

## Memories and Matrimony

The bundle of light orange was curled up against Applejack's chest. The last rays of Celestia's setting sun illuminated each stripe of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple hair as the streams of natural light shone through the window. This light caused each streak of color to shine and stand out against the light straw-blonde mane and tail of the little pegasus filly that rested against her mother. With each breath, the chest of the small pony rose and fell as she slept. Applejack reveled in the sensation against her pelt as each of Applejoy's breaths caused her body to press against her mother's chest. Applejack smiled down at her sleeping daughter. It had taken several hours of gently rocking and feeding the filly to finally get her to sleep throughout the night, but the blissfully peaceful look on Applejoy's face made it all worth it. Just that look on her daughter's face could fill Applejack with a happiness that she had, in truth, not stopped feeling since the birth of her little filly, or even the day she found out she was pregnant. It was a happiness she had not known since the death of Granny Smith, but had finally rediscovered when she and Rainbow began rebuilding her family. As she gazed into Applejoy's pink eyes, memories flooded Applejack's mind. A day in the hospital room, when Nurse Redheart had offered the first 'Congratulations', or later that same day when Rainbow had produced the little box with a golden band inside. That led to the day, several months into her journey, when they had sealed their love with a ceremony in front of all their friends. But most of all, the day her ball of joy had come into the world.

Applejack looked up from the sleeping form of her daughter to the door that led from their living room into the shared kitchen and entrance area. She was watching, waiting for a sight that she looked forward to after every long day of tending to her filly's needs. She waited for that door to open, and for a figure to step from the entrance hall and back into her life, a sight usually heralded by the setting of the sun. With a small creaking noise that warmed her heart, the door Applejack was watching began to swing open. Carefully, quietly, the other pegasus that Applejack loved with all her heart crossed the threshold. "Good evening, Rainbow." AJ whispered, trying not to wake the sleeping filly as she said this and as she carefully picked herself up off the couch and moved to the floor, leaving Applejoy curled in a ball on the cushion behind her. She trotted across the living room to where Rainbow Dash stood by the door.

"Hey there, Honey," Rainbow whispered back as Applejack left her a quick kiss on the cheek. Something felt wrong though, Rainbow's eyes seemed to be slightly glazed over, almost as if...

"What's wrong, Sugarcube?" Applejack asked, worry suddenly starting to creep up on her.

"Nothing, AJ." Rainbow answered with a sigh, "I guess I'm just tired is all."  
"You're working too much."

"No I'm not."

“Yes you are. Ah know you’ve been working the apple cart in town every afternoon for a while now, on top of your weather duties.”

“Because it needs to be done, and you obviously can’t do it, and Big Mac has too much on his mind recently. I’m happy to pick up the slack.”

“But Ah hardly get to see you during the day anymore, and Ah worry that you’re overworking yourself.”

“Just think of it like I’m bringing in extra bits for the family while you’re on maternity leave.”

“Ah own half the farm, Rainbow. Maternity leave is paid.”

“All the same, I’m going to keep doing it. I feel like it’s the least I can do.”

“The least ya can do for what?”

“For us, AJ, for the family.” Rainbow explained, “I’m a part of this whole family now, and with you taking care of Applejoy, and Applebloom still being too young to work the stand herself, I feel like I should be the one to take some of the work off Big Mac’s back. The wedding is tomorrow, and the last thing he needs is a full work schedule when he should be preparing.”

“Ah can see there’s no point arguin’ with you.” Applejack sighed, resigned, “Just please, when ya’ll are out there doin’ what’s best fer the whole family, try ta remember me, sitting here all day alone, waitin’ fer ya ta come home.”

“I’d never forget you, honey. Who do you suppose I think about all day?” And with that, Rainbow leaned in and plated a kiss right on Applejack’s lips, holding it there for a moment to lift both their spirits. “Now,” she said, turning to head into the shared kitchen and eating area which divided their side of the house from Macintosh’s, “I’m tired. So I’m going to go grab a quick bite to eat and then head upstairs to bed.”

‘Now this ain’t right.’ Applejack thought to herself. Every day when Rainbow came home, especially once she had started picking up extra work recently, she had been extremely hungry. ‘Somethin’s on her mind, and it ain’t just that she’s tired.’ Applejack decided, ‘after all, she’s always been hungry enough to eat... well... a horse. Today shouldn’t be any different. Somthin’s botherin’ her.’ Applejack sighed as she watched her wife head to the kitchen. She herself turned around and trotted back over to where Applejoy was still lying on the couch. She carefully picked her sleeping daughter up and settled her onto her back for the walk upstairs to the nursery. ‘Granny Smith’s old room,’ she thought absent-mindedly, and with a pang of sadness that was gone instantly, ‘No. The nursery.’

