

## Chapter 6

***Knock knock knock...***

"Enter."

The door to the Mayor's office creaked open slowly, Applejack standing in its threshold. The Mayor's office was simply decorated. A few portraits lined the walls, paintings of past mayors of Ponyville. The Mayor's desk held an inbox for files with an ink-well next to it. There was a picture frame on the desk too, but Applejack couldn't see what it contained.

"Ah! Applejack," The earth-pony Mayor said without looking up from her paperwork, "Perfect timing. I was beginning to think you weren't going to show at all." The Mayor finished signing the papers with her quill, spitting it out of her mouth and back into its ink-bottle. She looked up. "My my, those wings look quite fetching on you." Applejack blushed a bit at the compliment.

"Thank ya kindly ma'm." She said while rubbing her head in embarrassment.

"Alright then...let's get this report over with." The Mayor pulled a file open under her desk and pulled out a manilla folder. She flipped it open, skimming through the papers inside till she found the right one. "Ok then...You're filling in for Rainbow Dash, and she has a scheduled thunderstorm for this afternoon. Oh! It seems it got bumped up a notch on the intensity scale as well. I guess that's because we skipped it yesterday." The Mayor began to brief Applejack, giving her all the details of the storms placement and consistency. Applejack nodded, listening to the instructions.

"Ya' can rest easy Mayor, Weather-Mare Applejack's got ya' covered!" Applejack said with confidence as the Mayor seemed to be wrapping up her report.

"Oh, wait. There's one more thing here." The Mayor stopped her before she could leave. "It seems you have an extra assignment today. Some particularly nasty storm clouds have been seeping out of the Ever Free Forest and making a mess of the nearby grasslands. We need you to go disperse them immediately." Applejack grew excited at the prospect of having to deal with rogue weather, anything to be able to show-up Rainbow Dash.

"Yee-Haw! Then I guess it's time ta' go wrangle us up some storm clouds!" Applejack yelled gleefully, rearing high as she thanked the Mayor and bolted out the door. The Mayor smiled at Applejack's enthusiasm.

"Oh to be that young again..."

Applejack stood on the stairs of Town Hall, opening her wings wide. She leapt into the air, rising high over Ponyville. She could see the edge of Ever Free on the horizon as she sped over the town, looking down at the market place as she passed by. *"Ah' wonder how Rainbow's doin' righ' about now..."*

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"I'm telling you, they look better in the back."

"No no no, the red ones are best up front Scootaloo!"

Applebloom yanked a sizable basket of red-delicious apples to the fore-front of the market stand. Scootaloo huffed in frustration, shoving Applebloom aside and pushing them back to the mid-center of the stall.

"They look better like this because it makes a triangle." Scootaloo argued.

"But if you put 'em there the customers'll have ta' reach over the other ones to get ta' the reds, an' they sell the most! They need ta' be in the center!" Applebloom protested, getting to her hooves quickly and knocking Scootaloo away.

Scootaloo recovered from the shove, stamping her front hooves in frustration. "I say they go in the back!"

"And ah' say they go center!"

The two foals butted heads, pushing on each other in anger. Rainbow Dash rolled her eyes at the quarreling kids; this argument had been going on for nearly ten minutes. She felt a hoof tap on her shoulder. Turning, Rainbow noticed a strawberry colored earth pony smiling at her. Her mane was bright yellow with some grey streaks. She looked old, but not as old as Granny Smith. "Excuse me, are you open yet?"

"Uhh..." Rainbow muttered, looking to Scootaloo and Applebloom. Their head-butting had turned to Hoof-wrestling on a sizable rock near the stand. "Yeah, I guess we are. Welcome to Sweet Apple Acre's Apple Stall. What can I get you today?"

"Oh I would love to get a dozen of those red apples." The strawberry pony requested.

"Coming right up!" Rainbow said with a smile as she plucked twelve apples out of the basket by the stems with her teeth. She placed them all in a paper bag and passed it over to the strawberry pony. "That'll be...Um..." Rainbow turned back to the fighting fillies, "Hey Applebloom, what does Applejack charge for the reds?" She yelled.

"Two bits an apple!" Applebloom managed to bark back, struggling as Scootaloo gained leverage in their wrestling-match.

