. Applejack looked over to see Twilight approaching.

"Oh, hey there Twilight. What can I do for ya?" Applejack asked her friend.

"You two were going to meet us at Sugarcube Corner for lunch, remember?"

"Oh, right. Sorry, things have been a little hectic. Give me a minute to find Rainbow."

"Fluttershy found her. She's calming her down, and she'll meet us there."

AJ nodded and followed her friend through town. The streets were considerably less crowded due to the large number of ponies protesting in front of Marty's store. By the time Twilight and Applejack got to Sugarcube Corner, Fluttershy was standing at the door, comforting a tearful Rainbow Dash. They went in together, where Rarity was already sitting at one of the larger tables. They all sat down, and Mrs. Cake brought them muffins and hot chocolate, and the conversation began.

"To be honest, we didn't want you guys to find out like this..."

Rainbow began, "To be honest, I wasn't sure if I wanted anypony to find out at all."

"Rainbow, darling. This is love! The strongest kind of friendship there is. Did you really think your friends, the Elements of Harmony, would judge you for this?" Rarity asked, a little shocked at Rainbow's admitted secrecy.

"I didn't know what to think. This has been happening so fast."

"You shouldn't be ashamed of it, Rainbow Dash. You've finally found somepony who makes you happy. It should be celebrated."

Fluttershy encouraged.

"I know. It's just that with the way somepony like Marty reacted, I don't want AJ's farm or business to be hurt because of me."

"Rainbow, don't you worry one bit about that. If that protest outside isn't entirely obvious, Marty's actions are not being tolerated in the slightest." Applejack encouraged.

"So how's everypony doing today?" Mrs. Cake asked, bringing everypony refills.

"Well, good enough." Applejack replied, "and yourself?"

"Things are a bit weird around here, actually. Every night, I could swear I'm hearing noises down in the basement. But every time I go to check, there's nothing there. It's been happening more and more often. I hope I'm just hearing things. And with what happened to poor Lyra last night, that doesn't help things either."

"Huh? Something happened to Lyra?" Rainbow asked.

"I don't know much. Just that her scream woke up half of her block, and she was taken to Ponyville Urgent Care. She's probably still there."

"I hope she's alright." Applejack commented.

With everypony's lunch finished, they got up from the table and headed for the door.

"Hey AJ, I'm gonna go see Lyra at the hospital. I'm sure she could use another visitor. See ya back at the farm, okay?" Rainbow said.

"Sure thing, Rainbow."

As Dash headed off for Ponyville Urgent Care, Applejack got an idea.

"Hey Twilight?" she called as the lavender unicorn headed back in the direction of the library.

"Yeah, AJ?"

"Uh, can I talk to you privately, in the library?"

PONYVILLE URGENT CARE

The front double doors of the care center slid open, welcoming the cyan pony inside. Checking in at the front receptionist's desk, she announced she was here to see Lyra. She was directed down a hallway to Room 14. The door was open, as was the custom during visiting hours, unless the patients requested otherwise. Rainbow saw the bright teal unicorn under the blankets of the partially reclined hospital bed, looking away from her out a window.

"Hey there, Lyra." Rainbow gently greeted with a smile.

The lyre player turned to face her new visitor, and Rainbow saw the reason for her visit to the hospital. There was a square of gauze bandage patched over her right eye, and above her eyebrow, as well as on her cheek, was a deep red scar, running vertical out of both the top and bottom of the bandage.

"Hey there, Rainbow Dash. Always nice to have a new visitor." Lyra said softly.

"What happened?" Rainbow asked, approaching her bedside.

"I imagine it looks worse than it feels," Lyra began. "I woke up to my lyre playing itself on the coffee table last night. When I went in for a closer look, one of the strings snapped, and, well..." Lyra cut herself off, pointing a hoof at the bandage on her eye.

"Are you okay?"

"It spooked me, for sure. As for my eye, I won't be able to see with it for a few weeks, but the doctors say it should heal up entirely. I'm being kept overnight for a psych evaluation. Apparently they don't believe me when I said my lyre was playing itself. Derpy and Berry Punch came and checked on me this morning. But this is a nice surprise. So what can I do for ya, Rainbow?" Lyra asked.

"Well, actually, I came to talk. Ya see, I need to know...I need to know how you did it."

"Did what?"

"You and Bon Bon. How did you two handle being together?"

Lyra stared at Rainbow for a few moments, and saw that she was sincerely interested.

"Why do you ask?"

"Applejack and I are...seeing each other. One of AJ's customers didn't take too kindly to it."

"Ah, so that's what all that fuss outside is about. The hateful bigot is going to deserve whatever is coming to him."

"So how did you and Bon Bon do it? How did you avoid all the ridicule and hate?"

Lyra cleared her throat, as she prepared to give Rainbow her explanation.

"Because we kept it private. We kept our affection for each other in public to a minimum. No pony else needed to know."

"Why not? Why didn't you celebrate your love for each other? Why is it okay for colt and mare couples to show affection for each other in public, but ponies like us have to keep it behind closed doors?"

"I'll be honest, Rainbow. I don't know. It's just the way things are. But Bon Bon and I didn't care. We had each other, and that's all that mattered to us. We kept it to ourselves because we didn't want the stress of anypony disapproving of our relationship."

Rainbow scoffed. "You shouldn't have to hide it away like it's something to be ashamed of. I mean, at first that's what I wanted to do. But then because of what did yesterday, that's no longer an option, and now, suddenly, I feel proud of it. I want it to be out in the open" she argued.

"We didn't view it as hiding it away. Our relationship was personal. It was no other pony's business. Rainbow, I can't help but notice that in the very short time you've been here, your tone has been rather aggressive whenever you've mentioned your relationship with Applejack. You don't have to defend your relationship from anypony."

"So I just let them say whatever they want?" Rainbow shot back.

"Let me ask you a question. Do you love her?"

"Absolutely. What kind of question is that?"

"An honest one. One you should be constantly reminding yourself of in these first days. You don't want to have to keep defending Applejack in the manner you did yesterday, or you might find yourself in a situation where you won't be able to be with her." Lyra cautioned, essentially advising Rainbow to keep her temper in check.

"You don't understand. Growing up, I was teased and bullied mercilessly simply because of my hair; that was the excuse they used to brand me a fillyfooler. It got so bad that I had to run away from home to get away from it all. So you'll excuse me if I find



defending myself a little more commonplace than you, Lyra. What about you? Did you have to deal with anything like that?" Rainbow shot back, albeit politely.

"No, I wasn't bullied, and even if that factors in to what you're going through right now, the love between you and Applejack is still very, very young. You still have some things to figure out."

"Like what?"

"Like how far you'll go for each other. How far out of the way you'll go for one another. How much you'd sacrifice you each other. I promise, when you've figured all that out, when you are 100% sure of your love for her, you won't care what anybody else thinks."

PONYVILLE LIBRARY

"So, Applejack. What can I do for you?" Twilight asked, once they were both comfortable at a table in the library.

"Twilight, 'ah was wondering. In all your books and studies, have ya ever done any research on...love?" AJ asked.

"Love's a pretty broad subject, AJ."

"Well, 'ah mean...relationships. Making 'em work and all."

Twilight gave the workhorse a quizzical look.

"Applejack, where's this coming from? Is everything okay with you and Rainbow?"

"That's just it. Ah...'ah don't think so. That's why I need advice. It hasn't even been two days, and I feel like we're struggling already."

"Well, um, for starters, how did everything start?"

"Ya mean, when did I start having feelings for her?"

"Sure, start there."

"Well, um, I guess a small part of it was way back when she came to Ponyville three years ago after running away from home. I found her sleeping in the barn. There was just...somethin' about her. As time went on, and she and I became better friends and more competitive with each other, it kinda grew without being noticed."

AJ explained.

Twilight listened intently.

"Then...then when Pinkie got to her, and I barely saved her, it hit me as I was sitting outside the ER. She's the most important pony in the world to me."

"And then she came to stay with you."

"Yeah. I made it a point to set my feelings aside, and focus on helping her recover. And then...two days ago..."

Twilight sat silently, noticing Applejack's cheeks tint red.

"She kissed me. Out on the swimming dock we built for her."

"So she shared these feelings."

"Yeah! At first I was stunned. Rainbow misinterpreted it and ran back to the house in tears. I fought through my stupor, and realized how happy I was. I chased after her to reassure her, and then...she...she made love to me."

"Alright," Twilight began, "obviously you two love each other, so what's the problem?"

"The problem is everything that's going on! That journal of Pinkie's, this crap with Marty, and Rainbow never told me why she ran away from home, and I think something involving that has come back to haunt her. I think that's why she broke Marty's window. The point is I'm...I..."

Applejack swallowed, tears pricking her eyes.

"I feel like I did outside the emergency room. I feel like I'm losing her all over again."

"Ah, I see."

"Another thing I guess is she's made all the moves. She kissed me, she made love to me, she broke a window in my defense."

Applejack thought some more.

"Maybe I'm not as confident about this relationship as I'd like to be. It just feels like I'm surrounded. By my family, by work on the farm. Heck, even that first night together we had to keep it down to avoid bothering anypony else."

"Then there's your solution."

"What is?"

"Young love is delicate, AJ. To lay the foundation for a long, healthy relationship, you have to give it plenty of attention. It sounds like everything else has come first. And sometimes that can't be avoided, as long as you set aside time for just the two of you."

"So, what, more time in bed?"

"No, not quite. Your bed is surrounded by a house full of sleeping family members. Here's what you do. You take Rainbow someplace secluded, someplace private – just the two of you."

"And then?"

Twilight gave a smile at Applejack's naivety.

"And then you show her how much you love her."

This made AJ blush again, and she smiled.

"Thanks, Twi. I think I will do that." she replied, with a nervous chuckle.

Applejack left the library, and was about to head back to the farm, when she was approached by Cheerilee.

"Oh, Applejack, there you are. I need you to come with me to the schoolhouse, please."

"Why, what's happened?"

"Applebloom almost got into a fight with Diamond Tiara over what's been happening today. You know as well as I do that her curiosity isn't going to just go away. I wanted to come and get you, so maybe you could talk to her about this. You're her legal guardian, so I wanted to check with you."

Applejack let out an exasperated sigh.

"Ah do not need this right now...ugh, alright. I'll talk with her."

The two ponies made their way to the southwest corner of town, where the schoolhouse was. The schoolyard was empty, due to class getting out a half-hour earlier. They entered the classroom, where Applebloom sat at her desk, with a worried, angry look on her face.

"Okay, Applebloom. First, I want you to know that you're not in trouble. I just wanted Applejack to come by so she can explain things. She can probably do it better than I can."

"First off, what happened, sis?" Applejack asked.

"Diamond Tiara started saying you were disgusting and unnatural for 'fillyfooling'. I don't even know what that is, but I wasn't gonna just let her say those things."

"Applebloom, I'm going to have a chat with her father right after we're done here, so you don't have to worry about her." Cheerilee told her.

"And besides, just because she says these things about me, doesn't mean you can start swinging your hooves. She may be a bit of a brat, but she's entitled to her opinion. Believe me, sis. Nothing Diamond Tiara says is gonna matter all that much to me."

"So what is all this fillyfooling talk going around? What's goin' on at Marty's store?" Applebloom asked. Applejack cleared her throat, and took a seat in front of Applebloom's desk.

"Sis, I'd say under more controlled circumstances, you're too young to hear this, but here it goes. 'Fillyfooling' is when a mare loves another mare. Over the course of Rainbow staying with us, I began to have feelings for her. And these past few days, I've realized I love her just as much as I love you, Big Mac, and Granny. And some ponies, like Marty and Diamond Tiara, believe that to be wrong. They think that a mare can only love a stallion. But it doesn't matter to me. Nothing anypony ever says will make me stop loving Rainbow. And a lot of ponies here in town don't like what Marty did to me, which is why they're protesting in front of his store."

Applebloom looked like she understood, but was still a bit confused.

"Why does anypony care who you love? I know I don't. That's yer business."

Applejack smiled.

"That's a question no pony can answer. And knowing that it's my business alone proves that you gotta good head on yer shoulders. So no more fights, okay?"

Applebloom nodded. "Alright sis. I just wish I landed a good one before Scoot held me back. Maybe she'd think twice before sayin' things like that again."

"Sis, fightin' isn't the answer. If Diamond Tiara doesn't learn her lesson today, she will eventually. Now you get on home. Dinner's soon."

Applebloom smiled and got out of her desk and ran out of the schoolhouse. Applejack exhaled. Cheerilee came over to her.

"I'm terribly sorry about putting you on the spot like that, Applejack."

"No no, it's alright. Thanks for coming to get me."

"If it's any consolation, I agree with those protestors out front. What he did was hateful and wrong."

"I appreciate that, Miss Cheerilee. I just hope it doesn't get out of control."

With that, the two ponies bid each other farewell, and Applejack made her way out of Ponyville back towards the farm, making sure to stay clear of the protests continuing at Marty's store as the sun began its final journey toward the west horizon. She began to wonder if they would even go home for the night. She certainly hoped so. Ponyville needed some peace after today, that was for sure.

She arrived back at the farm, and was greeted by the aroma of crispy hay fries, apple cider, and hot apple crisp for dessert. Entering through the side door at the kitchen, she also saw an arrangement of flower sandwiches at the table.

"There you are, about time. Everypony's starving!" Rainbow said.

Applejack smiled at her. Rainbow always seemed more her usual self now that she was back here. It felt great to sit down to a nice home-cooked meal after the stressful day they had both had.

"So how did everything go today?" Big Mac asked, with Granny Smith also wanting to know. At first, Applejack wanted to berate her brother for bringing up the topic over dinner, but figured that they had a right to know.

"It's...hard to say. I agreed to reinstate business with Marty, but I don't think that did any good. The protesters didn't budge at all" Applejack reported.

Part of her wanted to ask Rainbow why she didn't just move on and accept Marty's apology, coerced or not. She suspected it had something to do with her childhood memories that she had managed to keep buried, until now. They had finished the main course and were just about to start dessert when there was a knock at the door.

"Now who could that be this time of the evening?" Applejack asked, going to answer the front door, visible from the kitchen down the hall. She opened the door, and came face to face with Marty.

"Hey, Miss Applejack. I...I was wondering if I could speak with Rainbow Dash." he requested sullenly.

Applejack carefully considered his request, then called to Rainbow from the front door. Rainbow came around from the corner where the dining table sat, and her eyes widened briefly in surprise, then took on a look of annoyed anger.

"What do you want?" she asked, coming to the door. Applejack retreated back to the kitchen.

"I...I came to apologize again, Miss Rainbow. The situation in town is getting out of control. I didn't sell one item today."

"So because your business is failing, you think I'm automatically going to believe that you're sincere now? Beat it."

Rainbow turned to go back to the kitchen and was about to kick the door closed when he continued.

"Miss Rainbow, please. I'm not here for me. I'm not even here for my store. I'm worried about not being able to feed my wife and filly at home. I'm afraid only you can put a stop to all this."

Rainbow paused, waiting a moment before turning around, giving him another look of disbelief.

"You still don't get it. You think I have any control over what that mob is doing? It's out of my hooves! It's been out of my hooves ever since you made such a public display out of this whole thing! Okay, maybe you patched things up with Applejack, but that still..."

Rainbow breathed in, getting choked up, tears pricking her eyes.

"...that still doesn't excuse what you did to us. You exposed us. You let all of Ponyville know about our relationship, thinking they'd take your side. Well, they didn't, and now you're paying for it. And you have a family? Really? Well why didn't you think about them before you made this whole mess?"

Marty couldn't reply. He had no ground to stand on.

"Now get off this property. We're having dinner." Rainbow said, turning her back and closing the door.

Applejack saw Rainbow come back into the kitchen crying. Enough was enough. She set her piece of apple crisp down and got up from the table.

