Chapter 5

This was it. Today was probably the most important day in Fluttershy's life. So far it had been everything it could have been and more. Dash had somehow managed to score seats in the most exclusive restaurant in Ponyville. For the life of her Fluttershy couldn't remember its name, though she was having such a wonderful time it hardly mattered to her.

"So how're you liking the food?" Dash asked half-heartedly. Dash stared at her supposed meal before her, resting her head on one hoof. She nudged the small portions around, as if trying to stretch out the meal as long as possible.

"Oh, I think it's wonderful," Fluttershy said, glancing around the room, wondering where the next part of their meal was.

"That's great! I knew you would like this place." Dash beamed, relieved to brag at least a little bit.

"I know these kinds of things are not really your style. Dash," Fluttershy sighed, like a weight had been lifted from her shoulders. "Thank you. For everything, I couldn't have asked for a better birthday."

"Don't mention it Shy," Dash smiled, "it's the least I could... "

"Ehem," the waiter said, interrupting Dash. "What might I get the two of you for the next course?"

"Oh, right. Second course. Let's see." Dash dived back into the menu, trying to find something that wasn't too foreign nor skimpy. That, she had realized half an hour ago, excluded most of the menu, but she was hoping that it was just a case of something slipping out of sight.

Fluttershy was about to follow suitewhen something caught her eye. A couple at a nearby booth seemed to be talking about something. What was odd was that they were doing it while staring straight at Rainbow Dash and Fluttershy. She couldn't hear what they were saying, but based on their faces, Fluttershy suspected that it wasn't anything nice. She turned back to her menu, glancing over the items to try and push the couple out of her mind.

Nothing seemed to stick out to Fluttershy, and she turned to ask the waiter to give her some more time-only to find him gone. A new plate of food lay in front of her, but she couldn't

remember seeing it on the menu. She smiled as she realized that it was one of her favorite salads. A mixture of lettuce and tomatoes, topped with daisies and a smooth cream sauce.

“Hope you don’t mind,” said Dash nervously. “You were taking a while to order, so I ordered something for you.”

“No, it’s all right.” Fluttershy shook her head. She gave Dash a soft smile before digging into the salad, happily munching away. It would have been a better moment if a noise hadn’t drawn Fluttershy’s attention. The pegasus turned, her eyes falling upon another group of ponies in a nearby corner booth. Yet again they seemed to be silently discussing something, their eyes filled with scorn.

Fluttershy tried to force down her fear and return to her meal. She was with Rainbow Dash after all; what did she have to be concerned about? Even so she could still feel their eyes bearing down upon her. Dash was fully occupied with stuffing her face with food, completely unaware of anypony else. The whispers and glares of the other patrons continued despite Dash’s obliviousness and Fluttershy’s attempted ignorance.

Why were they doing this? Fluttershy thought, trying to focus solely on her date. *What have I done to earn their hate?*

“You should know,” a familiar voice spoke.

Fluttershy and Dash turned to see Pinkie Pie sitting at the edge of their table. The usually happy pink pony held no cheer in her eyes, only anger. Her mane and tail were flat as glass, and her vibrant colors were darker.

“Pinkie? What are you doing here?” Dash asked.

“No, the better question is what are you doing here?” Pinkie rounded on Dash, pressing her face directly in front of the her. Pinkie wore a massive scowl on her face, and Fluttershy could practically hear her grinding her teeth.

Dash pushed back against Pinkie, trying to get the earth pony out of her personal space. “I’m on a date, duh.”

“Exactly! I thought you were better than that!”

“What are you talking about, Pinkie?”

Fluttershy struggled against the urge to drop off her chair and hide beneath the table. She knew why Pinkie was here. It was because of her. Because Fluttershy had betrayed Pinkie.

“You know why, you liar!” Pinkie didn’t let up, pushing Dash back into her seat. The rest of the patrons were now crowding around the table. Each agreeing with Pinkie, with a few nods of their head and angry glares.

“You’re siding with her! All of you are! I thought you would at least be on my side, but no! You had to ask her out! On her birthday no less! How can you do this Rainbow Dash?” Pinkie slammed her hooves down on the table, making both Dash and Fluttershy jump.

“Pinkie, you’re acting crazier than usual! How can me going out with Fluttershy be a bad thing?”

“Why? Why! You know exactly why!” Faster than Dash could react, Pinkie reached under the table and pulled Fluttershy out from her hiding spot. “You're as much to blame as well. I told you it would never work, but just like Twilight and my Pinkie sense. You. Didn’t. Listen.”

