

The Secrets We Share

Chapter One

“Rarity, catch me!”

Those words, those stupid, foolish words echoed in Rarity's mind as she trudged through the burning desert, each step painful to her already blistering soles. The wind whistled in her ears, scouring her skin with coarse sand. The sun beat down, fierce and unyielding. Her coat was already encrusted with dirt and cactus shreddings, and the sunburn only added insult to injury. Her poor mane, once beautifully coiffed and curled, hung dead over her eyes, all life driven out by the heat. The unicorn rubbed her swollen tongue over her lips, though she was so parched that all she accomplished was more frustration.

And of course, throughout it all, that thrice damned pink mare would just not *shut up!* Endless chatter about this and that and only Celestia knew what else, because Rarity most certainly was doing her utmost to tune it out. Though how the Pinkie was able to spew out a never ending torrent of speech when they were both thirstier than they had ever been in their lives was beyond Rarity's comprehension. It was enough to make Rarity wonder if her friend had a camel's hump hidden amongst her pudgy frame.

“Oh, Pinkie Pie!” Rarity beat back a cough as she spoke. “What time do you suppose it is?” Truth was, Rarity didn't care much, but she was desperate for anything to stop Pinkie's flow of nattering nonsense.

Pinkie paused—*oh thank you, Celestia, for this blessed silence!*—and peered up at the sun, squinting a bit from the harsh light. “I dunno. Ten, maybe eleven? Oooh, or maybe it's ten thirty! I love ten thirty because that's when I get to play with the twins! Pound and Pumpkin are always so...”

Oh no you don't! Rarity burst out a groan. “Pinkie, we've been walking for hours and we still have seen anything but sand, rocks, and cacti!” She pursed her lips into a pout.

“Cactuses!”

Rarity fought the instinct to clap a hoof to her face. “It's cacti.”

Pinkie hopped over and bounced giddily in place. “But cactuses is more fun to say! Cactuses! Cactuseseseseseses...”

“Pinkie!” The pony in question shut her mouth at the harshness of Rarity's tone, which was just fine with Rarity. “You're missing the point.”

Pinkie shrugged. “And that is?”

“Oh for the sake of...we should have found something by now.”

Pinkie smirked. “Toldja we should've waited for Dashie and the others!” she sang.

Rarity grimaced as she recalled the events of just a few hours previous...

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The cart bustled about like a bucking bull. Rarity clung to the sides, lest she fall. The hooves of the stallions leading Applejack's wagon thundered so fiercely that Rarity couldn't understand a word Pinkie Pie said. At least until those three words were shouted.

Rarity barely managed to stammer Pinkie's name and shriek before the party pony smashed into her face, sending both of them tumbling out of the cart and onto the ground. The impact knocked the wind out of Rarity, preventing her from crying out over the cactus spines ripping through her skin. At least one piece of cactus ended up in her mouth.

After a moment to catch her breath, Rarity struggled to sit up and spat out the offending cacti pieces and glowered at Pinkie Pie. Pinkie actually had the audacity to grin at her!

Oh never mind her, what about the others? Rarity thought to herself. She scanned the horizon, spotting a cloud of dust in the distance. "No, please, wait!" she shouted, waving her foreleg desperately as if to try to wave them back, but the carts were already gone.

Rarity fell back onto her haunches. "They...they left us behind!"

"Whoopsies!" said Pinkie. "Guess we're stuck, huh?"

Rarity snorted in disgust. "It does appear we're in a bit of a bind, as it were. Oh, look at what this dirt is already doing to my mane!" The purple curls, normally so coiffed and immaculate, hung limply on her face.

"I dunno, the dirt feels just fine to me!" Pinkie said, falling over and rolling around in the sand with a giggle.

Rarity shook her head in disbelief. "I don't know *what* you were thinking, Pinkie, but I suppose there's no helping it. Come on!" With that, the unicorn stood and trotted off.

Pinkie zipped to her side with an almost unbelievable speed. "Wait, wait, where are we going?"