"I'm taking Rainbow for a walk. Don't...don't wait up for us."

Applejack said, walking to Rainbow's side, putting a hoof around her shoulders. "Come on, Dash. Let's go."

Rainbow simply nodded, and followed Applejack out the side door out towards one of the orchards. When they got far enough away from the house, Applejack walked side by side with her upset marefriend.

"Rainbow, it's tearing me up inside, seeing you like this. I just think there are some things that you need to get off your chest. I've never seen you act the way you did today."

Rainbow sniffled, swallowing, taking a few moments to gather her thoughts, as they walked through the apple trees.

"I...I never told you why I ran away, did I?"

"No. No, ya didn't."

Rainbow took another few breaths.

"Growing up in Cloudsdale, I was always bullied for being a fillyfooler. And back then it wasn't even true. They just used the

color of my mane as an excuse. It went on day after day after day. It never stopped. When I tried telling the instructors, they just did it behind their backs. When I tried ignoring them, they got in my face. And that's when I started fighting back. I was good at it, too. All that pent up anger. I wasn't going to be defenseless anymore. And that didn't sit so well with my parents. Fighting got me reprimanded, but it was the only way I could make the bullying stop. When it got me expelled, my parents wanted me to apologize to the school and to the ponies I fought with. And that would've put me right back at square one. I wouldn't be able to show my face in school again. I refused, and my dad kicked me out."

Applejack comforted her friend as fresh tears fell from the cyan pony's eyes.

"Rainbow...I'm so sorry you had to go through that."

"It's not your fault. You were actually the first one in a long, long time to show me any compassion. I haven't seen or spoken to my mom and dad since that night. And I'm glad I haven't. Maybe I wasn't fit to be their daughter. They weren't fit to be parents, that's for sure."

"Rainbow, what a thing to say! They did raise you, after all."

"Sure didn't feel like it those last few years. They didn't bother to notice when I came home from flight school stressed out day after day. They didn't hear me cry myself to sleep night after night after night. What was I supposed to do? They didn't listen. They didn't care. I was alone. So I took matters into my own hooves, and when they still didn't hear me out, I figured I was better off away from home."

"So you haven't seen either of them in three years?" Applejack asked, still surprised at that fact.

Rainbow shook her head.

"I still don't know what I'd say to them. I'm not even sure I could forgive them. Luckily I managed to steer clear of them during the Best Young Flier Competition. So all in all, that's why I did what I did to Marty. I've had to deal with bullies all my life over things that weren't true. And I wasn't going to tolerate another one hurting you or your business over the first thing that was true. He gets no sympathy from me if Ponyville wants to hang him out to dry."

They came to a single, secluded apple tree in the orchard. There was a clearing of at least 20 feet all the way around.

"So what's this?" Rainbow asked.

"This was the first apple tree I planted after being put in charge of the farm. When mama died after Applebloom was born, I was still too young to do anything but simple chores. Big Mac and Granny Smith kept things afloat until I was old enough, and then Big Mac and I got equal shares of the Acres."

AJ turned to Rainbow, who stared at the tree.

"We've had a very trying day. And I figured we both need to unwind. Away from the house. Away from the family. Just you..." AJ paused, planting a quick peck on Rainbow's lips. "And me." she finished, kissing her again.

The third kiss, she held firm, closing her eyes. Feeling Rainbow melt into the kiss as well, she allowed her self to fall over into the grass with Rainbow, sliding her hooves through her spectrum mane, sliding her tongue between Rainbow's lips. She slid up so her body was in full contact with her partner's, and began to grind against her, causing Rainbow to moan softly.

"No..." Applejack whispered. "We're alone. You, me, and the stars. Don't be quiet about it. Not tonight." she said, before grinding hard against Rainbow, her intimate area coming into contact with her lover's, causing both to let out short cries of ecstasy.

AJ slowly felt herself get wet between her legs, and when she came in contact with an equally wet Rainbow, she became excited, knowing she wanted it just as badly.

She didn't keep up the grinding for long before rolling Rainbow onto her back, and then getting up briefly to turn around and position herself above Rainbow, and laid back down, her sex just inches from her lips. She teased Rainbow with a few light licks to her inner thighs, causing her to cry out with desire. Rainbow answered by spreading the lips of the workhorse's slit with the tips of her hooves, and she felt Rainbow's breath on her most intimate of areas. The question was who was going to be the first to give in? Rainbow managed to be the first, slipping the tip of her tongue into the bottom of her slit, then drawing it up, causing AJ to cry out in sexual pleasure. This excited Rainbow, never having gotten a sound like that out of AJ before. She drew her tongue out, bringing a string of the workhorse's juices with it. Rainbow didn't wait for Applejack to begin on her, she was going to make the workhorse fight through her pleasure to do her job as well. She dove back in multiple times, each time pushing her tongue in just a little further. Applejack tried to return the favor, but with the waves of pleasure washing over her, she was sloppy. Rainbow wasn't giving her enough of a break to focus. Not being able to do any precision work on her lover, she pushed her tongue all the way in, but before she could do anything further, Rainbow did the same, and began to suck, causing Applejack to crane her neck up, moaning in bliss. Ever the competitive pair, Applejack had to admit that right now, Rainbow was winning this fight.

While she tried to continually go back down into her mate, Rainbow was just too good, knowing just when to up the intensity of her licking and sucking. When Rainbow's mouth was met with a slightly increased surge of wetness, she knew that AJ was close. Giving one final, long lick, Rainbow sucked vigorously on the farm pony's sex,

causing her to scream out as she reached her climax, her body convulsing as she managed to ride her high for several prolonged moments, the muscles in her thighs nearly squeezing Rainbow's snout in her slit. Rainbow continued with the light licks, slowly bringing AJ down from her peak, and she shakily turned around, and nearly collapsed on Rainbow, rolling over onto the grass, laying next to her partner, breathing heavily, satisfied. Rainbow took this opportunity to climb on top of her, giving her a kiss.

"Too bad you barely started with me" Rainbow teased.

Still breathing heavily, Applejack looked Rainbow in the eyes.

"Yeah, well, you were relentless there" she said, kissing Rainbow again. "Besides," she began again, adjusting slightly under Rainbow. "Who said I was finished with you?"

Finishing her sentence, Applejack brought her rear right leg up, and pressed her lower thigh and knee against Rainbow's wet sex. The move caught the spectrum-maned pony off guard, causing her to gasp in sudden pleasure. Applejack kept the soft pressure firm, and began rubbing up and down, massaging Rainbow's most intimate area with her leg. Soon, evidence of Rainbow's arousal became apparent, as it began dripping down Applejack's coat. She was also pleased at the new sounds she was getting out of her lover.

Her stimulation getting higher, Rainbow's legs instinctively raised her rump up into a mating position, and Applejack kept her leg's pace steady, slowly increasing the pressure as Rainbow began to grind back against it. Her front hooves dug into the grass on both sides of the workhorse, and at first she managed to kiss Applejack several times, but as the pressure and pleasure increased, she buried her face in Applejack's chest, eyes closed, beginning to nibble on her lower neck.

The wetter her leg got, the harder and firmer Applejack applied the pressure to her grinding. With a loud gasp followed by a short scream, Rainbow held herself against Applejack's leg as she hit her peak. AJ held her leg against Rainbow, as the wingless Pegasus' orgasm dripped down and soaked into her coat, and began slowly and softly rubbing against her again to bring her down from her high, making it last as long as she possibly could. With Rainbow impressively still half-standing, rear end raised above her, Applejack slowly drew her knee away, only to have Rainbow place her right knee behind Applejack's withdrawing leg.

"No. Please...please don't stop...don't stop," Rainbow begged, her chest heaving, but obviously wanting more. Applejack seemed surprised for a moment, but didn't show it, and was more than willing to give her best friend more.

Pressing her leg once again against Rainbow's sex, she began again. Rainbow grunted, gasped, and moaned as she ground herself against Applejack's leg in tandem to her lover's pattern. Rainbow's



juices continued dripping down, and soon found Applejack's slit, causing the farm pony to become aroused again as well.

The second time Rainbow achieved climax, she gave out an even louder, satisfied moan, louder than she ever had in the bedroom, and again remained on her hooves. Applejack repeated her actions, slowing and softening to bring Rainbow down from her peak, but this time, didn't pull away, slowing down to where she stopped for just a moment before beginning again. This pattern repeated for nearly a half-hour, and Applejack found herself surprised, thrilled, and not to mention aroused, at Dash's endurance.

Rainbow held herself hard against AJ's leg again, as she hit her climax for the fourth time this night, letting out a shuddering, stuttering scream, as she released the last of her love onto Applejack's already soaked leg. Finally, her energy reserves exhausted, Rainbow's legs gave way, and she clumsily set herself down, collapsing on AJ for a moment, before slowly rolling off onto the grass, laying at her lover's side.

No words came to Rainbow, as her chest heaved, her whole body shivering from sheer ecstasy. At first, nothing came to Applejack as well, but then, she knew the only appropriate thing to say.

"Only for you, sugarcube," she said, tenderly licking Rainbow's ear. "Only for you."

Rainbow leaned over to kiss Applejack. "Th-thank you, Applejack...thank you s-so much."

"Ya lasted quite a long time there, sugar. I might have to get one o' them stallion toys to really give us a workout."

Rainbow chuckled, quite aroused at the thought, but knew they were quite done for the night. They lay in the grass under the apple tree, as the stars and moon shone over them. Recalling that she had told her family not to wait up, Applejack snuggled into Rainbow, taking in the sweet scent of her mane, and together, the pair fell asleep.

Applejack wasn't sure how long she had been asleep, but all of a sudden her eyes shot open, and she was still there, in the orchard with Rainbow, the stars and moon still bright in the sky.

But she felt very cold, very fast. She knew something was wrong. Upon sitting up to investigate her surroundings, Applejack was forced back down, suddenly and without warning, and found her hooves pinned to the grass by another. She couldn't do anything but draw in a short, frightened breath, as she gazed up at her attacker; at the long, straight mane, shrouding the face like a curtain...

...and she looked into the eyes of Pinkamena Diane Pie.

## Chapter 6

### Employment and Resentment

PONYVILLE

THREE YEARS AGO

Rainbow pranced nervously in front of one of the many houses in Ponyville. She couldn't help but be nervous. She was pretty much applying for her first job.

She had been staying with Fluttershy for a week now, helping out however she could. And then just yesterday, there was an ad in the Daily Equestrian for an entry level weather pony. That was why Rainbow was standing outside the house of Cloud Chaser, the director of Ponyville's Weather Patrol, at 5 in the morning. Her prancing was brought to an end, and her nervousness skyrocketing, as the front door of the house opened, and a brown Pegasus walked out with a cup of coffee. With a yawn, he looked down to get the morning paper, and then noticed Rainbow Dash standing in front of him.

"Who...huh? Can I help you?" he asked, still shaking off last night's sleep.

"Uhhh, yes sir! I'm here for the job opening in yesterday's paper" Rainbow replied.

The Pegasus looked surprised. "Somepony actually saw that ad? Heh, and here I thought nopony read the Daily Equestrian anymore. Too picky about what they print. Anyways, nice to meet ya. Name's Cloud Chaser. I'm the Director of the Weather Patrol here in Ponyville. To be honest, I'd normally have reservations about hiring a Flight School dropout, but Fluttershy put in a good word for ya, so I'll give you a chance. I'll be right back."

With that, Cloud Chaser went back inside for a few moments.

Rainbow was surprised, and again flattered at Fluttershy's compassion and willingness to go out of her way for a friend.

Rainbow's determination grew. She wouldn't make a liar out of Fluttershy. Not by a long shot. She could do this job. Fluttershy knew it, and she knew it.

A few minutes later, Cloud Chaser came back out with saddlebags on. "Alright, come with me, kid." he said, taking off and flying casually above Ponyville, Rainbow flying at his side.

"Alright, so you read a wanted ad in a paper and had a friend put in a good word. But do you actually know what this job requires?"

Cloud Chaser asked. Rainbow knew he wasn't deliberately insulting or doubting Fluttershy's word, and that he was just conducting a job interview.

"Yeah. We had a job fair back in flight camp. I'm assigned a specific area, and then I get the weekly forecast delivered up from the

Cloudsdale Weather Factory. I follow those instructions to the letter. I know rainclouds and thunderclouds have to be handled with a bit more care; we can't have them leaking or accidentally going off."

"Well, at least now I know you didn't just read an ad in a paper and come running. You paid attention during your job fair, and you know what this job involves. Good, but some days you'll be pulling long hours, and you may have to cover other Pegasi that call off sick. You up for that?"

"Absolutely! More bits just lead to better things. And I bet I could get the weather forecasts done in record time!"

'Certainly not modest' Cloud Chaser thought to himself. "Well, you've certainly got enthusiasm. So are you gonna send some of the money home or something?" he asked. Rainbow gave him a brief quizzical look.

"Heck no, why would I do that?"

"Oh. Well, it just seemed to me you're still a tad too young to be out on your own."

"Well, that may be, but that doesn't mean my parents are getting one measly cent of my pay. Not after I ran away."

Rainbow's eyes went wide for a moment, as she realized what she had just said.

"Uh, that's not gonna be a problem, is it?"

"Not as long as you do a good job. That's your business."

Relief washed over Rainbow.

"Well, here we are. This will be the area you're responsible for."

Rainbow looked down, and saw they were over Sweet Apple Acres.

"Oh, the apple farm! Cool!"

"Now there's something special about this area. Once a year, you're to let the weather from the Everfree Forest drift over the farm. The owners will let you know when to do that. It has something to do with the apple jam they make once a year. But other than that, just follow the forecasts. I assume until you get a place of your own, you'll be staying with Fluttershy, yes?"

"Yep, probably."

"Alright. So that's that. You start bright and early tomorrow morning. I'll have the mailmare deliver the forecast to Fluttershy's cottage today."

Rainbow shook the director's hoof.

"Thanks for this opportunity, Cloud Chaser, sir. I won't let ya down!"

"I hope not. You've got the motivation. Now you just have to get the skills. Good luck!"

The two ponies parted, and after Cloud Chaser was far enough away, Rainbow did her own loop-de-loop.

"Wahoo!" she cheered, elation quickly taking over. She raced back to Fluttershy's to give her the good news.

"I got the job!" she nearly screamed joyously into her friend's face upon being greeted at the door.

"That's wonderful, Rainbow! I knew you would. I know you'll be one of the best weather Pegasi Ponyville's ever had."

"You'd better believe it! Oh, and he's going to have the mailmare deliver the weather forecast for me here. Hope that's okay."

"Sure, no problem. I hope she gets it here. My mailpony puts my letters in the wrong mailbox all the time."

For the last day of being unemployed, Rainbow once again helped Fluttershy with whatever chores she could. She was mowing the back yard when a gray Pegasus about her age came fluttering down from the sky, carrying a mail bag.

"Are you Rainbow Dash?" she asked, touching down on the grass as Rainbow brought the mower to a halt in front of her. She immediately noticed the odd lisp in the pony's voice, as well as her lazy eyes. Regardless of this, she greeted the cyan Pegasus with a smile.

"Uh, yeah. That's me."

"Hiya. I'm Ponyville's mailmare. I was told you're the new weather pony for the southeast corner of town. Here's your forecast for next week." the Pegasus said, digging into her saddlebag and handing Rainbow an envelope.

"Thanks. Oh, I didn't get your name."

"Derpy. Nice t'meetcha!"

Upon Derpy's departure, Rainbow opened the envelope, and unfolded the paper, her eyes scrolling left and right as she read it. "Clear skies tomorrow...sounds easy enough. I'll clear those clouds in ten seconds flat!"

The next morning, Rainbow left dark and early, trying her best to stay silent in getting ready, as to not disturb Fluttershy or her animals. When she got outside, the Ponyville outskirts were nearly lifeless. As she flew the short distance to Sweet Apple Acres, she was concerned about not being able to spot all the clouds in the early morning darkness. But by the time she got to the farm, her eyes had adjusted, and she saw that quite a few clouds had drifted over the farm from the Everfree Forest.