Pinkie tossed Fluttershy out into the crowd of ponies. She landed hard on the cold floor with a yelp. Dazed, Fluttershy tried to right herself, but was quickly shoved back to the floor by the various patrons. Fluttershy felt their hooves pressing down on her from all sides, restricting her movement to futile wiggles. She could hear shouts and cries from a fight coming from just out of her line of sight. Fluttershy wanted to scream, to call for help, but found her lungs empty of air.

“You can’t do this Pinkie! She’s our friend!” Dash screamed, attacking anypony within reach of her hooves.

Before her sight was blocked completely, Fluttershy could hear Pinkie, sadness filling her voice. “I will never understand why you did this to me, Fluttershy.”

Fluttershy’s heart was racing, her body covered in a cold sweat as she stared up at her ceiling. Her mind took it all in: the rays of the early day sun shone happily into her room. The darkness of the nightmare slowly fading as Fluttershy’s mind came down from her terror. *Only a dream,* she thought, bringing her breathing back to a normal rate.

Fluttershy sighed, slowly pulling herself from her bed. Her body felt like it weighed a ton. She had to practically drag herself to her bathroom, getting a better look at herself in the mirror. Her mane was a disheveled wreck. Her coat had several clumps that were soaked with sweat. Her eyes carried bags under them, making it look like she had stayed awake the whole night.

Fluttershy grabbed her hoof brush, and began to work on fixing her appearance. Today was both her birthday and her date with Dash. It was not the day that she wanted to appear to be concerned about something. Today was going to be great; it had only been one bad dream.

So why was she so scared?

Fluttershy had gone to bed the night before feeling happier than even when she had earned her cutiemark. She had confessed her love, received a heartfelt gift, and had been asked out on a date by her fillyhood crush. There had been nothing that could have spoiled her mood, even if Gilda herself came riding into Ponyville on the back of a dragon after having allied herself with a freed Discord. Then why did that dream hurt so much?

Satisfied with her fixed appearance, Fluttershy put on her best smile and trotted downstairs to take care of her morning chores, though it was hardly a sufficient distraction from her nightmare. Fluttershy knew some of it made sense; she had only told her friends so far, and a date is a very public thing. Her secret wouldn't be a secret for much longer, but that still didn't account for the rest of her dream.

Pinkie Pie was the key. Fluttershy knew Pinkie was the happiest, friendliest, and nicest pony she knew, even if they didn't hang out that often. Fluttershy still found Pinkie to be a great friend, so there would be no possible way that she would ever act as she did in the dream. So why wasn't Fluttershy able to convince herself?

As Fluttershy wracked her brain for an answer, she started her morning chores. As she worked she tried to think of something, anything, that could explain why Pinkie had acted that way in her dream. Fluttershy knew that not every dream had a specific meaning to it, but she could feel that this one was trying to tell her something. Yet no matter how hard she tried she just couldn't remember anything that could tell her why.

It couldn't simply be because today was her birthday. Fluttershy knew that she hadn't spoken much with Pinkie recently. She figured so at her inevitable party she would have to tell Pinkie what had happened the day before. All of her other friends were happy for her and readily accepted her for what she was. Why wouldn't Pinkie be any different? Despite such reassurance, the dream refused to leave her alone. Something about it had shaken something loose inside of her. Now it sat burning away at Fluttershy's core. A constant reminder, but too painful to explore.

Fluttershy's animal friends were quick to pick up on her stress. Even though she was doing her absolute best to stay strong around them, they had spent enough time around their caretaker that they knew when something was wrong.

"Oh, I'm sorry everyone," Fluttershy said, handing out another bowl of food for the rabbits. "Its just some silly old dream. The sooner I forget about it the better. Besides, today is my birthday. Why should I be all down in the dumps?" Fluttershy put on her biggest smile, which seemed to ease most of her charges. Angel merely gave her a worried stare as he ate. He made no comment though, opting to let her have her space for once.

The rest of her morning proceeded without much incident. Fluttershy did her best to forget the dream and move on. She was convinced it was just her natural shyness that had crept up in her sleep, turning her dream from something pleasant to a horror show. As the hours passed Fluttershy had tried to convinced herself that was the only thing to the dream. It had helped, but only just so.

Fluttershy was wrapping up the last of her chores when she heard a knock at the door. *That must be Rainbow Dash!* she thought, bouncing slightly with each step. Her earlier sour mood nearly completely forgotten at the thought of the upcomming date. Rainbow Dash beamed at her from the doorway. Fluttershy could see a bouquet of flowers under one and a red box tied with a pink bow under the other.