"Twenty-four bits then." Rainbow said, embarrassed at the spectacle Applebloom and Scootaloo were causing. The strawberry pony gave Rainbow Dash her money and trotted away with her apples. Rainbow sighed in relief, placing the gold coins in the money box behind the cart. Her expression turned sour as she turned to the fighting children, leaping over to them and pushing them apart. "OK! You two pip-squeaks knock it off!" she boomed loudly, Applebloom and Scootaloo both being brought to attention. "You're so lucky you didn't scare off that old lady. I gotta sell all these apples today or I won't be able to win my bet with Applejack, and you

two just sitting here fighting isn't helping me one little bit. Got it?" Scootaloo just sat there with a glum, guilty look. Applebloom was first to speak, looking up at Rainbow with huge, sorrowful amber eyes.

"We're sorry Rainbow Dash. We just wanted ta' help..." Rainbow could see a sliver of a tear forming in Applebloom's right eye.

"Yea...we're sorry..." Scootaloo added, kicking some dirt with a fore-hoof while looking to the ground. Rainbow couldn't help but feel swayed.

"Alright you little munchkins, apology accepted." Rainbow said kindly, rubbing her head against Applebloom's cheek in an attempt to cheer her up. "Now, you two ready to sell some apples!?" Rainbow jumped in place, trying to psyche up the mood once more. Both foals instantly leapt joyfully, waiting for Rainbow to give them their tasks.

It was a simple enough plan: Rainbow would take customer orders, Scootaloo would bag up the orders, passing them back to Rainbow and Applebloom would handle sales pitching. Rainbow thought this was a good setup, seeing as Applebloom already knew how Applejack usually ran her store. What she didn't count on was Applebloom's over-zealous attempts to get customers to buy apples. At first it seemed like a good thing, Applebloom was able to pressure a few undecided ponies into buying at least a dozen apples over the past hour. Admittedly Rainbow began to worry once she started sneaking apples into ponies' saddlebags and demanding payment, but sales didn't really drop. It was only until the incident with the vacuum cleaner that Rainbow forced Applebloom to switch places with Scootaloo. Thankfully Applebloom hadn't scared every single pony away, but she had caused several groups to flee in terror.

"Ah' said ah' was sorry..." Applebloom sighed, sitting on an empty box with a glum look.

"I know kiddo, but no dice...You're staying right here where I can keep an eye on you." Rainbow told Applebloom as she passed a bag of green apples to another customer. She tipped her hat, mimicking Applejack's inflection, "Ya'll come back now, Ya'hear?" She giggled to herself, this was actually really fun.

Business had begun to slow down for the afternoon and Applebloom wanted desperately to redeem herself. She watched as Scootaloo tried to draw in business with some apple juggling while singing about how tasty apples are. The juggling was stellar, but her song was less so. Still, she did manage to get one pony's attention. As Rainbow finished off her new sale the clock-tower tolled the arrival of one o'clock. Rainbow looked over the apple stall; they had nearly emptied every basket. "Hehyeahaa! We are doing good! Let's get more apples from the cart." Rainbow called to Applebloom, letting Scootaloo watch the stand. Applebloom followed in tow, saying nothing. After filling back up the stand for the next round of sales, Rainbow Dash called lunch. Both Rainbow and Scootaloo picked a golden delicious for their meal, while Applebloom picked a gala.

"How much money have we made?" Scootaloo inquired, chomping at her juicy treat.

"Mm, we've filled up almost the entire money chest. At this rate we might need a new container for all this loot." Rainbow Dash boasted on their success. Applebloom felt a little better, before the accident she had helped fill almost a fourth of the box alone. Suddenly, a thought shot through her mind.

"Hay Rainbow Dash, weren't ya supposed ta' be bringin' that delivery to Sugar-Cube Corner?" Applebloom said, pointing a hoof at the last basket of apples in the apple cart. Rainbow quickly drew her attention away from her apple, upset that she had forgotten Sugar-Cube Corner's order. The small tag attached to the basket indicated the delivery was due fifteen minutes ago.