After tucking her tiny pegasus, who surprisingly hadn’t even woken up, into her crib, Applejack headed back down to the kitchen. Strangely, she didn’t find Rainbow either there or in

the dining room as she had expected, so she begrudgingly trudged back upstairs to their shared room. 'Ma and Pa's old room.' Was the again unintended thought that she shook off immediately. Reaching the doorway, Applejack stopped and listened. She could hear a soft sobbing sound, a quiet weeping, coming through the closed door. 'That's it.' She thought, 'That pony's got somethin' that's botherin' her, and she's goin' ta tell me whether she wants ta or not.' She quickly thrust open the door and stepped inside. Rainbow, sitting on the bed, quickly looked up as if startled and tried to sniff away the tears that were evident on her face. "Sugarcube, tell me what's wrong, and tell me now."

"Nothing is wrong, AJ," Rainbow stammered, "It's just... allergies. I think I have Hay Fever."

"Ah can tell when ya are lyin' ta me, Dashie." Applejack retorted, "Please just tell me the truth. Ah love you, and Ah hate ta see you feelin' like this and tryin' to deny it."

Rainbow broke down. "I'm sorry, AJ..." She said, "It's just that... it's... it's today, AJ." Applejack didn't understand. Rainbow continued, "Today's the day that... that... that..." She stopped, obviously at a loss for words, fresh tears brewing in her eyes, whatever she was trying to say seemed too painful. Applejack watched as Rainbow pulled herself up from her laying position and reached over to a nightstand on her side of the bed. She opened a drawer, one of the nightstand drawers full of the trinkets and small items that she had deemed most important to her during her big move from her cloud house down to the remodeled Apple Family house several months ago.

Applejack watched as Rainbow pulled her hoof back out of the drawer, with what looked like a very old piece of paper in her grasp. It was yellowed, with small cuts and tears in places, and it seemed crinkled, as if it had been kept for years, which, AJ realized, it may have been. She wondered what was on the paper, from what she could see of it from across the room it looked like it may be a clipping from a newspaper. Whatever it was, it was obviously important to Rainbow Dash, who reached out as if to hand it to AJ. Applejack crossed the room and climbed into the bed next to her wife. She could see that the piece of yellowed paper was indeed a newspaper clipping, an issue of the "Equestria Daily" Newspaper. Applejack took the old newspaper page from her wife and began reading. The first thing she noticed was that the paper carried the same date as today, only different. It was the same month and day, but the year was over a decade in the past. Applejack wondered only briefly why Rainbow would keep a newspaper clipping from so long ago. She didn't have to look far to find her answer however. Farther down on the page, circled in ink that had obviously been there for as long as Dash had had the newspaper, was one particular short article. It read:

### **Two Ponies Killed in Tragic House Fire**

A fire broke out in a small house on the outskirts of the small town of Maresburg in the

wee hours of the morning yesterday. When fireponies reached the scene, they found that the home's two occupants, a married couple by the name of Blue Thunder and Sky Dasher, had both passed on due to the fumes and flames that filled and consumed their house before rescuers were able to respond. The ponies of...

Applejack stopped reading. She looked up from the text. She knew those two names, the names of the ponies who had been killed in the article. She knew them not from experience, but from stories, tales of a certain pegasus from when she had been young. "Rainbow," Applejack said as she turned to face the mare beside her who now had even more tears in her eyes, "Your parents. Is this... is today the anniversary of the day they died?"

"No," Rainbow responded, glumly, "Today is the anniversary of the day I found out." They were both silent for a moment, Applejack said nothing as she processed this, she only stared into the deep magenta eyes of her wife, willing her to go on. After a moment, Rainbow continued: "I was at flight school in Cloudsdale. This was before I even had my cutie mark, and it was today, all those years ago, that one of my instructors came rushing into my room with a newspaper in her mouth. That was it. She had circled the article, she tried to tell me it was OK, that it was just a horrible accident and I shouldn't feel too bad, but I did anyway. I had to find out from a newspaper, AJ, a newspaper, and almost two whole days after it happened too."

"Ah know, Sugarcube." Applejack said in her sweetest voice, leaning over to nuzzle her lover, "That sounds horrible, and it's a terrible way ta have ta find out. But why didn' ya tell me this before? Ah coulda' talked with you about it, you don't need to feel this bad."

