

The rising sun was a relief to every resident of Ponyville. It seemed that the weather patrol had been at their duties half the night as the sky was a perfect, cloudless blue. Bleary eyed equines staggered from their homes and began their daily routine. Some of the residents of the town seemed a bit jumpier than usual. Others were lost in their own thoughts, distractedly offering apologies to anypony they bumped into. In the library six friends gathered to discuss their dreams.

Pinkie Pie, being the closest, arrived first. Her usual bounce was rather subdued and she hesitated before entering. She swallowed hard when she saw Twilight Sparkle. A nervous giggle escaped her lips and she quickly clamped her hooves over her mouth. Her eyes, often filled with unrevealed mischief, darted about the room as if she were afraid to meet the gaze of her friend.

“Hi Twilight.”

“Hi Pinkie Pie.” Twilight’s red rimmed eyes and own subdued manner gave a hint as to the night she had experienced.

The sound of the door swinging open made both ponies flinch. They turned towards the sound as a bedraggled Rarity stepped through, her mane limp and tousled. She sidled up to her friends with less poise than normal.

“Hello girls.”

“Hi Rarity.” The other two chorused.

Over the next fifteen minutes the rest of the group filed in. Applejack had a decided slump to her normally confident frame. When she saw Rarity she opened her mouth as if to speak and then shut it again with a little sigh. Fluttershy was obviously in a state of severe distress, shooting nervous looks in all directions, her flanks trembling as if she was ready to bolt. When Twilight touched her on the flank the little yellow filly started and managed to run three steps before freezing in place. Rainbow Dash appeared to be her normal, brash self. Yet she seemed touchier than usual and snapped at Fluttershy when she asked how she was. It took the effort of the whole group several minutes before the timid pegasi could be calmed down.

“So...I take it everypony else had nightmares?” Twilight ventured after the group was settled.

“You...you could say that.” Rarity gazed determinedly at the nearest book as if it held an answer to some difficult question.

“Ah’ did.” Applejack glanced towards Rarity again and then fixed her eyes on the floor.

“It was...it was awful.” Pinkie Pie looked towards Twilight and the glimmer of tears appeared in her eyes.

A slight nod and a quiet mew was all that could be coaxed out of Fluttershy.

“Nightmares? Really? Aren’t we all a bit old for that?” Rainbow Dash looked at the group with a smug expression on her face. Twilight fixed her with a level stare and the bold flier dropped her eyes. “Yeah. You could say that I had kind of a bad dream.”

“A bad dream? That’s what you want to call it?” Pinkie looked at Dash. “It wasn’t just a bad dream it was the worst dream I’ve ever had!”

Twilight sensed an argument might be brewing and interjected before the two began venting their elevated feelings.

“It was the worst dream I’ve ever had too. I think it would be for the best if everypony here took a turn and explained what they saw.” She drew a slow breath and let it out in a sigh. “It might help us deal with what happened. I’ll...I’ll go first.”

The other ponies arranged themselves in a semi-circle around their unofficial leader.

"I was...I was here. In the library. Somepony, I'm pretty sure it was Pinkie Pie," At the sound of her name Pinkie gave a start and seemed ready to burst into tears. Twilight furrowed her brow for a second then continued.

"Pinkie Pie came to get me. Something had happened and they needed my magic to clear it up. I ran to...it was the center of town. Somehow the rest of you had gotten tangled up in some big gummy thing and I was supposed to separate you from it. It was kind of funny at first but..."

Twilight paused again and stared fixedly at the shelved books, her voice taking on a monotone.

"I started to separate you from the stuff. Pinkie Pie thought it looked fun so she jumped in the pile as well. I...it..." Twilight swallowed hard, a tear trickling down her muzzle. "I lost control. Somehow...I separated everypony alright. I separated them into what made them up."

"What do you mean? What made us up?" Applejack said, confusion etching her face.

"Your...parts. Skeletons. Skin. Organs. Blood. I separated you all into different categories and...and...thankfully what was left didn't live long." Twilight swallowed again, turning away from the group. "I...I wanted to die. All I could do was scream."

The purple unicorn hiccupped a few times, her sides heaving. As one her friends stepped forward and wrapped her in their comforting embrace. After a few moments of quiet sobs she sniffled and shook her head.

"But it was just a dream. That's all it was. A dream." She took a shuddering breath and let it out. "Let's...let's hear what happened to everyone else."

"I'll go next." Rarity said. "What happened to me can't be nearly as disturbing as that. I had just finished a dress ordered by Princess Celestia. It was one of the greatest things I've ever made, and the princess was going to come by to pick it up by herself. To my surprise she had her nephew with her. They entered my shop and I showed them the dress. Princess Celestia...she...she said it was horrible. One of the worst things she had ever seen. She doubted whether I should even be a designer. Her nephew...he...he...he said that I was ugly as the thing I had made and that it was the most hideous thing he had ever seen.

"I wanted to die. I wanted the princess to strike me down. I begged her forgiveness, pleaded for her to banish me or something. She said that she had a better punishment in mind. She would let all of Equestria know how ugly and horrible I, and everything I had ever done, was. She touched my horn with hers and I felt the mark of shame being burned into me. I screamed so hard I thought I would tear out my own throat."

"That's...awful. Princess Celestia would never do a thing like that." Twilight placed a hoof on her elegant friend's shoulder.

"And if she did, she'd be wrong. You design the best...coolest stuff I've ever seen." Rainbow Dash looked uncomfortable at making the admission, but she too placed a supportive hoof on her friend. "If she ever said that I'd...I'd tell her what an uncool loser she was."

"Thank you both. I know it was just a silly dream but it rocked me to my core." Rarity closed her eyes and sniffed. "I had to go check in the mirror to see if I had the mark burned into me."

