

Fixing up Miss Smartypants, Part 7

by [Arkensaw Pinkerton](#)

Big Macintosh drummed his hooves nervously on the table. He'd gotten to the Maison de Lune early and had decided against rushing back to the farm to change into anything formal. Miss Smartypants sat slumped on the table in front of him, looking questioningly off to his left at one of the only other two ponies at the Maison's tables this evening. Big Mac resisted the urge to do the same- Princess Luna had walked over a while ago and taken a seat after politely greeting him. He knew the correct thing to do was to make small talk, but his tongue seemed to have frozen up. It didn't seem to matter too much, though- Luna seemed to be anticipating something just as much as he was, and wasn't paying him much heed.

The other pony, to Big Mac's left, had barely noticed the princess- she seemed too enamoured with her own companion, who had just launched into another apparently fascinating diatribe on the relative merits of granite and low-quality quartz. As Spike happily chattered away, Sweetie Belle barely seemed to notice his words, just nodding along occasionally, with a big grin across her face.

His companions at the restaurant weren't helping, but Big Mac was mostly nervous because he didn't know exactly what he was going to do. Twilight should show up for her date any minute now and he had no plan other than presenting Miss Smartypants. Conversation, he worried, was likely to elude him.

From his right, he heard a familiar buzzing noise, and Scootaloo and Dinky zoomed into view. They'd ditched the red wagon somewhere since he'd seen them last, and Scootaloo was looking tired, taking intermittent breaks from powering her little scooter along. Dinky seemed to be trying to help too, her horn producing a faltering grey glow around the scooter's wheels while she crouched in between Scootaloo and the handlebars.

"Come on, Scoots! A little further, she's getting close!" Dinky shouted as Scootaloo veered through a nearby bush. Big Mac didn't really have time to engage with the situation before he saw Ditzzy veering erratically over the Maison's tables, landing next to him and breathing heavily.

"Ditzzy? Y'alright?" he asked, concerned.

"It's D-Dinky. She w-won't come home! I've b-been chasing her down. Could you h-help? Please?" the grey pegasus asked. She looked tired, thought Big Mac, and if he was any judge she'd been having a bit of a cry. He didn't even have to think about it.

"Sure thing, Ditzzy," he said, turning to the table next to him. "Spike, Sweetie Belle? Ditzzy's worried about Dinky. Could y'help us find her and bring her back to her ma?"

“Sure, I guess so,” said Spike, not noticing Sweetie Belle’s slightly put out expression. “How hard can she be to find?”

Spike dropped to the ground and indicated the nearby bushes.

“Sweetie Belle and I will see if we can follow their tracks. Why don’t you two try asking around?”

Spike and the unicorn filly walked off into the bushes by the same route Scootaloo and Dinky had gone, leaving Big Mac and Ditzzy alone. Big Mac realised this might be a good time to help untangle Ditzzy’s anger with Whooves, as the two of them walked towards the crowd and left Luna as the last pony at the Maison tables. If Big Mac was any judge, the princess was the reason the rest of their tables were empty- everypony seemed a bit intimidated by her. Fixing his attention on Ditzzy, he decided to bring it up as bluntly as possible.

“Whooves is sweet on you. He’s bad at sayin’ it is all.”

Ditzzy looked at Big Mac incredulously with her good eye and snorted derisively. “N-No pony’s that bad at s-saying things. He said he didn’t want to s-see me any more.”

“Ah’m just telling you how it is,” said Big Mac with finality, and he could see doubt creeping into Ditzzy’s expression. “Y’should let him say his piece.”

Ditzzy thought about it for a second and sighed.

“Fine, I’ll h-hear him out. We n-need to get looking for D-Dinky though, I d-don’t know why she’s leading me on such a ch-chase.”

Big Mac thought he might have some idea why, but thought it best to keep that to himself for now. Keeping an eye on the bushes and flower beds, he and Ditzzy started asking around in the crowd for leads.

Twilight’s stomach dropped as she saw Ditzzy and Big Mac leave the Maison tables from her hiding place in the nearby bushes. She’d already had the hem of her dress run over by Scootaloo, who thankfully hadn’t spotted her, and had to deal with a barrage of barbed cat-calls from Trixie, who had.

At first it had all looked like it was going so perfectly! Spike and Sweetie Belle were already at a table, and they clearly weren’t her mystery date. Then Big Mac had showed up and taken a seat. He’d even got a little gift, or something. It was pretty clear he was waiting for a date, Twilight thought- he was looking all nervous and excited, and that was what the books had said a pony was likely to be feeling before a romantic encounter. With a rush of relief, Twilight had

realised she was feeling the same things. She'd always known Big Mac was handsome, but recently she'd found her eyes wandering to his usual reading spot even when he wasn't there. He was so well-read, too, and more than that- Twilight knew that ponies could sometimes tune her out when she got too enthusiastic about a subject, but Big Mac always seemed like he was really, actually listening to her. It looked like all her worries had been baseless.

Then, Luna arrived and sat at the Maison, showing just as much anticipation as Big Mac, and everything was all jumbled again. It could be either of them! If Luna had arrived first, Twilight might have actually been able to stick to her plan and work out if she was actually attracted to Luna at all, but all she could do was compare her to Big Mac. Luna seemed perfectly nice, but Twilight knew Big Mac. No, more than that- now the two possibilities for her date were sat next to each other, she realised she'd hoped it would be him all along.

Then she'd had her dress ruined by Scootaloo and Dinky, and shortly after that Ditzzy had arrived. She and Big Mac had spoken to each other for a minute and then they'd just left. He might have been waiting there for her all along, Twilight thought with a heavy heart. She'd barely noticed as Spike and Sweetie Belle stamped through the bushes next to her, not coming close to her before crashing out on the other side and picking up Scootaloo's trail again.

There wasn't much to do but make the best of it- go and talk to Luna, maybe try and have a good time on the date. Even if it wasn't the one she wanted. Twilight bundled herself up and got out of the bushes, her chin high, projecting a confidence she didn't have and enthusiasm she didn't feel.

Applejack arrived in the park a little after Fluttershy and Rainbow, who were talking urgently in low voices when she arrived. Applejack knew they were likely talking about her- as far as she was concerned they were welcome to. Fluttershy could probably do with a bit of a conversation with somepony, and Applejack knew she wasn't dealing with the whole situation well at all. Whenever she looked at the yellow pegasus, Applejack felt like she'd caught her chest in a vise- her breathing got tight and uncontrolled. She knew she was using the whole Rarity and Rainbow disaster to try and buy herself some time to think things through, but she didn't know what conclusion would be a good one.

Fluttershy was pretty, there was no denying that. It was easy- easier than Applejack was comfortable with- to imagine her moving to the farm and being part of every single day there, sun-up to sunrise. It was easy to imagine kissing her, Applejack thought, and at that her chest tightened up again. So why was she so nervous about the whole thing? Why did it feel like she didn't know what she wanted? Applejack took a quick breath and tried to work it through. What she needed was somepony to talk this through with, she decided. But who? Rainbow needed to be there for Fluttershy, that was fine. Rarity was nowhere to be seen and Rainbow likely wouldn't thank Applejack for trying to find her. Pinkie would be busy with party planning- maybe

Twilight would have read something about this? Applejack thought to herself. Twilight's probably got a book about relationships somewhere, or-

Rainbow and Fluttershy both saw the orange pony go pale for a second, her eyes suddenly wide. Applejack couldn't believe herself- she'd screamed at Twilight this afternoon, accused the unicorn of all sorts of awful things, and she'd been absolutely wrong. She'd only just realised it! She'd been so relieved, so blessedly relieved that Fluttershy and Twilight weren't together the farm pony had completely forgotten that she owed Twilight an apology.

"Rainbow, Fluttershy, Ah'm sorry but Ah've got to go and find Twilight. Ah owe her an apology and Ah don't think it can wait. Fluttershy, you understand, don't you? Rainbow, I promise Ah'll be back in time to help you out, okay?"

Fluttershy didn't say anything, and Rainbow looked between her two friends for a second before blurting something out.