"Because whenever I talk about them, and about how I wasn't there for them, I always feel so guilty. I've never liked to talk about it, it brings up too many bad memories."

"Now wait here just a minute, Sugarcube. Weren't ya the one tellin' me before, back when Granny Smith died, that I shouldn't feel guilty about her? Yet here you are sayin' ya felt guilty about yer own parents all these years? Doesn't that make you a hypocrite?"

"No, AJ, it's not like that," Rainbow sighed, "I know their death isn't my fault, and I don't blame myself for it. The fire was a horrible accident. But I've always felt guilty about them because of the way I acted to them before." She paused for a moment, putting words together in her head, "Let me tell you a story." She said finally.

"My parents lived in Maresburg for a long time. It was a really small town, even smaller than Ponyville, so when I was born, I came into this world in the only clinic for miles around, on the ground." Rainbow Dash began her story, and Applejack snuggled in next to her to listen, making sure her comforting presence was known. "Because I was born on the ground, and as pegasus fillies can't really fly until they get older, my parents bought a little old house in the hills outside of town and moved the family in." Rainbow leaned back over to the still opened drawer and pulled something else out. It was a photograph; probably older than the newspaper but kept in much better condition by the frame that held it. She handed it over to Applejack, who took it, setting the newspaper down.

Applejack smiled when she saw the three ponies in the picture. Two of them lay on the ground while one large stallion stood over them. The proud-looking, muscular, pegasus stallion had a deep blue coat and a mane and tail of an even darker shade of navy blue. He stood tall and proud with his powerful wings outstretched, a grin on his face. Laying down at his hooves was a smaller pegasus mare. She looked fragile, delicate. Her coat was a mix between light shades of blue and purple, and her wispy, pure white hair fluttered in a gentle breeze. A happy, blissful smile rested on her face and her eyes gazed at the third pony in the picture. Curled in a tight ball, sound asleep, at the ends of her four outstretched hooves was a small pegasus filly with a light blue coat and a short mane and tail that carried the colors of the rainbow. Blue Thunder, Sky Dasher, and Rainbow Dash. Besides knowing their names, and hearing that they had been gone for many years, Applejack had never known much about her parents-in-law. She had only seen a picture of them on one other occasion. AJ looked up from the photograph to find Rainbow Dash had been silently watching her as she studied it. Applejack shifted herself over so she was touching the rainbow-maned pegasus and leaned against her, gently nuzzling to show her she cared. With the picture lying next to them, Applejack silently pleaded Rainbow to continue with her story.

Communicating with Applejack on a level neither of them really understood, Rainbow heard her silent pleas, and began again in earnest. “We lived outside of Maresburg for years in that little house as I grew up. My father was the weatherpony in town, he was the only one, because the town was so small. He had never had any great aspirations in life, so he lived content with his job and his family. Mom was always a stay-at-home mare, so neither of my parents really had any dreams for themselves or for me. Dad always thought I’d follow in his footsteps and become Maresburg’s weatherpony someday, and I was fine with that for a while as I grew up, but then, we took a trip. My parents took me to Cloudsdale as a reward as soon as I learned how to fly from my dad. It was my first time in a big city, and while we were there, I saw something that changed my life forever. My parents took me to a show by the Wonderbolts, and I loved it. From that moment on, I wanted nothing more than to one day be a Wonderbolt. But my parents had other ideas. They had always lived a small town life, and when I told them of my dreams, they said ‘your aspirations are too great’ and that I would never achieve it. They still wanted me to live a simple life, grow up with them, and eventually take over dad’s job. But by then, being a small-town weatherpony wasn’t going to cut it for me.”

“Isn’t it ironic how that’s exactly what ya are now? A small-town weatherpony?”

“Hey, don’t interrupt me!” Rainbow said with a small laugh, “So, my parents and I drifted farther and farther apart as I got older. I probably got a lot more rebellious and headstrong than most ponies my age, because I really wanted to chase my dreams and my folks seemed to be in the way of that. I practiced on my own and I got pretty good at flying. But I was also alone and away from my parents a lot, so I guess they got worried about me, they never did understand that a small town life wasn’t going to be for me like it had been for them. They thought I was just wasting my time. Then, one day, we got into a big fight about my future. They seemed bound and determined not to let me go live my own life, and it just got too much for me. I screamed at them, and I argued with them for hours. I was still furious with them that night, so I gathered up

all the bits I had ever earned and all the little things that I cared about and I flew off into the night. I didn't know where I was going, but I knew I didn't want to see my parents after they had done, so I left. I got my wish. I never did see my mom and dad again." Rainbow stopped, tears welling in her eyes again. "I'm... I'm sorry, AJ, I don't want to be like this, you shouldn't have to see me like this."

