

The Truth About "Pokey" Pierce

Part 5: In which plans are brought to fruition

Over the next few days, Pierce's life changed little, despite his fears. He didn't see Canker again, and the bizarre tale which the old pony had told began to seem more and more like some mean-spirited prank.

Then, as he stepped out to fetch the mail one afternoon, Pierce found that he'd received not one, but two items today: a letter, and a package. The letter was from Canker; the package had no return address. Setting aside the letter, he examined the mysterious parcel. It was fairly heavy considering its small size, and rattled when he shook it. Curious, he opened it.

Inside was a small pile of bits, gleaming brightly. There was no note, and nothing else in the box. For a moment, Pierce was confused, but then a terrible thought occurred to him. Quickly, he tore open the letter from Canker. It simply read:

Pokey,

I've sent word to the Department that you're my new apprentice. You should receive your first monthly stipend within a few days. It's not much, at least compared to what they pay me, but consider it a taste of what's to come. You'll need to meet with an Administrator before you're eligible to replace me, but that can wait a while. Meantime, you'll just be my assistant.

-Canker

Pierce wanted to go scream at Canker that he hadn't agreed to any of this, but he remembered how well the last confrontation between them had gone. So, swallowing his anger (and, if he was honest with himself, more than a little fear), he trotted towards Canker's shack, parcel tucked securely into his saddlebag. When he reached the wide fence which ringed the property, he stopped. He had planned to leave the package at Canker's door, but Pierce found himself reluctant to go any farther. Instead, he simply threw it onto the lawn and ran off, suddenly frightened. He spent the rest of the day inside, watching through the window for any sign of the black pony, but Canker never came.

Pierce was confused and frightened, but time stops for no pony, and life, as they say, goes on. Over the next few months, unmarked packages of bits continued to arrive for Pierce, and Pierce continued to refuse them, depositing the coins in Canker's yard each time. The old pony, for his part, made no further attempt to contact his 'assistant,' despite Pierce's incessant worrying.

Life continued apace at school as well, where many of Pierce's classmates obtained their cutie marks as the year progressed. Before too long, only two ponies in the class still sported bare bottoms: Pierce and Pinkie Pie. In truth, it was no surprise that either of them were slow to mature; where the other young ponies had all gone out and tried myriad professions and trades in order to find their special skill, Pinkie seemed to do nothing but plan parties and play pranks, and Pierce continued to remain a recluse. Although the teasing and abuse he received at school only intensified as it became clear that he was a 'late bloomer,' Pierce didn't much mind his lack of cutie mark. Ever since he and Canker had spoken, he had feared that he would wake up one morning to find a stylized face imprinted on his flank, grimacing at him with disgust.

Yet, despite the seeming return to normalcy, Pierce was all too aware that his current situation could not continue indefinitely. Among his classmates, only Pinkie continued to be friendly towards him; only Pinkie spoke to him as a pony, rather than as a freak or an idiot. Canker's words played daily in his mind: *"There's nopony in this whole flea-bitten, rot-infested town that cares two bits who you are or*

what you do. You have no friends, your parents don't care about you, your teacher thinks you're an idiot, and there's not one pony in Equestria that could look you in the eye and say 'I love you' with a straight face."

With each passing day, the truth of those words became more and more apparent to him. With each passing day, the thought of revenging himself upon the citizens of Ponyville grew more and more alluring. Yet he resisted the urge to go to Canker, to ask how he could inflict 'productivity' upon his tormentors. *As long as one pony's still nice to me, he thought to himself, I'll get by. As long as Pinkie doesn't hate me, I can put up with this for the rest of the year. And next year, who knows? Maybe things will be better then.*

The words felt hollow, but he told himself that it was enough.

One day, Pierce came into the classroom to find a mob of his classmates pressed around Pinkie Pie. He didn't need to guess the reason; there had been enough ponies showing off their new cutie marks over the past few months that he could recognize the tenor of the crowd at a glance. Still, he had been dreading this day, knowing that the other students would take even greater delight in his degradation now that he was the sole remaining blank-flank in class.

