

## The Truth About "Pokey" Pierce

### *Part 6: In which irrevocable decisions are made*

As Pierce struggled to process the scene before him, Canker leered down at him from the stage. "So, you decided to come after all. When you didn't show up right away, I thought maybe you'd gotten wise. Oh well."

"Gotten wise? What are you talking about? What's going on here?"

"Use your head, Pokey. You tell me what happened."

Pierce considered the situation. "I...I don't know. Where is everypony? They can't all have just left..."

"Of course not, Pokey. But the room's empty, so that must mean..." he gestured for Pierce to finish the thought.

"...That means they weren't here at all."

Canker clapped his hooves together slowly, the sound echoing through the empty ballroom.

"Bravo. There was never a party here. You, my boy, have been duped." Canker frowned. "And here I'd hoped you were smarter than all that. Never mind, there's still time to learn."

"But I don't understand! Pinkie said to be here at five! She told me this is where the party was! She...she told me..."

"Now Pokey, you didn't *really* think a popular young filly like this 'Pinkie Pie' was going to invite you to her *cuteceñera*, did you? Can you imagine a social reject like you being allowed at the most important night of her life?"

"But, she told me..."

"She told you to come here, didn't she? Look around you, my boy. There's no party here."

Pierce's shoulders slumped as he came to grips with the situation. "Then...there never was a party. This is just one big joke being played on Pokey."

Canker smiled, a sickly caricature of compassion worming its way across his face. "Now Pokey, that just isn't true. You aren't nearly important enough for her to bother pranking you. No, Pinkie just wanted to make sure you were out of the way while the *real* party went off. Couldn't take the chance that you'd show up there uninvited now, could she?"

"The real party?"

"Of course! Today is her *cuteceñera*, after all. However, it seems that everypony else's invitation told them to be at Sweet Apple Acres at five. What a coincidence, eh?"

Pierce's face flushed. "No...Pinkie wouldn't do that...that's not like her at all!"

Canker snorted dismissively. "You feel free to go on believing whatever you want, Pokey. But do yourself a favor; head down to the Apple family barn, and check out what's going on without you. Then see what you think."

"I will." Pierce turned and began walking out the door, when the black stallion's voice stopped him.

"One more thing, Pokey." As Pierce turned, Canker kicked a large saddle bag over to him. "I think you might find these useful, once you get there." Pierce looked inside, then back to Canker.

"Canker, what is this?"

"You just head down to the farm, Pokey. I'm sure you can figure it all out."

Everything had gone according to plan, Pinkie thought. She had really outdone herself with her idea for a reverse surprise party. And the cake! It had taken her two days of nonstop work to bake all of it, and most of a third to set it up just so, but it had been well worth the effort. The guests could hardly help but stare, so improbable was her creation. The music was playing, people were laughing and joking

all around her, and she was at the center of it all, in her element.

There was one thing missing, though. By now, every pony on the guest list (and some who weren't besides, but that was no problem; Pinkie had planned for a few extras) had shown up, save one. As she accepted complements and presents with her usual flare and excitement, Pinkie kept looking towards the barn's wide-open doors, hoping to see one more pony coming in. Although he was late, Pinkie wasn't worried. He'd promised he'd come, and she didn't doubt that Pokey was as good as his word.

Pierce didn't need to walk far before he could see the light coming from Sweet Apple Acres, and hear the myriad sounds of celebration that commingled in the still night air. Still, he stubbornly clung to the hope that there was some misunderstanding. He crested the last low hill ahead of the party site, and approached the wide barn doors.

The doors were open, and Pierce could see that the barn was filled with ponies. There must have been a hundred or more all crowded together. A stage had been assembled at the far end of the barn, on which a young white unicorn was operating an elaborate sound system. But the most arresting thing about the party was the "cake."

In the center of the barn was a monstrous conglomeration of pastry, candy, and sugar, at least ten feet on a side, which combined to form a remarkable representation of Ponyville's downtown in miniature. Houses and buildings were constructed of gingerbread, while roads were paved with puffed rice. Gumdrop ponies made their way through the saccharine landscape, some pulling blown-sugar carriages while others leaned against candy cane lampposts.

Almost as impressive as the town itself was the way in which it hovered in the air. Tied all around the base were hundreds of brightly colored balloons, their combined lift carefully measured to keep the candy construction floating about two feet off the ground. The balloons lined the barn's rafters, filling the usually dark and dull space with vibrant hues. Ponies ooh-ed and aah-ed at the sight of their town, cleverly positioned at eye level for the school-age ponies, as it drifted slowly about the center of the room.

After a moment, Pierce realized he had stopped, slack-jawed with awe, as he took in the sight before him. Hurriedly, he ducked behind a nearby apple tree. There, he paused to consider his options.