"No." Applejack whispered, still nuzzling and comforting her wife, "Ah think ya need ta say this. Ya should just let it all out."

Rainbow took a couple deep breaths and continued. "I finally found my way back to Cloudsdale, the place where my dreams started, and I used all the money I had to get enrolled at the flight academy. At first I thought that my parents would send somepony looking for me, but no one ever came and found me. I only found out later that when they reported me missing with the Maresburg sheriff, the only search that got started was a local one that never reached Cloudsdale. At flight school, weeks turned into months, and I didn't really tell anypony about where I came from. Only one of my instructors, she was the only one I felt comfortable to open up to, knew about me and my parents, because I told her. She was the one who found the newspaper, she was the one who brought it to me all those years ago today." Tears were continuing to flow freely down her face now, but Applejack kept nuzzling her. She remembered a time when she had been sad, depressed even, and she had only Rainbow to thank for lifting her spirits then, it was her turn now. Rainbow needed her, and she wasn't going to let her down.

"I left after we had a huge fight. I told them I hated them. I told them I never wanted to see them again. In all those months I was in Cloudsdale, I never tried to send them a letter. I never tried to contact them. I never reached out to them again. And then, I found out that they died. They died and the last they knew of me was a hateful disrespectful child who abandoned them. I never got the chance to apologize, to tell them I loved them. They were just gone. For months I couldn't think of anything but them. My grades slipped, I stopped seeing what few friends I had made, and I even thought about just ending it all a couple times. I was that miserable. I don't think a day goes by now that I don't feel guilty. They were the first two ponies to love me, the first two ponies I ever loved, and I failed them. I completely, utterly, failed them. I try to block out my feelings nowadays and forget my memories, but... every year... on this day... they just get to be too much to hold in." With that, her story finished, Rainbow finally broke down completely. Tears rolled freely down her face and she sobbed heavily from the guilt and the sadness.

For several minutes Applejack did nothing but nuzzle her wife as soothingly as possible. Then, she turned her head and locked eyes with Rainbow Dash. She stared deep into her lover's magenta eyes and watched each tear as it formed, pooled, and then rolled downwards. Finally, she spoke. "Sugarcube," She said slowly, "Let me dry those tears fer ya." She leaned in and began kissing Rainbow's face. Each time a fresh tear appeared, Applejack would wipe it away with a kiss. The tears tasted salty on her tongue, but Applejack didn't stop. She had to do this for Rainbow. Rainbow had done the same for her all those months ago, and it was time to repay that debt. The smallest trace of what could be called a smile crossed Rainbow's face as the tears stopped flowing. She knew what was coming next. With no more tears to kiss away, AJ pulled

her face outward slightly. She and Rainbow stared at each other for a few moments, faces merely inches apart, before she leaned in and pressed her lips to those of her lover's. Applejack could feel Rainbow's body relaxing as she kissed her deeply, tongues locked in a well-rehearsed dance that had been acted out many times before...

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They lay with each other for a long time. Silently letting their love and compassion for one another express itself silently, they both thought their own thoughts and allowed themselves to rest in each other's arms. Finally, a question that had been bothering Applejack for a while came to the surface.

"Rainbow?" She said, lifting herself up slightly, "Ya said... ya said earlier that ya... ya thought about... about..." She struggled to phrase her question delicately, "ya said: 'I even thought about just ending it all sometimes', didja... didja mean..."

"Killing myself?" Rainbow asked, AJ could only nod as she felt her face blanch, Rainbow Dash just sighed. "Yeah, I guess I did think about it at one point." She admitted, "I'm glad I didn't, though."

"Well... What... What kept ya... What kept ya from..."

"Actually doing it?" Rainbow's voice was no longer sad, instead it was filled with a cold factuality, as if she were beyond feeling sad about her past and was going to answer Applejack's questions with purpose, "It wasn't a what, that stopped me. It was a who. Back then, when I was deepest in my depression and thinking about suicide, was when I met Fluttershy." Rainbow paused for a moment before continuing. "She was, is, the nicest, kindest, most caring, understanding, and selfless pony I have ever met. When we were at Cloudsdale flight school together, she found me, a few weeks after I heard the news, crying to myself. At first I thought she was going to laugh or look the other way like almost everyone there did, but she didn't. She comforted me, she lay down next to me and asked me what was wrong, and I told her everything. For the next few weeks, we just talked. I opened up to her, told her everything about my life, and she listened, and consoled me. She seemed to have an answer for everything, and every time I needed somepony to talk to, or somepony to cry on, she was there for me. I didn't have a friend in the world until I met Fluttershy."

