

WITH A HEAVY HEART

(The Ocean Between You and Me...)

Chapter VIII

"You're wasting my time, Pinkie."

A lot of ponies tell me this.

I don't think they mean for it to be as mean as it comes across, but the feelings are still there.

For a time, I just endured this. Somehow, it didn't hurt much when said by ponies I didn't really know.

Then, my friends started saying it.

It hurt.

Did they not trust me? Did they not believe in me?

Did they not love me for who I am?

If I stopped acting as I did, I'd no longer be Pinkie Pie. I'd no longer be the pony you continue to hurt for being who she is.

Do you know what's worst about it?

My friends; Rarity, Fluttershy, Rainbow Dash, Applejack, Twilight Sparkle, they haven't even noticed that they're hurting me.

Is it because my feelings are so unimportant to them?

I thought they might've noticed, and tried to help, but seemingly, the magic of friendship isn't really as strong as it once appeared to be.

~~Mrs Cake~~ Cup Cake, don't for a second believe that this is your fault, because, if you do, you couldn't be further from the truth.

Your company has been the best thing that's ever happened to me, and you're the reason I've been here as long as I have.

Without you, I wouldn't have lasted as long as I've done so.

But, despite that, this is goodbye.

Even though I always feel your love, it's no longer enough to counter a life in a town that seems to think my time is worth nothing.

If I'm gone, then I'll no longer be able to waste everypony's time.

Don't bother to tell ~~my friends~~ the others about this.

I wouldn't want to waste their time.

-Pinkie

Twilight stared at the letter for what could've been hours. However, she'd not read a word on the letter for ages, she was staring into it, past the words, to try and find what Pinkie really meant...

Twilight knew Pinkie, she was her friend. Surely the Pinkie she knew wouldn't have done... 'that'...

But Twilight began to wonder, staring into the paper, whether the Pinkie Pie she'd known was Pinkie Pie at all...

It wasn't just the not knowing that Pinkie had been hurting that upset Twilight, it was the fact that she had been hurting because of her friends, *and they hadn't even noticed.*

That, and the friendliest pony she'd ever met; Pinkie Pie, was telling her that 'the magic of friendship wasn't as strong as it once appeared to be.'

Finally, Twilight looked up, from the crumpled, tear smeared words she'd been reading, and upon doing so, realised that she was no longer standing firm like she'd been when she began reading, but collapsed on the floor, curled up in front of Mrs Cake. She could hear Applejack's heavy breathing from beside her, no doubt caused by Pinkie's words.

Twilight sighed, unhappily. It may well have heightened the awkwardness of Sugarcube Corner's silence, but Twilight wasn't really fussed. Although she didn't know the scientific basis behind it, she knew that a sigh could normally alleviate any of her grief.

She'd hoped that this would've been true in this situation too, but, her efforts seemed in vain.

In fact, to Twilight, it seemed that the thought of a sigh dealing with such important, sensitive things such as Pinkie's disappearance made the bitter sinking sensation within her a thousand-fold worse.

Twilight looked across to Mrs Cake, through her slowly clouding eyes, to meet with already cloud-burst ones. Even though the movement of eyes should only take a tiny amount of effort; to Twilight, it felt as if she'd never performed a task more arduous: to meet Mrs Cake's eye's in honesty.

"Mrs Cake..."

Mrs Cake looked on to Twilight, saying nothing, her forlorn expression speaking in place of words, tears dropping down in place of tone.

Twilight rifled through her own brain, searching for the perfect words to say – How do you avoid upsetting somepony in this situation?

Unable to think, Twilight looked away from Mrs Cake, to Applejack, for support. Yet, even the dependable, honest pony Applejack was unable to reassure Twilight; her eyes were glazed over, fazed out, staring at the floor. Joining Applejack, regaining her gaze down at the floor, Twilight resigned herself to the fact that in the time she needed to, she'd never be able to truly find words that wouldn't hurt, and so, Twilight decided to speak her mind. Raw, yet still tentatively.