“Happy Birthday Fluttershy!” Dash stretched out her hoof which held a bouquet of flowers. She presented the gift to her date with a smile on her face.

“Oh, thank you.” Fluttershy smiled, taking the flowers. “You really didn’t need to Dash. I mean you already got me a gift.”

“True, but I’m also taking you out on a date. I can’t just arrive empty-hoofed now, can I?”

Fluttershy sniffed at the bouquet, taking in the mixed aroma of roses, lilies, lilacs, and a few others. It was a beautiful assortment. She wasn’t sure if she wanted to eat them now or save them in a vase for later. However, it was the box that caught her interest. “Um, if you don’t mind me asking, what’s in the box?”

“Oh, this?” Dash held it out. She opened the box to reveal a collection of chocolates. “Well, I didn’t know whether to get you flowers or chocolate so I got both. Bon Bon’s had some really great stuff. She said it was kinda corny. I hope you don’t mind.”

For some reason at the mention of Bon Bon, the dream came crashing back into Fluttershy’s mind. She had no idea why it chose now of all time to resurface. A quick shake of her head helped to clear her mind of the nightmare. Fluttershy turned back to Rainbow Dash, who seemed only mildly concerned.

Fluttershy didn’t mind getting flowers and candy on a first date, she couldn’t disagree with Dash’s lack of romantic ideals. She had grown up with Rainbow Dash, and she knew that Dash’s experience in dating was just as extensive as hers, in that both had no experience whatsoever. “No it’s fine. I like them both, but I think I will eat them later if that’s okay.”

“Sure, no problem. I was planning on taking you out to dinner anyway,” Dash said. “So are you ready to go?”

“I should probably put the candy away first, and the flowers will need a vase. I also need to talk to Angel so that he can take care of a few things while I am gone. So, um I just need to talk to him a bit, then we can head out. If that’s okay.”

“Sure thing, Shy.” Dash smiled as Fluttershy trotted back inside.

Fluttershy took a deep breath, trying to calm her nerves and get her mind settled. She made sure both the flowers and candy were safe before speaking with Angel. He only seemed mildly upset this time, and set about his duties quickly and efficiently. Fluttershy then slipped Dash’s gift around her neck before heading toward the door. *You can do this Fluttershy,* she thought, setting off down the stairs. *Dash won’t let anything bad happen to you. I just hope our friendship can survive this.*

“A walk in the park?” Fluttershy asked. “I mean it’s a beautiful day, but it seems kinda calm for you. Not that there is anything wrong with that.”

“Well yeah, why not?” Dash smirked. “I mean you gotta save the best for last. Figured we would start with something calm and work from there.”

The park was peaceful and mostly empty. The birds were singing and the smell of flowers wafted through the air. Fluttershy was thankful that Dash decided to go with something so peaceful to start with. She wanted to enjoy it, she really did. A peaceful walk with her possible marefriend, but her mind refused to cooperate. Fluttershy couldn’t help but keep an eye out for a certain pink pony that had a predilection for popping out of various places. Right now that wouldn’t be something Fluttershy was prepared for.

“Soooo, this is... nice,” Dash said.

Fluttershy could see Dash’s wings twitching and fidgeting. She knew that Dash was used to flying everywhere, so a slow walking pace was nearly tortuous. She knew that no matter how bored Dash would get, she would never dump Fluttershy just for that. Still, it was not like there was anything else they could really do on a simple walk. “Oh hey, look,” Dash said, looking further down the path. “It’s Lyra and Bon Bon. Wanna go say hi?”

Fluttershy glanced over, seeing the long-time couple walking down another path. She almost said hello herself before the nightmare returned with a vengeance. *Why can’t I get this dream out of my head?* Fluttershy could feel a panic attack coming on as the nightmare once more drew her focus. She couldn’t take it, and she couldn’t bear to make a scene right in the middle of the park. So Fluttershy did what came naturally to her, she ran and hid.

Fluttershy turned and ran off as fast as she could. She could only think about hiding,

somewhere, anywhere. Pinkie was more than capable of showing up anywhere in an instant. Fluttershy couldn't be seen going on a date with Dash, not yet at least. She dived into some shrubbery, shuddering in her hiding spot not even daring to peak out.

Fluttershy tried to wrack her brain, trying to think of some kind of reason, any reason, as to why the nightmare bothered her so much. There had to be a memory, something that happened to her that would have caused this dream. Pinkie was the key, and Fluttershy began to search through any memory involving Pinkie, no matter how small or insignificant the event might have originally seemed. Then she began to wonder why the sight of Lyra and Bon Bon had retriggered the nightmare, and then she finally started remembering.