"Oh, Rainbow." Applejack could feel tears even coming to her eyes as her partner's story sank in, "Ah'm so glad she was there fer ya. Ah'm so glad ya had somepony ta be there with ya." Applejack was silent for a moment. She had a new question, but she didn't feel right asking it...

"What is it, AJ?" Rainbow suddenly questioned. She could sense that there was something else on her wife's mind.

"Well, Ah... Ah was just wonderin'... didja... didja love her, Rainbow? Like you love me?" Applejack felt horrible that she had even thought of the question, but deep inside, she knew she had to hear the answer.

“No.” Rainbow said quietly, seemingly not surprised by the question. “I mean, I knew that I was a fillyfooler back then, but I never felt that way towards Fluttershy. In many ways, she was like a sister to me. She was my protector, she protected me from my own sadness, my own fear, my own past, but that’s all she ever seemed to be. A sister. That was a time when I didn’t really think about love and relationships, all I needed then was family, and Fluttershy became like family to me. In the time that I knew her, I felt truly happy knowing that somepony was looking out for me. Then, one day, I saw her being bullied by those two stupid colts. She was still so shy around everypony else, I think she would’ve still been shy towards me if she hadn’t found me crying when we met, and I hated them for hurting her like they were doing. I felt like she had done so much for me, that she deserved me to protect her too. That’s why I challenged them to that race, but you’ve already heard that story.”

“Yes, Ah remember, that’s when ya got yer cutie mark.” Applejack said.

“Yep. And that’s the day I discovered racing. That day, I got a lot of my personality back. I got most of my pride back by beating those colts, and I remembered my dream to become a Wonderbolt. After that, I was a lot more like the self I had known before my parents died. I kept racing, I kept wanting to go faster and faster, and I made a bunch more friends, like Gilda, who enjoyed racing and flying as much as me. That’s also when I fell back into my rebellious streak. I started talking to Fluttershy less and less because I felt I didn’t need the little therapy sessions any more. I started breaking the school rules and slacking off, racing was the only thing I really cared about. Eventually, I left. I didn’t feel like flight school could suit me anymore and I left. I flew around Equestria for a while and eventually found my way back to Maresburg.”

“Maresburg hadn’t really changed since I left. It was still a tiny town and there were many of the same people there, some of them shocked to see I was still alive. The biggest difference... was out where my house used to be. It was just gone. The grass had grown over the spot where my old house stood and if I hadn’t had my memories, I wouldn’t have known anything ever stood there, let alone burned to the ground there. The only thing there to remind me of my old life was on top of the hill behind the house. That was the hill I flew off of when my dad was teaching me to fly. On the very top stood a gravestone. It read: ‘Here lies Blue Thunder and Sky Dasher, husband, wife, and loving parents. May their dreams live on in their daughter.’ Not only was it my parents’ grave, but it mentioned me. I stayed up there for hours, just sitting on the ground and staring at it. That was the first time I realized that I truly had nowhere to go. I couldn’t stay in Maresburg, that place had too many bad memories. So I left that night, and for a long time, I just wandered around Equestria. I slept on clouds and I did various odd jobs to raise bits for food, and I lived like that for a long time. I didn’t even keep track of time during that period of my life. I just existed, roaming from place to place. Then, one day, I overheard two strangers having a conversation, and I heard a name I never thought I would hear again. Fluttershy. I jumped into their conversation and asked what they knew about her, I found out that she was living in Ponyville, so I set out at once.”

“I think I know why I’m the element of Loyalty.” Rainbow suddenly said, throwing Applejack off with her change of subject. “Ever since I lost my parents, failed my parents, I have been afraid. I used to be afraid to get close to other ponies, so in the time since learning of my



parents' deaths I shied away from others. But then, after talking to Fluttershy and growing close to her after several weeks, I realized that I was afraid not of getting too close to another pony, but I was afraid of failing them. I didn't want to get too friendly because I was terrified I might fail them like I failed the first two people to ever love me. Even now, I love you, I love our friends, and I know I could never let any of you guys down because that would be failing, and I could never do that. That's why I'm the element of loyalty. That's why... that's why I cried the day I saved you, at the cliffside, because I came so close to watching you fall to your death, so close to not being able to catch you, so close to failing you. That's why I came to Ponyville. When I heard that Fluttershy, the best friend I had ever had, was her, I had to see her. I had to make sure we were still friends after what I did. I had to make sure I hadn't failed her."