"...and Mr. Cake said, 'Oh no, how can I do all the baking for Bon-Bon's birthday party *and* get the shop front ready for C.J.'s Young Baker's competition afterparty *and* still find the time to do something nice for my wife on our anniversary?' And I said, 'You just leave it to me, Mr. Cake!' And he said, 'Bu-' But I said, 'Pinkie Pie party planning and presentation, prepare for...um...something that begins with "P" that means "Here we go!"' And then I put together all three parties at the same time! I mean, I knew I liked parties, well DUH, everyone likes parties, but I didn't realize until then how good I was at making them happen, and this morning when I woke up I had these balloons on my butt! Aren't they the most super-sweet thing you've ever seen?" All the ponies ooh-ed and ahh-ed appreciatively.

As Pierce took his seat, he was already mentally preparing for the rounds of humiliation which, if he was lucky, wouldn't start until recess, when he and the other students were out from under Miss Cheerilee's watchful eyes. If things were half as bad as he feared, this was going to be the worst day he'd had in a long time. But just before class was called to order, Pinkie took her seat in front of him. Turning around, she looked right at him and said, "Pokey, I know I just got my cutie mark today, but if my special talent is parties, then I'm gonna throw the biggest, best cuteceñera Ponyville's EVER seen!" Abruptly, the pink pony blushed. "And, well...I wanted to ask you to come. Before I invited anypony else." Her bashfulness was a dramatic break from her usual persona. She looked uncommonly serious as she asked, "You *will* come, won't you?"

It took a moment, but Pierce managed to choke out, "Of course! I'll be there."

Rose interjected then, commenting that nopony else had invited Pokey to *their* cuteceñeras, and that while it was Pinkie's business if she wanted to ruin her special day by inviting total rejects, Rose could hardly be held responsible if he ruined the vibe for everypony. Pinkie continued to talk, thinking out loud about possible dates and venues. Miss Cheerilee was at the front of the class now, trying to settle the children down so she could begin the lesson. Pierce, however, was not listening to any of them. He was thinking about Pinkie's cuteceñera.

Today, he decided, was the best day he'd had in a long time.

Applejack grunted, and straightened up as much as the confines of the 'party planning box' permitted. "Alright sugar-cube, now what's so dang important that you could only tell me about it in here?"

Pinkie, sitting opposite the orange earth pony, made a show of looking around the tiny space for

intruders. Then she leaned in close and whispered, "Applejack, *I've got it!*"

"Got what, Pinkie? I'm not a mind-reader, here."

"I know how to have the best, most super-fun-tastic cutecañera ever! It's going to be...a *surprise party!*"

"Huh?"

Pinkie rolled here eyes. "C'mon, Applejack, you know what a surprise party is, don't you? It's when-"

"Yes, I know *what* a surprise party is. But you're the guest of honor! How are you supposed to surprise yourself?"

"Oh silly, I'm not going to surprise *me*, I'm going to surprise everypony else! That'll be a lot easier anyway!"

"Um, Pinkie, it's a little late for that, don't you think? I mean, everypony already knows you got your cutie mark. And heck, you just told me on the way here that you already reserved the main ballroom for Friday night. Besides, if they don't know about your party, how will you get them to show up at all?"

"You just leave all that to Pinkie. But, there's something I need you to do for me. Your family can let me borrow the farm's barn for a few days, right?"

From around the corner, the old black stallion strained his ears to catch the muffled conversation coming from inside the box. He'd been watching Pinkie for some time now, and had a pretty good idea what she had planned already. Aloud, he muttered, "Maybe this'll push him over the edge. Just gotta play my cards right...it'll take some effort, but one more shove ought to be all he needs..."