"I'll go find her! You and Fluttershy can wait here for, uh, for Rarity! I can cover the ground faster than you anyway," the cyan pegasus said, forcing a smile.

"That's mighty kind of you, Rainbow, but Ah really need to find her myself. Fluttershy, Ah'll be back soon. Ah promise, okay?"

"Sure," said Fluttershy quietly, without looking Applejack in the eye.

Applejack hesitated for a second before leaving. Part of her was screaming just to tilt her hat back and kiss Fluttershy, to just let her know how much she was loved, but there was that tiny, nagging doubt in the pit of her stomach. If Ah did this now, Applejack thought, that'd never go away. There would always be a part of me that wondered if Ah really wanted her the way Ah should- the way she deserves to be wanted. Or if Ah was just trying to make my friend as happy as possible.

"Sorry, y'all. Ah've got to talk to Twilight," Applejack said, turning and cantering out towards the food stalls.

Rainbow sighed, turning to Fluttershy.

"Sorry, I tried. Look, she's gonna come around, okay? You know that, right?"

"Rainbow, if she wanted to tell me anything she wouldn't be running off to Twilight the first moment she had a chance. I wanted to know if she liked me, and now I suppose I do. She wants to be friends."

"No! Look, you can't think like that! She's just stubborn, alright? Give her just a little time to get

her head together and she'll realise that she loves you."

"She's had years to get her head together and see me properly, Rainbow. Listen, Rarity could come in through the other entrance too. You should go cover that one or you might miss her," said Fluttershy sadly.

Rainbow looked worried, pacing backwards and forwards for a moment before groaning.

"Augh, fine! I don't want to miss her. But I'll keep going backwards and forwards, okay? If you want to go after Applejack, don't feel like you have to stay here. I can work stuff out with Rarity on my own."

Rainbow took to the skies, and with one last worried look at her friend, sped towards the other entrance to check for Rarity.

Fluttershy watched her friend fly away, and dropped her gaze back to the ground, feeling thoroughly miserable. She couldn't tell how long it was before she was interrupted.

"Excuse me? Are you- that is you! Trixie knew it!" Fluttershy looked up to see a blue unicorn with a silvery mane looking at her excitedly. The newcomer quickly brushed down her cape, adjusted her hat and carried on excitedly.

"Trixie was wandering the park, looking for a pony worth her precious time and then she saw you! You're Fluttershy, yes? The model?"

Fluttershy nodded nervously; she'd had bad experiences with fans in the past and Angel Bunny usually dealt with them. Extremely thoroughly, actually- there had been a few lawsuits- but he was all the way back at the cottage.

"Oh, Trixie knew it! She looked over and saw you here, all glum, and Trixie thought to herself 'Such a pretty pegasus simply must be cheered up a little'. As Trixie got closer, she recognised you from your work! Trixie has to admit- you are simply stunning in the flesh, Fluttershy. Your pictures really don't do you justice."

Fluttershy blinked in surprise. She'd seen Trixie before, when she'd performed at Ponyville, and the showpony had seemed a lot boastful and a little cruel. Now she was actually speaking to her, Trixie seemed a lot nicer- confident instead of arrogant, and so complimentary, even if she did speak in the third pony. Fluttershy realised to her horror that she was starting to blush a little.

"Thank you," she said in a small voice, before realising she should probably say something more substantial. "What brings you to Ponyville, Trixie?"

“Oh, Trixie was visiting with a friend, but she’s all tied up with work. Trixie doesn’t really have anything special to do, but Trixie did, ah, aquire these-” Trixie levitated out a pair of lanyards from underneath her cloak- “and they could let me take a friend backstage, but Trixie doesn’t really know anypony here. Trixie wondered if- no, Trixie is being silly! Enjoy the party, Fluttershy. It’s been so nice meeting you!”

Trixie turned to walk away, and Fluttershy almost reached out to stop her. Trixie had made a bad first impression with her show, but that didn’t mean Fluttershy should treat her badly now. Besides, thought Fluttershy, it’s nice to be appreciated a little.

“Trixie, wait- I mean, if you want, I could perhaps go with you? I don’t mean to push if you’d rather not.”

Fluttershy didn’t see the grin on Trixie’s face at her words, just Trixie’s expression of surprised delight as the unicorn turned back to face her.

“Really? Trixie considers it a great honour to be accompanied by such a delightful pony!”

Trixie put her own lanyard with magic, but reached around Fluttershy’s neck to snap the other one around the pegasus. Fluttershy caught the scent of Trixie’s hair as she did so- it smelt of gunpowder and sandalwood.

The two ponies went towards the back of the stage, Trixie making most of the conversation and standing a little too close to Fluttershy, and Fluttershy surprised herself by not minding in the least. There was still something dark and cold in her gut, but it was easier to ignore it and just listen to the handsome unicorn mare tell her how pretty she was. Yes, Fluttershy lied to herself. I’m just fine.

Twilight left the bushes, dignified and calm and ready for her date, and was almost immediately assailed by two of her friends. Applejack and Pinkie Pie both spotted her at the same time and immediately charged over, each trying to speak over the other in their haste to be understood.

“Whoa, calm down, you two! Applejack, you first,” Twilight said, wanting the worst over with. Applejack had been extremely angry at her earlier, and Twilight didn’t know if she still was- but when she got a good look at the farmer, Twilight could see her worries were utterly foundless.

Applejack looked tired, more than anything, and almost on the verge of tears. Pinkie seemed to notice at the same time as Twilight, becoming unusually quiet.

“Twilight, Ah’m sorry. Ah said some stuff to you earlier that Ah ain’t proud of, about the way

you'd treated Fluttershy, and Ah made a real fool out of myself. Ah lost my temper and Ah should know better. Can you forgive me?"

"Applejack, of course I can! I can understand why you'd say what you did. You misunderstood the situation. Just give me a chance to explain myself in future, okay?" Twilight said, relaxing a little. But that didn't seem to be everything on Applejack's mind; she pawed at the floor nervously before continuing.

"Ah've got myself into a corner over Fluttershy," said Applejack slowly, her eyes starting to fill with tears. "Ah think- no, Ah know- she's in love with me. And Ah love her too, but it might not be in the same way. It's so hard to tell! She's so dear to me, and Ah want her to be happy. She'd be happiest with me, Ah reckon. Ah can see how it'd be easy to be with her and Ah know she's real good for me but what if Ah'm leadin' her on?"

"That's a tough one, Applejack. I'm not sure what the right advice is to give," Twilight admitted.

"I am!" Pinkie shouted, almost bouncing with delight. "At least I think I am. If I'm right. So let's see if I am! Applejack, why were you so mad at Twilight earlier?"

"I guess because Ah caught her- Ah mean, Ah thought Ah caught her getting all seductive with Fluttershy. It really ticked me off, because Ah always thought Fluttershy would end up with Big Macintosh," Applejack admitted with an apologetic glance at Twilight, who wrinkled her nose. That wasn't quite right.

"Actually, Applejack, that's not what you were shouting. You said I'd been seducing Fluttershy and that I had no right to take her away from you. Not Big Mac. You," Twilight said carefully, while Pinkie grinned manically and bounced on the spot.

"See? I thought I was right! You were jealous for yourself, because you didn't want to see Fluttershy with anypony except you!"

Applejack looked down, considering this new information for a minute. She didn't look up again when she spoke, and underneath her hat Twilight could see tears spattering the ground.

"You're right. Thank Celestia, you're right. I love her the same way," she murmured, lifting her head, and Twilight and Pinkie finally saw a smile on her face. Pinkie immediately pulled Applejack and Twilight into an enormous hug, squeezing them both tight.

"Woohoo! Applejack, I'm so pleased for you! Erk." Pinkie's glee seemed to be cut short by her left ear twitching madly.

"Aaa! That means Rarity's nearly here! Applejack, I need you over at the catapult, and you've got to go over your script," said Pinkie, producing a couple of pages of text for Applejack to

read. The farmpony took them with an incredulous look at Pinkie.