Giving her wings a quick stretch, she immediately got to work. Gaining altitude, she came down in a long swoop, her arcing path catching several clouds, and they dissipated as she passed through them.

'Best. Job. Ever!' she said, climbing up for another swoop.

SEVERAL HOURS LATER

Cloud Chaser made his way through town, glancing at various ponies opening up shops for the day. The sun was now fully above the horizon, and the weather director was making his rounds, making sure the skies were as they should be.

"Oh, and I have to check on the new kid today, see how she's doing with her skies."

Coming to the east side of the market, he noticed an out-of-place cloud, floating about 50 feet above the ground. Squinting at it, he noticed somepony on top, sleeping.

The rainbow tail dangling off the end gave it away.

"So much for her big talk..." he grumbled, assuming she hadn't even started with the forecast yet.

He was about to fly up and give her a stern reprimand, but then he heard an approaching voice calling him.

"Scuse me, pardon me. Mr. Cloud Chaser sir!"

He turned to see Applejack, the co-owner of Sweet Apple Acres, galloping up to him.

"Hey Applejack. Sorry about the skies. I put somepony new on it today. I'll get somepony over to get them clear right away."

"What are you talkin' about? They're already clear! How'd they do it?"

"Come again?" Cloud Chaser asked, requiring a double take.

"They've never been cleared before sunrise! But sure enough, 'ah got up and there wasn't a single cloud over the orchards!"

Cloud Chaser was amazed. Not only did Rainbow Dash talk big, but she delivered, as well.

"So ya got somepony new over my farm? Who'd ya get?"

Cloud Chaser simply pointed up, at the floating cloud. Applejack too, noticed the dangling multicolored tail.

"Well, what d'ya know, she got a job!"

"You know her?"

"Well, no, not really. I found her sleeping in my barn after last week's thunderstorm. She'd run away from home or something."

Cloud Chaser went to see Rainbow's work for himself, and sure enough, Sweet Apple Acres' skies were crystal clear. He was very impressed, to say the least.

"She earned her pay today, that's for sure."

ONE MONTH LATER...

Getting up and tending to her animals as usual, Fluttershy was in the middle of feeding her birds when one of her new bunnies, whom she had named Angel, came and poked her leg, and pointed to the back yard.

"Hmm? You want me to see something in the back yard?"

Fluttershy walked around the front of the cottage to the back yard, and was shocked to see a particular addition.

Next to the shed in back, was a pile of cloud, nearly as tall as the shed itself.

"Oh my goodness, what on earth...?"

"Hey Fluttershy!" Rainbow said, coming down from the skies with another armful of clouds.

"Rainbow, what is this? Why are you piling clouds in my back yard?"

"Oh, sorry about that. This," she began, showing her current haul to Fluttershy. "This isn't just any regular type of cloud. This is Premium Building Cloud. Straight from Cloudsdale!"

"Oh, that's...nice, I suppose, but what's it doing in my back yard?" she asked again.

"I've been setting a little aside each payday. I've almost got enough up to build my own house in the sky above Ponyville. I can finally get out of your hair. I know I've been a bother. I just didn't have anywhere else to put it yet. I need enough before I begin building, so I just put it as out of the way as I could."

"Oh, alright. I was just wondering what it was doing here. And you're...building a place of your own?"

"Yep. So much cheaper than the places available in Ponyville right now. I just need a little more to get the primary living space built. I can add on more whenever I like. That's the advantage of building in the sky."

"Well, best of luck with that, Rainbow. And you're not a bother, not at all. It's been great having you here. Company is nice."

"I just always felt like I was in the way. But thanks for having me."

"How long do you think it'll take to get your cloud house just the way you want it?"

"Oh, I don't know. To get everything right, probably a couple of years."

TWO YEARS LATER

Rainbow awoke in her cumulus bed to the ring of her doorbell. Yawning, she flew out of her room, and went to the front door. Opening it, she was greeted with the familiar face of Ponyville's mailmare.

"G'morning, Derpy. I'm guessing you've got next week's forecast for me."

"No, not today. Mr. Cloud Chaser said he wanted to meet with you as soon as you wake up. He said to meet him in his office down in town."

This came as a bit of a surprise to Rainbow. For the past two years, she had slowly been building this house of hers, and she finally got it just the way she wanted it a few weeks ago, even adding a rainbow fountain. The day-in-day-out of being the Acres' weather pony was very comfortably routine.

"Alright, I'll be right there."

Derpy left, and Rainbow got herself ready in a hurry. She didn't want to keep her boss waiting any longer than she needed to. Getting herself presentable, she flew out the front door and zoomed down to Ponyville. Cloud Chaser's house was over by the town pavilion, and he doubled it as the Ponyville Weather Office,

encouraging any citizen of Ponyville to come to him with any weather-related concerns they might have.

Rainbow descended to his front door, and gently knocked. Within seconds, he opened the front door.

"Rainbow, thanks for coming on such short notice."

"No problem, boss. What can I...uh, are you going somewhere?"

Rainbow asked, noticing a stack of suitcases and travel bags piled beside the front door inside the house.

"You could say that. I've been promoted to a supervisor position up at the Weather Factory."

"Whoa, that's awesome. So, who's replacing you?"

"You are."

Rainbow was dumbstruck.

"Say what?"

"Yep, you heard me, kid. Congrats." Cloud Chaser said with a smile.

"But...but I've only been here for a couple years! There are ponies all over the weather team that have more experience."

"Yes, but in that two years, you've performed your section flawlessly, and covered for nearly every other section of Ponyville at least once. I've discussed this with the rest of the team, Dash. It's unanimous. Everyone thinks you've got what it takes."

Rainbow was speechless.

"Wow...I mean...uh...wow. This is all so sudden. What do I do? The Summer Sun Celebration is coming up in a few days!"

"Yes, I know. Don't panic. All you need to do for that is make sure the entire sky above Ponyville is clear, and you've proven time and again you can do that in almost no time at all. Princess Celestia is sending down some kind of overseer for the preparations. Put on a good show, and let 'em see why we're the #1 weather team in Equestria."

Dash was still beside herself. Cloud Chaser smiled.

"Don't worry, Rainbow. You've been one of my best weather ponies, and you've got the entire Ponyville weather team behind you. You're gonna do great, trust me."

"I'm...I'm not sure if I trust myself, boss."

"Nonsense. You'll do great, I know it. You start tomorrow. I'm giving you today off. Take some time to relax. You've earned it, for sure."

Rainbow shook Cloud Chaser's hoof, and bid him farewell, and then let him get back to packing. He said he'd forward her all the necessary paperwork to her house in the coming days. Rainbow returned to her house to take it all in.

When she finally let out a "Whoohoo!", nearly the entire market block heard her.

CLOUDSDALE WEATHER FACTORY

THE NEXT DAY

'I'm sorry. Whenever I look at you, I see my daughter. I can't deal with that every day anymore. I'm sorry.'

Stormcloud repeated his wife's last words to him in his head over and over. As he had nearly everyday for the past year, ever since she had left him.

His efforts to find Rainbow in the weeks after she ran away proved fruitless. Equestria was too large to cover ground effectively. His last endeavor was sending out 'MISSING' pamphlets along with every forecast the Factory sent out, but even that returned nothing. He had tried everything he knew how to do, and after a year, Firefly couldn't take it anymore. She had never said it directly to him, but Stormcloud had always been afraid that she blamed him for Rainbow running away. They hadn't spoken to each other since. Regardless of his situation, he still had a job to do. The Weather Factory never stopped, so the floor supervisors never stopped either. He turned his grief into focus towards his work. He didn't like to think of himself as a workaholic, but it was the only way he knew how to deal with the pain, and accepting the fact that somewhere, he had gone wrong, and lost his only daughter. This new motivation quickly gained him notice, and now, here he was, recently promoted to Head Supervisor of the entire Cloudsdale Weather Factory. He was proud of himself, yes, but he also couldn't deny the fact that this promotion came from a renewed focus in his work, which directly came from trying to put his broken family behind him.

His new position came with new responsibilities. The first of these was filling his now vacant Floor Supervisor position. Normally, someone lower in the Factory employee chain would be moved up. But the few ponies that were eligible refused the position, knowing the additional stress that came with a manager position.

So he looked out across the entire Equestrian Weather Patrol, and found something that caught his eye: Ponyville.

The small town in one of Equestria's central valleys had one of the most flawless Weather Accuracy records in the books. So he decided to reward that kind of workmanship. He offered his previous position to the town's Weather Director, Cloud Chaser, and he had immediately accepted. He was on his way now, and Stormcloud knew that if he took his punctuality as seriously as he did his weather, that he'd be right on time for their first meeting in three minutes.

And indeed he was. Early, in fact. Stormcloud's new secretary informed him of Cloud Chaser's arrival, and showed him into the impressive office overlooking the various areas of the Weather Factory.

"Hello, sir. Pleasure to be here." Cloud Chaser greeted, shaking the Factory Manager's hoof.



"The pleasure's mine. I'm looking forward to seeing what you'll do with my previous position, given your record with Ponyville. Make no mistake, that's why you're here."

"And I'm proud of it, sir. Nowhere else I'd rather call home. You can rest assured that Ponyville will continue with it's track record. I made sure to replace myself with somepony that I knew could get the job done."

Stormcloud was impressed with the way Cloud Chaser conversed in this meeting. Serious, focused, yet somehow, casual.

"Glad to hear that. Who'd you promote?"

"A young Pegasus that came to me looking for work two years ago when she ran away from home. She's definitely got a knack for it. Name's Rainbow Dash."

## Chapter 7

### Realization and Confrontation

SWEET APPLE ACRES

PRESENT DAY

Applejack found herself unable to think as she stared into the menacing blue eyes of the Cupcake Killer. Her long, desaturated mane dropped down the left side of her head, and nearly nearly touched Applejack's neck as Pinkamena slowly lowered her face toward the farm pony's. As the inches decreased between them, Applejack's eyes darted for a split second over to Rainbow, still sleeping soundly next to her. Barely centimeters from her face, the killer finally spoke.

"I see you're having your own private party with Rainbow out here!" she said, in a frighteningly cheery tone. Applejack wasn't sure if she was dreaming, but she decided to treat Pinkamena as a very real threat.

"Ah don't know what you're doing here or how..." AJ began, fighting through her fear, "but you touch her, and I'll make you regret ever coming back."

Pinkie seemed to completely ignore AJ's threat.

"So, how does she taste?" she asked seductively, licking Applejack's neck. "I just tried one of her meaty thighs, but I see you went for the juiciest part..."

AJ continued leering at Pinkamena as she was pinned to the ground.

"What's the matter, Applejack? I can't come to visit my friends?"

"You're not my friend. You're a sick twisted freak in her mind."

"Same body, same mind, Applejackie. Besides, I still consider you my friend. Even after the rude way you interrupted her very special party. Isn't that nice of me? To forgive and forget? I paid Lyra a visit last night, too."

"Ghosts don't last forever." Applejack stated, saying it as much to herself as she did to Pinkamena.

"Oh, and I suppose you're Ponyville's expert on ghosts? I'm not going anywhere. She'll never get rid of it. And soon, I'll be strong enough to continue my parties. I'm sure Dashie is eager to finish hers.

AJ felt a surge of anger rise up in her chest.

"You lay one hoof on her, and I swear to Celestia, I will find a way to make ghosts feel pain."

Pinkamena looked astounded.

"You'd go so far as to hurt me when all I want to do is keep my friends forever?"

Applejack leered at her.

"Yes. The kind of unimaginable pain you put her through. And I don't care what you say; you are NOT my friend."

"You should learn to not say such mean things, AJ. Even after I forgave you!" Pinkamena said, sounding insulted. "It's weird, all the friends I made, all the ponies I threw parties for; you brought an end to it all..."

She placed her front hooves on both sides of her head, finally releasing Applejack.

"Don't worry, Applejack. The stage isn't set just yet. First, things have to be shaken up a bit for my greatest party ever!"

With that, Pinkamena twisted her head violently to the left, snapping her own neck.

Applejack screamed at the sickening crack, and Pinkamena vanished.

Roused by the scream, Rainbow sat up.

"Hey, what's going on?" she asked, her sleep suddenly disturbed. She then saw the frightened look on her friend's face.

"AJ, are you alright?"

Applejack simply stared wide-eyed at where Pinkamena had been.

"Applejack...what's wrong?" Rainbow asked, her concern growing.

AJ didn't have an opportunity to respond before they both noticed something wrong beneath their hooves.

The ground had begun to vibrate.

"What on earth...?" Rainbow asked quizzically at the phenomenon.

Then came the jolt, as both ponies were nearly knocked off their feet as the shaking increased tenfold.

An earthquake.

The apples swayed on the branches in the orchard. Some fell to the grass. Applejack and Rainbow Dash managed to keep their footing, and soon, got their bearings.

"Come on, we gotta get back to the house!"

They galloped as best they could back towards the farm house.

Arriving in a matter of minutes, they were about to burst in the front door when they heard someone screaming at them from over by the barn.

"Rainbow! Sis! Over here!" they heard Applebloom cry out to them.

They turned to look, and saw that the rest of the family had taken cover in the apple cellar underneath the barn. Rushing to join them,

AJ and Rainbow descended the stairs, and Big Mac immediately closed the doors, hearing a window shatter in the shaking.

Sitting in the cellar with nothing but a dim lantern under a shaking barn was unnerving. But about five minutes later, it finally came to a stop.

Waiting perfectly still to make sure there weren't any immediate aftershocks, they finally breathed a sigh of relief, and headed back outside to survey the damage, of which, fortunately, there was very little. A bunch of frightened and spooked farm

animals, and a few broken windows, but other than that, everything else seemed to hold together.

"We've gotta get into town. Make sure everypony else is okay."

Rainbow said, her thoughts falling to her other friends.

Big Mac, Granny, and Applebloom agreed to gather up what spare supplies they could and would head into town after them. Together, Rainbow and Applejack headed through the night towards Ponyville, which was understandably in a bustle after the quake. Coming in the east side of town, one of the first things Rainbow took notice of was no one was attending the Feed 'n' Seed. Marty was no where to be seen. The streets were full of disturbed and confused ponies, some who had most likely woke up when the quake was just coming to an end, and were wondering what had just happened. Fortunately, most of the damage seemed to be limited to broken windows and minor structural damage.

That is, until they came to the center of town, and Rainbow's heart sank in her chest.

The memorial fountain had been reduced to a pile of rubble.

"No way a normal quake could do that...on something that small and sturdy?" she wondered aloud.

Twilight, Rarity, and Fluttershy had likewise rendezvoused in the center of town.

"Y'all okay?" Applejack asked, the five of them getting together.

"Yeah. All I have to deal with is a bunch of un-shelved books."

Twilight reported.

"Just a lot of spooked critters. I've gotten them all calmed down."

Fluttershy commented.

Their individual damage assessments were brought to a halt by a commotion heard over by Sugarcube Corner.

"Honey, we don't even know what causes it!" they heard Carrot Cake say to his wife.

"Exactly, and until somepony figures out what it is, I'm not setting hoof in that building!"

"What's going on?" Twilight asked, the group approaching the couple on the steps of Sugarcube Corner.

"Cup Cake's been hearing weird noises in the basement the past few days." Carrot Cake claimed. Cup Cake nodded.

"Mostly it was just soft whimpering, barely noticeable. At first I thought I was hearing things. But during the quake, it turned into full on screaming. It was earsplitting. And I'm not going back in there until we get an exorcist in there or something!"

With that, Cup Cake ran off to see what she could do to help, her husband in tow.

"Something is wrong here, guys. Something is very, very wrong." Rainbow cautioned.