"Pony-feathers! The delivery's late! Um..." Rainbow looked at the two fillies, trying to think of a plan. Her mind swiftly cooked one up, though it worried her to go this route. "I'm gonna have to run this over to Sugar-Cube. Do you two munchkins think you can handle the cart while I'm gone? I shouldn't be too long." Applebloom's face lit up at this idea, Scootaloo was already on her hooves with a salute.

"You can count on us Rainbow Dash! Don't be surprised if all the apples are sold before you get back!" Scootaloo assured Rainbow.

"...Ok then. You two keep out of trouble. I'll be back as soon as I can." Rainbow said as she dashed off in the direction of Sugar-Cube Corner, the two foals waving their hooves goodbye.

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The Ever-Free Forest was already unnatural and something that was generally feared by most ponies, but now it just looked down-right terrifying. Applejack hovered a quarter-mile from the forest's edge, mouth agape. Nearly the entire sky-line over Ever-Free was covered in raging, pitch black storm clouds. The wind they were producing caused the trees to bow and sway. Lightning cracked forth from the clouds numerous times as Applejack observed them. The mayor's words echoed in her mind, "*Some particularly nasty storm clouds...*"

"...Ah' think 'nasty' was a bit of an understatement." Applejack said to herself. This storm was violent, and to make matters worse chunks of it were beginning to break off into the Ponyville region. It happened after every other lightning strike: a sizable chunk of the main storm broke apart and began to drift away from Ever-Free. Applejack watched as one of the pieces shot lightning down onto the sun-bathed grass, singeing the plants and darkening the earth.

"Ain't gonna do much good sittin' here gawkin' at it." Applejack told herself as she grabbed the harness of her saddle-bags in her teeth, pulling it tight. The last thing she'd need is for them to fall loose in the weather. She glided closer to Ever-Free, thinking of the best way to dispatch the menacing storm. "*Ah' guess I can try just buckin' 'em apart like any other cloud.*" she thought to herself. She had seen Rainbow Dash perform the same kind of action in the past.

Applejack chose to practice on one of the smaller patches that had broken from the main storm. The small cloud was pouring rain and wasn't throwing lightning at the moment. Applejack flapped her wings hard, gaining speed for the assault. The grey cloud seemed to respond to this and started to quiver and groan with thunder, almost as if it knew something was threatening it. Applejack didn't back down though, swooping down and then straight up to the cloud's under-belly. With a quick spin and a kick, she threw her back hooves into the cloud. Unexpectedly, the cloud didn't break apart. Instead, all Applejack could feel was pain, the intense tingling of electricity surging through her back-legs and up to her spine. She could feel her hair stand on-end as the cloud's electrical barrage sent her plummeting to the ground. Thankfully Applejack managed to regain composure moments before collision, throwing open her wings and gliding back up to the nasty little cloud's level.

"Con-sarnit! Thought fer sure that was gonna work..." Applejack cursed her luck, realizing this might be a bit harder than intended. She took a moment to think, *"Well, maybe from the side instead?"* she mused.

Circling around once, Applejack made herself level with the cloud, lining up her assault. With an orange-blur she shot herself at it, fore-hooves pointed out for impact. The gloomy cumulus groaned in protest once more, Applejack bracing herself.

### ***KRACKA-BOOOM!***

Applejack collided with the cloud, but didn't break through it. Instead, it felt like she had just crashed into a pile of bean-bags. The lightning and thunder that shot forth from the cloud was ear-deafeningly loud, Applejack's attack being the catalyst for the storm-patch's explosive display. It only took Applejack a moment to realize this as she looked to the ground, observing a new patch of singed earth below her. A few residual flames flickered on the tips of the now blackened grass. She blushed with an embarrassed giggle, "Oopsie... Good thing no pony was 'round ta' see that."

Now Applejack was getting frustrated. She couldn't break the cloud from below because she'd get shocked, but she couldn't break it up from the side either unless she wanted to set the whole meadow on fire. She punched a fore-hoof into the cloud, not realizing her action as a smaller bolt of lightning launched out again. "Oh hush up you!" She scolded the cloud. Then, Applejack had one final inspired thought. *"Well, if ah' can't beat it from below or the side, might as well try the top."*

Applejack's wings beat heavily as she rose, watching her target shrink smaller and smaller. When she felt she was high enough, she folded her wings in tight and dive-bombed the storm cloud. This time the cloud didn't cause any commotion as Applejack made her assault. Before impact, Applejack flipped herself around and stretched one back-leg out in a karate-kick pose. A spike of air-current formed around her out-stretched limb as she collided with the cloud. In an instant the storm cloud was busted to vapor as Applejack slammed through it, small

arcs of electricity branching out in a dying breath. Applejack threw open her wings once more and glided to a stop, checking behind her.