“Darn it, Pinkie, Ah was gonna go find Fluttershy and tell ‘er-”

“You don’t have time! Go go go!” said Pinkie, pushing Applejack towards the catapult until she finally got the hint and set off on her own. Twilight watched them leave, when a thought crossed her mind. Earlier today, Applejack had accused her of seducing Big Mac. Twilight snorted in frustration- that was probably her last good chance to ask her about that! Collecting herself, she adjusted her dress and was about to finally walk to the Maison when Pinkie suddenly popped up in front of her, causing the unicorn to shriek and jump backwards.

“I forgot to introduce you!” Pinkie grinned. She grabbed Twilight’s hoof and started dragging her towards the Maison tables, finally depositing the dishevelled Twilight on a chair in front of Princess Luna, whose expression quickly changed from a faintly dreamy anticipation to stark surprise.

“Luna! You remember Twilight, right? Well, I thought you two had so much in common and you’re both such great ponies that I thought I’d set you up on a date tonight!” Pinkie said, with an enormous grin. Luna seemed less than impressed as Pinkie barrelled on undeterred.

“I’ve even got these passes so you can eat for free and- huh. I thought I had more of these, “ said Pinkie, pulling two lanyards from a saddlebag and putting them on the table. Luna cleared her throat to get the earth pony’s attention.

“I fear I misunderstood the situation earlier, Pinkamena. Truly, is Twilight Sparkle to be my paramour this evening?” Luna said, and Twilight thought she could sense a hint of pleading in the Princess’s voice. Twilight’s schedule flashed through her head, with “BANISHED TO MOON” circled several times in red. She had to be as charming as possible!

“It’s an honour, Princess!” Twilight said, forcing her best smile. “I’m sure we’ll have a great time and it won’t be treasonously uncomfortable at all!”

Pinkie and Luna exchanged a glance. Luna smiled nervously, leaning in to whisper to Pinkie, but Twilight could still hear every word; subtlety was not exactly the Princess’s strong point.

“Pinkamena, Twilight Sparkle is a fine pony indeed, but I was under the impression that-”

“That you two were going to have a great time?” Pinkie supplied, clearly aware that Twilight couldn’t help listening in. “I hope you have a fantabulous evening!” Pinkie quickly swept the contents of the neighbouring tables, candles and all, into her saddlebags, leaving Luna and Twilight isolated even if other ponies came to sit.

“At least, I think I hope you do,” Pinkie muttered to herself as she left, frowning for a moment

before her usual bubbly demeanour re-asserted itself.

Twilight looked at Luna, who seemed thoroughly peeved. In a panic, Twilight reached for her list of conversational topics, not caring if Luna saw. They had to talk about something! Okay, this one looked good!

“Luna, did you know that there are over seven thousand types of apple? And several of those are grown right here in Ponyville?”

Luna raised an eyebrow at Twilight before bursting out into a surprisingly loud, throaty chuckle. Twilight tried to find the joke in what she'd said- was that funny? Were there way more or less? Had she just made an idiot of herself in front of the Princess?

“There really are!” Twilight blurted out, causing Luna to laugh even harder. “I’ve got lists at home and I’m almost never wrong! I can fetch them!”

Twilight realised she was almost shouting in her panic, and was about to keep defending her apple-related knowledge when Luna gently placed a hoof over Twilight’s, silencing her.

“Twilight Sparkle, please calm yourself,” Luna said, wiping away a tear of mirth. “It is abundantly apparent that I am not the companion you expected this evening, and in all honesty my affections lie elsewhere too. You do not need to impress me with apple factoids.”

As she finished her sentence, Luna started to giggle again, and Twilight started to see how ridiculous the situation was. She was unable to prevent a laugh slipping out, and before she knew it she and the princess were both in absolute hysterics, beating onto the table and clutching their stomachs before they pulled themselves together. Twilight honestly couldn’t say how long she’d been laughing, but it felt like it had purged something from her. She realised she wasn’t nervous at all, even a little bit.

“Sorry, Princess. I was so worried about impressing you,” Twilight admitted, adjusting her dress.

“Do not aggrieve yourself, my little pony,” Luna said. “I should hope that you know I count you as a firm friend after the assistance you have provided me in the past. You need not impress me further. Now, what say we make the best of an awkward situation and order something to eat?”

Twilight was about to agree when she heard an incredibly loud high-pitched scream from the direction of the main crowd, followed by an almighty crash.

“What was that?” She said, realising that both she and Luna had risen to their hooves.

“It may require our assistance,” Luna said, all levity vanished from her face. “Twilight, come with me and we shall see what can be done.”

Worried, the two ponies cantered towards the main stage, the crowd parting before them as they saw the Princess. Twilight tried to calm herself. Whatever happened, they could probably fix it. Right?

Rarity entered the park, the Doctor standing beside her and her barding on. True, her chestplate might be a fabulously slinky little blue number, and her helmet might be a perfectly coiffured mane, but it was barding all the same. Rarity felt she needed it; she'd made an utter fool of herself over Rainbow Dash one too many times, and now she needed to prove to Rainbow- to everypony- that she didn't give a short sharp buck about the dashing weatherpony. She glanced to her left, checking on the Doctor, and was pleased by what she saw. As well as being educated, he fitted formal dress extremely well, his jacket hanging pleasingly across his flanks.

Rarity still didn't have any deeper reaction than that, though, and that was irritating. She was seeing him through dressmakers eyes, looking for cut and fit, not at the pony himself as a possible romantic option. If she was honest with herself, it had been a long time since she'd looked at anypony that way. Except one. Rarity shook her head a little to clear the cobwebs, and listened to the music- it seemed to be a mix of a heavy bass beat and some extraordinarily gifted strings. Eminently danceable, at least.

"Shall we, Doctor?" Rarity smiled at her companion and the two of them set off towards the dance floor. As they got there, they were greeted with a wave by Pinkie, who directed them to a clear space near the edge, by what Rarity assumed was a platform for firework launching. Pinkie gave Rarity a quick smile and then melted away into the rest of the party, staying unusually quiet. Rarity thought that was rather odd, but was distracted when she noticed that Whooves seemed a little uncomfortable.

"Doctor? Is there a problem?" she asked, politely.

"No, not at all! Except, ah, I don't actually know how to dance," Whooves admitted, slightly embarrassed. Rarity took a deep breath and kept her best smile on.

"Oh, it's not difficult at all. Look, I'll show you. Start by standing up straight- that's it- and now you just need to-"

"Hey Rarity," came a voice from behind Whooves that Rarity hadn't expected quite this soon. Taking a deep breath, she moved around Whooves to speak to Rainbow.

"Good evening, Rainbow," Rarity said as calmly as she could manage. Just seeing the pegasus brought on such a rush of feelings it was all she could do to remember breathing. Rainbow had an apologetic smile and her wings folded, and before Rarity could say anything else, Rainbow

started to speak.

“Look, Rarity, I owe you an apology, alright? I’m sorry I shouted at you,” Rainbow said quietly. She seemed to be waiting for a response, and Rarity somehow found a way to keep her anger down. While she collected herself, Rainbow didn’t seem to be able to let the silence rest, suddenly blurting out a sentence she seemed to instantly regret.

“I mean, it doesn’t matter that much right? You found a date for tonight quickly enough.”

Rarity snorted at the implication, snapping back at Rainbow.

“Oh, you mean the Doctor here? He’s a very dear friend who agreed to accompany me this evening. As my date. I was just teaching him to dance.”

Rainbow narrowed her eyes, her apologetic posture seemingly forgotten, anger at Whooves’ presence written clearly across her face.

“He can’t even dance? Great catch there, Rarity. He’s a total keeper.”

“It’s not the dancing that’s important, Rainbow! Doctor Smith knows how to treat a mare, you see,” Rarity said, not noticing the little grey unicorn filly skidding to a stop in front of Whooves. Dinky’s expression of delight at finding Whooves quickly changed to dismay as she started to take in the circumstances in which she’d found him. Whooves raised an eyebrow as he noticed Dinky, and was about to interrupt Rarity when she continued.