"Let's go check out the basement." Twilight suggested. She immediately turned to Rainbow. "If you want to stay up here, we'd certainly understand."

"And let you guys deal with it alone? No way. I don't care what happened down there. I'm still the Element of Loyalty." Rainbow immediately rebuked.

Together, the five friends entered Sugarcube corner, and descended the steps into the basement.

The lights flickered, the old electric wiring not holding up considerably well against the quake. Some of the cobblestone wall had also fallen to the floor. As they turned the corner, they were shocked at what they saw before them.

Blocking the door to the back room entirely, from floor to ceiling, wall to wall, was a shimmering, flaming green barrier. The attempts to approach it were futile. Some otherworldly force blocked all progress as they closed in to about 10 feet. Twilight tried spell after spell, to absolutely no effect. Beyond the thrums and humming of the barrier itself, they all heard the soft whimpering, barely audible above the ambiance of the barrier.

"Alright. Who could possibly know anything about something like this?" Applejack asked.

After a moment of thought, Twilight had an idea.

"Zecora!" she exclaimed.

With nods from the group, the five ponies ran out of the basement back up to the black Ponyville night. They continued south through town, and continued along the path into the Everfree Forest. It was here they had to slow their pace considerably, keeping out of the way of plants like the Poison Joke, not to mention the increased darkness the forest canopy brought.

Once they caught sight of Zecora's mud hut, they made a break for it.

"Zecora!" Twilight called. The mohawk-haired zebra poked her head out into the forest night, and saw her quickly approaching guests.

"Ponies, come in, come in for goodness sake. It is good to see none of you harmed in the quake."

The five of them entered her hut, escaping the chilly breeze of the forest.

"Now, what can I do for you at this hour? I certainly hope it is within my power?" Zecora asked.

"Do you know anything about spirits and ghosts? Not to mention what might have caused this quake. Ponyville isn't anywhere near any major fault lines." Twilight said.

Before Zecora had a chance to speak, Applejack stepped up.

"Now hold on guys...I...I think I know what the problem may be here."

All eyes were now on the workhorse.

"And what would the problem be?" Twilight asked.

"Call me crazy, but...Pinkie."

No pony immediately replied to what was just said.

"Darling, how would that be possible?" Rarity asked after a few moments of silence.

"The same way that magical field down in the basement is possible. I saw her, tonight. Not the Pinkie we were friends with. No, the crazy one, the one who wrote most of that journal of hers."

"I think AJ is right, guys. I think Pinkamena is trying something. Something bad."

"You've seen her too?" AJ asked, turning her head to Rainbow.

Rainbow nodded. "A few nights ago, after our first night together, just before Luna showed up with the journal."

"She seemed to mostly want to scare me, it seemed like." AJ added.

"By drawing out your fear, the ghost may thrive. Because you two were the last to see her alive." Zecora hypothesized.

"She only came to you in your dreams?" AJ asked. Rainbow nodded affirmatively. "She seemed awfully real to me. Pinned me to the grass, snapped her own neck, and then she vanished. That's when the earthquake started."

"So what's that got to do with the voices Mrs. Cake's been hearing? The force field in the basement?"

Something clicked in Rainbow's head.

"In that journal, there were two distinct personalities. The Pinkie we all knew, and then this "Pinkamena" personality, that first appeared the day of her surprise birthday party. As the journal went on, and the murders continued, Pinkie became effectively trapped in her own mind. Forced to watch, unable to control anything. But it was still the same body."

Zecora sensed what Rainbow was getting at.

"If this Pinkamena is after you, then the friend you knew is around here too! I'm sure by now we can all see, that only a supernatural occurrence can this quake be. As she feeds on the town's fear, her power grows. What she'll do then, no one knows. Pinkamena is creating fear, and we must stop her, now and here!"

"But...how?" AJ asked.

"This evil, back down to the depths we must send, and the only one who knows how, is your long lost friend!"

## Chapter 8

### Redemption and Revenge

PONYVILLE

TWO AND A HALF YEARS AGO

Rainbow awoke in her new, in-progress cloud home above Ponyville, brought from her dreams by a knocking at her door. Clearing away the haze of sleep, Rainbow got up and headed for the front door, remembering that Cloud Chaser had left on a week's vacation yesterday, and had asked her to take care of the mail while he was gone. So in short, everything that would normally go to him, for a week, Derpy now brought to her.

"Morning, Rainbow Dash!"

"Hey there, Derpy, what do you have for me?"

"Just some stuff that normally goes to Mr. Cloud Chaser. You're awful lucky the Apple family is making that Zap Apple Jam this week. Guess that's why Cloud Chaser went on vacation, too. Well, here ya go," she said, giving Rainbow a small pile of envelopes from her mailbag. One in particular was a bit larger than any envelope the forecasts came in. Upon checking the address, Rainbow confirmed that this had come from the weather factory.

"What do we have here?" Rainbow asked as Derpy flew off to continue her deliveries.

Deciding to not leave something from the Weather Factory unopened for a week while her boss was on vacation, she tore open the top, and pulled out the single sheet of paper within.

Her eyes widened as she studied the flier. It said:

MISSING

Rainbow Dash

Was last seen in Cloudsdale six months ago. Please contact Cloudsdale Weather Factory Floor Supervisor Stormcloud with any information regarding whereabouts.

There was a full color photo of her in Cloudsdale on the center of the flier. Silently, Rainbow slipped the flier back into the envelope, and returned to her room to slip it under her bed without a word.

CLOUDSDALE WEATHER FACTORY

YEAR AND A HALF LATER

"I-I'm sorry, sir. I don't recall ever getting any kind of flier with the forecasts." Cloud Chaser stammered. Upon revealing his replacement to his new boss, the conversation had taken a considerable turn. It turned out that Stormcloud was Rainbow's father.

"I made sure to send out fliers with every forecast that July. How did you not get it?"

"July..." Cloud Chaser said, putting a hoof to his chin. "I went on vacation that year. I put Rainbow in charge of my weather-related

mail for that week. I'm can only guess she opened it and kept it hidden. Sir, if I had known..."

"Two years..." Stormcloud muttered, sitting down at his desk. "Two years without a peep from anypony about her. I had given up. I didn't even know if she was alive. And then bam...she's been down in Ponyville all along."

Cloud Chaser looked as if this was somehow his fault.

"Don't worry about it, son. There was no way for you to know. At the very least, I now know she's okay." Stormcloud reassured his new employee.

"Are you gonna go see her, sir?"

Stormcloud remained silent for a few moments, honestly pondering the question.

"I'm not sure yet."

The answer initially surprised Cloud Chaser. But he recalled that Rainbow never really talked about her life before coming to Ponyville, and if she hid the flier away, that was a clear sign that she didn't want to be found. But that was a year and a half ago. Perhaps she just forgot about the flier. Or, as he was guessing Stormcloud was afraid of, Rainbow was still angry over whatever had happened, even after all this time. Cloud Chaser had the mind to not press further, as it was none of his business. Stormcloud knew where Rainbow was, knew she was okay, and that was that.

PONYVILLE OUTSKIRTS

YEAR AND A HALF LATER

The five friends raced out of the Everfree Forest back into Ponyville, where cleanup efforts were starting up in the black of night. Power was minimal, but the townsfolk had set up lanterns and torches where they could in order to provide as much lighting as possible.

"We need the Elements of Harmony. If anything can break through that barrier, the Elements can." Twilight encouraged, and the group made for the library. True to Twilight's damage report, the tree had suffered minimal damage in the quake. Entering the library, the inside was a slightly different story, with books having fallen off the shelves all over the place. It was a few minutes of everypony searching before Rainbow finally found the Elements of Harmony: A Reference Guide. Flipping it open, there they were; the five Element Necklaces and the Tiara of Magic. The gems of all of them glimmered brightly, save for one; the sapphire on the Necklace of Laughter was faded and dull, reaffirming that Pinkamena had something to do with this. They left the library at a full gallop, heading for Sugarcube Corner once again. The building was still unoccupied, the Cakes still helping other ponies around town. They entered the bakery and immediately went around the back to the basement door. They cautiously retraced their steps to the supernatural flaming barrier between them and the storage room at the end. Together, the five of them concentrated, and their



necklaces started to glow. They shot out beams of light at the barrier, and to everypony's surprise, it didn't seem to do any good. Instead, the Necklace of Laughter thrummed with energy, and with Rainbow holding it, it created a bubble of glowing pink energy around her and Applejack, and pushed them through the barrier. Once on the other side, the bubble popped, and there they stood, together, facing the door to the storage room.

"We're okay, guys!" Rainbow shouted back through the barrier to their friends, unsure if they heard her. Nodding at Applejack, they approached the door, and slowly pushed it open.

What they saw, surprised them.

There, in the center of the room, facing the back wall, was Pinkie. They weren't sure which one. Her mane was flat and deflated, she was facing away from them, in a sitting position, sobbing.

"Pinkie...?" Rainbow risked calling out to her friend.

Pinkie didn't respond, or even acknowledge their presence for that matter. The soft, glowing white aura around her strongly suggest that this was another spirit.

"Pinkie...it's me. It's Rainb-"

"Don't. Please don't come any closer. I don't even want to look at you...to see what that monster did to you...I'm...I'm so sorry, Dashie..." Pinkie said through her sobs, her shoulders heaving.

Ignoring the advice, both Applejack and Rainbow Dash advanced on either side of her. Rainbow approached to her right, and saw, held in her two front hooves, a blood-stained cyan feather.

"You didn't do this to me, Pinkie. I read the Journal. Remember? You didn't know what to do when she started taking victims."

"What?" Applejack asked, shocked. Rainbow turned to AJ, on the other side of Pinkie, as the workhorse leered at Pinkie accusingly.

"You knew what she was doing? While you still had control?"

"AJ, this isn't the time for thi-" Rainbow tried to defend her former friend.

"You could have turned yourself in! You could've put a stop to this before more ponies died!" Applejack cast the blame over the sobbing pony in the middle of the room.

"Applejack!"

"She's right, Rainbow. I was just so scared. I didn't know what was wrong. This is my fault. I could have ended this all before it began. That day...that day before my surprise birthday party...I don't know why I felt the way I felt. I don't know why I thought you had all suddenly abandoned me. I just...just took Spike at his word. I should've known he would say anything for that bowl of gems, not to mention the way I was questioning him...this IS all my fault, Rainbow. I've accepted the entire blame for not taking action when I could. And..." Pinkie took a deep breath, her shoulders heaving as tears continued to stream down her cheeks. "And you don't know what it means to me...to know you're taking care of Gummy. But

right now, we have to stop her. She's trying to gain enough power to have a complete physical resurrection in this world."

"What do we do, Pinkie?" AJ asked.

"The journal. Destroy it." Pinkie demanded.

"What?" Rainbow asked, shocked. "Pinkie, that journal is the only thing that proves your innocence." Rainbow protested.

"And it's also the only thing keeping Pinkamena alive, Rainbow. I just told you, I'm not innocent in this. Not even close. If anything, all that journal proves is how much of a coward I was. You've forgiven me for what I've done. That's good enough for me. Let the rest of Ponyville hate me, if it brings them closure for the loved ones she took from them. You have to destroy it. Burn it. Burn it so there's nothing but ashes left!"

At that, the room shuddered.

"Sorry, but I can't let you stop my parties before I've even started them again!" came an all too familiar voice. Back at the door, the menacing figure of Pinkamena materialized, and she stared at them all with icy blue eyes. She held a knife in her left hoof. "It seems that keeping you trapped down here did no good. They found you anyway, and now they know how to defeat me." Pinkamena mocked, in a worried tone.

Pinkie stood. Shaken, scared, heartbroken, but ready to do whatever she could to defend her two friends.

"I certainly hope you're not planning on laughing at me in hopes I disappear, Saddle Pie. It's not gonna be that easy. And as for you..." Pinkamena said, leering at Rainbow, pointing the tip of the knife in her direction.

"You and I have unfinished baking to take care of."

CLOUDSDALE

YEAR AND A HALF EARLIER

Stormcloud walked with purpose down the neighborhood streets of east Cloudsdale. After getting Cloud Chaser settled in to his new area, he had taken the rest of the day to think. And now, as the sun was setting behind the horizon, he had decided that he was tired of being alone. He couldn't come to a decision by himself. He had created this mess, but there was still somepony else who deserved to know, and maybe they'd help him come to his decision, to help him know if these fears were at all founded. Coming up to a two story dwelling in the middle of the neighborhood, he strolled up the front walk, and rang the doorbell.

Moments later, the door opened, and there stood his wife, Firefly. Whom he had not seen in a year. She seemed surprised to see him. "She's alive, Firefly. And I know where she is."

## Chapter 9

### Fears and Flames

CLOUDSDALE

ONE YEAR AGO

"So let me see if I'm understanding you correctly," Firefly began, her husband sitting with her at the dining table. "You spend the last two years looking for your daughter, and now that we finally know where she is, you're hesitating to go see her? Because you're afraid she's still angry?"

Stormcloud knew it was an odd position.

"She got a job not even a week after running away. What does that say to you? To me, that says she had no intention of returning home. And then she hid the flier I had sent with all the forecasts. So not only did she not want to come back, but she didn't want us to know she was down there, either."

Clearly, Firefly was the more impatient of the two, but Stormcloud had come to her with this, even after their falling out more than a year ago.

"We have to go see her eventually. So how will you know when she's not going to be angry anymore?"

Stormcloud couldn't answer that. And he certainly didn't want to stretch his wife's patience anymore than he had to, as they were just starting to reconcile after what had happened.

"I...I don't know. Still, I really don't feel that this is the right time. If she's still angry, she doesn't need the added stress of dealing with us right now. She's just been promoted to this new job, and the Summer Sun Celebration is in two days."

Stormcloud was unsure if his wife was satisfied with that reasoning. "Sweetheart, don't worry. She's Ponyville's weather director. I don't think she's going anywhere."

SUGARCUBE CORNER

ONE YEAR LATER

Pinkamena expertly maneuvered on three hooves, the fourth clutching the knife, ready to strike at any time.

"Why did I ever consider you to be my friends? All I ever wanted to do is keep you all close to me forever, and to let all the ponies of Ponyville know the friendship I knew with my friends. But now I know the truth."

Pinkamena slowly stepped towards the group of three ponies and ghost. Applejack was conflicted; unsure if they should split up to divide her attention, or to stick close to Rainbow, ready to defend her if Pinkamena made a move against her. The workhorse looked over at Pinkamena's last victim. She stood as determined as the rest of them. Ready to dodge whatever attack came her way.

"The truth is you were never my friends! You abandoned me on my birthday. You tried to put an end to my parties. And even now, when I forgave you, here you are, in league with Saddle Pie, trying to put an end to me for good!"

"You're a sick twisted monster! Unworthy of forgiveness, and unworthy of friends!" Pinkie screamed back, and that was the breaking point. With a shriek, Pinkamena charged. She collided into Pinkie's spirit, ready to drive the knife deep. Rainbow countered with a swift buck to her side, and dodged the retaliatory swipe from the knife. Seeing Rainbow get attacked, Applejack now attacked from the other side, and when Pinkamena swung at her, she was unable to get out of the way entirely, and the tip of the knife went red as it's very tip came in contact with Applejack's right cheek. AJ barely flinched; her determination far greater than any glancing slash from the knife. Pinkie, seeing what happened to her, went into a rage. Screaming, she rammed her whole body into Pinkamena in a charge, slamming her into the left wall, causing her to drop the knife.

"You won't hurt anypony ever again!" she shrieked, trying her best to pin the Cupcake Killer against the wall. "AJ, Rainbow, go! Get the journal! Burn it!"

At Pinkie's insistence, AJ and Rainbow made for the hall again, the Necklace of Laughter allowing them to pass through.

"Wh-what's going on?" Twilight asked, the other three obviously hearing the commotion on the other side.