"I didn't realise Pinkie Pie felt this way..." Twilight gulped, she knew what she was saying was probably incredibly cliché, and far from eloquent. Holding back tears, Twilight continued, "But if she did, why didn't she say so?"

Twilight still looked to the floor, somewhat guiltily, away from Mrs Cake. Even so, she still heard her sigh, tinged with sadness, but overwhelmed with what sounded like disappointment

"Pinkie always told me you were the clever one, Twilight Sparkle."

Upon mention of her name, Twilight looked back up, reflexively, towards Mrs Cake. She was no longer tear stricken, but her eyes were dulled, her snout pulled back, ever so slightly, in a look of disappointment. Perhaps even anger.

"However, I'm beginning to seriously doubt what she said."

Twilight answered in silence, fearing that what she'd said had worsened the situation.

"If you really were smart, Twilight, you'd have noticed that Pinkie Pie really hasn't been that 'Pinkie' for a long while now..."

Unable to find speech once again, Twilight was relieved to be rescued by a choice few words of Applejack's southern drawl, even if they did sound slightly wavering.

"But Mrs Cake, Pinkie was happy. Wasn't she?"

Once again, Mrs Cake sighed, remorsefully.

"That's just it, isn't it?"

Twilight and Applejack's confused expressions must have made their thoughts clear to Cup Cake, as she continued on, explaining further.

“To you, and everypony around her, Pinkie Pie was the ‘happy pony,’ wasn’t she? This was good, for Pinkie. She could spend her days spreading the happiness she loved to surround herself, and then when she had an ‘off’ day, she felt no guilt in taking time away, to rest. She felt no guilt in being unhappy, when she had to be.”

Mrs Cake looked on, seemingly nostalgic, to Twilight’s perceptions, towards the window, into the distance.

“However, after the Summer Sun Celebration, after she gained the element of Laughter, after she met you, Twilight, she started feeling guilt.”

Twilight’s stomach sank, further than it’d already sunk, with the horrible realisation of what was going to come next.

“After she had her element bestowed to her, spreading laughter and happiness were no longer just an enjoyment. To Pinkie, she felt that it was her duty to do so. This was fine, for a time, but then I realised that she was having less and less unhappy days. To begin with, I thought this was good, I thought she was just becoming an even happier pony than she already was. It was when the off days became so scarce that they petered away into nothing; that I started to worry.”

Mrs Cake’s nostalgic look had left her face, once again to be replaced by the grief stricken look she’d worn earlier, tears once more tumbling to the ground, sobs beginning to punctuate her speech.

“When I confronted her, Pinkie said that I should stop being so silly. She shouldn’t question what her element bestowed upon her. If she could’ve done, Twilight would’ve said so. After all, Twilight was not only one of the smartest ponies in Ponyville, but one of her very best friends...”

Although it may not have been so, but to Twilight, it seemed as though within her upset, Mrs Cake had delivered the last few words with venom.

Even if she didn’t mean to say her words like that, they still took their toll on Twilight, seeping deep into her, as she realised how devastating her negligence had been to Pinkie.

She’d been suffering, yet she was too worried to tell anypony.

After all, Pinkie Pie, the party loving pink pony, the spirit of the element of laughter, wanted anything but to bring about unhappiness...

All Twilight would’ve had to do was say a few words, and then Pinkie Pie would never have gone...

Gulping down, forgetting the delicacy of the situation and remembering the urgency, Twilight began to speak quickly, her organisational skills coming

into play.

“Mrs Cake, we need to find Pinkie Pie. Before she does anything...” Twilight paused for a moment, searching for the right word. “Silly... Where would she go when she was feeling ‘off?’”

Mrs Cake sighed, again.

“Twilight, if you really were Pinkie’s friend, you’d-“

Twilight butted in, still headstrong from her sense of urgency.