“Doctor Smith understands how to actually care for somepony, you see? He doesn’t shout at me or call me names! He doesn’t ignore me for months on end, Rainbow!”

Rarity’s voice was starting to get genuinely loud. The nearby ponies had stopped dancing, fascinated by this new spectacle- through them, Whooves saw Big Macintosh’s eyes widen as he suddenly turned to try and restrain another pony the crowd was obscuring. Rarity seemed oblivious, continuing with her rant, and Whooves had a sinking feeling it was too late to prevent a disaster.

“He doesn’t ignore the effort it takes to make a gift! He doesn’t think I’m vain, or boring, or manipulative! He’s a better fit for me than you could ever be!”

Rarity’s last tirade was unfortunately punctuated by Ditzzy Doo pushing past Big Mac with a flare of her wings. Glaring at Whooves with one good eye, she advanced on Whooves and Rarity as Whooves tried to get out an explanation.

“Dizzy, I’m just doing Rarity a favour here-”

Ditzy turned sideways and flared her wing across Whooves's face with a sharp cracking noise, silencing him and leaving a thin red mark across his cheek.

"I bet you are," she said without looking at him, her voice clearer with anger than it had ever been before. They stayed frozen like that for a second, Whooves trying to find his words, when they were both snapped to their senses by a wailing from around their hooves.

"You're not supposed to fight! You're supposed to- No! NO!" shouted Dinky, with an angry, horrified expression. Suddenly the filly turned and bolted through the crowd, disappearing into the forest of legs and hooves. Ditzy didn't look at Whooves as she immediately took to the air, scanning the park for her daughter.

"That went about as badly as it could go," muttered Whooves to himself.

"Eeyup," said Big Mac, patting his smaller friend on the shoulder. "We'd best go find Dinky. C-Come on, John."

"Yeah. Yes, you're right, of course," said Whooves, wiping an eye and turning to Rarity. "Rarity, I've got to go. I won't hold you to your end of the deal. It's a lost cause, I fear."

Whooves smiled sadly at himself, and Big Mac shepherded him into the crowd to help look for Dinky. For a moment, there was silence, and then Rarity was appalled to hear Rainbow all too eager to fill it.

"He wasn't a real date, then."

"What exactly is that supposed to mean?" retorted Rarity.

"He was doing you a favour. As part of a deal. Why were you bringing some other pony with you tonight?" Rainbow asked, her brows narrowing. "Were you trying to hurt me? Is that what this is?"

Rainbow and Rarity started to circle each other, getting closer and closer, neither of them able to keep still.

"Me hurt you? Me hurt YOU?" Rarity shouted. "I was trying to let you off the hook after making such an idiot out of myself! I was trying to make you think I was fine! It's pretty clear you've never cared for me at all. After you saved me, you didn't visit. You barely spoke to me. You didn't even thank me for your silly Nightmare Night costume!"

"I didn't think that was such a big deal," said Rainbow dismissively. "It didn't really fit me, it was too tight."

“It did fit you, you featherbrain! It was aerodynamically contoured! It was supposed to be tight!”

“You made me a proper flightsuit?” Rainbow asked, suddenly forgetting any anger she’d had. “Like the Wonderbolts use? You must have put a lot of work into it, huh.”

“Yes!” screamed Rarity, advancing on Rainbow, who backed off the dance floor. “Weeks of research! A matching costume for myself in Wonderbolts and Shadowbolts colours! I had Twilight prepare the spell that gave me wings! I even had Pinkie script us a little scene where you corrupted me into changing sides!”

“I corrupted you?” Rainbow asked, suddenly stopping her retreat. The fight seemed to go out of Rarity all at once.

“That was the plan,” Rarity said, her eyes starting to fill with tears. “You never even visited my house.”

“Aw, Rarity, I’m so sorry. I didn’t know! You never showed up, and I’d spent so long altering the costume- I was kind of mad it didn’t fit, I thought you didn’t care. I was a bonehead, I’m really sorry.” Rainbow said. As soon as Rainbow had started to apologise, Rarity could see that the pegasus’ words were coming to her more easily, as if some great block had been lifted from their path.

“Rarity, the truth is I’ve been- I’ve been playing it cool, okay? After the young fliers competition I just didn’t know how to talk to you. But I wanted to! I really did, I couldn’t stop thinking about you. I can’t stop thinking about you. I didn’t mean to hurt you, Rarity, I swear.”

With every word, Rarity could feel a weight lifting from her, until she honestly felt that her next steps would take her aloft. Rarity sniffled a little, before raising her head. Rainbow was standing there, looking so concerned, so beautiful. There was just one little thing that Rarity was confused by, now.

“Wait, you altered the costume? You altered a professionally tailored flightsuit? Rainbow, you don’t know how to thread a needle. How on earth did you alter it?” Rarity said, smiling. Rainbow grinned in relief before answering.

“Oh, easy! See, I have this old stapler, and-”

“You used staples?” Rarity cut Rainbow off, and Rainbow backed away again, Rarity following her quite deliberately.

“You used STAPLES!?” She asked again, her voice taking on a dangerously high pitch. Rarity could feel her blood boiling. “Did you even THINK about how much WORK I had to-”

“Oh no!” a familiar voice yelled from somewhere up above. Rarity looked up with the rest of the crowd to see Applejack standing atop some sort of platform, shouting to the crowd.

“It is too distressing to me to see mah friends fighting like this! Ah believe Ah am about to faint!” Applejack shouted in a practiced, mechanical voice, rolling her eyes as she jumped off the platform. Rarity and Rainbow gasped- what was Applejack doing? Before Applejack landed, Pinkie Pie suddenly appeared behind Rarity and shoved her sideways, sending her staggering onto a tilted platform.

Rainbow was the first pony to work out what was happening, and she had her wings flared before Applejack landed. Applejack was landing on the same catapult Rainbow had tried to use in the past, to improve her take-offs, and Rarity had just been pushed onto the other side. Applejack hit the catapult hard, and in the blink of an eye Rarity was in the air, screaming as loudly as she could, soaring towards the stage as the assembled crowd gasped, too stunned to react.

“Rarity!” Rainbow shouted, powering into the air as fast as she could. She’d reacted fast enough she was only thirty yards away from the spiralling, screaming Rarity, then twenty yards, then ten, pushing harder and harder, accelerating as fast as possible. For a moment, she caught a glimpse of Rarity’s eyes, and there it was again- that moment of panic turned to trust. Rarity knew she’d be saved. She knew Rainbow wouldn’t let her down. With a sudden burst of speed, Rainbow closed the gap and grabbed Rarity bodily, pulling her chest to chest. She felt Rarity’s forelegs locking around the back of her neck, felt Rarity’s lips on her chin and jaw and throat, heard the unicorn she was carrying- the unicorn she loved- whispering that she felt so safe, Dash, so right in her grasp, so happy to be caught by her Rainbow, murmuring the pegasus’s name over and over again and punctuating it with small, frantic kisses as Rainbow tried to slow their descent towards the stage.

It was understandable, Rainbow maintained afterwards, that she’d judged the landing so badly that they’d ploughed straight through the backstage area and into the flower beds. Rainbow wrapped herself tight around Rarity during the crash, taking the brunt of the fall, and when the dust had cleared Rainbow was flat on her back in the dahlias. Rarity was still grasping her tight, the unicorn’s head pressed against the pegasus’s heaving chest as Rainbow gasped for breath.

“You saved me again,” said Rarity, lifting her head and kissing Rainbow full on the lips. “You always save me.”

Rarity pulled back for a second, her head above Rainbow’s, tears dripping down her nose and landing hot on Rainbow’s face. Her mascara was running, there was a big smudge of dirt on her cheek, and Rainbow had never seen her more beautiful. The tired pegasus pulled her head up and kissed Rarity again for a second before slumping back down.

“Always,” said Rainbow. “I promise. Always.”

They lay there, in the flower bed, holding each other for an amount of time Rainbow found it quite impossible to measure, until Rainbow realised something.