"Aayup. Top attacks it is then!" Applejack told herself as another cluster of rogue-weather caught her attention. It only took Applejack a half an hour to corral and disperse the remaining broken and drifting parts of the storm. All that remained afterwards was the still growing mass over Ever-Free Forest. The storm's winds grew strong the closer Applejack approached, almost like a show of dominance. This only made Applejack more determined as she pushed her way up over the cloud cover.

As Applejack flew high over Ever-Free, she began to truly see just what she was up against. The storm was not only growing more dangerous, but it was down-right huge, covering almost the entire fore-front of the forest. Applejack took a moment to wipe some sweat from her brow, trying to decide how to handle this threat. "Ah' guess ah'll just tackle it like the others." She said to herself while lining up her first shot. Applejack dove at the storm cloud, this time keeping her fore-hooves to the front. She punched right through the top of the cumulus, ejecting out the bottom and leaving a large hole in the storm. Instantly she was buffeted with wind and rain, her mane getting soaked. A lightning strike shot through the air, just barely missing her. Applejack pulled up, aiming for her newly-made hole in the clouds and slipping through. She leveled out just in time to see her hole seal shut as more dark clouds filled the gap.

Applejack whinnied in anger, this was going to take a while. With much effort, Applejack continued to punch holes in the cloud-cover; each hole filled in with more clouds as the storm's size shrunk with each pass. Another half hour passed, and though Applejack had made some progress it wasn't much. Applejack was also growing concerned for her own well-being; every pass through the clouds was met with lightning and wind. She shuddered to think what might happen if she actually got struck by a lightning bolt. She had to think up a new way to deal with this bigger storm. Applejack tried to relax, her thoughts drifting. For some reason, her thoughts flew her back to the apple orchard again. All the apple trees filled with red fruit just waiting to be plucked. Then, her mind shifted to the fields, an image of Big Macintosh pulling his trusty plow through the soil. The metal tool cutting large swaths through the loam like a knife through cake. Applejack snapped back to reality, yelling aloud, "That's it!"

With no time to waste, Applejack flew up and positioned herself over the dead-center of the raging storm. "YEE-HAW!" She cried as she dive-bombed the storm once more. Only this time the orange pegasus didn't punch through it. Applejack had pulled herself parallel with the storm's surface right before impact, bracing her outstretched wing and jabbing it into the cumulus like a blade. The wing cut right through the stormy weather, leaving a large gash from where Applejack flew. With great speed, Applejack looped once in mid-air and struck the cloud again, running this new slice parallel to the one she had just made. She repeated this process several times, eventually shifting her attack so that her newest slices ran perpendicular to the old ones. Soon, the large storm had been cut into dozens of small squares, all separate from each other and easy prey for Applejack's kicks. With every burst block of nimbus, Applejack's

task grew easier and easier till there was only one left. The grey puff groaned and thundered in protest, but was no more menacing than an over-inflated marshmallow at this point.

Applejack didn't destroy it though. Instead, a thought crossed her mind regarding the thunder storm she was going to have to make for Ponyville. She looked up at the sun, judging by its position that it was nearly four o'clock. Her own thunderstorm was due in Ponyville soon.

"Hmm...Ah' wonder..." Applejack began to hatch a plan in her mind, thinking up a better use for this little rogue storm-cloud. She reached her mouth into her saddle bag and pulled out a length of rope. Quickly fashioning it into a lasso she spun it in the air and threw it over the grouchy nimbus.

"Ya'll are comin' with me lil feller. Ah got a plan for you." Applejack said to the protesting cloud as she dragged it away from Ever-Free. She flew in the direction of the Ponyville Lake, chuckling to herself at this brilliant plan.

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The brass bell above the entrance to Sugar-Cube Corner sang its song as the door opened underneath it. ***Dingle-ling-le-ling***. "Hellooo...Delivery here from Sweet Apple Acres." Rainbow Dash glanced around the store, spotting Mrs. Cake over by the register.