"When I got here, we were still friends. She was so happy to see me, she demanded that I tell her everything that happened to me while I was away. And I did. In the end, she said: 'Oh you poor thing!' and took me under her wing again. She told me I should settle down from my travels, and she showed me the town, but most importantly, she introduced me to everypony she knew. Even though she was still her shy self and didn't know that many ponies, I still met those she did know."

"Ah remember that! She introduced ya ta me!" Applejack exclaimed, all the pieces of the puzzle finally fitting in in her head.

"And I fell in love." Rainbow finished, "I fell in love with the town, with the ponies here, and most of all, with you. From the moment I met you and got to know you, I felt that I could have something special with you. Here was a pony who was an athlete just like me, and shared enough of my interests to not get boring, but still had a level of kindness that other athletes I had met couldn't hope to match. In a way, you were athletic like Gilda, but nice like Fluttershy. All the qualities I had enjoyed in my other friends seemingly wrapped up in one." Applejack nodded. She had heard this part of the story before. She had heard Dash's claims of 'love at first sight' before, but this story still made her happy. She would never get tired of hearing it. "That's why I built my cloudhouse here. To be close to Fluttershy, and to be close to you, to get to know you better. I wanted to really get to know you, to spend time with you, because I had never felt the way I felt about you about anypony else before. I challenged you to all those competitions partly because I felt an athletic rivalry with you, but also because I just wanted to be with you."

"So in all that time, why did it take ya several years to tell me how ya felt?" Applejack thought she knew the answer already, but she didn't want this to end. This was the longest the Rainbow pegasus had ever talked to her for, and she was enjoying every minute of it. She enjoyed hearing of her lover's life, and she enjoyed being able to share feelings with the mare she loved so much.

"Because you had become my best friend, and I was afraid of ruining our friendship by trying to take it to the next level when I wasn't sure whether you liked me in the same way. It seems silly now, but I always thought you would reject me for being a fillyfooler. Then, that day after Pinkie's play, when you caught me in your orchard, I was so flustered that I didn't know what to do. So I went to Fluttershy. I cried to her, and she comforted me again. She told me to

just let everything out and tell you the truth. But when I was leaving her house, and you surprised me on the road, I was so startled that I almost let my fear of rejection overcome me again and I almost let my normal, prideful, self win out. But when you questioned me I remembered Fluttershy's advice, and I told you everything. And even though Rarity interrupted you and I didn't get to hear your response, I still think it was better that she did interrupt us, because maybe saving your life sealed the deal." Rainbow finished with a wink.

"Yeah, Sugarcube, Ah guess it did seal the deal." AJ chuckled. "Still, why didn't ya tell me this before? Ya never told me that it was Fluttershy who convinced you to tell me your feelings."

"I guess it just never came up. It's just one more thing that I owe to Fluttershy. She told me to tell you my feelings, she introduced you to me, she convinced me to stay in Ponyville, she taught me to believe in myself after my loss, she probably saved my life. Without Fluttershy, if I was even alive, I never would have come here, I never would have met you, and Applejoy would never even have existed."

Applejack shuddered at the thought. "We might never have gotten the elements of harmony together and maybe Nightmare Moon would have ruled Equestria!" She added, shuddering a bit more. "Ah guess we all owe a lot to little Fluttershy. Who woulda thought she affected all that."

"She certainly made my life the best it possibly could." Rainbow said with an air of finality.

"Well, her weddin' is tomorrow, if we owe her so much Ah think we should get a good night sleep so we can give her the best support possible."

Rainbow looked over at the clock and was startled by what it said. 'Have we really been talking for that long?' she asked herself. "I guess you're right." She said, settling into the sheets and pillows that she had grown so accustomed to recently.

"Rainbow?" Applejack said as she settled herself down into bed next to the blue pegasus. "Thanks."

"For what?" Rainbow asked.

"Fer tellin' me your story. It means a lot ta me knowin' you trust me enough to spill yer whole life story ta me in one sittin'. Especially considerin' all the bad stuff you've been through."

"No Applejack, thank you. Thanks for listening, thanks for understanding, thanks for making me feel better, but most of all, thank you for being yourself." She yawned before finishing, "I love you."

“Ah love you too, Sugarcube.” Applejack said, batting a single tear away from her eye.

