

The Truth About "Pokey" Pierce

Part 1: In which the stage is set

"Pierce? Pierce? PIERCE!"

Pierce's head snapped up at once, as several classmates giggled. "Wha...here, Miss Cheerilee!"

The young teacher smiled. "Thank you, Pierce. Now, please try to pay attention, won't you?"

"Yes, Miss Cheerilee." Pierce groaned inwardly. The day had barely begun, and he couldn't even maintain his concentration long enough to make it through roll call! His mother had told him that he needed to do a better job focusing in class, but his mind wandered so often...

He glanced out the schoolhouse window, and saw Mr. Cake setting up a buffet table near the library. There was going to be a party today for the old librarian, who was retiring after almost three decades. Pierce had heard from his father that a lengthy search had turned up no suitable replacements, and that the building would be run entirely by volunteers from now on. A glance at the desk behind him showed that young Cake Jr. was watching his father as well. C.J. was the first in the class to get his cutie mark, and nopony had been surprised to see that it was three slices of cake. C.J. loved the bakery, and would no doubt follow in his father's hoofsteps as soon as he finished his schooling. He wondered if C.J. would always be known as Jr., or if someday the ponies would simply know him as Mr. Cake...

A kind but obviously frustrated voice jolted him back to the present. "Pierce! I asked you a question!"

"Wha...sorry, what...um..." Pierce fumbled desperately, racking his brain for the question, but it was no use.

"Pierce, I asked you who the first weather pegasus to successfully disperse a tornado was. You *did* read the assigned chapter over the weekend, didn't you?"

"Yes...um...it was...Windwhistler Blast!"

"That's correct. Now please, try to focus." Pierce relaxed as Miss Cheerilee continued her history lesson, but he tensed up again as a voice beside him whispered, "Nice going, *Pokey*. Teacher only needed to call your name three times. That's a new personal best."

Pierce didn't turn to respond to Rose, his personal tormentor. Mother had said that if he just ignored her, eventually she would get bored and leave him alone...

"Hey, *Pokey*!" This time, the whisper was accompanied by a sharp jab at his flank. He jumped, and looked down at the spot where Rose had stabbed him with her pencil. Rose gave a satisfied smirk. "That got your attention. Maybe Miss Cheerilee should try it!"

Pierce rubbed his side and whispered back, "Please be quiet, I'm trying to pay attention to the lesson." Just like father had told him to say.

"You? Pay attention? That'll be the day! It's a good thing you aren't a pegasus pony, or you'd probably forget to flap your wings and splatter yourself on the ground like a pancake!" A pair of high-pitched giggles revealed that Rose's two compatriots, Lily and Daisy, were listening as well. Pierce turned his head away, trying not to show that their laughter had struck a nerve.

Suddenly, a loud, unrestrained voice interrupted the girls. "Now wait just a minute! Sure, sometimes Pokey doesn't pay attention real good, but I'll bet there's lots of things he *is* really good at! Pokey might not be real smart, or strong, or fast, or good at magic, but I'll bet he's really nice and a bunch of snotty-snouted meanie-heads like you three just don't appreciate how good he is at...um...being nice!"

Pierce buried his face in his hooves. Once more, the pink earth pony in the desk ahead of his had come to his defence. And once more, he was sure, Pinkie Pie's words would only make things worse for him.

The lesson had stopped as soon as Pinkie began speaking, of course. Unlike the other ponies, she didn't seem to grasp the concept of 'indoor voices'. Miss Cheerilee walked up the aisle to his desk, putting a hand on Pinkie's shoulder as she passed.

“Thank you, Pinkie. But remember what we said about yelling in the classroom?” Pinkie nodded and pressed her lips together. “Good. Now Pierce,” she continued, turning her attention to him as she spoke, “Was anypony bothering you just now?”

Pierce looked over at Rose, who was staring straight ahead with a neutral expression on her face. He sighed. “No, miss Cheerilee.”

“Good. I don’t want any bullying going on in my class.” With that, the teacher turned and went back to the blackboard, where she continued her lesson. From beside him, Pierce heard Rose whisper, “That’s right, Pokey. It’s not bullying if it’s true.”

A growled expletive from behind him caused Pierce to turn around, where C.J. was still staring out the window, a snarl on his face. “Why did that old hamhoof have to show up now? The retirement party’s in less than an hour!”

Looking out the window, Pierce saw a black earth pony with a grey-white mane. The cutie mark on his rump was a stylized face, with eyes scrunched up and tongue sticking out--the same label used to identify poisonous substances throughout Equestria.

As he watched, the old pony made his way down the buffet line, knocking pastries to the ground, plunging his face into bowls of punch, and soiling piles of plates and napkins. Mr. Cake, coming round the corner with a load of muffins to add to the buffet, cried out and ran at the intruder, chasing him away. But by then, the damage had already been done.

“Oh man, I spent all night helping dad with that!” groaned C.J. “There’s no way he’ll be able to put everything together in time for the party now! I *hate* that old coot so much!”

Everypony knew ‘that old coot,’ of course. His name was Canker, and he’d lived in Ponyville for as long as anypony could remember. Pierce saw him almost every day, but he’d never talked to the old stallion. As far as he knew, Canker didn’t have any friends at all. Wherever he went, people avoided him, creating a bubble around the reclusive fellow. If he minded, he never showed it.

What Canker was best known for, of course, was what he was apparently doing right now: spoiling parties. Even though nopony ever invited him, he managed to find his way to almost every celebration in Ponyville. And when he arrived, he was sure to cause a disturbance. If he wasn’t stopped, he would invariably soil the food and drink, wreck the party favors, defile the decorations, and generally cause as much chaos as he could. Little wonder, Pierce thought, that nopony liked him.

As Pierce watched Mr. Cake scramble to salvage the buffet, he noticed that C.J. was outside, helping. Strange, Pierce hadn’t noticed that C.J. had left. In fact, there were some of his other classmates too...

With a start, Pierce looked around. The classroom was empty save for Miss Cheerilee, sitting at her desk as she worked on the lesson plan.

“I dismissed the class almost ten minutes ago, Pierce,” she said without looking up. “I know it’s hard for you, but you need to learn to focus.”

His cheeks burning, Pierce headed outside. His only consolation was that his classmates had already left, so there was nopony to mock him as he headed home.

And nopony to see him cry.