“Shouldn’t somepony have come to find us by now? Not that I’m complaining.”

“I suppose you’re right. Should we go and find out what’s happened?” Rarity asked, lazily.

Rainbow flared her wings and wrapped them around Rarity, pulling her tight and kissing her forehead. Her hair smelled of tangerines, Rainbow realised.

“Nah. Not yet.”

Applejack started galloping for the stage the moment after she landed on the catapult and launched Rarity through the air- as Pinkie predicted, Rainbow was after her like a shot. Pinkie’s predictions started to get a little fuzzy about the subject of landing, however, and instead of a graceful landing on the stage Rainbow and Rarity tore through the backdrops one after another, vast swathes of fabric falling from the rafters and landing haphazardly across the stage. The musicians seemed to be dealing with the whole disaster pretty well, Applejack thought- Octavia was keeping up the tune even though she had to quickly drag her cello fifteen feet backwards to avoid being draped in thick, dark fabric, and Vinyl’s horn was glowing brightly as she deflected the falling debris away from her equipment. It was only when Applejack got close enough to climb up on the stage and find out what had happened that the music lost some depth, and Applejack realised Octavia had stopped playing.

As she clambered up, Applejack could see Octavia had dropped her cello, and was staring, stunned, at the wings of the stage. Vinyl was still concentrating on keeping her records spinning and the debris out of her equipment, so Applejack figured she was the only other one who’d noticed what Octavia had. There in the wings, Trixie and Fluttershy were lying on a pile of sandbags, kissing deeply, seemingly oblivious to their sudden visibility. It hurt like a sledgehammer to the chest. Applejack heard a low, pained moan, a wounded animal noise, and didn’t realise for a moment she’d made it herself. She didn’t snap back into action until she heard Octavia lose it.

“TRIXIE! You little- I’m going to kill you!” she screamed, and with practiced reflexes taking over Applejack bit the musician’s tail, pulling her back onto her rump. Trixie broke away from Fluttershy at hearing her name, and the unicorn didn’t seem to be fazed by the situation at all. Applejack could see Fluttershy’s expression as Trixie broke away from their kiss- she didn’t seem happy, or shocked at Octavia’s outburst, or appalled at being interrupted. She just looked

numb. Trixie shook her mane out of her face and levitated her hat back on her head before saying anything.

“Octavia, you’ll do nothing of the sort. Trixie has never stated that you had any right to expect Trixie’s unwavering attention. Frankly-” the showpony glanced at one of her hooves, blowing sand out of it- “given how we got together, did you really expect anything else? I was getting a little bored of you anyway.”

Octavia was stunned. Applejack could barely believe the sheer, unassailable arrogance radiating from Trixie- did she honestly think she’d done nothing wrong? Neither of the earth ponies could find anything to say, until the silence was broken by a small voice from behind Trixie.

“Excuse me- Trixie, were you dating this pony?” Fluttershy asked, rising to her hooves.

“Trixie fails to see how that’s any of your business, dear,” said Trixie, not turning around.

Applejack’s attention to the scene was broken by a voice from beside her that turned out to belong to Pinkie Pie, who must have finally caught up with her.

“What’d I miss?” she asked cheerfully.

“I can’t believe this, Trixie! Not just that you cheated on me with her- yeah, I should have known you were a total scumbag, you’re right- but that you were stupid enough to do it on the same bucking stage I was performing on!” Octavia screamed.

“Okay, I’m up to speed!” Pinkie smiled, before her face suddenly became serious.

“Trixie doesn’t really think there’s much you can do about it, Octavia. None of you have the magic to stop me. Now, if you’ll allow Trixie to make her way off the stage?” Trixie sneered, ready to push past the ponies in front of her.

“Augh! You loathsome little wretch!” Octavia screamed, grabbing things at random from Pinkie’s saddlebags and hurling them at Trixie. The showpony just caught them in midair with her magic, stopping a handful of balloons, an unfurled streamer and a little doll inches in front of her face.

“As I was saying-” said Trixie dismissively, before she was cut off by a white glow arising around her. A confused look passed over her face for a second before she suddenly lifted into the air, still holding Octavia’s impromptu missiles, and then accelerated out of the hole in the backstage that Rainbow and Rarity had torn a few moments ago. Rushing over to look with Pinkie and Octavia, Applejack thought she saw a glimpse of Trixie, screaming loudly, disappearing over the top of the town hall. From behind the three ponies, Vinyl spoke up.

“Tavi, please don’t be mad. I didn’t want to overstep my boundaries, but-”

She was cut off by Octavia’s mouth on hers, pressing against her in a grateful kiss. Vinyl seemed to lose herself in it for a moment before breaking away.

“Yah! Um! Tavi, Pinkie and I- we’re still sort of a thing, I can’t just-” Vinyl said, looking at Pinkie pleadingly. Applejack saw her friend almost roll her eyes, smiling quietly.

“Vinyl, it’s okay. Really. I understand, alright? Now could you go look after Octy? She’s had a pretty rough day.”

Vinyl seemed stunned for a moment, until Octavia pressed into her, needing the contact, the familiar feel of Vinyl against her. With a last, apologetic, grateful glance at Pinkie, Vinyl led her lover off the stage.

Applejack was so caught up in this she’d almost forgotten about Fluttershy, but as soon as she turned and saw the pegasus mare standing there, still where she’d been a moment ago, the crushing weight in Applejack’s chest came back.

“Fluttershy?” said Applejack quietly, pulling away from Pinkie, who’d graciously returned to staring out of the hole at the back of the stage. As she got closer, Fluttershy said something so quietly Applejack couldn’t hear it.

“Say again, sugarcube? That was a mite quiet for me,” Fluttershy looked up at Applejack, and while her eyes were as determined as Applejack had ever seen them, her face was wet with tears.

“I said don’t you dare be mad at me.”

Applejack took a deep breath. This was going to be hard to say right.

“Ah ain’t mad. Ah ain’t going to pretend it didn’t hurt me none, seeing you all curled up with Trixie, but Ah ain’t mad at you. You got your reasons for doin’ what you done and Ah don’t mind what they were.”

Applejack could see Fluttershy was about to either collapse or scream at her, and so hurriedly pressed on.

“Ah got to be honest with you, Fluttershy. Ah want you to move in up at the farm and for us to be a couple together. Ah want to wake up in the morning and see your head on the pillow next to mine. Ah ain’t just saying this because it’s gonna make you happy to hear it, either. Ah’m plain telling you what Ah want, and it’s you. Ah love you, Fluttershy. It’s okay if you don’t love me back, or if you want to kiss every pony in Canterlot. Ah just wanted you to know.”

Applejack couldn't read Fluttershy's reaction- her face was still a mask except for the tears pouring down her cheeks. All of a sudden, the pegasus's lips were against hers, soft and gentle, and Applejack knew she'd never want to kiss anypony else. Fluttershy pulled back for a second, smiling at Applejack, and the farmpony felt the weight on her chest dissolve in her happiness.

"You were pretty silly about this, you know."

"Ah reckon so. So what do we do now?"

Fluttershy blushed a little, and leaned in to whisper in Applejack's ear. Applejack could feel her own blush spring up at Fluttershy's suggestions, and her cheeks got hotter and hotter until she finally leaned away. Applejack called to the group of ponies that, she realised with embarrassment, had turned to watch them. Pinkie had at some point been joined by Twilight and Princess Luna, Applejack noticed.

"Um, Pinkie Pie? You mind makin' sure Applebloom gets to a friend's place tonight, for a sleepover or something? Ah'm not gonna be home."

"I don't think she can stay at mine," a small voice piped up from the hole at the back of the stage. The assembled ponies turned to see Spike and Sweetie Belle looking out through the place Rainbow and Rarity had crashed through the backstage. Sweetie Belle pointed to a flowerbed where it was just possible to see two ponies, one white and one pale blue, curled up around each other and kissing.

"We were looking for Rarity- we saw her get thrown through the air- and, er, she's going to be busy too, I think," Spike said, a little downcast.