"Pinkie's journal. We need to burn it. Spike has the most intense flames around. Get him." Rainbow said hurriedly, as they continued running from the basement.

"But the journal's back at the house! How can we cover that much ground as fast as we need to?" AJ asked.

"You can't but I can. With enough concentration, I should be able to teleport to Sweet Apple Acres and back. You go get Spike!" Twilight said, as they ran up the stairs.

Back in the storage room, Pinkamena struggled for the upper hoof again. With a vicious headbutt, Pinkie's hold on her evil demented half diminished, and Pinkamena took the opportunity. She slid out from Pinkie's grasp, and with all her might, grabbed Pinkie's head and slammed it into the cobblestone wall. Pinkie screamed, and collapsed to the floor, severely dazed.

"Sorry, Saddle Pie, but the parties must go on."

Pinkamena picked up the knife, put the handle between her teeth, and gave chase.

CLOUDSDALE WEATHER FACTORY

SIX MONTHS AGO

Stormcloud sat in the break room of the Weather Factory, after making his rounds. He was glad that his friendships with his co-

workers hadn't really changed since his promotion. But still, in six months, he still hadn't gotten up the courage to go see his daughter. Cloud Chaser had been performing his job in the factory superbly, and he had been right; under Rainbow, Ponyville was continuing its near-flawless weather record, save for a small mistake; they had missed a rainstorm a few days ago, so they were currently making a much bigger thunderstorm to make up for it.

"Hey there, Stormcloud. How's the new job treatin' ya?" the familiar voice of his longtime coworker and friend, Cloudkicker, greeted.

"Afternoon, friend. The job's been pretty good."

"Firefly tells me you found Rainbow Dash by pure coincidence.

How's the kid doin', by the way?"

Stormcloud cleared his throat.

"We, uh...we haven't gone down to see her, yet." he admitted.

"Am I hearing this right?"

"She hasn't tried to get in touch with us at all. She stayed with Fluttershy for the first few months after getting a job, then started buying small amounts of Building Cloud to make a place of her own. Purely by chance, she got the flier I sent out instead of the then-director, and she hid it away. I...I don't know, but to me, that says she doesn't want anything to do with us anymore."

"And what does Firefly think of all this?" Cloudkicker asked.

"You didn't ask her? Didn't you just talk with her?"

"You're my friend, Stormcloud. I'd rather hear it coming from you. I know this whole mess caused you two to separate for a year. I just hope you're not going to repeat that mistake."

Stormcloud considered this.

"I know she's trying to be patient with me. I want to see Rainbow again too, it's just that...I don't think I could handle it."

"What?"

"Her rejecting me if she's still angry. I don't know if I could deal with that."

Stormcloud noticed Cloudkicker's eyes glance for a moment to the wall behind him, next to the door that lead back out to the factory.

"Maybe there's a way for you two to see her without approaching her directly." he told his friend, motioning in the direction of the wall.

Stormcloud turned to see what Cloudkicker was getting at. There was an event poster on the wall next to the door. He got up to get a closer look, with Cloudkicker behind him. The poster read:

**BEST YOUNG FLIER COMPETITION!**

Come and compete against the best of Cloudsdale's youngest fliers, and have your routine judged by this year's special panel of judges: Her Royal Highness Princess Celestia and the Wonderbolts!

Entry fee: 20 bits.

"You always told me Rainbow was obsessed with the Wonderbolts. If she's still infatuated with the group, you think she'd honestly miss a chance to show off for them? When that contest comes around, you and Firefly take the day off and go see her perform."

Stormcloud smiled. "Thanks, Cloudkicker. That's a great idea." When he went home that night and told Firefly the idea, she was thrilled that her husband was beginning to compromise on his concerns. So three months later, they found themselves at the Cloudiseum for the Best Young Flier Competition, getting some of the highest up seats available.

To keep the cheering and competition fair, the contestant's names weren't listed in the program. It merely stated how many contestants there were, of which there appeared to be 15.

"Do you think she's here?" Stormcloud asked, not having any idea because of the omission of names in the program.

"I hope so. When she was younger she wanted to skip school for every single Wonderbolts show." Firefly said, skimming through the program.

"Fillies and gentlecolts, please rise and join me in welcoming our beloved Princess Celestia!" the announcer began over the stadium's amplifier system. Out of the sky, descended Equestria's loved ruler, escorted by two of her Royal Guards, and she came to a gentle landing on the VIP Balcony.

"Please welcome our celebrity judges for the Best Young Fliers Competition, the Wonderbolts!"

At that, the stunt flying group flew overhead in formation, six members, who then pulled up in a steep arc, performed a quick tight circle line turn, and then exploded outward in a six-point firework explosion, to the cheers of the crowd. Three members broke off as the other three took their places on their own viewing platform, next to the Princess'.

"And now let's find out who will take the prize as this year's Best Young Flier!"

Contestant number 1 came out from behind the curtain. A tan-colored filly. At first they came in order; one, two, and then three. But then instead of Contestant 4, Contestant 7 came out and performed his routine, which had a heavy focus on barrel rolls. In order or not, one by one, they all came out and performed, and still, no Rainbow. They were beginning to lose hope.

"And now, for our final competitor of the day, Contestant #15! Uh, and apparently Contestant #4."

There she was! Firefly quickly pointed their daughter out to her husband. Time seemed to slow as they laid eyes on their daughter for the first time in three years. She had grown. She looked a bit nervous as she moved to her starting position.

Then, to their surprise, came another one of the contestants. This one, was not a Pegasus, to be sure. From this distance Stormcloud could've sworn it was a Unicorn with butterfly wings, and one of the most outrageous outfits he'd ever seen.

"Who...is that?"

Firefly was equally perplexed at the pony's choice of outfit.

"That must be the Weather Factory tourist everyone was talking about today. They're performing at the same time?" she asked.

It appeared so. The two contestants conversed briefly before the Unicorn flew up and began doing some kind of formal dance step in midair, as a string piece of music began to play. At first, Rainbow didn't move, but then she made a dash for the line of cloud pillars that had been set up for her performance. She expertly slalomed her way through them, but Stormcloud noticed something a bit off. "Careful, Rainbow, careful..." and then he winced, as Rainbow collided with her sixth pillar and went veering off to the left, face first into the side of the stadium.

Three ponies above her laughed. She appeared briefly dazed, but unhurt. Up above, the unicorn's dance routine continued, evolving into rapid spins. Rainbow got her bearings and flew quickly up out of the stadium, up to four close clouds, and began zooming around them. The clouds began spinning rapidly by Rainbow's momentum, and she moved from one to the next, keeping them spinning like tornadoes.

And then, another mishap. Rainbow took a small piece of cloud to the face, sending her flipping off course, and the whirling cloud came quickly down towards the Cloudiseum. In fact, it looked like it would...no, of all places...

Yep. Princess Celestia and her guards up on their balcony had to momentarily duck to avoid being hit by the cloud before it vanished from the impact. Stormcloud groaned. This was not her day.

The unicorn down in the stadium continued spinning, and then began to ascend up, followed by Rainbow, who quickly overtook her co-performer. The unicorn got between the current position of the sun and the stadium, and spread her wings full, covering the crowd with a brilliant spectrum of colors.

"Look upon me, Equestria. For I, am, Rarity!" she claimed.

"Certainly not modest..." Firefly mumbled to her husband.

Several members of the crowd looked in awe at the spectacle.

And then, in a flash of flame, the unicorn's wings evaporated, and she began plummeting down with a scream. The crowd gasped as she fell through the center of the Cloudiseum, continuing rapidly toward the ground.

The Wonderbolt trio was quick to spring into action, quickly taking off and going into a steep dive in an attempt to rescue the helpless,

wingless Unicorn. When they closed in on her, they failed to take her flailing legs into account, and all three of them were hit. Rainbow, still ascending above the stadium, noticed what was going on. She began her own dive.

"Hold on, Rarity. I'm comin'!" he heard her scream as she too, flew down through the center of the stadium.

Stormcloud, Firefly, and the rest of the crowd looked on in horror, as the five ponies quickly plummeted towards the earth.

And then, he noticed something. A mach cone had begun to form around Rainbow. Was...was she really going that fast? How could she hope to pull up in time?

She continued to gain speed, and in an instant, brilliant flash of light, she broke the sound barrier, a circle of rainbow expanding out from where she had done so, as she continued towards the four falling ponies.

A Sonic Rainboom!

Stormcloud saw Rainbow catch the Wonderbolts and the unicorn and pull up at an unnatural 90-degree angle, barely avoiding the ground. She quickly ascended, a rainbow forming in her wake. She arced over the Cloudiseum, a brilliant rainbow now looming over the center, and she came up underneath the center and slowed to a hover as she came up onto the stage again. The contestants who already performed quickly flew in to help relieve Rainbow of her load of four ponies.

When her feet touched the stage, the crowd went absolutely wild. Somepony also had the mind to set off the confetti cannons as well. Stormcloud and Firefly were absolutely stunned. The overwhelming volume of the crowd continued as a weather balloon was brought in to place the Unicorn safely in. Four other ponies came to talk to Rainbow and the Unicorn, and Stormcloud recognized one as Cloudkicker's daughter, Fluttershy. The three Wonderbolts came to thank Rainbow for her heroic actions, and then Princess Celestia also came down to the group. After a short conversation, the princess got out the tiara for the Best Young Flier.

"For her incredible act of bravery, and her spectacular Sonic Rainboom, I'm presenting the grand prize for Best Young Flier, to this year's winner, Miss Rainbow Dash!"

Princess Celestia placed the gold winged tiara on Rainbow's head, and the crowd cheered again, as three of her friends hoisted her up and paraded her around the stage. Stormcloud turned to his wife.

"You can go see her if you like, hun." Stormcloud said, letting her know it would be perfectly alright if she wanted to go down to talk with her without him. She spread her wings, and was about to take off.

And Stormcloud was very surprised when she hesitated. As if her hooves were stuck to the cloud they were sitting on.



"What...what do I say? How do I say it...?" Firefly asked herself and her husband. It stunned her when she realized she had unknowingly been just as hesitant as Stormcloud had.

She wasn't sure how long she stayed there, standing, unwilling to move. But she saw her daughter take off from the stage, towards her grand prize, a day with the Wonderbolts. She had waited too long. Tears streamed down Firefly's face.

"There will be another time," Stormcloud assured her, putting a wing around her.

Together, they left the Cloudiseum, and flew home.

TWO MONTHS LATER

Stormcloud came in the house after a day at the factory. Today had been, odd, to say the least.

"Hey hun. You home yet? The weirdest thing happened today. The moving team brought up a whole bunch of Premium Building Cloud up today. They said it-"

Firefly rushed into the foyer, in a panic, with a newspaper.

"Are you alright?"

"I'm done, Stormcloud. I'm done waiting. Are you?" she said frantically, showing him the front page of the paper.

PONYVILLE SERIAL KILLER DEAD!

Disappearances in Ponyville solved.

Latest victim Rainbow Dash listed in Critical Condition at Ponyville Urgent Care.

Stormcloud dropped the paper.

"Are you ready? Or do we have to lose her all over again?" Firefly asked, tears pricking her eyes.

"Come on, let's go!"

The two Pegasi bolted down from Cloudsale down towards Equestria's central valleys at the fastest speed they had ever flown, as the sun began to dip below the hills.

PONYVILLE URGENT CARE

10 MINUTES LATER

Rainbow lay motionless in the hospital bed. The way she felt right now, she may as well have been dead.

It had been just under 24 hours since Applejack had rescued her from the basement of Sugarcube Corner. Her mind was still in a state of shock. She still hoped against hope that she would go to sleep, and wake up the next morning, and her wings would be there, good as new.

Why had Pinkie done this? That question lingered and burned in her mind. Her friends were the most important thing to her in her life. Applejack and the others had left only after the staff's repeated insistence. AJ was sleeping out in the waiting room, and the others had gone home for the night.

Rainbow glanced up at the clock on the wall. 9 PM. And right on schedule, one of the nurses came in to check on her before lights out.

"How are ya doing, Miss Rainbow?"

Rainbow didn't answer. She still felt dead on the inside; unsure how she could possibly go on. The nurse checked her heart, and her blood pressure, and made sure her bandages were in good condition as well.

"Miss Dash, we checked your file with the Weather Patrol, and we noticed you don't have any Immediate Family or emergency contacts listed. Before I go, I'd just like to know if there's anypony we can contact for you, let them know you're here."

"No, thank you." Rainbow replied sullenly.

"There's no one? No family?"

"I didn't say that. I said there's no one you can contact. They're the last ponies I want to see right now." Rainbow declared, anger beginning to rise in her voice.

"Miss Rainbow, last night's events were the front page story of every newspaper in Equestria. Chances are they're going to find out where you are."

"And if that happens, you keep them out of here, you understand me? I do not want to see them."

"If they show up, they're probably very worried about you."

"I don't care. If it takes something like this to make them come see me, then I don't want to see them in the first place. I won't let them see me like this."

This nurse said nothing more. She subtly shook her head, and shut off the light.

"Have a good night, Miss Rainbow."

PONYVILLE

10 MINUTES LATER

Stormcloud hit the ground so fast that he actually lost his balance and skidded for a few feet. Firefly landed a bit more gracefully, but was also in a hurry. They asked the closest pony where the Urgent Care Center was, and were pointed to the center of town. Once they spotted the lit medical cross sign, they raced for it at a full gallop.

They almost came crashing through the front doors and into the lobby, startling the desk attendant, a nurse on her current shift.

"Can I help you?" she asked them. Stormcloud approached the desk.

"Yes. May we see Rainbow Dash please?"

"I'm sorry. Visiting hours are over, sir."

"Please make an exception. We're her parents." Firefly added, coming up next to her husband.

The nurse's expression suddenly changed to an awkward sorrowful look.

"I'm...I'm sorry sir. But even during visiting hours, she's given specific instructions to not let any immediate family in to see her." This was the knife to Stormcloud's heart, and the nurse could tell, too. He stood there, shocked and hurt, for several silent seconds. "Please. That's my daughter in there. Tell me what's happened to her, and let me see her, please!" he asked. He had a mind to keep his voice down so as to not disturb the sleeping farm pony in the chairs a few feet away.

The nurse sorted through a few clipboards. "I can't let you in there, but I can tell you her condition, if you feel you're truly prepared to hear it."

Stormcloud said nothing, afraid of what they were going to hear. The nurse skimmed the clipboard, and then looked up at the duo. "She's lost both of her wings."

Firefly gasped, and fell into her husband, sobbing.

"She was at death's door when she was brought here. They got her here just in time."

Both Pegasi in the waiting room were weak at the knees.

"No, oh Celestia, please, not my Rainbow..." Firefly wept into Stormcloud's coat. He put a hoof around her to try and comfort her.

"Please. We haven't spoken to her in three years. I'm begging you...please let us see her."

The nurse's expression was honestly sympathetic, but she didn't relent.

"I sympathize with you, I really do. But I'm afraid we have to follow patient orders."

Stormcloud said nothing else. Fighting his hardest to not collapse there in the lobby, his wing around his wife, he slowly turned, and they walked out of the lobby into the Ponyville night, the doors sliding closed behind them. For the longest time, they just stood there, out in the open. He tried his best to comfort his wife.

"Wh...what...what do we do now...?" Firefly sobbed.

Stormcloud embraced his wife, unsure how to feel or think at the moment.

His worst fears had been realized. Even Rainbow's brush with death hadn't removed her grudge.

"I don't know. I...I just don't know."

SUGARCUBE CORNER

ONE MONTH LATER

The five ponies came rushing out of Sugarcube Corner out into the Ponyville midnight.

"Where's the journal? I'll go get it." Twilight said.

"In Applejack's room in my saddlebag. Last room down the hall."

Rainbow answered.

Twilight nodded. "Somepony go get Spike. Make sure he's ready when I get back. This'll only take a second."