"Fluttershy! Hey Fluttershy! Where did you go?" Rainbow Dash called out.

The shout had pulled Fluttershy out of her introspection, but she didn't even so much as squeak. She just wanted to hide until this day was over. Then she could talk to her friends again, asking them what to do about Pinkie. Fluttershy knew that this day was going to end badly.

"There you are," said Dash, pulling apart the bush that Fluttershy had found refuge in, revealing the shuddering pegasus to the sunlight.

Fluttershy merely squeaked, curling into an even tighter ball. She could hear some rustling, and then some warmth as Rainbow Dash settled into the bush with her.

"C'mon, Shy, what's wrong? I know you're a bit of a scaredy cat, but I've seen you talk to Lyra and Bon Bon all the time. Why are you so jumpy about them now?" Dash said, draping a wing over Fluttershy.

Fluttershy sniffled slightly before leaning into Rainbow Dash's embrace. She knew Dash had the right to know why she had freaked out, but she wasn't quite ready to tell her everything just yet. "It... it wasn't them, well, not specifically. I... I, um had a nightmare... " Fluttershy started.

"A nightmare? What about?"

"About Pinkie."

Rainbow Dash nearly giggled, barely managed to stop herself. "I know Pinkie can be a hoof-full, but she isn't really scary. What's this have to do with Lyra and Bon Bon anyway?"

Fluttershy shook her head, taking a few deep breaths before continuing. "It's because they are like me. In my dream, Pinkie was angry at me for being a filly-fooler. When I saw them

it reminded me of my dream, and I sort of panicked."

"Wait, Pinkie doesn't know that you're gay?"

Fluttershy shook her head. "I told Rarity, Applejack, and Twilight. I also made them promise not to tell each other until I told them all."

"Well, it's just a dream right? Pinkie and the others are setting up your birthday party at Sugarcube Corner right now. Why don't we head over there and settle this whole thing. You really are blowing a simple dream way outta proportion Shy. Sides, I'll be there to back you up. You've got nothin to worry about."

Fluttershy shook her head even harder than before. "I... I can't. N...not yet. Please, just...let's just stay here for a little while." Fluttershy nuzzled up closer to the cyan mare, seeking as much comfort in her warmth as possible.

"Okay, we'll stay. We have to go see them eventually. You know that, right?"

Fluttershy nodded before Dash continued. "Pinkie probably needs a little more time to get it set up. We can wait till then."

It didn't take them long to get to Sugarcube Corner. It was around midday and would be otherwise very bright, but to Fluttershy it might have as well had been the dead of the night. Dash had been trying to get Fluttershy's spirits back up after the failure of their date, to with little success. After all, Fluttershy's dream still weighed heavy on her. With the realization of what it meant had added a whole new level of fear to what was supposed to be an otherwise happy birthday party.

"Well, you going to open it or not?" Dash asked as the two stood at the entrance to the store. "You know Pinkie won't be upset with you right? It was just a dream, nothing more."

If only you knew, Dash, thought Fluttershy. She couldn't bring herself to tell Dash about the memory; it had been hard enough to talk about the dream. Yet no matter her fear, this had to be done. With a shaky hoof Fluttershy pushed open the door. Fluttershy took the first steps into her darkened building, wary and ready for her friends' appearance. When the lights came on,as one the group of friends jumped out of their hiding places. "SURPRISE!"

Fluttershy hardly even flinched. It was so unlike her that all the others stopped, except Pinkie who continued babbling a mile a minute.

Pinkie seemed to be drawing her rant to a close and bounced toward Fluttershy smiling.

“...I mean I just couldn’t believe it, you’re only a year older than me and already you’re taking such a big step in your life! So this party is super extra special because not only are you turning a year older, you even came out of the closet and asked Dashie out on a date! I’m so happy for you!” With that last statement Pinkie wrapped Fluttershy in the biggest hug she could.

Fluttershy, instead of relief, felt only confusion. She knew? Pinkie knew that she was a filly-fooler? She didn’t think Dash had blabbed too much about their date. They hadn’t even really started the date before Fluttershy ended it. So how did Pinkie know? “P... Pinkie? H... how,” Fluttershy stuttered.