"Yeah, last time she had company I got in trouble for singing too loud in the bathroom and ruining the mood, so I definitely can't stay at hers," Sweetie Belle said, before turning to Spike. "Don't be too sad, Spike. She's too old for you anyway."

"Yeah, I know," admitted Spike ruefully.

"Ooooh! I know! We can have a campout right here in the park!" Pinkie squealed joyfully. "Me and Spike and Applebloom and Sweetie Belle and anypony else who wants to!"

"That sounds just champion," said Applejack, smiling broadly. Then she realised something- the music had stopped completely. The last record Vinyl had put on must have reached its conclusion.

"We don't have any musicians left!" Pinkie Pie shouted, clapping her hooves to her mouth as she realised the problem.

“It has been some time, but I believe I can play the instrument your sister left here,” Luna said, walking over to the cello and lifting it and the bow with her magic. The crowd seemed to go silent as they realised what they were about to witness- a performance from the princess herself.

“Twilight Sparkle, may I have a moment of your time while I prepare?” Luna said, settling down and making herself comfortable while she familiarised herself with the instrument, lifting it in the glow of her magic. Twilight raised an eyebrow and walked over to her.

“Twilight, there was somepony else you were hoping for at your date tonight, yes?” Twilight nodded, looking a little embarrassed.

“Then for my sake, go and find them. This is too pleasant an evening to be wasted on mistakes,” Luna said quietly, looking seriously at the lavender unicorn. Twilight seemed like she was about to say something, and then just smiled at the princess and her friends before running off the stage. As she reached the wings, Applejack called after her.

“Twilight! Big Mac’s looking for you, just so you know. It’d work out pretty well for you if you were looking for him, if you understand me.”

Twilight nearly span around, grinning enthusiastically and shouting back before leaving the stage.

“That’s perfect! Thanks, Applejack!”

Luna held the cello in place, raised her head and called for Pinkie.

“Pinkamena? I would like very much for you to stay on stage while I play. I play better when it is for an audience of one, even if everypony can hear it,” the princess said. Pinkie smiled and moved to lie down beside the princess, folding her legs underneath her as Luna tried a few putative notes on the cello.

Then the princess began to play; a waltz, beautiful and simple, her eyes closed as she concentrated on her magic, dancing the bow across the strings. Applejack felt a tug at her foreleg, and saw that Fluttershy wanted her to join the dance floor, where ponies were coupling up and starting to dance.

They reached the floor and stood on their hind legs, each supporting the other. Applejack wrapped her hooves around Fluttershy’s waist, and the pegasus leaned into her, whispering in her ear as they swayed to the music.

“I love you too, Applejack. You did know that, right?” Fluttershy murmured quietly.

“Ah think Ah have for a long time,” she whispered back, holding Fluttershy tight as they spiralled out onto the floor.

Lyra breathed a sigh of relief when the Princess’s waltz began. She’d been looking for the perfect opportunity to propose all night, and every time she thought she’d found the right moment, something had happened to ruin it. First, they’d entered the park, and Bon Bon had been so delighted by everything. It seemed just right- but then she’d seen Luna at the Maison, and suddenly that was all she’d talk about. They’d had a little picnic with apple fritters a while after that, and another perfect moment had been utterly ruined by the shrieking Rarity sailing through the air. After that, Bon Bon had been all aflutter about Rainbow Dash’s heroics, gossiping about the pegasus’ supposed romantic entanglements. Apparently, Lyra had found out, most of the town assumed she had been secretly seeing Applejack. Lyra didn’t care a bit. She was starting to worry she’d never get to propose, after saving up so much for the party and all the entertainment.

The waltz, though, gave Lyra a real opportunity. She could lead Bon Bon to the centre of the floor, and then give the signal for the spotlight, and then finally propose. Everything was going wonderfully at first, she and Bon Bon getting lost in each other’s eyes, and then Bon Bon had suddenly spotted something over Lyra’s shoulder. As they rotated, Lyra saw that it was Applejack and some pegasus she didn’t really know kissing and dancing, and Bon Bon was off again, rattling off new gossip. The moment had completely gone, Lyra thought.

“Sweetie? What’s wrong? You seem a little distracted,” Bon Bon asked, pulling Lyra out of her reverie.

“Ah, it’s nothing really, babe. I just- I guess I had different expectations about this evening, is all. Not that it hasn’t been lovely!” Lyra hurriedly added, but she needn’t have worried.

“Oh, it has been, hasn’t it!” Bon Bon said happily. All this romance and tension in the air, a visit from the princess, and you. My perfect partner.”

Bon Bon seemed to consider something for a second, swallowing hard and pulling her head back to see Lyra properly.

“This evening’s inspired me, sweetie. You know I love you- I love you more than I’ve ever loved anypony. More than I’ve ever loved anything. Lyra, would you marry me?”

Lyra was stunned for a moment, and then before she knew it she was babbling with excitement.

“Yes! Of course yes! I’ll marry you and we’ll be married!” Lyra pulled her head back, shouting to

the crowd, wanting everyone to hear. "We're getting married!" The waltz became a gauntlet of congratulations after that, everypony wanting to share in the happiness of the longstanding couple. After a while, Lyra found a moment to hold Bon Bon close, and spoke to her quietly.

"This was perfect, babe. I couldn't have planned a better proposal," Lyra said, smiling broadly. She didn't think she'd ever let Bon Bon know exactly how true that was.

Not every pony was out on the dance floor. Whooves was still looking around for Dinky around the back of the stage, watching as outlying ponies- including Rainbow and Rarity, he noticed with a smile- walked over to join in the Princess's waltz. Whooves had been looking around, feeling distinctly sorry for himself, for some time now, trying to spot Dinky among the crowds of ponies.

Then he'd had an idea- he was likely looking in the wrong places. Where would a pony like Dinky want to hide? Somewhere she felt like she wouldn't be spotted. Somewhere she knew fairly well. Around the back of the stage, there were several picnic tables, and Whooves had seen Dinky and her mother eat at them occasionally. So far, he'd checked three tables without success, but as he got to the fourth, he was certain he saw movement underneath it. Carefully, he sat down on one of the benches.

"Dinky?" he said softly.

"No! Go away!" came a small voice from under the table. Whooves thought for a moment before answering- he'd have to play this cautiously.

"Oh, you're not Dinky Doo? My apologies, miss. Her mum's lost track of her, though. Have you seen her?"

"Maybe," said the little voice. "What if I have?"

"Well, if you have, can you tell her I'm looking for her? My name is Whooves, and I think I've upset her," Whooves said, looking at the ground. "I think she saw me with a pony called Rarity, who's a friend of mine. I think she's worried- just like her mum is- that I'm in love with Rarity. I'm not though. I'm in love with her mother, with Ditzzy Doo. I was just helping Rarity out so that she'd help me win Ditzzy over, because I'm a big idiot and I never say the right things. I needed the help."

"You are a big idiot," came the incredulous filly's voice from under the table. "Mum- I mean, Ditzzy Doo- she's liked you for ages. Dinky knows, she told me. You should have just said 'I love you' and kissed her."

“Really?” said Whooves, smiling to himself. He got off the bench and leaned his head under the table, to see Dinky huddled up. She’d obviously been crying, but she smiled at Whooves when she saw him. Whooves was about to try and coax her out when he heard a familiar voice behind him.

“R-Really.” Ditzzy said, and Whooves tried to stand up so quickly he smacked his head off the bottom of the table. Backing up, he raised his head- he’d have quite a lump tomorrow, to go with the wingslap mark he’d received earlier- and turned to face Ditzzy, who was smiling at him. That, at least, was a big improvement.

“Dizzy! I mean, Ditzzy! Look, I can explain everything, okay?” Whooves said, frantically smiling. Ditzzy raised an eyebrow and shook her head.

“Y-you’re worse with w-words than I am,” she said quietly, stepping closer to Whooves, until they were inches apart. “You should t-take Dinky’s advice.”

She smelled of clean sweat and honeysuckle, Whooves realised, and the words came tumbling out of his mouth before he’d had any time to overthink them.