“If you really want to, we can discuss to what lengths my friendship with Pinkie extends to, but right now, if you really cared, you’d help me *find her*.”

Twilight looked dead into Mrs Cake’s eyes, unwavering.

For the first time in a while, Sugarcube Corner felt a bit happier, warmed by the faintest of smiles. Even if Cup Cake was still looking down to the floor, tears still seeping out, it was still there.

“On the days when Pinkie wasn’t feeling so ‘Pinkie,’ she used to climb the mountain trail above Ponyville.” Cup Cake’s smile tinged with sadness again, “If she hasn’t left completely, she’ll be there, I’m sure of it.”

Twilight began to pour concentration into her horn, focusing on Pinkie’s supposed location, yet she still had concentration for a few choice words.

“Thank you.”

“All I did was tell you where she was, Twilight Sparkle.”

Twilight shook her head, smiling happily.

“No, thank you for believing in the magic of friendship again...”

Just before Twilight blinked away, she caught the glimpse of one of the happiest, teary eyed faces she’d ever seen...

Applejack jumped, gasping suddenly.

Even though she’d gotten mostly used to Twilight’s magic, whenever she disappeared like that, well, it just didn’t seem natural.

Applejack turned away from Mrs Cake, slowly trotting towards the door, but feeling guilt with every hoofstep. How could they just not notice Pinkie’s unhappiness?

As she reached the doorway, Applejack faltered, hoof waiting in the air

to push at the door. As much as she wanted to just leave the resonating tension of Sugarcube Corner, she knew that she ought to say something before she did so, just to try and patch things up.

Looking over her shoulder, glancing towards Mrs Cake, Applejack spoke, huskily, tentatively.

“Mrs Cake, we’ll find Pinkie Pie.”

Applejack tried desperately to convey her voice in its normal, reassuring affirmative manner, but it just wouldn’t come through. In the end, she settled once again for tentative huskiness.

“We’re her friends, after all.”

Not wanting to let the melancholy linger, and wanting to leave on an optimistic note, Applejack finally outstretched her forehoof, nudging the door forward, emptying her lungs of the bitterly sickly sweet air, and breathing deeply, replacing it with the cold fresh air of outside.

As the door behind her slammed shut, sending a light breeze through Applejack’s Stetson topped mane, she began to slowly trot, absentmindedly, deep within thought, in no particular direction.

However, Applejack knew she wasn’t going anywhere in particular; it was a conscious decision to just wander around, as what was a pony supposed to do on receiving such news?

Applejack’s mouth moved to form an ‘o,’ as she realised what she had to do, and where she had to go. She had to let Pinkie Pie’s other friends know what was happening.

Fluttershy and Rarity were away, far out of town, which left Applejack with one main choice. She had to go and see Rainbow Dash.

Regaining control over her hooves’ direction, Applejack pointed herself at the floating mass of clouds and rainbows at the edge of Ponyville, and trotted on.

Absentmindedly staring at Dash’s cloud-house, trudging onwards, Applejack’s mind became overcome with worry, not just as Pinkie’s words sank in, more and more so, but also over the prospect of meeting Dash. Not because of the relationship between them, Applejack wasn’t a stupid pony, she knew there were more important things to confront than the growing distance between them, but even so, Applejack couldn’t help but let constant worries about what Dash was actually thinking about her.

Applejack knew that Dash wasn’t at all the most emotionally mature pony, and so, she knew that Dash would probably react somewhat badly to Pinkie’s letter. Load that on top of how Dash was reacting over the relationship between herself and Applejack, and well...

In truth, not even Applejack, the pony who was pretty much closest to Dash, the pony who’d stayed up on stormy nights, listening to Dash, listening

to her every thought, could know how she would react.