He thought about simply walking through the barn's wide doors, but rejected that option out of hand. If Pinkie really didn't want him here (*that's not true*, he told himself, *there's got to be some other reason!*), he had nothing to gain by showing up except further humiliation. It would be better to just walk away and head home now.

To simply leave...that possibility Pierce did consider at length. After all, even if Pinkie had made an honest mistake, even if she had meant to invite him here, he had no doubt that the other ponies wouldn't miss him. Whatever Pinkie's intentions, he could save himself a lot of trouble if he just left now.

But, as tempting as that option was, Pierce couldn't will himself to follow through. He had promised Pinkie that he would come to her cutceñera, and that had to count for something. And, a more cynical part of his mind noted, he desperately wanted to know if Canker was telling the truth.

Shaking his head, he made his way to the far side of the barn. The ground-level doors here were closed, but up above him the loft's door stood open, doubtless to provide some ventilation on the warm night. Opening his saddlebag, he took out the rope and grappling hook that had been carefully packed inside. Pierce wondered how Canker had known it would come in handy, but shoved such thoughts aside as he concentrated on getting up into the hayloft. From there, he'd be able to look down on the party surreptitiously. Once he'd had a chance to observe for a bit, perhaps matters would become a little clearer.

Pinkie knew she couldn't wait much longer. The guests were starting to grow antsy; they were waiting for her to give her speech. Until she'd addressed everypony, they couldn't cut the cake, and it had already been almost an hour since they'd arrived.

She had hoped Pokey would come, but she didn't let her smile falter. If he wanted to skip out on her cutceñera, it was his loss! She still had a lot of guests to entertain, and she intended to make sure there was nothing for them to complain about at her party.

Amid a hail of clinking glasses and cries of, "Speech! Speech!" Pinkie stepped up onto the stage.

Pierce gasped for breath as he sprawled amid the hay in the open loft. He really was out of shape; just getting up the rope had been a struggle for him. While he recovered, he took the time to orient himself.

The loft was small; it only extended forward over perhaps a quarter of the barn. There might have been a similar setup on the other side, but his view was obscured by the hundreds of balloons that hovered directly in front of him, tethered to the enormous sugar village down below. The wood was ill-fit and full of knotholes, and he had no trouble finding a spot from which he could look down at the stage directly below him. As he looked, the ponies began to hush and the DJ turned off the music. Pinkie was clearly preparing for her speech.

The young filly pranced up to a waiting microphone and addressed the crowd. "Heya, everypony! I hope you're all having a super-duper time tonight!" Cheers and affirmations filled the barn. "Great! I don't have very much to say, because the longer I talk, the longer I have to wait to get a piece of that cake! By the way, I call dibs on Sugarcube Corner!" The crowd laughed, and ponies began claiming those sections which they wanted for themselves. After a few moments, they quieted again, waiting for Pinkie to finish. "Well, before we all dig in, I just want to tell you all something. You're all the best friends a pony could have, and I'm so happy that you're all here tonight! Now, let's make this the best party ever!" And with that, Pinkie leapt down from the stage amid thunderous applause. The music started up once more, its thunderous bass beat rattling the floorboards.

Pierce sighed as he stood up. Whatever the truth, Pinkie was clearly having a good time without him. It would be best if he just went home, before somepony found him skulking about and-

"Well, well, well! I thought I saw a little rat creeping around out back!"

Pierce stiffened at the sound of that voice. Turning, he faced Rose. She favored him with a malicious sneer.

"What's the matter, *Pokey*? Aren't us regular ponies good enough for you to hang out with? You weren't *hiding*, were you? My friends and I were waiting for you!" She clapped her hooves together. "Oh, I know! Pinkie probably told you not to come after all, but you showed up anyway! You know, I told her it was a terrible idea to invite you, but I didn't think she'd listen. Good for her!"

As Rose spoke, Pierce felt a strange feeling welling up inside him. Before, he had always tried to quietly absorb whatever abuse she hurled at him. He had always tried to make himself as small and unobtrusive as possible, hoping she would get bored and leave him alone. Before, he had always retreated into the safe confines of his mind.

Now, he felt something different. As Rose talked, Pierce felt his cheeks flush. His muscles began to quiver slightly, as a surge of adrenaline rushed through his veins. Abruptly, Pierce put a name to this new feeling.

He was angry. No, he was *furious*. His vision tinged red as he thought back on all to torment he had endured, and realized that he didn't have to meekly acquiesce when Rose spoke.

He didn't have to take this.

Rose stepped forward and gave Pierce a hard shove. "C'mon Pokey, aren't you going to come down and play? Maybe if you get on your knees and beg, Pinkie will let you come in for a few minutes."