“I love you,” he said.

Ditzzy smiled at him, leaned in and kissed him twice. First, gently along the red mark she’d made on his cheek, and then hard against his lips, pressing herself against him and only breaking away when Dinky cleared her throat.

“I’m still technically lost, mum,” she said pointedly.

“There y-you are!” Ditzzy said theatrically, picking up Dinky in an enormous hug and falling flat on her back, eliciting a series of snorting giggles from her daughter, who suddenly started pawing at her mother’s chest in alarm.

“Mum! You’ve got to go! You and Mister Whooves can’t miss the dance!” Dinky said, bouncing off Ditzzy and worriedly looking towards the dance floor. “Otherwise Mister Whooves isn’t being a proper gentlecolt and that would be totally disasterisk!”

Ditzzy rolled to her feet, leaning into Whooves as they followed the frantic filly towards the dance floor. Whooves realised that she felt different against him than he’d imagined- her body felt every bit as marvellous as he’d thought, but he hadn’t ever imagined it would feel this right, that he would feel this comfortable. As they got to the dance floor and Dinky and Ditzzy stepped out ahead of him, he thought about saying he couldn’t dance, and then changed his mind. Frankly, words had only gotten him in trouble recently. He lifted the giggling Dinky onto his shoulders and pulled Ditzzy up into the same hold as the other dancers were using, trusting her to balance him. This couldn’t be that hard, could it? As he faltered through the first few steps, Ditzzy pulled him

close, whispering in his left ear.

“I love you t-too,” she said quietly. Whooves found he couldn’t move at all as Ditzzy pulled back, blushing quietly.

Dinky pulled his right ear hard from her perch on his shoulders, whispering into it loudly.

“You’re supposed to kiss her! Don’t you know anything?”

Whooves and Ditzzy both suppressed a laugh, and Whooves leaned in and kissed her gently, feeling her pull him closer as he did. He would take a leaf out of Big Macintosh’s book from now on, he promised himself, and barely say anything ever again.

Big Macintosh sighed in frustration as he lumbered through the flowers, looking for Dinky. He’d already found Scootaloo, who had been busily losing a strudel-eating contest with Applebloom, but she’d lost track of Dinky a while ago. This, he thought, pushing aside the posies to see if there was a filly hiding under them, was not the evening he’d hoped for. He was about to start on the rhododendron bushes when he heard a voice behind him.

“Big Mac? What are you up to?” Twilight asked him.

Big Mac turned around and saw Twilight, who had removed her dress and left it backstage. The unicorn looked tired and nervous, almost bouncing from hoof to hoof.

“H-hullo, M-M-Miz Sparkle,” said Big Macintosh, cursing his stammer as he did so. It was always so difficult to say anything to her! “D-Dinky’s gone m-missing.”

“Actually, I think she’s been found now. She was on the dance floor with her mom and Doctor Smith. Didn’t you know?” Twilight asked apologetically.

“Nnnnope,” drawled Big Mac, letting his irritation seep into the word.

“Well, that means you don’t have to look for her any more, right? So you aren’t doing anything right now?” Twilight asked, looking from side to side.

“Nnnnope,” the big stallion said again. He’d been dreaming of something like this for a while now, of Twilight coming to speak to him, and now he couldn’t say the words. He had them lined up in his head, all ready to say- that she was stunning, that he loved hearing her talk, that she was in every way a pony that he had never expected to know, and that he absolutely adored. He just couldn’t force them past his stupid tongue.

"I was thinking that- that maybe-" Twilight asked, starting to blush. "I was hoping that- that you would-"

Big Mac realised, then, that Twilight was having exactly the same problem he was, and that suddenly made everything a whole lot easier. Shifting his weight between his hooves, he started speaking, trying not to think about it too hard and let his stammer take over completely.

"Miz Twilight, Ah was hoping to be your blind d-date tonight. Ah'd got your old doll all fixed up as a gift and there was a whole kerfuffle over which pony was supposed t'be waiting for you, but Ah wanted it to be me. But Ah've lost the doll- Ah think Ah left it at the M-Maison de Lune- so Ah don't have a gift for you any more."

Twilight seemed a little taken aback at this, but Big Mac didn't let it stop him. It felt good to be doing things the proper Apple way, finally breaking through his shyness, just telling the truth regardless of the consequences.

"You're th' highlight of my day, when Ah can make it to the library. You're adorable when y-you're concentrating on something. You work hard and you take good care of Spike. Ah would be very interested, Miz Sparkle, in spending some time with you this evening. If you would like to spend it with me."

Twilight seemed to have sort of frozen into an embarrassed silence. Big Mac waited for her response, trying not to panic. Surely, he thought, she'd have said something by now if she was interested. She certainly would, right? Twilight broke the silence by speaking far too loudly, all at once.

"You're really pretty!" Twilight practically shouted, wincing at her volume when she realised how loud she'd been. Big Macintosh was blushing as furiously as he ever had.

"What I mean is, you're really pretty." Twilight clarified, before realising she hadn't actually said anything new. "I mean- you actually want to go on a date with me? Because you're really- I mean- you still have green eyes."

Twilight slammed a hoof against her forehead in frustration and Big Mac smiled at her. The unicorn was clearly having a bad words day.

"R-Really," he clarified, walking up to the unicorn and leaning towards her. "May I?" he asked, his face inches away from hers.

"May you? Oh! Yes, I mean-"

Big Mac cut off Twilight with his lips against hers, and after a moment of freezing Twilight leaned into the kiss, tentatively at first and then hungrily, pushing against Big Mac with a strength he

hadn't expected. After some time, they broke off the kiss, both breathing heavily.

"Whew!" Twilight said, smiling, so much calmer than she had been a few moments ago. "I mean- I mean, well, that was really nice. I mean really good! I've never kissed anypony quite like that before."

She bit her lip at that last admission, smiling at Big Mac.

"What do we do now? I mean, do you have any plans for the date? Because there's a new book in at the library that I think you'll really enjoy. We could read it together?" Twilight asked, flush with her first dating success. Big Mac nodded, and the two of them fell into matching step as they walked towards Twilight's home.

"Big Mac?" Twilight asked quietly as they walked together, standing closer than they ever had before. He found something extraordinarily comforting in her presence, Big Mac realised.

"Eeyup?"

"Did you know there are over seven thousand varieties of apple?"

"Eeyup," Big Mac raised an eyebrow. "We grow 'em, Twilight."

"Oh yeah, of course," Twilight realised, rolling her eyes at herself. Big Mac felt like it was perhaps, now, his job to keep the conversation moving.

"Ah'm sorry Ah lost your doll, Twilight."

"It's okay. I didn't really need her or anything. It's nice to know somepony who cared picked her up- that's really all I wanted, I think. And Big Mac?"

"Eeyup?"

"I like when you call me Twilight," she said. Suddenly, she leaned up on the tips of her hooves to kiss him on the cheek, and returned to walking beside him just as quickly. Big Mac felt the heat of her lips fading away, and silently thanked whatever forces had brought them together.

After she'd finished her impromptu concert, Luna had taken three rounds of grateful applause, and had then retired to a cloud over the park to rest while Pinkie closed up the evening. Pinkie had busily organised the deconstruction of the stage for tomorrow and started the clean-up processes, as well as press ganging Octavia and Vinyl into rounding up and looking after Dinky, the Cutie Mark Crusaders and Spike. They'd made tents out of the backdrop material from the

stage and a bonfire out of parts of the catapult, and from her lofty perch anypony could see them clearly. Luna could see and hear them perfectly, if she concentrated- the sun had gone down and Luna had risen the moon, and now all that transpired under it was her domain. Vinyl was telling a ghost story, complete with monstrous faces and spooky noises, to the rapt attention of the foals- Scootaloo and Applebloom seemed to revel in the gory details, Dinky was soaking it in as though she'd never heard a ghost story before, and Spike was clutching Sweetie Belle's hoof as the two of them cowered together.