Twilight's horn glowed brilliantly, and with a flash, she vanished. AJ ran down the marketplace to the library. "Spike! Important dragon job for you!" she yelled. Spike came running, and they rushed back to the collapsed, shambled fountain.

And then the ground began to rumble again.

Twilight re-appeared with a purple flash, Pinkie's bloodstained journal in her horn's grasp. She tossed it into the fountain.

"Spike, burn that, now!" Twilight told him urgently. Spike ran up to the fountain.

"Dashie, time for baking!" came the sinister voice of Pinkamena from the doorway of Sugarcube Corner.

"Rainbow look out!" Rarity screamed.

Rainbow turned, just in time to see the knife, spinning end on end, coming at her with a whirling sound.

Before she could even react, there was a dull 'thunk!', as the thrown knife found its mark.

Deep in Rainbow's chest. Her eyes went wide, and she found herself unable to scream or breathe.

"Rainbow!" Applejack shrieked.

"Spike, now! Now!" Twilight yelled.

With a furious intake of breath, Spike let loose a stream of green flame on the book resting on the rubble. Smoke erupted as it incinerated almost instantly. Pinkamena screamed as she grabbed onto Sugarcube Corner's doorframe as her body began to smolder and crackle. Spike immediately followed up with a second blast of flame.

Rainbow collapsed to the ground as Applejack ran up to her, removed the knife, and immediately, fear gripped her heart.

Rainbow's left lung had been punctured.

With one last scream of defiance, Pinkamena Diane Pie disintegrated into nothing.

"Rainbow! Rainbow! Somepony get a doctor!" Applejack screamed as she held the silent, dying Pegasus in her hooves. Blood began to bubble up from her throat, and Rainbow could do nothing but look in silent pain, up into her lover's eyes.

"Just hang on, Sugarcube, we're getting help, ya hear? Help is on the way."

The Element of Honesty found it difficult not to choke on the lie as Rainbow slowly drowned internally in her own blood, unable to speak or breathe due to her fatal wound. Her body convulsed once, her eyes closed, and she went still.

"No...no no no...please no!" Applejack pleaded, crying into Rainbow's mane.

Spike and the others slowly gathered, tears rolling down their faces. It had happened impossibly fast.

Then, after several seconds, they noticed the Necklace of Laughter on the ground next to AJ and Rainbow begin to glow, its gem becoming brilliant and shimmering again. This was joined by another source of light, over by the fountain.

Up from the smoldering ashes of the journal, rose the glowing white silhouette of a pony. As the seconds passed, it was joined by a dozen other glowing spirits rising up from the fountain rubble.

These ponies of pure white light had no eyes, mouths, or other features, but the spirit that had risen from the journal's ashes was unmistakably Pinkie, and they recognized the others as the victims of Pinkamena. Silent, the shimmering glowing spirits began to form a circle around the group of ponies, as Pinkie slowly made her way over to AJ and the lifeless Rainbow.

At this distance, AJ could just begin to see Pinkie's sorrowful eyes through the light. She knelt down to the duo, and the Necklace of Laughter floated up from the ground and fastened itself around the spirit's neck.

"She did more for me than I'll ever be able to repay. She tried to help me when everypony else ignored me. She forgave me when everypony else condemned me. There truly is no pony more worthy of the Element of Loyalty."

Pinkie leaned down, centimeters from Rainbow's face, as the Necklace of Loyalty and the others began to glow brightly.

"I want you to keep my Necklace, Rainbow. Keep it until you find somepony else who laughs their troubles away."

With that, Pinkie slipped her arms under Rainbow, and embraced her, and her glowing white body exploded in a brilliant flash of light, followed by the other ghosts present. Applejack and the others tried to shield their eyes, to no avail. The light was too bright. It lasted around ten seconds, and then, the light faded, returning Ponyville to the early morning black.

Applejack and the others opened their eyes. The spirits were gone.

They noticed the Necklace of Laughter on the ground next to the motionless Rainbow, and were unable to speak at what they saw.

## Chapter 10

### Heart and Healing

#### PONYVILLE OUTSKIRTS

#### THREE WEEKS AGO

Mayor Mare was up bright and early at the crack of dawn to oversee preparations for today's race. Without a doubt, this year was going to be special.

It had barely been a week since the disappearances and killings in town had been solved. Newspapers around Equestria had called them "The Cupcake Killings." Regardless of last week's events, Ponyville was determined to carry on as usual, and it was only a few days ago that the organizers of the Running of the Leaves got quite the unexpected message: Rainbow Dash would be competing. Several of the organizers voiced their concerns to Applejack, the bringer of the news, that Rainbow should be in bed recovering. She claimed she had been over all this with Rainbow herself, and she was quite stubborn about running the race. News of this spread quickly, and race attendance was looking to highly increase because of this single participant.

Checking all around the starting area on various preparations, the Mayor saw a chariot approaching in the rising sun, from the direction of Cloudsdale. Being pulled by three Pegasi, it came to a slow, gentle landing by the start line. In the chariot, was a black cauldron.

"Where would you like it, Ms. Mayor?" the lead pony on the chariot said, unhooking himself from the yolk.

"Right next to the starting line would be perfect." she replied, and the gray Pegasus directed the other two to place it so.

"I'd like to personally thank you for donating that liquid rainbow, Mr. Stormcloud. It means so much to the town to see Rainbow Dash getting this kind of support in her recovery."

The Weather Factory manager smiled.

"I hope it means just as much to her, as well." he said.

Once the cauldron had been set down next to the start line, one of the other chariot haulers came over to Stormcloud, while the last remaining one went to pull the chariot out of the way.

"Do you think it'll help?" Firefly asked privately, after coming over from the chariot.

"I don't know. I doubt she even knows I got promoted. But if it helps lift her spirits, it doesn't matter if she knows who it's from."

As the sun began to rise over Ponyville, the spectators and competitors began to trickle into the starting area, and began dipping their hooves in the liquid rainbow. At first, they wanted to actively search for their daughter, but then reconsidered. Knowing now how she still felt, they didn't want to confront her before this

big race. Instead, they made their way over to the cauldron they had brought, and joined a few other newcomers at dipping one of their front hooves in the liquid rainbow to show support for their daughter's recovery.

A short time later, as the racers were preparing to begin, the duo subtly slipped to the back of the crowd, close to the starting line. The Running of the Leaves course would take them mostly through the woods, as the purpose of this race was to aid the trees in losing their leaves for autumn, through the hills and back here for the finish.

"Good morning, Ponyville, and welcome to the opening ceremonies of the Annual Running of the Leaves! This is your eye in the sky, Spike! Along with my new co-host, Twilight Sparkle!"

Twilight Sparkle, Princess Celestia's protege and Ponyville's newest librarian floated above the starting area in a pink and purple weather balloon, along with her baby dragon assistant, Spike, who had assisted with the commentary last year with Pinkie.

"Thanks, Spike. It certainly looks like this year's Running of the Leaves will be one to remember. In no small part to a generous donation by the Cloudsdale Weather Factory!"

"That's right, Twilight. This morning, the Pegasi factory workers brought down an entire cauldron of liquid rainbow to the opening ceremony, and the race's spectators and participants alike have dipped a hoof in the cauldron to show their support for Rainbow Dash!"

"Ever since what's now being known as the Case of the Cupcake Kidnappings having been closed, everypony attending the Running of the Leaves are showing their gratitude that the last victim managed to make it out alive. And despite some concerns about her recovery, Rainbow Dash has decided to enter the Running of the Leaves again this year, and she's determined to win it!"

Stormcloud and Firefly saw Rainbow mingle with some of the other competitors, until the farm pony that they saw in the waiting room the other night come up to her. They conversed briefly before sharing a hug, and then took their positions next to each other on the start line.

"On your marks, racers!" Twilight announced from up top.

"Get set..." Spike continued, the ponies hunched down, ready to take off.

"GO!"

And they were off, leaving a wake of dirt and dust. At first, Stormcloud and Firefly were worried about their daughter's well-being, but their worries were set aside when they saw her hold her own off the start. She and the farm pony stayed neck and neck as they made their way into the woods.

"And they're off! And thus begins the annual Running of the Leaves. Rainbow Dash seems to be holding her own along with Applejack in

this opening leg of the race. Attendees of last year's event may remember that these two ponies had a competition in last year's race following a controversial Iron Pony match, but due to them constantly trying to one-up the other, they tied for last. But if this start is any indication, it's looking to be quite different this year." The two of them listened to every word of the commentators as the balloon moved with the racers along the forest. Before they knew it, they were coming up on the final stretch, and Applejack and Rainbow were neck and neck.

"We're coming up on the final leg and Rainbow Dash and Applejack are nose and nose for first place!" Spike commented enthusiastically. The crowd's cheering became louder as the group of racers closed in on the finish.

"Come on, Rainbow, you can do it...you can do it!" Stormcloud cheered his daughter on, his encouragement not even coming close to overcoming the volume of the crowd.

"Give it all you've got, sweetheart!" Firefly cheered.

The ground began to vibrate as dozens of galloping hooves got closer and closer. When it was apparent that no one would be overtaking the pair in front, the racers a few paces behind them began to cheer as well. Stormcloud and Firefly began to tear up at the overpowering encouragement the crowd, and other racers, were giving their daughter.

"Rainbow Dash! Rainbow Dash! Rainbow Dash!" a group of onlookers began to cheer and chant.

The screaming and cheering became only louder, mixed with the galloping hooves, as the two leaders weren't giving each other an inch.

Then, mere feet from the finish line, Rainbow gave one final bound, and tore the finish line tape a fraction of a second before Applejack. Stormcloud and Firefly lost themselves in cheering for their daughter, and didn't see her somersault end over end several times before coming to a halt, immediately being helped up by Applejack. The photo finish pony ejected the photo from his instant-develop camera, and confirmed that Rainbow had won the Running of the Leaves.

SEVERAL MINUTES LATER

"And Rainbow Dash, it is absolutely astounding what you have accomplished. You've not only fought a rigorous physical battle of recovery, but an emotional one as well."

Celestia unfurled the gold medal, and with the greatest of care, she gently placed it around Rainbow's neck, before putting her rainbow-dipped hoof on the Pegasus' shoulder.

"Congratulations."

Rainbow gave her a polite bow, as did Applejack and the third place racer.



After the Winner's Circle ceremonies, the rest of the day's festivities began. All around the starting and finishing area, picnics and games began. The Princess took her time enjoying the relaxing time with her subjects. Fall was one of her favorite seasons. She noticed that Rainbow Dash and Applejack had not stayed, and had opted to return to the farm. She thought this was for the best; regardless of her just winning a marathon, Rainbow was still very much in recovery.

As mid-day gave way to afternoon and evening, the games wound down, Ponyville's town folk sat down to a few bonfires across the hills, and as Celestia took a moment to set the sun to make way for Luna's stars and moon, ponies finally started returning to their homes. The stars and moon were bright in the sky by the time the last bonfire was doused, and the last of the equipment was hauled away.

Celestia herself was about to retire back to Canterlot when she heard somepony behind her call her.

"Ex-excuse me, Your Highness? May we have an audience with you?" the male voice said.

Celestia turned, and saw two Pegasi, a gray male and a pink female.

"It's awfully late, my loyal subjects. Don't you want to get home and rest?"

"Please, Your Majesty. It's...it's important, to us. I...we...need your advice."

Celestia considered their words, as well as their expressions, carefully, and noticed something...desperate...about the pair's eyes.

"Certainly, my little ponies. What can I do for you?"

The gray Pegasus took a step forward.

"Your Highness, my name is Stormcloud. I'm the new manager of the Cloudsdale Weather Factory. This is my wife, Firefly. Rainbow Dash..." he stopped to take a breath.

"Rainbow is our daughter. We...we haven't spoken to her in three years. Not since she ran away."

"Oh? Why did she run away?" Celestia asked, taking a seat on the grass.

"We had an argument after she had gotten expelled from flight school for getting into fights. We told her to either apologize to the school, or leave the house. She took off into the night, and we haven't approached her since. And..."

Stormcloud again had to pause to keep himself composed.

"And when we heard about what happened at Sugarcube Corner, we got to the hospital as soon as we could. When we got there, we were refused. The receptionist told us she had been given specific instructions to not let any immediate family in. We...we didn't take that too well."

Celestia continued to listen, and Firefly stepped up to join her husband.

"We just want to know where we went wrong, why she's still so angry at us. We're sorry to come to you with this, but...we have nowhere else to turn." she said.

Celestia smiled gently at them.

"Well, the first thing you have to do is know and understand why she's angry. Other than the fights in school, was she well-behaved?" Celestia asked them.

Stormcloud immediately nodded.

"Absolutely. She's always been a bit competitive, but the fights at school was the first trouble we had with her."

"Alright. So when the fights started, did you wonder what was going on? Did you talk to the teachers?"

The parents shook their heads.

"We didn't talk to the teachers until after numerous fights. They just told us to get her under control."

"Honestly, my ponies, the Cloudsdale flight school has always had an unbalanced instructor-to-student ratio. Perhaps they weren't addressing the source of the problem."

Firefly turned to Stormcloud. "She did say one time she tried asking the teachers for help, but they were always busy with other students."

"Chances are, physically defending herself was her last resort. It was a cry for help."

They understood what Celestia was politely and subtly saying: You were ordering your filly around when you should have been listening to her.

"Also, kicking a child out of their home almost never has the desired result, as I'm sure you've noticed now. She had tried everything she knew how, she was back up against the edge of a cliff, and what you essentially did was throw her off the edge."

Stormcloud looked like he had been stabbed in the heart.

"Make no mistake, that's why she's still angry at you. She was crying for help, and instead of listening, you showed her the door. She was alone. She had no one. I'm sorry to have to be the one to tell you this."

Stormcloud's eyes widened, and with a gasp, he fell to his knees and began to cry.

"Oh, what have I done...?" he asked. Firefly stepped over and leaned down to comfort her husband.

"You were only doing what you thought was best."

"What kind of father thinks it's best to kick their bullied daughter to the curb? What kind of father does that?" he asked in return.

Celestia stepped forward.

"Based on what I see before me, a loving, caring, imperfect father, who's ready to correct his mistakes."

"Your Majesty, what do I do? I'd give anything to speak to her again, but...but I don't think I could handle being rejected by her again." Stormcloud said through his tears.

"I'll be honest. What you two did that night probably severely wounded your relationship with your daughter. But all wounds, properly cared for, heal with time. And that's what this is going to take. Time. Likely, more of it than you want. Give yourselves more time. Wait until you're not afraid. Wait until it feels right to approach her and apologize."

Stormcloud looked up at her, tears glazing his eyes.

"How will I know when the right time is?"

Celestia placed her liquid rainbow-covered hoof on the distraught father's shoulder.

"Your heart will know."

PONYVILLE URGENT CARE

THREE WEEKS LATER

"In all my years, I've never seen anything like this. It defies all medical reasoning." was the doctor's reply upon getting Rainbow checked over when Twilight and the others came rushing into the Care Center with the unconscious Pegasus.

Rainbow Dash slowly felt herself return to the physical world. It felt like she'd been sleeping for a week. Her black vision cleared, and she saw blurry outlines of her friends around her bed, in what looked like a hospital room.

"Hey everypony, she's waking up" she heard Fluttershy say as her ears cleared up. With a groan, she sat up, and saw her four friends and Spike were looking at her with smiles of disbelief.

"Rainbow...your...your..." AJ couldn't even get the sentence out, as tears streamed down her cheeks.

Rainbow groaned again. Her chest was sore, she felt light-headed, her wings felt-

Dash looked like she had just been struck by lightning. Slowly, in disbelief, she turned her head to confirm what she was feeling. There they were. Her wings. Fully intact. Her mouth fell agape. She turned her torso, and slowly unfurled them.