"Oh ho! Rainbow Dash. Sorry dearie, didn't quite recognize you with that cow-boy hat on." Mrs. Cake said with delight. "Is that our delivery of apples for the pies?" She didn't seem fazed by the fact Rainbow was making the delivery instead of Applejack.

"Um, Yea. Sorry I got here a bit late. I've been taking care of all Applejack's business today." Rainbow said with a smile.

"Oh of course of course, no need for apology. Truth be told, we've been running a little behind schedule today as it is. So really, you running late isn't a problem. Pinkie-Pie is in the kitchen, why don't you go drop the apples off with her and I'll get your money." Mrs. Cake motioned for Rainbow to head into the kitchen as she slipped into a back-room. Rainbow Dash took the offer and wandered behind the counters, heading for the archway between the store-front and kitchen. She stopped at the threshold, thinking a moment as a grin snuck over her face. Rainbow quietly stuck her head into the kitchen. Immediately she noticed her pink pony friend, her back turned toward the doorway as she rolled out pie dough. Rainbow snuck into the kitchen, being very careful not to make a peep. Pinkie Pie was humming to herself, her balloon-covered flank and cotton candy-like tail bouncing back and forth to the tune in her head. Rainbow was now right behind Pinkie, waiting for her to turn around. Pinkie was completely oblivious though and just continued her work. Rainbow Dash took a deep breath, blowing a puff of air in Pinkie's direction. Pinkie felt the breeze and stopped her humming, she turned her head around.

"BOO!" Rainbow said, her face just inches away from Pinkie's.

"WAhAaAaa!" Pinkie leapt in surprise, not expecting the sight of her prismatic friend.

The rolling-pin in her hooves went flying across the kitchen and clattered to the floor. Pinkie was breathing heavily, a hoof pressed against her chest. Rainbow was laughing intensely, nearly dropping her basket of apples she held on her back. Pinkie soon caught up with Dash, laughing along with her friend at her prank.

“Ahh-hahahahah! Good job sneaking up on me Dashie! Heheheh, you totally got me.” Pinkie giggled, giving Rainbow a friendly hug to keep her from falling over in laughter.

“Yea! Finally got a little pay-back for you scaring me in Appleloosa.” Rainbow chuckled to herself, giving Pinkie a hug back and letting go. “Oh man...the look on your face!” Pinkie smiled, her expression changing as she noticed Rainbow’s parcel.

“Ooo! Are those my apples?” Pinkie said excitedly as she hopped over to Rainbow’s side to grab the basket. “Mmm, they look delicious. Gonna to make the best pies ever!” Pinkie stopped, staring at Rainbow’s side and then to her face with confusion. It was then she also noticed Applejack’s hat. Dash knew what was coming next. “Rainbow Dash, where’s your wings?” Pinkie asked, bending down to get a closer look at Rainbow’s sides. She prodded her with a hoof out of curiosity.

“Pinkie, cut it out.” Rainbow said taking a step away from her.

“But there’s nothing there anymore! Did you lose them in a bet? One time my Pa lost his favorite bow-tie in bet. He was so sad.”

“No Pinkie, I didn’t lose a bet.” Rainbow stopped her ramble, “Quite the contrary, I’m hoping to win one. Applejack and I traded places for the day.”

“So...no more flying around?”

“Nope. At least, not for today.”

Pinkie regarded Rainbow, she looked like she was heavily contemplating something. Quickly her expression changed to a smile. “Aww that’s ok Dashie! There’s nothing wrong with being a little Earth Pony. Ooo! I know what will cheer you up, making Apple Pies!” Pinkie chuckled happily as she collected up the basket of apples and placed it on the counter-top. Dash smiled at her friend’s enthusiasm, but wasn’t sure about the whole ‘baking’ part.

“Uhh, but Pinkie, I’ve never baked anything before. Are you sure I won’t be more trouble than help?” Rainbow asked, Pinkie giggled again.