She pushed him again. "What's the matter, Pokey? don't you-"

With an inarticulate scream, Pierce rushed straight at the stunned Rose. Bowling into her headfirst, he hurled himself forward as hard as he could. Rose tried to brace herself, but she was caught entirely off-guard by Pierce's sudden display of aggression. Toppling over, she slid backwards across the loft floor.

Pierce saw her tumble straight out the door. A moment later, he heard a soft thud, the sound barely audible above the beat of the music below him.

Instantly, his anger was replaced with dread. He rushed to the door, and looked down to see Rose sprawled on the ground some fifteen feet below him. For moments that felt like hours, she lay unmoving.

Then, with a groan, she picked herself up. Standing shakily, she looked up at Pierce.

"What the hay, Pokey? Are you insane? I could have been killed by a fall like that!" She clutched her side with one hoof. "Ugh, I think I might have broken a rib. You just wait, Pokey! I'm gonna get Applejack's parents, and then you'll be in a *world* of trouble!" Slowly, she staggered away, leaving Pierce alone in the loft once more.

It wouldn't take Rose long to reach the barn's front entrance, even at the speed she was moving. But Pierce already knew what his next move would be. He was through playing the victim; now was the time to repay Ponyville for every wrong he'd ever suffered.

Starting with Pinkie Pie.

Pierce turned his attention to the balloons, and concentrated as hard as he could. Magic had never come easy to him, and this would be the most difficult incantation he'd ever attempted. But the years of pent-up anger and frustration that had now boiled over gave him strength. With a concussive blast, he released the spell.

As one, hundreds of dry needles of hay rose up around him. With another wave of effort, he hurled the makeshift arrows at the balloons in front of him.

Not all the balloons popped. Not all the hay even hit its mark; Pierce lacked the power or skill to aim each one individually. But enough hit; enough damage was done.

The energy used in the casting nearly caused Pierce to faint. Without waiting to see the result of his actions, he stumbled to the loft door. He slid down the rope, landing hard on his rump. Pulling himself up, he rushed off into the orchard as fast as his exhaustion permitted. From there, he began slowly making his way home, doing everything he could to stay out of sight.

Below, Pinkie Pie had just finished posing for photos in front of her massive construction. Before she could cut the first slice, however, the room was rocked by a concussive burst. As one, the assembled ponies looked up to see that nearly half the balloons holding up the cake had popped simultaneously, all of them on the same side.

Immediately, the now-unsupported end of the construction lurched and fell to the ground. Hundreds of pounds of cake and candy slid to the floor in an unidentifiable heap. An instant later the other side of the cake, its balloons unpoped and much of the weight it supported now shorn, shot into the air. Sugary confectionery was hurled out over the crowd.

In the chaos which followed, Rose rushed in. Shocked at what she saw inside, she completely forgot to clutch her side or wail in pain. Nevertheless, she quickly found Applejack's mother, who was acting as a chaperon, and told her that Pokey had been hiding in the loft. It didn't take long for everypony to realize who must have been behind this.

Eventually, the crowd dispersed, each pony heading home, leaving the Apple family barn a sticky, disgusting mess. In the confusion, no pony noticed that Pinkie Pie had vanished.

Pierce reached his home without being seen. As he closed the door behind him, he felt a strange mix of emotions; fear and sadness, regret and disappointment. But the overwhelming sensation was one of giddy exuberance: he had finally done *something*, and if it felt wrong, it also felt good.

Mere moments after he took his hoof from the knob, there was a knock on the door. Pierce froze. He almost didn't answer, but he realized that would only be putting off the inevitable. He was through hiding.

When he opened the door, Pinkie Pie was standing on the doorstep. Her dress was spattered with frosting and confectionery. The streaks below her eyes made it clear she had been crying. She looked nothing like the cheerful, exuberant Pinkie that everypony knew and loved. For a long moment, neither of them said anything.

Pinkie broke the silence with a simple question. "Why?"

Pierce didn't hesitate. "Oh, don't give me that. You deserved everything I did and more. I've got a list of slights a mile long, Pinkie. And from now on, I'm going to make sure that each and every one is repaid in full."

Pinkie hesitated a moment, then spoke. "I just wanted everypony to be happy. I wanted *you* to be happy, Pokey. But, if this is how you want it..." Her tone took on a whetted edge, "If this is what you want, fine. Pokey, you're not my friend anymore."

Pierce laughed. "Oh, Pinkie. We were never friends!" And with that, he slammed the door in her face.

That night, Pierce slept soundly. He awoke to discover that he had at last gotten his cutie mark: his flank was now graced with a gleaming silver pin. He knew exactly what his talent was.

That morning, he made his way to Canker's shack. The old stallion was waiting for him.

"So Pokey, what brings you here?"

"I've made my decision, Canker. I'm ready to become your apprentice."