The tip of each feather now had bright pink barbs, like the very ends of each one had been dipped in cotton candy. It seemed to contrast perfectly with the rest of the cyan color of the wings. Rainbow was beyond words. She became even more perplexed as she looked over the rest of her body. The rest of the scars from that tragic night were still there; the skin tear going down her back from the base of her left wing to her tail, the scars around her cutie marks; even the scar from the hours-old stab wound was still there on her chest.

She looked at all her friends wordlessly as tears welled up in her eyes. All of them were also beyond words. Rainbow noticed that the cut on Applejack's cheek had also started to heal up.

Without so much as a word, Rainbow bolted up out of her bed, the sheets falling off to the side and the suction-cupped wires popping off simultaneously as Rainbow hit the floor and shot out of the room.

"Rainbow!" Applejack called after her. She didn't stop.

She galloped passed orderlies and nurses just getting on their shifts, and slid through the swinging doors to the front waiting room. Not stopping there, she sped through the double doors of the entrance out into the Ponyville morning, spread her wings, and with all her might, leaped into the sky.

Beating her wings furiously, she rapidly gained altitude, and was already 100 feet up by the time her friends rushed out to the front of the care center to see where she had gone. Rainbow lost herself in the euphoria of flight, for the first time in what honestly felt like a lifetime. She soared above the cloud cover, and stopped flapping her wings. Her ascent stopped, and she was suspended in midair for a single breath, and watched the sunrise for a split second, before falling back down under the clouds. Her tears of joy were lost to the wind as she quickly flew down back to the front of the Care Center, touching down lightly, and crying with happiness. Applejack was the first to come up to her and embrace her.

"Congratulations, sugarcube." Applejack said, tearing up a bit herself.

As all of her friends came and congratulated her on her miraculous recovery, something in Rainbow's mind clicked. This wasn't some otherworldly healing Pinkie had just done. That was evident enough by the scars that remained.

No, this was a gift, a final farewell from a departed friend. And it would be one that she would cherish forever.

SWEET APPLE ACRES

TWO WEEKS LATER

Applejack had to be honest. A small part of her expected Rainbow to up-and-leave now that she had her wings back. But she didn't. She still got up at the crack of dawn every morning with her, and helped with all the chores around the farm. She even swam in the lake almost every day.

So when Applejack came back from the market one afternoon, she knew something was amiss when she saw Rainbow sitting on the bed in their room, her back to her, crying.

"Rainbow? What's wrong, hun?"

Rainbow, shoulders heaving, merely pointed a hoof at the nightstand, where a folded piece of paper sat on top of a torn envelope. Applejack walked to the nightstand, picked it up, and read to herself.

*Dear Rainbow Dash,*

*I would first like to congratulate you on your astounding recovery.*

*It must feel great to fly again.*

*Secondly, the purpose of this letter is to bring you an offer. For this upcoming season, we would like to elevate you from your position as an honorary Wonderbolt to a full performing member. No audition necessary, Dash. We know you've got what it takes. We look forward to hearing from you.*

*Sincerely,*

*Spitfire*

*Wonderbolts Captain*

Applejack immediately set the letter down, came up on the bed, and gave Rainbow a tight hug.

"Oh, congratulations, Rainbow! Joining the Wonderbolts is what you've always wanted! Why are you crying?"

Rainbow sniffled, looking at the floor.

"It's not that, AJ."

"Then what's wrong?"

Rainbow looked her in the eyes.

"I...I don't want to leave you."

## Epilogue

### The Rainbow After The Storm

SWEET APPLE ACRES

"Rainbow, I don't want you to give up your lifelong dream for me, d'ya hear?"

"Applejack, you helped me get through the hardest ordeal I've ever been through in my life."

"Yep, now you're through it, and now you can go after what you've always wanted."

Rainbow looked hurt.

"AJ, are...are you saying you want me to leave?"

"What? No! No, no. Sugarcube, you can do whatever you want. It's your decision. Mah' point is, Pinkie gave you an amazing, wonderful gift. She gave you a second chance to go get what you've wanted since you were a little filly."

"I don't know. I mean, I'm very, very happy to have my wings back. But, I'm not sure if it's what I want most anymore. I want to be with you, most of all."

"Rainbow, I really think you need to take a step back and look at the whole picture. You've wanted to be a part of the Wonderbolts for years. Our relationship is barely a few weeks old.

"And in that few weeks, I've realized how much you mean to me. I'd...I'd miss you."

"And I'd miss you too, sugarcube. But I really think you should go and give this a shot."

Rainbow turned to look out the bedroom window for a few moments, and then back at Applejack.

"You really think so?"

"If you don't like it, I doubt anything would stop you from flying back down here to the Acres, Rainbow. I just don't want you passing this opportunity up without even considering it. You'll get a lot more use from your wings up there performing than you would down here doing chores."

Rainbow smiled at her best friend. Taking her advice to heart, she nodded.

"Okay, Applejack. I'll try not to miss you too much while I'm up there."

"Sweetheart, I won't be surprised if you hardly think of me. You'll be too busy becoming the best Wonderbolt ever. Now get to writing that acceptance letter, ya hear?"

Rainbow gave Applejack a hug, and got to work on replying to Spitfire's offer.

Applejack got up from the bed and went to help make dinner. All the while, she tried to make her heart stop aching. The truth was,

she would miss Rainbow terribly. But she didn't want Rainbow to turn her back on her dreams for a life on the farm. It just didn't seem right with the gift Pinkie had given her. The rest of the day went as it usually did. The family sat down to dinner, Applejack finished up some lingering chores around the farmhouse, and Rainbow took Gummy out to the lake for an evening swim. The next morning, Rainbow had completed her letter to Spitfire. Getting up even earlier than Applejack, she gently woke her to let her know she was taking the wagon to take care of something in Ponyville, and she'd be back by late morning. With that, Rainbow went to the barn to get the wagon, got hooked up, and on her way out the front gate, slipped the letter to Spitfire into the mailbox.

PONYVILLE

TWO HOURS LATER

The town-wide recovery efforts from the quake had been slow and steady the past couple weeks. Damage had appeared light, but building inspectors wanted to be absolutely sure that no subtle structural damage occurred that might have dire consequences in the weeks and months to follow. One pony in particular, was glad to see the town's attention had turned towards recovering and repair, and away from him.

Marty's goal now was to try and prevent complete financial fallout, which would force him to move his family away from Ponyville. He figured his first order of business was aiding with recovery efforts. He began that task by donating all the fresh water and produce he had to volunteers working around town. The immense generosity had paid off. Slowly, as the days passed, he began to get customers back, as the townsfolk began to realize that he now honestly regretted his actions. But he didn't yet have enough money to repair his front display window.

So that morning, he was quite surprised to see Rainbow Dash waiting in front of his store with a cart. In the cart, carefully resting against one side, was a pane of glass.

"Uh, um...good morning, Rainbow. Can I help you?" was all he could muster into a greeting.

"Yeah, you can help me get this thing out of my cart so I can be on my way." Rainbow said, motioning to the pane of glass.

"But...why would-"

"Alright. I do not want to sit here and talk about this, okay? I'm not here to say you were wrong and I was right; none of that. I broke your window, here's a replacement. Now do you want it or not?"

Marty decided to take the hint and shut up. He walked over to the cart and helped Rainbow lift the glass out of the back and gently set it against the front wall of his store.

"Thanks." he said to her as she got refastened in the cart.

"Yeah..." was all she said before departing. She didn't even look back. Marty, as confused as he was about what just happened, couldn't help but smile a bit.

When she got back to the farm, Applejack asked Rainbow if she needed help packing.

"Nah, I don't think I'm gonna be packing anything. I'll just take some bits. I really don't know what to expect, but I probably won't need my luggage. Besides, I'll always consider this my home."

Two days later, Rainbow was helping AJ with some apple dishes in the kitchen when there was a knock at the door. They stopped what they were doing, and went to answer. Rainbow opened the door, and there stood Spitfire, surprisingly not in uniform.

"Hey there, Rainbow Dash."

Rainbow wasn't quite sure how to respond. Conflicted inside, here she was, standing in front of one of her biggest idols, and also, knew that it meant that she would be leaving the farm shortly.

"Uh, hi Spitfire. I hope ya don't mind, but I'm not taking much along with me."

"Hey, it's cool. Just bring whatever you feel like. Even though we're foregoing the audition in your case, we start training in a few days for this next tour we're doing, so we've got to get you situated up in Cloudsdale. Then we'll discuss what we'll be doing for the show. Are you ready?"

At first, Rainbow nodded, then hesitated.

"I just...I just don't know. I mean, normally, this would be a dream come true. But...I just want you to understand my hesitation here. Applejack here has done more for me than anypony else. She's the reason I'm still here. And a small part of me feels that by joining up with you guys and following my dream, that I'm abandoning her here."

Spitfire nodded empathetically.

"Sugarcube..." Applejack began. "Please don't view it like that. Yeah, I'll be honest, I'm gonna miss you very, very badly, especially considering how far we've come the past few weeks. But knowing that you're out there doing what you've been dreaming of since you were a filly, that will make it hurt less, darlin'. I promise."

"Leaving your friends and family isn't easy, Rainbow. It's your choice. You wouldn't be leaving them for good, but I won't sugarcoat it for you. Our tours around Equestria usually take several months. We'd be thrilled to have you, but we'd certainly understand if you can't leave this behind." Spitfire told her, letting her know there was no pressure to her decision.

Rainbow swallowed, fought back the tears, then nodded again.

"I'll do it. I'm ready."

Spitfire smiled. "I'll give you a few minutes, then. I'll be waiting by the front gates."



The undressed Wonderbolt left the front door, leaving Rainbow and Applejack to their farewells. Rainbow went to their room, and tugged on her Wonderbolt hoodie, that Rarity had immediately offered to tweak for her by adding holes for her wings. She came back to the door, and gave Applejack a tearful hug.

"The first chance I get, I'm coming back here to visit." Rainbow shakily said.

"Ah look forward to seein' ya, sweetheart. Give it all ya can. I'll always be here for you if ya need anythin' at all."

With that, the two ponies released each other, and Applejack watched as Rainbow trotted down the front path to the waiting Spitfire, who gave her a smile, and they took off into the skies. As the pair of Pegasi faded into the horizon, Applejack felt like she had lost a part of herself. Her heart aching, she went back inside, and continued her cooking in the kitchen to try and get her mind off Rainbow's departure.

CLOUDSDALE

WONDERBOLTS HEADQUARTERS

Rainbow stood in awe at the interior of the Wonderbolts HQ. When the Wonderbolts weren't on tour or didn't feel like going home when on a break, this was the place they came. To Rainbow, it was almost as impressive as the Cloudiseum. Portraits of past Wonderbolts lined the front halls. Framed newspaper clippings of record breaking sales or performances also lined the walls among them among them.

Spitfire gave Rainbow the time to look around, taking it all in, and then when she was satisfied, they continued down the west hallway.

"So when do I get my uniform?" Rainbow asked. She loved her hoodie that Rarity made, but she couldn't wait to see how she looked in an official Wonderbolt uniform.

"Well, that's the thing, Rainbow. Before we do that, we want to run an idea by you." Spitfire told her, before leading her into the cafeteria. There, at the single, large, round table were eight more Wonderbolts. Rainbow recognized them all. Soarin, Blaze, Firestreak, Fleetfoot, High Winds, Lightning Streak, Rapidfire, and Misty. Some had been the celebrity judges for the Best Young Flier Competition, and others she recognized from the VIP Section at the Grand Galloping Gala. With Rainbow and Spitfire coming to sit down, the table's occupancy reached ten Pegasi. Each greeted her with warm smiles.

Dash was beside herself. It took considerable and visible effort to not go into her usual fangirl mode. Here she was, sitting down to lunch with NINE Wonderbolts.

"Wow, wow, wow! I...I never thought I'd ever be here with you guys!" Rainbow said with a squee. Rainbow's demeanor brought some light chuckles from some others at the table. Obviously, this

type of excitement among new recruits was nothing new, and veterans never tired of it. They always appreciated the enthusiasm. "So what's this idea you wanted to tell me?" she asked, sitting down in between Spitfire and Soarin, as the chefs brought out crispy hayfries and stormcloud soup.

"Well, Rainbow. I'll get right to the point. After we invited you to become a Wonderbolt, we decided we wanted to make this year's show about you." Spitfire told their new recruit. Rainbow's eyes widened, and her mouth dropped open slightly.

"A-about me?" she asked, dumbfounded.

"Yeah. Your story, your journey, and your experience over the past two months." Soarin added.

Rainbow smiled.

"Honestly, it feels like a lot longer than that." she said, thinking back to all that had happened since that night.

"So what do ya say, Rainbow Dash? Do you want to have your story told by the Wonderbolts?"

Suddenly, an epiphany hit Rainbow. This was her chance. She could tell the story her way. It would be on a stage that half of Equestria would see. But how could she put her experience into a Wonderbolts airshow? It was this last question that she posed to the nine Wonderbolts at the table.

"That's what this get-together is for. Toss around ideas and suggestions, and above all, make sure it fits in with how you want it to be told," Spitfire said.

Ideas and scenarios began flying through Dash's head. The first thing to come to Rainbow's mind, was that if they were going to actually pull this off, even with a team of Wonderbolts behind her, that the most crucial component was absent.

"Well, I have an idea, but it will require something that the Wonderbolts have probably never done before."

THE NEXT DAY

Applejack's curiosity had been piqued, to say the very least.

Rainbow hadn't even been gone a day, and now here she was, with Twilight and Rarity in Twilight's weather balloon, ascending to the Wonderbolts Headquarters in Cloudsdale. Each of them had gotten a priority-delivered letter from Rainbow last night, saying she needed to see all of them about something important. So the next morning, Twilight gave each of them the Cloudwalker spell, and here they were.

"What do you think she wants?" Twilight asked.

"Ah haven't the faintest clue, Twi," AJ replied.

The weather balloon poked through Cloudsdale's bottom cloud surface, and Rainbow's directions were on the money, as they were right at the front steps of the very impressive-looking Wonderbolts HQ.

Rainbow awaited them at the top of the steps. She beamed upon seeing her friends. Applejack jumped out of the balloon, and galloped towards Rainbow. The farm pony threw her front hooves around the Pegasus.

"Long time no see," Rainbow joked, but AJ's reaction was understandable. They hadn't spent more than a day away from each other in over a month. They released each other as the two unicorns came up the steps.

"So what's this all about, Rainbow?" Applejack asked. Rainbow cleared her throat, and began.

"Guys, the Wonderbolts want to to this year's airshow about me; about what I went through these last two months."

"That's fantastic, darling. But, what does that have to do with us?" Rarity asked.

"Everything. I wouldn't be here right now if it weren't for all of you. I couldn't think of trying to make this show without having you guys be a part of it."

"But, what about Fluttershy?" Twilight asked.

"I sent her a letter too. She got back to me surprisingly fast. She appreciated the gesture, but she couldn't leave her animals. But I figured you could find a replacement librarian for awhile, Twi. Your knowledge of magic could make some seriously awesome special effects. Rarity, they want me to be the center of this show, and I can't think of anypony better who could make the most amazing, most stunning flight suit ever."

Lastly, she turned to Applejack.

"AJ...I know it isn't the easiest thing to ask of you...to find a replacement at the Acres for this long of a time. But you saved my life. You're the reason I'm here. You helped me start a life on the ground. I couldn't imagine telling this story without the most important mare in my life. And...Soarin's prepared to sweeten the pot. He sais if you can get him one of your apple pies after each show, he'll guarantee the Apple family a prime vendor spot for each performance."

Rainbow studied the looks of thought and consideration on the faces of her friends.

"So what d'ya say?"

CLOUDSDALE CLOUDISEUM

SIX MONTHS LATER

Rainbow stood at the curtain that separated the backstage from the main performance area. She felt like her whole body was on pins and needles. She had never felt this nervous in her life. She looked over at the wall, at the poster for this year's show.