When Friday's lessons had finally finished, Pierce hurried home. Pinkie's reminder as the class was dismissed still rang in his ears, "Don't forget, Pokey, the party's in the ballroom at five. And be ready; there's a surprise waiting for you there!" What this 'surprise' could be, he couldn't imagine, but he knew that for the first time in months, he was excited to go out. After wracking his brain, he'd decided that too many other ponies would take the easy way out and get a balloon-themed present, so he'd tried to be more creative; knowing that parties and music go hand in hand, he'd opted to buy her a compilation of dance tunes on record. He'd looked over the songs carefully, and was sure she would appreciate each and every one of them.

When he got home, however, he found the front fence had been tagged by vandals. More shocking still, they had managed to cover every picket facing the street with a variety of words and phrases too crude for public utterance, let alone display. Vandalism was rare enough in Ponyville, but something like this was unheard of.

As he walked in the door, Pierce saw his mother hanging up the phone in the living room. Turning, she exclaimed, "Oh Pierce, I'm so glad you're here! I just got off the phone with the police, they'll be on the lookout for whoever did this to our fence. But right now, I need you to go paint over those dreadful words at once!"

Pierce's heart sank. There was no way he could finish this task and still be at the ballroom by five. He tried to negotiate with his mother, but there was no question that the ugly scrawls needed to be covered immediately, and she was adamant that Pierce be the one to do it. "After all," she pointed out, "It was probably one of your friends playing some particularly ill-thought-out prank. Do talk to your friends at school and make sure they know they crossed the line, won't you?"

In the end, Pierce had little choice but to put on a pair of work clothes and start painting the pickets with a fresh coat of whitewash. He worked as quickly as he could, and hoped this setback wouldn't delay him from Pinkie's party for too long.

As the afternoon wore on, the hour of the party approached. Ponies began to file into the ballroom, but many were surprised and (though they were too polite to say as much out loud) a bit disappointed; the decorations were sparse, and there were only a few light appetizers lining the table. Sufficient for an ordinary pony's cutedeñera, perhaps, but for a pony who's talent *was* partying? It all seemed very...mundane. The pink pony herself, of course, had yet to make her entrance.

Just after 5:00 had come and gone, however, the state of the festivities rapidly altered. The lights abruptly went out, revealing the words written on the walls in glowing ink: LOOK OUTSIDE. Confused, the ponies made their way to the door, and looked about. They saw a series of brightly-lit signs pointing away to the southwest, towards Sweet Apple Acres. Over the hills in that direction, they could see fireworks exploding in the air.

It was only a few minute's walk to reach the nearest part of the farm, where the large barn rested on a low rise. Standing in the open hayloft and cheerfully firing explosives skyward was Pinkie Pie. When her confused guests began to trickle towards her, she started waving and began to sing the Surprise Party Song. As the first ponies to arrive began filing into the barn, Pinkie's grin grew by the minute. This was a party that nopony would ever forget.

As the last straggler ponies left the ballroom to head towards the real party site, an old black stallion slipped out of the shadows and into the town center. He looked about himself and grunted.

"Lots to do, and not much time. Still, everything's going to plan so far. Just have to hurry and hope for the best." With that, he began removing the signs which pointed out of town, being careful to leave no trace of their presence behind.

Pierce hurried towards the ballroom, his work at last completed. Gripping his gift in his mouth, he ran down the streets towards Ponyville's central plaza. But as he grew closer, he slowed his steps.

Something was wrong. He was almost an hour late, but he didn't hear any noise coming from up ahead. Confused, he walked on and, arriving outside the ballroom, found the streets abandoned.

The ballroom itself was dark; it was obvious there was no party here tonight. Pierce mentally rechecked: today was Friday, the party was Friday at five, it was not quite six...they couldn't possibly have ended so soon, could they have? Not knowing what else to do, he opened the ballroom door and stepped inside.

Flicking on the lights, it was immediately clear there had been no party here. The room was bare and empty; no streamers or decorations graced the walls, the tables and chairs sat vacant around the edges of the room, and the silence that filled his ears was deafening. He was not alone in the ballroom, however.

Sitting on the stage was the black stallion who Pierce had been dreading these past few months. Suddenly, he was once more face-to-face with Canker.