Rarity rolled her eyes. "Back to town, of course! We can't exactly sit out here in the dirt, after all."

The smile usually gracing Pinkie's face dwindled just a tad. "Rarity, we got all turned around like a million billion times! Do you even know where it is?"

Rarity let out a nervous titter. "Of course I do! It's...to the north! We went south out of town, so we head north."

"Oh." Pinkie raised an eyebrow. "Are you sure?"

Rarity grinned sheepishly. "Yes, absolutely! One hundred percent! Now...which way is north...oh yes, this way!"

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Rarity's eyes drilled like a laser into Pinkie's skull. "Yes, well, maybe if you hadn't confused me into heading south we wouldn't be lost!"

"What?" Pinkie shrunk back, her eyes losing just a little bit of that sparkling cheer. "But that's not—I thought you were heading the wrong way so I turned us around!"

Rarity grit her teeth. "No we weren't going the wrong way. *You* got us lost, not me!"

"Nuh-uh!" Pinkie blew a raspberry and giggled.

With a harrumph Rarity thrust her nose up and looked away, not about to let Pinkie Pie draw her into a childish bit of tomfoolery. In the process her eye caught sight of something in the distance...something shiny! "Pinkie, look, over there, to the west!"

"Ooh, lemme see, lemme see! What is it?" Pinkie gasped. "Oh gosh, is that what I think it is?"

For the first time since the awful day began, a smile crawled onto Rarity's lips. "Yes, I think so! A building...and train tracks! That means ponies...I hope."

"Thank goodness!" Pinkie glanced down at her belly and rubbed it. "I was getting hungry."

Rarity hauled herself up to her hooves. "Come on, then. We'd better hurry."

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Despite the pain of her hooves, Rarity found her new hope giving her the strength to trot at a quick pace. Pinkie kept up with no trouble at all, though she made one or two comments about her rumbling stomach. Both of them had missed breakfast after all. The pair of ponies walked for over an hour before they finally reached their destination, an hour that crushed Rarity's hope, since the building was abandoned.

The building, now that Rarity could see it clearly, was a gaunt shack constructed haphazardly from splintering planks made from Joshua tree wood. The shininess was a rusted metal sign barely hanging on by a thread above the door that read "Ralston Spur." One end of the train tracks laid in front of the shack, the rest trailing off into the distance past the horizon.

Okay, Rarity thought to herself, this isn't so bad. No pony's around but at least we can follow the tracks. Probably should check inside to see if there's anything we can use.

Pinkie, apparently unaffected by the obvious signs of no ponies, waltzed up to

the door and rapped hard with her skull. "Hello? Anypony home?"

Rarity placed a hoof on Pinkie's shoulder. "No one's been here for a while. Try the latch."

Pinkie jiggled the door handle once, then several more times when it refused to budge. "Aww, it's locked!"

Not for long it isn't. "One side, Pinkie. I'll have it open in a flash, as it were." Rarity moved up to the lock and activated her magic, surrounding the door handle in her aura. "Let's see...feel around a bit...yes, that should go here, then this clicks here and...got it!" The door creaked open with a click. "See?" said Rarity with a satisfied little grin. "No trouble."

Surprise danced over Pinkie's face. "Wow, Rarity! That was really neat! I've never seen a lock being picked...in fact I don't think even Twilight knows how to do that!" She narrowed her eyes. "Where'd you learn that?"

Sweat beaded on Rarity's brow. *Oh, drat...I don't want to tell her of all ponies about...him!* "Ah, well, you see...there's plenty of time to explain that later! We're a bit busy right now, aren't we?" She flashed Pinkie the most charming grin she could, given the circumstances.

Pinkie's eyes shrank a bit more. She cocked her head to one side, then the other. Then with a shrug she said "Okie dokie lokie!" and hopped inside the shack. "I hope they've got something yummy stashed away!"