Octavia was lying a little away from the group, a smile on her face as she saw Vinyl entertain the foals. Luna had been very careful not to listen in earlier when Pinkie, Vinyl and Octavia had had a longer conversation and afterwards, Vinyl and Octavia seemed to just be too tired of pretending they didn't need each other. Luna did have to admit to herself, she took some pleasure in the fact that Pinkie was no longer dating anypony.

As she looked around for Pinkie, she realised that there was a rapidly expanding shape coming up from beneath her cloud, and she barely had time to roll aside before a balloon crested through the cumulus. The balloon rose to reveal Pinkie in the basket.

"Hi Luna!" Pinkie said, cheerfully. "Would you do a spell so I can walk on the cloud? I brought fudge!"

Luna smiled and obliged, a flash of light around each of Pinkie's hooves fading into the skin. Pinkie walked over to Luna and lay down beside her, cuddling up to the princess with the lack of decorum Luna had grown to expect and delight in.

"Brr, it's cold! I thought we could maybe see how my friends are doing, if that's okay? I just want to make sure everything went off alright." Pinkie asked.

"Ceratinly, Pinkamena," Luna said, touching the cloudstuff with her horn and stretching it into an oval shape. Rotating the cloud with her magic, Luna aimed the lens at various places over Ponyville, amplifying the sound as well as the light.

"Whom shall we check on first?" Luna asked. It was rare that she could delight in playing voyeur, and she intended to make the most of it. She normally made a concerted effort not to pay any attention to the nocturnal lives of her little ponies.

"Ooh, Rarity and Rainbow Dash! I didn't get to see them after the catapult trick."

The lens aimed towards Carousel Boutique, zooming in at a window, Luna's magic clarifying the scene therein. Rarity was looking at herself in a mirror, bemoaning her ruined makeup, while noises from the bathroom indicated that Rainbow Dash was bathing.

"Oh, I look such a fright! Why didn't you just bring me back here straight away?"

“Hey, I’m not the one who suggested the dancing!” Rainbow’s voice came back, gently mocking. “I don’t think anypony noticed in particular, though. I mean, I had a flower stuck in my wings, roots and all.”

“Eww!” Rarity screamed in faux disgust, smiling quietly. “You mean you didn’t even notice until you got in the bath?”

Rainbow strode out of the bathroom, still dripping wet and wearing a wicked grin.

“Nope! Now, come on princess, it’s time for your bath!” Rainbow lifted a feebly protesting Rarity in her forelegs and carried her, staggering, into the bathroom.

“Oh! What are you doing- you brute! Put me down!” Luna and Pinkie heard an enormous splash, quickly followed by Rainbow’s laughter.

“Fbbppp!” Rarity spluttered, half-giggling. “You monster! Well, two can play at that game!” There was another grand splash that cut off a shout of protest from Rainbow, and then more laughter and the sounds of splashing, both slowly getting less and less frequent. At the first gentle moan from Rarity, Luna discreetly moved the cloud across to focus on a nearby tree.

“Wow, that worked better than I thought!” said Pinkie. “Let’s check on Applejack and Fluttershy. I think they’ll be out at her cottage.”

Luna moved the lens out to the cottage and focused it on Fluttershy’s little window.

Then, extremely quickly, while Pinkie started choking on a piece of fudge and Luna blushed a deep red, she defocused it as fast as possible.

“Whoa,” said Pinkie, finally swallowing her fudge. “That worked out way, way, better than I thought. Can you see if Big Mac and Twilight are still up? Before we check on them?”

Luna nodded her assent, slowly moving the lens across to Twilight’s and confirming that Big Mac and Twilight were both in the main body of the library, reading. As the lens got halfway there, neither she nor Pinkie really noticed a grey pegasus and a brown earth pony, both dark against the night, swimming in the local pond. As the lens scanned over them, the pegasus suddenly appeared from beneath the surface, grabbing the stallion into an embrace and a kiss and dragging him under the water. A moment later the two of them spluttered out at the water’s edge, giggling and panting, lying on the shore of the pond and rolling, happily, into each other’s embrace.

At the library, the lens could see Twilight and Big Mac both reading a book in front of them. As she watched them, Pinkie started smiling widely, for no reason Luna could see until Pinkie

leaned in towards her.

“Look at their eyes!” Pinkie whispered to Luna. “They’re not reading at all- they’re waiting for that last candle to go out.”

Luna looked closer and saw that it was true- both ponies were looking at the candle, shifting closer to each other, quietly willing it to go out and leave them in darkness. Luna smiled, and gently blew through the lens. In the library, the candle winked out, exterminated by a sudden gust of wind, and Big Macintosh and Twilight, liberated by the darkness, leaned in to kiss each other. Twilight broke away after a couple of seconds, looking worried, and relit the candle.

“Don’t worry! That was good- I mean that was really good- but I need to be able to read my other list!” Twilight said, giving Big Macintosh a peck on the cheek and taking the candle. She paused at the bottom of the stairs.

“Well?” The lavender unicorn asked, with a sly grin. “Are you coming?”

“Yes ma’am,” replied the big red stallion enthusiastically, following her up the stairs.

Luna let the lens drift away, losing focus on the couple, as she noticed Pinkie shivering. Cautiously, she extended a wing over the pink pony, pulling her in closer.

“Oooh, you’re warm!” Pinkie said appreciatively. “I’m so glad everypony has somepony.”

“What about you?” Luna asked, trying to keep her voice level. “You just lost Vinyl to your sister.”

“Don’t be silly, Vinyl was never really mine. And besides, I have you!” Pinkie said, turning her head to the alicorn and kissing her on the cheek. Luna seemed completely stunned.

“Do you want to try some of the fudge?” Pinkie asked. “It’s cranberry. And then maybe we could make out a little, if you like!”

“That sounds, er, marvellous,” said Luna, both shocked and pleased at Pinkie’s bluntness. She took a piece of fudge and chewed it, her eyes widening in delight.

“Mmm! Pinkamena, this is exceptional,” Luna said, revelling in the surprising, sweet tartness of the treat, chewing it slowly.

“Well don’t feel like you have to rush it,” Pinkie said, snuggling up to the Princess. “I’m not going anywhere.”

EPILOGUE

Trixie swept off her hat, revealing one of the rabbit dolls she used for practice balanced around her horn.

“As you can see, fillies and gentlecolts, he has returned completely unharmed!” she shouted triumphantly, imagining the applause from the crowd. Ponyville had been an unmitigated disaster once again- she needed to get back on the road, she thought to herself. Tidying away her tricks into the bags hidden in her cape, she checked her map and was about to leave the clearing and get back on the road to West Hoofington when she remembered she’d forgotten her audience.

Trotting back into the clearing, she lifted the abandoned little doll with the mismatched eyes and after considering the bags for a second, decided to hide it in her hat. As she carefully packed away the doll, she smiled at it.

“You really are the best crowd I’ve ever had,” she murmured to Miss Smartypants happily, dreaming of stadiums of adoring fans. Carefully balancing her hat over her horn, Trixie hit the road.

END

Author’s extraneous notes!

It’s finally done! This particular update clocks in at about 12,000 words, a double-length finale for you all. It’s been an absolute pleasure to write.

I really hope you’ve enjoyed it- well done for sticking with it all the way through! If you enjoyed it, please do let me know by leaving a comment at Equestria Daily or by writing to my email address at the top of the story. I appreciate each and every piece of feedback- and even if you’re reading this years after I wrote it it’d still be nice to hear that you liked it.

I can’t believe I beat “Hearts and Hooves” to the screen! That episode will make all of this utterly non-canon, so you’ve got like three days to enjoy it (after the fact edit- hah, I was right! Sweetie Belle can’t lie to save her life!).

It’s been wonderful. Thank you for reading.

[<----- Part Six!](#)

You're still here? Okay, this is only if you're interested- these are my notes, starting around chapter three, that show how the story could have taken slightly different directions. There's also a deleted scene! Be warned: Stream of consciousness writing, not designed for the public, lies within.

[Behind the scenes: Fixing Up Miss Smarty pants, Part X](#)