“No way José, you’ll be great help! Here take this.” Pinkie Pie passed Rainbow Dash the rolling pin. “You can roll out the dough for the pie shells. It’s super easy. I’ll cut up the apples and we’ll have Apple-dapple Pie in no time!” Rainbow couldn’t help but be swayed by the pink pony’s contagious enthusiasm and took the pin.

Pinkie certainly wasn’t lying that using the rolling pin was easy enough, but it didn’t help that Dash didn’t know a thing about baked goods. Her first lesson came when she completely ruined the first pie-shell because of it sticking to the pin and tearing. “Rule number one,” Pinkie told her as she glazed her sliced apples with cinnamon, “always flour your roller before use! ... I guess I should have told you that earlier...” Rainbow sighed, preparing another lump of dough for the roller. This time it didn’t stick, but the shape was too oblong and didn’t fit correctly over



the circular pie-pan. It took her three more tries to get the dough to be a nice circle. Pinkie hopped over to examine the shell. "That's it Dashie! Now you're getting the hang of it!"

Rainbow Dash kept at it, driven by Pinkie's words of praise. Eventually she had rolled out enough pie shells for ten pies. She watched as Pinkie-Pie poured the slurry of apples, sugar and cinnamon into each shell. Pinkie asked Dash if she would roll out one more layer of dough, to which she happily agreed. Rainbow became shocked however when Pinkie took a knife and began cutting up her dough upon completion.

"Hey! Pinkie, what are you doing? That was my best one yet..." Rainbow said with sadness in her voice.

"Oh, sorry, let me explain." Pinkie stopped her cutting, placing the knife in her mouth on the counter. "These pies are getting a special kind of cover. It's called a 'lattice' top." Pinkie carefully pulled a strip of dough off the counter with her hooves and laid it over top one of the filled pies. She performed this task over and over until a crisscross pattern covered the shell entirely. It made the pie look even more delectable. "See, this way ponies can see the filling inside even after its done baking. These pies always sell the best." Rainbow helped Pinkie with covering the remaining pies and prepping them for the oven. As the pies baked, the pair cleaned the kitchen and sampled some of the left-over filling. Soon the bakery was filled with the aroma of cinnamon and apples as the pies finished cooking.

"Mm, those smell heavenly Pinkie Pie." Dash complimented as Pinkie carefully pulled the pies from the oven, resting them on the counter to cool.

"Couldn't have made 'em this good without you Dash!" Pinkie returned a smile. Rainbow looked over her work, the pie's crust was baked just right and looked flaky and crisp. Just then, the ginger-bread house coo-coo clock within the bakery began to chime.

***COO-COO! COO-COO! COO-COO! COO-COO!***

"Wow, is it four already?" Rainbow declared aloud.

"Time likes to just fly away when you're spending it with friends. It just flies right on by...Whooosh!" Pinkie Pie agreed with Dash, making a motion with her hoof to imitate a flying object. Suddenly, two needling thoughts crossed Rainbow's mind. Four o'clock was when Applejack's thunderstorm was scheduled for Ponyville. This meant she had to get the apple stall broken down and under cover, but even more pressing than that...

"I left Applebloom and Scootaloo **ALONE** at the stand for a whole **three hours!**" Rainbow yelled out-loud in panic. Pinkie Pie hopped, startled at the sudden outburst.

"What's the big deal? It's not like the market isn't packed with other ponies. I'm sure they're safe." Pinkie said, shrugging.

"It's not them I'm worried about..." Rainbow stated, gathering up the empty apple basket and making for the exit. Pinkie Pie popped up in front of her, fore hoof outstretched to catch her. Rainbow wondered how Pinkie managed to move so quick without her noticing.

“Where do you think you’re going?” Pinkie said with a gruff expression. Rainbow was about to protest but Pinkie’s face quickly turned to a smile as she held up one of the pies she and Pinkie had made. It was wrapped up in plastic with a rainbow-striped ribbon. “You can’t leave without taking your present silly. This is for being such a good helper today.” Pinkie slipped the pie into Rainbow’s basket and stepped aside, much to Rainbow’s relief.

“Thank you Pinkie Pie. I wish I could stay longer but I have to go, I don’t have a lot of time.”

“Okie dokie Loki, bye Rainbow Dash!” Pinkie waved as Rainbow ran out the door of Sugar-Cube Corner, running as fast as she could back to the town market.