THE RAINBOW AFTER THE STORM

Airshow performance of Rainbow Dash's incredible story of survival, followed by freestyle.

"Nerves, Rainbow?" Spitfire asked, coming up next to her.

"Yeah, just a little," Rainbow admitted.

"You'll be fine. This is gonna be one of our greatest shows ever. I know it. You've come a long way these past six months. We all have."

Indeed they did. Twilight, Rarity, and Applejack had all agreed to participate in the airshow. Rainbow turned her head to look at herself, and the incredible outfit Rarity had made.

It was the same navy blue as the regular Wonderbolt uniforms, but there were a few key differences, seeing as how she was supposed to be the focus of this show. On the uniforms flanks, her own cutie mark had been expertly embroidered, the materials carefully chosen, so it almost seemed to shine. Then, Rainbow opened her wings, and looked at what was by far the most intricate and beautiful part of the outfit.

Rarity had painstakingly crafted a second pair of glass wings that acted almost like a sleeve to Rainbow's regular wings. Each 'feather' was an individual piece of glass. Rainbow had to practice for a couple weeks to get used to the added weight, but the glass wings could fold, unfold, flap, and move in any fashion her regular wings could, and was designed to serve as one of the show's most awe-inspiring special effects. Rarity was picky down to the last detail, as the last layer of glass feathers were a rich cotton candy pink.

"We're live in two minutes!" the stage director said. Rainbow gulped.

"You'll do fine, Rainbow. You've got your friends all here with you. Besides, we know you can. We've got this thing memorized."

"I can't believe I'm here. A flight school dropout at the center of a Wonderbolts show..." Rainbow said, as much to herself as it was to Spitfire, who scoffed.

"Pfft. You think you're the only dropout who became a Wonderbolt? You'd be wrong there, Dash." Spitfire said with a wink, and then trotted off to take her place. That little revelation did wonders to calm Rainbow's nerves. She sneaked a peak between the curtains. There, in the front row, she saw Fluttershy with Scootaloo, who was eagerly awaiting the performance. Then the Cloudiseum went dark, as stagehands brought cloud cover over the bright sunny sky, followed by black thunderheads, that began to rumble.

Rainbow took a deep breath. This was it. She got down into a hunched position. She heard the director count down

"Three...two...one..."

With a leap and powerful flap of her wings, she bolted out of the curtains onto the main stage area.

Five more Wonderbolts were already flying in a circle formation, causing the clouds the stagehands were bringing in to spin into what looked like a considerable storm system. Had this not been an

airshow with what promised to be very convincing special effects, the audience might have begun to seek cover.

Rainbow began her routine, as the stage got darker and darker as thunder continued to rumble. She wowed the spectators by doing all sorts of aerial maneuvers, weaving in and out of the flying formations of the circling Wonderbolts.

Slowly and subtly, sickly, crimson pink trails began to form in the wake of half of the Wonderbolts, and as Rainbow began to move her routine to the center of the stage, they began to swoop at her. With how dark the arena was getting, it seemed as if these flying pink lasers were attacking Rainbow, as she began to appear to lose focus, as her flight path wavered. The other two Wonderbolts had bright, lively pink trails behind them, and they tried desperately to intercept the sickly pink trails, to no avail.

But again, this was all part of the act. This was one of the more complex maneuvers. The Wonderbolts were actually appearing to impact with her. Then, out of nowhere, came a sixth. The brightest of the pink trails came from above, at a bomb dive towards Rainbow, who was floundering in midair.

Unbeknown to the audience, this sixth Wonderbolt was nothing; nothing but a magical illusion, compliments of Twilight. And as the apparition flew directly down through Rainbow Dash, Rarity, hidden off on the side of the stage, used her magic to trigger the actuator on Rainbow's uniform, and the glass wings went fully erect, and appeared to shatter.

The audience gasped at the act. From their distance, the glass wings appeared real, and as the glass feathers proved the perfect distraction, Rainbow quickly drew in her real wings, slipping them into a hidden second layer of fabric in the uniform. For all intents and purposes, Rainbow appeared wingless as she plummeted towards the bottom of the stage, where she landed on a pitch black thundercloud, which appeared to swallow and envelope the Pegasus.

The magical thundercloud rumbled softly, mimicking a struggling and failing heartbeat, as Twilight levitated the individual glass feathers around the clump of thundercloud, like satellites in orbit. Then the beating stopped.

The audience murmured as the stage went dead silent for a few moments as the five Wonderbolts all scattered to the outside of the arena, and the glowing glass feathers slowly lost their glow and appeared to fall from the Cloudiseum.

Then came another player. A glowing white path of cloud appeared in front of the pony clad entirely in black, hiding their every feature. She ran for the center of the stage, towards the black thundercloud, and dove into it.

A spotlight came on above the stage, illuminating the thundercloud as it began to unfold, there laid Rainbow, who appeared wingless and unconscious, with the black anonymous pony sitting at her side, as it began to rain. It took a few moments for the audience to realize that a bowl of clouds had been placed at the floor of the arena in the darkness, and had begun to fill with water.

Scotaloo and Fluttershy smiled, as they knew what was coming. They had both been invited to rehearsals, and Scoots was quite proud of the fact that she had suggested this to Rainbow.

Down on the thundercloud, Rainbow slowly got to her feet.

Hunkering down for just a moment, she leaped off the thundercloud with the black-clad pony down into the cloud bowl of water. When they hit the water, it was revealed where the Wonderbolts had gone, as the five of them erupted up out of the water, creating impressive geysers. They continued this pattern, flying up, over the crowd, out of the Cloudiseum, to fly down and under and up through the cloud bowl again, which was constructed of enchanted cloud that didn't leak when the Wonderbolts shot through them.

Twilight used magic to keep the geysers formed, and soon, the Wonderbolts had created an intricate web of flowing geysers.

As the geysers slowly shrunk down, tree-shaped clouds materialized where they dipped back into the bowl. Together, Rainbow and her anonymous companion swam and leaped out of the water, dissipating the clouds one by one, as the Wonderbolts continued their geyser forming. Then, Rainbow's routine changed. As she kept leaping at the cloud trees, she grabbed a clump of cloud from them and then brought it to the center thundercloud, and began forming a structure. As they jumped through more and more of them, the pieces became clear – the memorial fountain in Ponyville. Twilight's magic assisted with having water flow in and out of it.

Then, lightning began to flash in the once-again-darkening skies above. A Wonderbolt with the sickly pink glow bombdived the cloud fountain, and Twilight assisted the maneuver with a bright, shimmering explosion as the flier shot down through the fountain, and then back up, as the arena appeared to shake violently. The Wonderbolt descended again, this time towards Rainbow and her companion.

Suddenly, a bright, vivid pink glow shot up from the fountain's remains, and collided head on with the descending Wonderbolt. A mass deceleration spell kept the appearance of a blindingly fast impact, but kept the two Wonderbolts unharmed as they went into a frenzied routine of midair combat. Rainbow and her companion looked on in awe, and the dark pink glowing Wonderbolt descended towards Rainbow, eluding the bright pink flier. Twilight charged up her horn, and just as the crimson pink Wonderbolt collided with Rainbow, a green pillar of flame shot up from the remains of the

fountain, and arced towards the pair, seemingly happening in an instant. Enveloping the two, the fire spiraled up and out of the Cloudiseum. When it finally dissipated, Rainbow again lay motionless on the central black thundercloud, as the bright pink orb-disguised Wonderbolt slowly descended to them. The Wonderbolt dipped below the clouds, but the pink glowing orb stopped when it reached Rainbow. Twilight used a levitation spell to levitate the ragdoll Rainbow up into the air with the pink orb. It got brighter, expanded, and with a flash, dissipated, and in that moment, Rainbow spread her wings, and took off up into the air, quickly followed by the team of five Wonderbolts from below, causing five last geysers.

Lightning bolts crackled in the wake of the Wonderbolts as they got in formation around Rainbow in a star formation, as they performed a vertical 180, and dove back towards the Cloudiseum. Due to the formation of Wonderbolts, the wake that began to form around Rainbow was much larger than when she did this maneuver at the Best Young Flier competition. Very impressively, the Wonderbolts began to spin their star formation, and the mach cone began to twist. Rainbow spun at the same speed, to keep the cone stable as they gained speed. Just before they came to the topmost row of spectators, the cone exploded into a much larger Sonic Rainboom, which spiraled wildly outward throughout the Cloudiseum. The entire arena filling with a vivid spectra, Rainbow rapidly decelerated, the Wonderbolts surging past her, as she slowed just in time to come to a rest on the thundercloud, her and her companion becoming surrounded by bolts of lightning.

Stepping in close to her anonymous rescuer, their lips met in a kiss, accompanied by a warm glow courtesy of Twilight., and the crowd began to cheer at an unbelievable volume. The five Wonderbolts came up as the two ponies broke the kiss. Twilight and Rarity came to center stage from the path of cloud, and together, they took a bow, as the Pegasi continued to cheer.

As the 'Rainbow After The Storm' show was a bit shorter than a traditional Wonderbolts airshow, what followed for the next 30 minutes was a looser, less routine freestyle performance, where even Twilight was allowed to experiment and have fun with illusion and light tricks. After that, they again returned to the center stage, and took a bow. As the crowd began to filter out, they all found themselves backstage again, thrilled at their first performance.

"That was incredible, Rainbow! One of our best shows yet," Spitfire congratulated her. Rainbow's anonymous companion removed her black concealing outfit, and it was indeed none other than Applejack.

"Nice swimming there, AJ," Rainbow complimented.

As they discussed favorite parts of the show, Princess Celestia came backstage to congratulate them on quite the performance.

"Especially you, Rainbow. Your wings are beautiful, by the way," Celestia complimented.

"Thank you, your Highness.

"And, if you like, there are a couple of ponies who want to say hi to you."

Rainbow nodded, and stepped forward, eager and excited to meet her two newest fans. Celestia drew back the backstage curtain ten feet away, and Rainbow's eyes widened, as the two ponies came into view, and for the first time since that fateful night, she laid eyes on her mom and dad.

"Hey there, kiddo" Stormcloud greeted. Upon looking into his daughter's eyes, his eyes teared up a bit.

"Hi, sweetheart" her mom added, both of them having hopeful expressions on their faces.

Rainbow said nothing, her mouth fumbling, stunned, and unable to find any words. Stormcloud took a single step forward.

"Rainbow...I...there are no words to truly express how sorry we are about that night all that time ago. You were crying for help, we didn't hear you, and instead we blamed you for standing up for yourself the only way you could. It's a grudge you've rightfully held the past few years. I'd...we...we'd like to know if there's anything...anything at all we can do to repair what's been broken between us. If you're not ready, just say so, and we'll leave without another word. You can come to us whenever you want."

Rainbow continued to stare at her parents, just mere feet from her. After all this time...she felt a lump begin to form and rise in her throat. She began to cry.

"Come on, hun. Let's go." Stormcloud softly said to his wife, and they turned to leave, not wanting to upset their daughter any further.

Rainbow's shoulders heaved as tears began to flow from her eyes. "W-wait. Wait!" she cried. Her parents stopped, turned back to her, and Rainbow galloped to them as if she had been longing for them all her life. As she rapidly closed the gap in what seemed like slow motion, she felt all these years of grief, anger, and sadness melt away from her heart. With the speed she approached them, the ponies present thought she would knock them over. Tears streaming down her face, she threw her front legs around her mom and dad.

"I'm sorry...oh I'm so so sorry!" she sobbed.

"Sweetheart, you have nothing to be sorry for. Nothing." Firefly said soothingly, all three ponies in the hug crying.

"Yes, yes I do. I should've let you see me at the hospital. I...I didn't want you to see me like that."



"It's all in the past now, Rainbow. We're so, so proud of you."

Stormcloud told her.

Rainbow released them from the embrace, and turned to look at AJ, who was also visibly crying at the reunion. Rainbow waved a hoof for her to come and get introduced. Applejack walked to her, and Rainbow hugged her, and then turned to her parents.

"Mom, dad. This is Applejack. She's...she's..." Rainbow struggled to introduce the workhorse truthfully to her parents. She glanced at Applejack, who smiled with a look of encouragement.

"She's my girlfriend. She was the one that saved my life."

To Rainbow, the silence that followed seemed to stretch on forever. But in reality, it wasn't more than a few seconds.

"I'm so very pleased to meet you, Applejack." Firefly greeted. Her husband did more than that. He approached Applejack and gave her a hug.

"Thank you. Thank you for saving my little girl." he said.

"No thanks required, sir. Your daughter's somethin' special to me."

Applejack replied, everypony in the group still quite emotional. "I wouldn't have had things turn out any other way. It was her running away that first brought her to my farm. She's simply the greatest friend I could ever ask for."

"And don't you two worry about what anypony else says,"

Stormcloud continued, releasing Applejack and addressing the both of them. "I can't pretend to understand it, but if you two make each other happy, then that's all the really matters."

*Dear Princess Celestia*

*Over the past several months, I realized one of the most important aspects not just of friendship, but of family too. Everypony has their flaws, and everypony makes mistakes, even big, life-changing ones. It takes a real friend to forgive those mistakes, and through that, miraculous healing can take place, emotionally and even physically, and that's the most powerful magic of friendship. There are times where it truly doesn't matter what somepony has done. All that matters is that they are your friend, they are your family, and if you can look past any fault, amazing things can happen.*

*Your faithful subject,*

*Rainbow Dash*

SIX MONTHS LATER

*Dear Mom and Dad*

*I know that there's probably nothing I can write or say that will change the past three years. I know we all regret that night, and nothing we do will get us that lost time back. What's important is that we're back together. We're a family again, and we can start patching things up together.*

*Dad, I think you and I should just stop dwelling on who was right and who was wrong that night. You were busy with your job still*

*trying to be the best father you could, and I was a stressed, angry, kid who was sick and tired of getting bullied. Maybe we should just leave it at that.*

*You don't know what it means to me that you accept Applejack and I for who we are. We mean the world to each other, and it makes me so happy that you're okay with that. The circumstances under which we found our love for each other could have been better, but what matters is that we found each other.*

*See you guys next time I'm home!*

*Love always, your daughter,  
Rainbow Dash*

Stormcloud smiled, reading the letter to himself as he had done numerous times since receiving it. He folded it back up, and placed it neatly back in his center desk drawer before getting up and going for the door, grabbing his hardhat before exiting his office to meet his guests for today.

DOWN AT THE FACTORY ENTRANCE

"Now class, it's important to stay in the group. We don't want anypony wandering off and getting lost. Once again, I'd like to thank Twilight for chaperoning, as well as providing the cloud-walking spell for the entire class."

"Thanks, Twilight." said the small class, at Cheerilee's beckoning. "No trouble at all, my little ponies. Last time I was here, our tour was cut short because of the Best Young Flier's competition. I'm looking forward to seeing the rest of the factory, now that the Wonderbolts tour is finally over."

"Speaking of, where is Rainbow?" Scootaloo asked.

"She's with the rest of the team in Las Pegasus, celebrating their successful tour."

"Why didn't you go?"

"Oh, I'm not nearly enough of a party pony to adequately enjoy Las Pegasus."

"Good morning, everypony. It's not too often we get a class from down below for the tour of the Cloudsdale Weather Factory. We're glad to have you all here!" Stormcloud said, coming down the stairs to the tour starting area.

"I can't wait to see how the weather's made!" Scootaloo said.

"Yeah, imagine that. A Pegasus who's never been to the Weather Factory" Sweetie Belle commented, getting a chuckle from some classmates, and a glare from Scoot, who then decided to drop the matter.

"Mr. Stormcloud, are we really gonna see the entire factory?"

Scootaloo asked the factory director.

"You bet, champ. Every bit of it."

With a quick check of the clipboard, he prepared to start the tour.

"And you won't believe how the rainbows are made."