With that, Rainbow Dash and Applejack, lying next to each other in the bed that they shared as a couple, let sleep take them. Tomorrow was going to be a big day.

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Rays of sunlight shone out over a bright green field surrounded by tall trees, cutting through the perfect blue of an infinitely clear sky. The weather pegasi, especially Rainbow Dash, had worked diligently to make sure the sky was completely clear and bright for this important day. Down in the field, a large gathering of creatures created a sea of color to clash with the green that surrounded them in the grass, trees, and other plants in the clearing. On one side of the field a large mass of ponies had gathered. All earth ponies, and all with an apple-related image as a cutie mark. They were all there to support one pony in particular. Big Macintosh, looking uncomfortable in a stiff tuxedo, gave a nervous smile down at the members of his extended family who had gathered to support him on his big day.

At the head of the clearing a simple temporary stage had been erected. Flowing from the top of the stage down to the ground were large lace sheets, decorated intricately with frills and designs that spoke of elegance and beauty. Surrounding the stage were strings of flowers, strung up on poles that were also decorated with flower heads. In truth, there were flowers all over the clearing, some strung up as decorations, but many more naturally growing in the space around the stage. Big Macintosh stood near the center of the stage, although slightly to the right. Behind him, his best friend, Caramel, as well as Red Delicious and Golden Delicious, two of his cousins, stood. All three were also dressed in tuxedos. Standing on Macintosh's right, directly in the center of the stage, stood an older, graying, pony in flowing robes. The wrinkles and the serious expression on his face could not hide the gleam in his eyes that betrayed his inner mirth, he loved his job. His happy eyes swept out over the crowd assembled in front of him again. Any minute now, the show would start. As he moved his gaze from the assembled Apple Family, across the aisle that separated the two groups, he saw one of the strangest sights he had seen in his many years as a minister. In the bride's side, the few well-dressed pegasi were completely outnumbered by small animals. Rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks, mice, ducks, and numerous other creatures had descended on the clearing.

Suddenly, everypony's attention was grabbed by the sound of light hoofsteps approaching the center aisle. A small, white, unicorn filly with curly pink and purple mane and tail slowly trotted down the aisle. Held in front of her by nearly all the magic the filly could muster was a small wicker basket. At intervals of every few seconds a small shower of flower petals would fly out of the basket and scatter themselves to the ground, spread out delicately by the proud little unicorn who was trying her hardest.

“Ooooooh. Just look at my darling little sister.” Rarity, standing in the traditional spot for the maid-of-honor, exclaimed, “She was just born to be a flowergirl!”

“Ah hush Rarity,” Applejack, standing beside her, said, “Ya said tha same thin’ at mah weddin’”, this earned a giggle from Rainbow, who stood on AJ's other side.

“Only because it’s true.” Rarity retorted. “At least I had the good sense not to bring my daughter up to the stage.”

“Ya don’t have a daughter.” Applejack answered, looking down at the cute little orange pegasus rolling around at her and Rainbow’s feet, “And we couldn’t very well leave her alone in the audience while her parents were up bein’ bridesmaids.”

“Will you two quiet down?” Twilight Sparkle interjected from beside Rainbow, leaning in to make herself heard, “Fluttershy is coming! Quit your bickering!”

“OhmygoshI’ve never been so excited in my life!” Squealed Pinkie, fifth in the row. “I can’t wait to see Fluttershy she’s going to look so amazingly beautiful and the reception party I planned is going to be so amazing!”

“Pinkie shhhhhhhh.” Twilight hissed, “Here she comes!”

Everypony suddenly felt their gaze drawn to the opposite end of the field. At the end of the clearing, from behind a stand of trees, a light yellow fore hoof was cautiously, tenderly, timidly, placed out in the open. It was followed by a second hoof and soon the blushing yellow face of Fluttershy. The silky white flowing headpiece she wore complimented her flowing pink mane beautifully, and as she gingerly stepped farther out into the open, she revealed the beautiful, silky, flowing, white, dress and gown that draped over her back and down her flank. A long flowing train trailed out behind her, ending in the beaks of several songbirds, diligently holding up the end of the train for their favorite pony.

“Isn’t her dress just gorgeous?” Rarity exclaimed, “I spared no expense you know. I think this is my finest ever work, the real silk, the lace trimmings, don’t you see how it highlights the color of her mane? Why, I think...” A chorus of four “sssshhh”s brought the fashionista turned maid-of-honor to silence.