Rarity followed her friend inside, and took in the sights. There wasn't much to see beyond a beat-up wooden desk half falling apart, a table near the center, and a couple of crates strewn about. Though fairly stifling thanks to the lack of decent ventilation, the shade was enough to make her feel a little bit more relaxed. For a while.

"Rarity!" Pinkie called. "Over here! I found something, I found something!"

Rarity glanced over in Pinkie's direction and gasped. "An icebox? Thank goodness! Don't just stand there, open it!" *Please have at least something edible...*

Pinkie cracked open the ceramic box, revealing a single glass jar of tepid water and two peculiar crimson fruits. Rarity snatched up one of the fruits with her magic before Pinkie's appetite caused the earth pony to scarf them both. "What is this?" she asked, cautiously sniffing the fruit.

"Prickly pear!" Pinkie answered past a mouthful of fruit. She smacked and chewed far too loudly, causing Rarity to wrinkle her nose in disgust.

"You've seen these before, then?"

"Uh-huh!" Pinkie swallowed and patted her belly. "They grow on a kind of cactus. Sometimes one of the fruit stands in Ponyville'll have some. They're really tasty, but not too good in cakes or muffins. Ooh, maybe when we get home I should buy some more and try them in turnovers. Or maybe even scones!"

Shrugging, Rarity sampled the pear. *Hmm...bit tart, but it's actually not that bad.*

Hunger compelled her to finish the pear in one bite, though her parched throat caused her to cough a few times.

"Here, have some water!" said Pinkie, hefting the jar between her forelegs.

Rarity shook her head. "No, no, Pinkie, I *insist* you have the first drink." *Why did I say that? I'm going to regret this.*

Pinkie frowned. "You sure?"

"Yes, go right ahead." *Oh damn me and my generous nature...*

"Okay!" Pinkie took the jar and flipped it over into her mouth, gulping away like she was drinking straight from a garden hose.

Rarity's mouth fell open. "Pinkie, at least leave some for me!"

The jar slipped out of Pinkie's grasp. Only swift action with magic prevented the jar from shattering on the floor and spilling its contents. Rarity checked the jar: barely a quarter of the liquid remained. She fired off an indignant glare.

Pinkie grinned sheepishly. "Whoopsies?"

"Stupid Pinkie, never thinks anything through," Rarity grumbled under her breath, though she fought off her instinct to grind her teeth. Contenting herself with a few more daggers thrown with her eyes, the dressmaker daintily dipped the jar into her mouth. Though stale, warm, and tainted by Pinkie's spittle, the water nevertheless eased her thirst.

"I don't suppose," said Rarity after draining the last drop, "there's any more water hiding in the icebox?"

Pinkie shoved her head inside. "Nope!"

Rarity sighed. "Of course not."

"Found this though!" Pinkie jerked her head back, tossing over a cloth saddlebag.

Though it was clearly empty, Rarity rifled through it anyway on the off chance something may have been hiding inside. "Guess we can at least take this with us to carry the jar." At Pinkie's questioning glance, she added, "In case we run across water somewhere else."

"Ooooooh!" Pinkie clopped her hooves together. "Good thinking!"

Yes, more than you're willing to do, Rarity thought. "Ahem. Pinkie, could you help me see if we can find a map or something, to help us figure out where we are?"

Pinkie chortled. "Yes ma'am!" Popping off a quick salute, she made her way to the closest crate to search.

For her part, Rarity stuck to checking the drawers of the desk. She found several papers, most of them worthless work orders, receipts, or other trash. One, though, caught her eye. "Pinkie, did you find anything?"

"No," answered Pinkie. "Did you?"

"I believe so." Rarity scanned the paper. "I found a document that shows a single hoofcart purchased for this shack. It was stored outside." Her brow furrowed. "Though

I'm not sure what good a cart will be."

"A hoofcart? That's a great thing to have, silly!" Pinkie chided with that little giggle in her voice that always felt condescending to Rarity. "We can zip along the train tracks faster than you can say lickety split!"