Despite her not knowing, Applejack liked that about their relationship, the idea that Dash didn't hide anything from her, she trusted in Applejack enough to confide in her all of her secrets, however, she still felt the need to tell Applejack all the little things too. The tiny, inconsequential things that amount to nothing. No thought was deemed too small, nor too pointless to tell her.

However, despite Applejack's happiness that she could be there for Dash, and to listen to her, this was also, unfortunately one of the things that made Applejack begin to question the relationship between them.

It was the way Dash told her these things. Always in secret, during nights, reminiscent of their first night spent together.

Why couldn't they meet during the day? What was wrong with meeting how ponies in a relationship normally would?

But, the meeting places weren't the only problem for Applejack.

The way these thoughts were told to her; they felt cold.

Cold, passed on thoughtlessly, dumped onto Applejack. Not once had Dash ever asked if Applejack was okay, or if there was anything *she* wanted to talk about.

Sure, Applejack knew Dash was loyal. She was the most loyal pony Applejack had ever known. She would always come to see Applejack, if she called for her, without hesitation, and despite Dash's lack of asking after Applejack, would always tell her that she loved her.

Until now, that was true.

Now, Applejack felt Dash's loyalty wavering, unhinging with her far from mature emotions.

Applejack didn't doubt Dash's loyalty one bit, however.

She just suspected that Dash's loyalty was beginning to shift to somepony else.

As Applejack reached the base of Dash's cloud-house, she scuffed the ground with her hooves, kicking up dust, trying to delay what she knew was going to be a difficult conversation.

She would've liked to think otherwise, but with the element of honesty within her, Applejack found it hard to even lie to herself.

With her still wavering southern accent, Applejack began to call out...

"Dash, I need to talk to you."

As much as she'd been building it up to look bad, Applejack was still very much looking forward to speaking with Dash.

Sounding more eager than stern, Applejack yelled, loudly.

“Dash, haul yer flank out here RIGHT NOW!”

Rainbow Dash smiled, sadly.

She knew Applejack *was* going to turn up at her house, sooner rather than later, but even so; she still couldn't think of anything that she could say which would help her out of her predicament.

She *had* contemplated flying off. To fly off and not talk to Applejack at all.

But Rainbow Dash wasn't that stupid. She may have been stupid enough to drop herself into the mess she'd gotten herself into, but she wasn't about to abandon all of her friends over something like this.

She was the spirit of the element of loyalty, after all.

Rainbow Dash trotted towards her door, and, in the presence of Applejack, the only pony who could *really* make her feel uneasy; sheepishly poked her head out, nervously grinning.

“Hey, Applejack.”

Rainbow Dash sighed; she could see the look on Applejack's face, her serious, determined look, and with that, she knew that it was pointless to resist Applejack. Of course, that wouldn't stop Rainbow Dash from trying.

“I said git down here *now*, Dash.”

Rainbow Dash still stayed behind her door, head poking out.

However, instead of dancing about the issue, she decided to come out and just be truthful; she felt as if too many lies had passed between the two of them.

Well, Rainbow Dash wanted to think that they were between the two of them, but really, they were just her own lies.

She spoke, subdued.

“I... Don't know if I'm quite ready for this talk yet, Applejack...”

As embarrassed as Rainbow Dash was about actually admitting such a thing, she still looked down to Applejack, continuing to meet her gaze. It was as if they were together on one of their nights; she just didn't mind Applejack being there, and knowing more than Rainbow Dash might ever let on to just *anypony*.

“Quite rightly, Sugarcube, I don't think I'm all that ready for ‘that’ talk mahself, either...” Applejack's voice was no longer as harsh. It'd calmed, somewhat, softened. This was the voice that Rainbow Dash was used to, on

cold, dark nights. This was the voice that Rainbow Dash especially *loved*. “But I’m not here for ‘that’ talk.”

Rainbow Dash arched an eyebrow, questioning.

“Ah need to talk to you about something else, Dash.”

Rainbow Dash was still somewhat confused, what could Applejack want to talk about that was more important than their *relations*?