"Who wants to go next?" Twilight looked at the group.

Applejack just stared at the floor. Fluttershy let out another scared mewling cry and shrank back. Pinkie Pie half opened her mouth but Rainbow Dash stepped forward.

"I will. It was just some dumb nightmare anyway. I was out practicing my tricks and Fluttershy and Pinkie were acting as my cheering section. I was on top of my game when out of

nowhere Gilda showed up. She challenged me to a stunt show and bet I couldn't beat her. I asked her what the terms were. She said if I won she'd go across Equestria and tell everyone in the world that I was the best flier ever. I asked what she wanted.

"She said if she won she got to prove how lame all my friends were. I was going to say no, cause her opinion doesn't really matter, but Pinkie and Fluttershy cheered me on. We started the competition. She went first. She put out some pretty cool stuff, but it was foal's play. I mean really, like a double loop the loop and triple barrel roll. It was going to be a cake walk.

"I took off and...and my moves just failed me. I couldn't pull them off. No matter what I tried it didn't work. I was making a fool of myself. I tried to do a sonic rainboom and I just ended up bounced into a cloud. She laughed at me, said I was seriously uncool. And that since I lost the bet she got to prove how lame my friends were." Dash finished, lapsing into silence.

"And that was it?" Twilight asked.

"Yeah...sort of..."

"Really. That was it?"

"Okay, there might have been a little bit more."

"Which was? Please Rainbow Dash you have to finish. It won't help if we don't know the end."

"She swooped down and tore Pinkie and Fluttershy apart OK! She ripped them to pieces and laughed about it and I tried to stop her but I just crashed into the ground and she said it was all proof that I was always a loser and I should thank her for proving just how truly lame my friends were and for getting rid of them!"

"That's...that's harsh."

"Yeah well it was just a stupid dream." Rainbow Dash crossed her legs over her chest defiantly. "That's all it was. Some stupid dream. And I'm done talking about it."

"OK then...who's next?"

Pinkie Pie began to relate her nightmare. When she got to the end she broke down crying and threw her hooves around Twilight's neck, begging forgiveness. After being repeatedly reassured that she hadn't done anything wrong, that dreams weren't real, she began to settle down. Applejack's story was related in a flat monotone while she stared straight ahead. She barely blinked during the telling. When she was finished she simply lay down and put her nose on her hooves.

It took quite some time to coax Fluttershy into talking about her dream.

The group began to collectively calm down after a good breakfast and some more time together. Pinkie Pie started cracking jokes halfway through the meal. Rarity remarked on how dreadful she must look as they were finishing up. Applejack's monotone finally broke and the faithful pony spent more energy trying to shore up her friend's spirits. Rainbow Dash urged everyone out into the sunshine and spent ten minutes showing off moves as if to prove the dream wrong. Fluttershy even found the courage to utter a few words of quiet encouragement to her acrobatic friend.

"Hey...where's Spike?" Pinkie Pie asked as the group headed back into the library.

"Spike? Why he's upstairs...I think. He seemed pretty miffed when I woke up in the middle of the night screaming my head off." Twilight said, chuckling slightly at the image of the indignant baby dragon carrying off his basket into another part of the building.

"Well, let's go find him and see if he had any dreams."

“That’s a pretty good idea.”

The group spread out through the building, checking each nook and cranny to try and find the little dragon. When he was located, sound asleep in his basket, the friends gathered around him in amazement. Twilight prodded him with a hoof and he grumbled and rolled away. She gave him another gentle nudge and he made a mumbled comment about gems. With a sigh of exasperation she tipped his basket up and he spilled out of it with a shout of complaint.

“What’d you do that for?!” He asked, dusting himself off. “What, I’m not allowed to sleep?”

“How can you sleep after all those horrible nightmares?” Pinkie asked. “Weren’t they just the most terrible scary things you ever experienced?”

“Nightmares? What? Twilight is this some sort of joke?”

“It’s not a joke Spike. We all had nightmares. We need you to tell us what yours was about.” The unicorn said.

“The only nightmare I had was when you screamed and woke me out of that awesome dream I was having.”

“Awesome dream?”

“Yeah. I was dreaming that I was at an all you could eat gem buffet.”

“Gem buffet?”

“Like the one I’ll never get living around here.”

“Wait...so you had a good dream?”

“I had lots of good dreams. I was having one just now when you decided to wake me up.”

“How did you have good dreams when all of us, everyone in town in fact, had the most terrifying dreams they can remember.”

“Beats me.” The little dragon said as he finished rubbing his eyes. He looked towards the assembled group and let out a gasp.

“What? What do you see?”

“Twilight...I don’t know much about dreams but,” He asked, pointing at her flank, “Are scary ones supposed to make your cutie mark fade?”

“What are you-”

Twilight broke off midsentence, craning her neck back to look at her cutie mark. As one the other friends did the same. Startled gasps and exclamations of surprise came from all the ponies as they realized that their cutie marks had indeed faded slightly. They galloped out of the room, leaving a very confused dragon to climb back into bed.

The thing in the cavern lay curled in the darkness as the small dot of sunlight tracked its slow way across the wall. It’s long, floppy ears heard something scurrying about its domain. It lunged silently, backwards jointed legs placing it directly in front of the offending creature. With a sudden dip of its head the unfortunate noise maker was impaled on the twisted teeth of the monster. It savored the taste of the panic emanating from its victim almost as much as it savored the fear. Soon, very soon, the cavern would cool again. Soon the world would lie down to sleep. Soon it would feed properly again and grow strong enough to break the bonds of its prison. Soon it would emerge. When it did...it gave a little snorting wheeze of amusement. When it did the world would know true terror.