Rarity swallowed the retort she wanted to spout and instead replied, "Oh, is that so? Please lead the way then, Pinkie."

With the saddlebag strapped to her back, Rarity followed Pinkie out and around the back to a two-pony hoofcart hidden underneath a tarpaulin. Though a bit rusty, it appeared to be in excellent condition, ready for the rails.

"Oh, this kind of cart!" Rarity said. *I can be foolish at times*. She rubbed her chin with one hoof. "But how are we going to get it onto the tracks? Surely it's too heavy."

Pinkie chortled. "Nah, it'll be easy. They're made for easy lifting. C'mon, take this side over here and I'll get this side."

It took them a good ten minutes, and more than a couple slips of the cart and banging of body parts, but they managed to get the cart secured on the tracks. "There!" Pinkie announced, gasping for breath. "Piece of cake!"

Rarity, who'd smacked her horn against the side of the cart more than once and developed a splitting headache as a result didn't agree, but wasn't about to argue. "Okay," she said after catching her breath. "How do we use it?"

Pinkie beamed. "Oh that's super duper easy. Hop on!"

Rarity climbed onto the cart and peered at the unfamiliar controls. "See this big thing here," said Pinkie, gesturing to the double-sided lever at the center, "is the controller thingie. We push it down, back and forth, kinda like a teeter totter, to move the cart."

Rarity examined the lever closely. "It's not too heavy, I hope?"

"Nope! Get a steady rhythm goin' and it'll be easy as pie." Pinkie held up a hoof. "But there's a trick to it. See this here?" She gestured to a smaller lever at the base of the center pedestal, where it nestled in a base labeled with three vertical red lines, one in the center and two on opposite sides at forty-five degree angles.

"Hmm...does that control which way the cart moves?" Rarity inquired.

"Uh-huh! Gotta make sure it's pointed the way you want, cause when it's straight up the cart can't move."

Seems straight forward, but... Rarity pointed to another lever along the side of the cart, near the wheel base. "What about this one?"

For some reason Rarity couldn't discern, Pinkie winced. "Oh, that's...that's the emergency brake. It's really important because sometimes the cart might be moving too fast and you gotta slow it down in a hurry."

Why did she wince? Deciding to satisfy her curiosity, Rarity asked, "Pinkie, how is it you know so much about hoofcarts?"

Pinkie remained quiet for several moments, her usual peppiness deflating like air slowly let out of a balloon. "It...I...we had them on the rock farm!" Though her voice bubbled with effervescent cheer as usual, it sounded forced.

"...I see."

Silence reigned, choking and cloying. Then all of a sudden, Pinkie smiled and said, "But we don't need to worry about that!" and the pall faded as swiftly as it had arrived. "We should get moving. No idea how far to the next town, right?"

Rarity nodded, though she grimaced as even that slight movement sent a new pulse of pain through her already aching head. "Yes, of course." She set her forehooves on the control lever.

Pinkie switched the gear lever to forward, and they cranked the control lever together. Back and forth, back and forth, though thanks to her headache Rarity struggled to maintain a steady rhythm. "Oof, this is difficult," she muttered.

Pinkie gasped. "You're right! How about something to help us focus? I could sing a song, or—"

"No!" Rarity cringed at her own volume. She lowered her voice to add, "No, no singing please."

"Hmm...I know! You can help me pick which name is better for my new dessert! Chimicherry, or cherrychonga?" Pinkie's smile at this prospect nearly split her muzzle in half.

"But...Pinkie please, I would rather we just..." But it was too late. Rarity's protests fell on deaf ears as the baker began her chant.

"Chimicherry, cherrychonga?" Creak, push.

"Chimicherry, cherrychonga?" Creak, push.

Back and forth, again and again. Her headache increasing by the minute, Rarity began swearing vengeance against ponies under her breath.

"Chimicherry, cherrychonga?" Creak, push.

"Applejack, you're going to pay for making us chase you so far from home..."