“Duh, I know everypony’s birthday you silly filly! Why would I forget the birthday of one of my closest bestest friends? I was a little scared that you might not show up for your party. After all I didn’t know how long your date was going to be considering how last minute it was. But it’s okay that means I will just have to reschedule it for tomorrow and then have a ‘Sorry I was late for your Birthday Party but congratulations on going out with Dashie make up party! I’ll even make sure it’s...”

Dash quickly shoved her hoof into Pinkie’s mouth. “That’s not what she meant Pinkie. She told me that she had made our friends promise not to tell anyopony that she was well, ya know, into mares. Not until she had told everypony, and she hadn’t told you. So how did you know?”

Pinkie quickly extricated herself from Dash hoof, looking at everypony in confusion. “What do you mean? I always knew. I mean she always prefered to hang out with us, never talked to any stallions. She even got that much happier and bouncier whenever she got around you, Dashie. All I had to do was put two and two and two together. How could I not have known?”

“Well ah’ll be. Here ah thought ah was tha only one that had figured it out.” said Applejack. A quick nudge from Rarity silenced any further comments.

“B-but, but I th-thought...” Fluttershy stammered.

“Yes Fluttershy?” Pinkie smiled.

“I thought you didn’t like fillyfoolers.” Fluttershy’s voice grew quiet as she spoke, and she tried to hide behind Dash fearing Pinkie’s reprisal.

Pinkie giggled slightly before bouncing closer to Fluttershy. “What makes you think that you silly filly?”

Fluttershy looked up at Rainbow, then to all of her friends. Each of them wore faces of concern, yet she could feel their silent support. She drew herself up, facing Pinkie before taking

a deep breath. “Because you told me you did.”

The room was dead silent for several seconds as the group of friends looked back and forth between Pinkie and Fluttershy. It didn’t last long before Pinkie burst out into laughter. The pink pony rolled around on the floor in hysterics. Fluttershy could only look at her friends in shock and confusion. Pinkie finally pulled herself up off the floor, wiping a tear from her eye. “Now where in the world did you hear me say that?”

“In the market. We were having a snack and you said you didn’t understand why mares would be together like that,” Fluttershy said, looking to her friends for some kind of answer. They seemed to be just as confused as she was.

“Duh, I said I didn’t understand it, not that I didn’t like it! I don’t get it because stallions are soooo much more fun!” Pinke smiled, before narrowing her eyes and nudging Fluttershy with her elbow. “If you know what I mean.”

Fluttershy, Twilight, and Rarity blushed as the meaning of Pinkie’s statement got through. Applejack and Dash merely giggled. “See Fluttershy? I told you, you were overreacting,” Dash said, draping an arm around Fluttershy.

Fluttershy shook her head, sighing in relief. Really, how had she been so silly? Pinkie was her friend, she had let a dream and a simple misunderstanding trouble her so much. “You’re right.” She turned toward Pinkie, feeling like a massive weight had finally been lifted from her shoulders. “Can you ever forgive me for doubting you, Pinkie?”

Pinkie immediately pounced on Fluttershy, pinning the pegasus to the ground in a bear hug. “Of course! I can’t stay mad at any of my friends. Especially for a simple misunderstanding!”

Before either Pinkie or Fluttershy could extricate them from the floor the rest of their friends joined in on the hug. Fluttershy couldn’t have felt more loved or appreciated. All her friends knew what she was, and they accepted her. She knew exactly what she was now, and she had no more fear about who else knew. Fluttershy knew what she was, and no more fear remained. She loved Rainbow Dash, a mare, her mare, and she no longer cared who knew.

As the group broke from the hug, the party truly began in earnest. Before Fluttershy could join in the festivities, she felt a hoof tug at her side. Fluttershy turned to see Rainbow Dash, a big smile on her face. “You do know I still owe you a date.”

“I’m sorry. I did sort of ruin it, didn’t I?” Fluttershy smiled. “How does next week sound? I would love to have our friends help set it up, if that’s okay with you.”

“No problem Fluttershy,” Dash said. “It’ll make it the best date ever!”

Fluttershy felt like her heart would explode right out of her chest, just like it had when she had cheered for Rainbow Dash during the Best Young Fliers competition. Emboldended by the party raging around her, along with her racing heart, Fluttershy decided to do more than just a cheer. In one swift move she wrapped her hooves around Dash, pressing her lips to Dash's own, kissing her with a passion that had built up ever since that day.

Fluttershy could barely hear the cheers of approval from her friends. She could feel Rainbow Dash putting forth just as much passion as she recieved. Fluttershy's whole world had dissolved to the feel of Rainbow Dash's lips against her own. When the couple finally broke Fluttershy had only one thing to say.

"That, was... nice."