Fluttershy continued to gracefully move down the petal-covered aisle, the entire crowd moved to silence. Finally, after a moment that stretched into hours with the beauty it contained, she climbed the steps to the stage and took her place next to Big Macintosh, as large a smile as anypony had ever seen her show on her face.

Clearing his throat, the old minister began his speech. “Fillies and Gentlecolts. We are gathered here today to witness the joining of this mare and stallion in Pony Matrimony.”

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“Now I do believe it is time for the ring bearer to come forward!” The old stallion called much later. Everypony’s attention was again turned to the aisle, where now, pink bow held high on her head, Applebloom trotted proudly towards the stage. On her back lay a dainty pillow, this in turn carried two hoof-sized rings. When she reached the couple and the minister she lay her parcel down on the stage in front of them and moved off to the side to join Sweetie Belle and

Scotaloo in watching. “Now,” The minister spoke, handing the first ring to Macintosh, “Do you, Mister Macintosh, take Miss Fluttershy to be your lawfully wedded wife?”

“Eeeyup. Er, Ah do.” Macintosh said, grinning sheepishly as he stumbled. He slipped the first ring onto Fluttershy’s outstretched hoof.

“And do you, Miss Fluttershy, take Mister Macintosh to be your lawfully wedded husband?” The old stallion asked, turning to the bride with the other ring.

“I do.” Fluttershy gasped out, sniffing to hold back tears of pure happiness as she in turn slipped the second ring onto Big Macintosh’s hoof.

“Then by the power vested in me, and with the combined blessings of Princess Celestia and Princess Luna, Sun and Moon, I now pronounce you Colt and Wife. You may kiss the bride!”

With that, Big Macintosh swept Fluttershy into his powerful grasp and locked her in a big, yet still gentle, kiss. Tears fell freely down Fluttershy’s face as she returned it. A wild cheering broke out from the assembled Apple family, Fluttershy’s few assembled relatives adding their applause as hundreds of animals began making their own noises.

Applejack felt tears come to her own eyes as she watched her brother and one of her best friends express their love for each other. She could hear both Rarity and Twilight Sparkle muttering about how beautiful it was, and from the sounds of water splashing the stage she could tell that Pinkie Pie was once again bawling much like she did at the return of Princess Luna. Scotaloo found herself unwittingly being hugged by the rest of the CMC as they expressed their adoration for the spectacle, and the sounds of this struggle reach Applejack’s ears as well. AJ felt a face nuzzle up against her cheek and turned to find herself staring right into the eyes of Rainbow Dash. Her magenta orbs filling Applejack with warmth as the blue pegasus leaned forward for a kiss of their own. Any semblance of worry about stealing the spotlight from the bride and groom was lost on AJ as she felt herself melt at the touch of their lips.

As both couples continued to kiss, bonds of love growing stronger, a small, light orange pegasus filly with rainbows in her straw-colored hair looked up from her place on the floor. She gazed up at her new aunt and uncle, and finally up at her parents, and in a language only she could understand, began to giggle her approval.

~Fin~

Author’s note: And thus ends the final installment of my Appledash fanfic. As it wove its course, it left many readers crying, it left some laughing at parts, and it left some claiming it to be the greatest Appledash ship-fic ever written. I’ve done all three, but only because I’m extremely emotional and also extremely full of myself.

I had a couple goals with this fourth story. First, I really wanted to explore the history of Rainbow Dash, by writing a backstory to explain her actions, to give a sad view on the life of a pegasus who obviously grew up pretty fast. Ever since I wrote Grief and Grievances, I wanted to write a story in which Applejack heals Rainbow Dash, just to show how the couple is mutually supportive of one another. I also really wanted to establish Fluttershy as a major player in the story by incorporating her into a big place in Rainbow's life story. With those goals in mind, I wrote the majority of this story with the aim of pulling on the heartstrings of the readers with a tale of unreconciled loss, then make it all better by having the strength of Applejack's love help to heal those wounds.

Explaining Fluttershy's role in Rainbow's life also created a Segway for me to take into my last scene. My final goal for this story was to write a beautiful scene to wrap up everything that had happened previously in the fic. I think FlutterMac's wedding accomplishes that.

Wait, what's that you say? You think I threw FlutterMac's relationship in there too fast and didn't give it enough time in the previous stories to warrant a big scene like the wedding? Well you know what this means don't you? This calls for a sidestory! Yes folks, I will be writing a sidestory featuring Fluttershy and Macintosh's burgeoning relationship as it happened off-screen during my AppleDash story. You can expect it within a few weeks.

Finally, there are a few people I'd like to thank:

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