Even *without* her somewhat egotistical tendencies, Rainbow Dash struggled to see what could possibly need to be more imminently addressed than that.

However, she didn’t complain; it gave her more time to think of what she could actually say to Applejack that wouldn’t ruin *everything*.

Yet, the fact that she didn’t know what to say wasn’t the only reason that Rainbow Dash was stalling. It was also that she’d never really stopped to think about what she was going to say before.

Yet now? It seemed like she was doing so all the time; especially with Applejack.

Slowly, spreading her wings, Rainbow Dash descended from her cloud-house, not flying down, but floating down.

“What?”

Rainbow Dash touched down in front of Applejack, face to face, trying to still seem confident by still meeting her eyes.

“Ah ain’t gonna beat around the bush, Dash. This is something you need to know, sooner rather than later.”

Even though Rainbow Dash knew that they *weren’t* talking about the relationship between the two of them, she still couldn’t help but let her mind run away, applying everything Applejack was saying to the two of them, regardless.

Rainbow Dash heard Applejack inhale, loudly, and then begin to speak, in a pained, upset tone.

“It’s Pinkie Pie; she’s...”

Applejack silenced for a moment, her look turning thoughtful.

“*Gone.*”

Rainbow Dash blinked, confused.

“Gone?”

For what felt like the thousandth time in the day, Rainbow Dash didn't actually know what to say.

Pinkie Pie, gone? Why would she leave? Why would she leave without saying goodbye?

Was she not important enough to Pinkie Pie to at least tell her she was going?

Perhaps she wasn't gone, Rainbow Dash supposed, but she'd merely gone away, for a day or two. That was what she wanted to believe. However, from the look she'd got from Applejack; the concerned, serious, matter-of-fact look, Rainbow Dash was sure that that wasn't the case.

Still, that didn't stop Rainbow Dash from hoping. Hoping that Pinkie Pie had, in fact, gone away, on an unplanned holiday, just for fun; anything but just 'gone.'

After all, Pinkie Pie did unplanned things like that, didn't she?

"Gone *where*?"

Again, Rainbow Dash heard Applejack sigh, unhappily, whilst scuffing her hooves against the ground, looking down.

"We don't really know, for sure."

Rainbow Dash felt her insides turn over, her worst fears seemingly confirmed.

"Twilight's gone to look for her, where Mrs Cake thought she could be."

Rainbow Dash suddenly felt a tiny bit better, her ears pricking up at Applejack's words of possible redemption.

Rainbow Dash began to speak quickly, suddenly eager.

"Where? Where did Twilight go?"

Applejack turned around, looking towards the mountain beyond Ponyville, away from Dash.

She wanted to draw out this moment, even if it was just for a few seconds more, because, Applejack knew, as soon as she told Dash where Pinkie's supposed location was, she'd be gone.

Applejack didn't blame her for this; she knew that Dash was loyal, and that even the few seconds Applejack was keeping her from Pinkie were probably tearing her apart.

Even so, Applejack still wanted Dash close to her; after all, she was hurting too.

"She's gone to the mountain trail, the one above Ponyville."

Pretty much as soon as the final word had left Applejack's tongue; she heard the predictable sound of wings flapping, frantically, quickly, and then, as Dash shot past her, she felt wind shoot along with her, washing through her hair. Her Stetson trembled in the wind, unsteady.

She couldn't fault Dash for having wings, after all, without them; she wouldn't be the Dash that Applejack knew.

Sometimes, she just wished Dash would slow down a bit, to wait. Perhaps even to think.

Applejack sighed, sadly. She didn't normally mind being left behind by her friends; she was proud to be an earth pony.

But right now, there was nothing more that Applejack wanted then to be up to speed, with them.

As the final gust formed by Dash's flight whipped past Applejack, it loosened the Stetson's trembling perch, stealing it away, flying gracefully in the wind, sweeping down to the ground.

Falling.