"Chimicherry, cherrychonga?" Creak, push.

"Rainbow Dash...oooh when I get home you are going to *get* it, Rainbow Dash!"

"Chimicherry, cherrychonga?" Creak, push.

"Maybe Fluttershy too, because I just know she cooperated with Rainbow Dash!"

"Chimicherry, cherrychonga?" Creak, push.

"Twilight Sparkle, you could've made Rainbow Dash turn around but you didn't!"

"Chimicherry, cherrychong—"

"**ENOUGH!**" Rarity screeched.

Pinkie shrunk back as though she'd been physically struck. "Rarity, w-what—"

"No! I have had *enough* of this!" Rarity hadn't meant to let her temper escape, but once unleashed it washed forth like a roiling blast of steam and rage that couldn't be

stopped. "I have been walking across this desert all day, wilting in the heat like a...like a bouquet of flowers from an unwanted suitor!"

Rarity locked her eyes onto Pinkie's, refusing to let the party pony look away. "Do you know what I could be doing right now? I could be at home, sewing a dress, or maybe a fine suit. Maybe even enjoying a good book with a glass of Merlot. But no! Instead I'm stuck in the desert with a stupid idiot who doesn't know when to shut up when I have a hornache the size of Celestia's throne! And believe you me, Pinkie, for a unicorn hornaches *hurt!*"

Pinkie's mouth trembled. "I'm...I'm not stupid!" she protested weakly.

Rarity sneered. "Oh yes you are, and don't you even try to deny it. You wanted to wait for Rainbow Dash when she clearly was going to leave us to rot! Hah! Some Element of Loyalty she is!"

"But Dashie wouldn't leave us behind!" Pinkie retorted, her sad features contorting into anger of her own.

"Oh please, don't give me that rubbish. Besides, we wouldn't even be in this mess if it weren't for you and your ridiculous Pinkie Promises!"

Pinkie's eyes narrowed to mere slits. "Excuse me?" she growled, her tone dangerous and threatening.

But Rarity didn't care. She was unleashing a year and a half's worth of frustration now, barreling forward like a freight train. "You heard me! Your Pinkie Promises are worthless! All they do is get us into trouble! So what if Applejack didn't come to breakfast? We could've been smart. She would've just hopped on the train, and we could have too. Once on the train she wouldn't have had anywhere to run. But no, because *you* lose it over the slightest provocation, you had us chase her in a wagon instead. And now we're probably going to die out here in the desert because of you and the stupid promise! No one cares about Pinkie Promises! They're not important!"

"*SHUT UP!*" Pinkie reeled back, and for a moment Rarity was afraid the baker might actually strike her. But instead, Pinkie, trembling with rage, set her hoof back down on the control lever and began her own rant. "You think Pinkie Promises are stupid? You don't know anything, Rarity! You're too obsessed with your image! You spend all your time making fun of anypony and everypony that aren't high class like you! You keep sticking your nose up in the air like you think you're better than everypony else! Well you're not! You're just...just an arrogant jerk!"

"How dare you?!" Rarity barely fought back her own desire to unleash violence. "Me? Laughing at everypony I meet? From the "premiere party pony" herself? Oh that's rich, Pinkie! You have no idea how much I go through each day to maintain my image. I'm actually rising in status, unlike you! You're too happy spinning your wheels playing pointless party games while I? At least I have ambition!"

"Yeah, ambition to be a stuck-up meanie pants witch!" Pinkie then did something

that left Rarity dumbstruck: she spit in Rarity's face. The spittle trailed down the front of Rarity's muzzle almost like a tear.

As soon as she realized what she'd just done, Pinkie gasped in horror. "Oh, gosh, Rarity, I didn't mean to—"

Rarity held up a hoof, her rage having transitioned into a much calmer, but much deeper anger. "No. Not one more word from your mouth, do you hear me?" She shook her head. "We travel in silence. And when we get home, you can consider our friendship over. *Permanently!*"