

In the town of Ponyville, there is a confectionery. Actually, there are two confectioneries, but only one is the subject of this story. This is not about the larger and more prolific Sugarcube Corner, the virtual gingerbread house and its cotton-candy party pony. This tale begins in the confines of the much-less-glamorously-named Market Street Candy Shoppe.

"Why yes," the proprietor beamed at her customer, who was sampling some fresh fudge. "It's my own recipe."

The unfamiliar pegasus before her made a sound of contentment. "I might become your best customer. Please tell me you make this regularly."

"I do ind.." The proprietor made a confused face, watching behind her customer as the aforementioned pink pony was making all sorts of strange gestures, as if to coach her into asking the customer something. She blinked and shook it off, ignoring Pinkie Pie for the moment. "Yes," she smiled. "Made every other day. Don't be a stranger!"

The pegasus trotted off, and the shopkeeper sighed, thankful that Pinkie (carrying a convenient bush for hiding in) decided to chase after the customer, rather than come berate her for not grilling the newcomer for her details. Clearly Pinkie was on a mission to plan yet another welcoming party for a new resident.

*Mission*, the shopkeeper reflected with a humorless smile as she tidied up, preparing to shutter her stall for the evening. She gave one last look around, a frown settling on her face as, for the second day in a row, her friend had failed to stop by even once.

Bon Bon reached up and removed the pole from the awning, closing the storefront for the day.

*Not Bon Bon*, she said to herself as she began the short walk home. *I'm sure that's what she's saying to herself right now.*

But Bon Bon was how she thought of herself now. Sweetie Drops was part of the former. Years in Ponyville had convinced her of this fact. The cover had been expertly planned, by none other than Celestia Herself. And there had been no intentions of shedding it, for the very reason that reared its ugly ursine head last Saturday at nine-thirty in the morning.

*Why did I blurt that out to her?* Bon Bon winced. *I could have made up some lame excuse like I needed to get more streamers and just melted into the scenery.*

She got home and pushed her way through the darkened door; no giddy Lyra here either, bouncing around like a fool ranting about something inane. There'd been no sign of the unicorn for days, as if she was avoiding Bon Bon.

The candymaker sighed and hung her head. "Maybe it's just as well," she murmured. With her hoof just a hairsbreadth from the switch to light the lamp, she froze, hearing a voice on the other side of the room.

"You and I both know that's not true."

Bon Bon - no, for the moment Sweetie Drops had to come to the fore - turned towards the voice, but the room was sheathed in even more darkness than should be possible. Almost as if somepony was able to control the very existence of light.

"Don't turn it on," the other mare said flatly, and needlessly.

"...Fair enough," Sweetie Drops acknowledged. "Am I in trouble?"

"Do you think you should be?" came the response.

The agent's ears folded back and a look of reticence crossed her face. "I broke cover."

"That you did," agreed the other mare evenly, not adding anything further.

"I don't know what you want me to say," Sweetie Drops declared, trying not to sound panicky. "Are we going back to Canterlot? Or rather beneath it?" Visions of dungeons swam in her head.

"I'm not sure that's necessary. The situation resolved itself rather nicely, with the help of our mutual friends."

Sweetie Drops paused, then nodded. "All right then.."

"Why was The Agency closed?" the mare asked.

"I... because..." She was briefly at a loss for words. "We failed."

"Did we?"

"The Bugbear was on the loose. No pony knew where it was. If word had gotten out that there was a monster roaming around and it was my fault—"

"*Our* fault," the other mare intoned purposefully. "I told you then and I'll tell you now: you weren't to blame."

"Say that all you want, but with all due respect, you weren't there. You can't take the blame."

"On the contrary... it's *because* I wasn't there that I *must* take the blame." The other pony made a sound like she had risen to her hooves. "This is all beside the point. The fact of the matter is, the Bugbear is back in captivity again. The reason for The Agency going dormant no longer exists."

Sweetie Drops' pupils shrank to pinpoints. "Are you saying what I think..."

The tall, porcelain-white alicorn leaned close to her agent's face. "It's time to tie up your loose ends and get back to work."

The next morning, visitors to the market were surprised to find Market Street Candy Shoppe still closed at the start of the business day. Rumors abounded, but no pony knew the real reason no sweets would be served that day.

Saddlebags on her back, Bon Bon was roaming up and down the alleys of Ponyville. Her search fruitless, she began casting out further and further, until hours later she finally discovered her quarry, on a small hill near the edge of the Everfree.

"You have made yourself *impossible* to find, do you know that?"

Lyra froze, then turned to look at Bon Bon as she approached. "That's not true," she countered. "*You* were able to do it. Or is that part of your skill set, making the impossible happen?"

Bon Bon sighed and climbed the knoll. "I thought we had settled things at the wedding?"

Lyra blew out a breath, puffing a lock of her mane from in front of her face. "I don't know," she admitted. "I thought so too, but the next morning, I had some thoughts I needed to work out. So I came out here. And then I found, this close to the Everfree, no pony really comes out here, so it's nice and quiet to just sit and think, and..."

Bon Bon settled down beside her best friend. "And you've been here ever since?"

Lyra managed a shrug and waved a hoof to one side. "There's a cluster of daffodils over there I've been *destroying*. They're nothing compared to your tulip salad, though."

Bon Bon smirked. "You had me worried there, and it turns out you just got distracted by something tasty, like usual." She shook her head and chuckled, then steeled herself for the talk - the reason she'd sought Lyra out. "Listen, I have to tell you something. I-"

Lyra's head snapped up and she noticed Bon Bon's saddle bags. "Nooo, oh no no no no no no. You are *not* pulling this 'I'm leaving' thing on me." Tears threatened to come to the unicorn's eyes. "Are you?"

"Just for a little bit," Bon Bon assured her. "I'm being reactivated. I'm... how do I put this... I've been asked to *lead* The Agency."

"That doesn't sound like a 'just for a little bit' thing," Lyra pouted.

"Well, if you'd let me finish," Bon Bon shot back. "I have to go to Canterlot and recruit some new agents. Train them up. Make them ready. And then I'm coming home."

"Home?" Lyra sniffled.

"Ponyville," Bon Bon nodded. "To stay. I'll run things from here."

"Really?"

"Honest."

Lyra leaned over and hugged her friend, and Bon Bon returned the favor. "There's a couple of things else," the agent finally added.

"What?" Lyra asked, pulling back.

"Since I opened my big mouth and spilled the beans to you," Bon Bon said, rolling her eyes, "She says I need to read you in. And swear you to secrecy."

"She?"

Bon Bon just nodded. "She."

Lyra's eyes widened. "Ohhh," she finally said, then brightened and added with a grin, "Does that mean I get to be a secret ag-"

"Don't press your luck," Bon Bon cut her off.

"Okay," Lyra answered quickly.

"That was one thing. There's another."

"What's... the other?" Lyra asked, raising an eyebrow.

"While I'm gone, unless I want Pinkie and the Cakes to take all my customers, I need somepony to run the Shoppe for me. Which means I need to train somepony to make candies and treats like I do." She sighed. "And against my better judgment..."

"Me?" Lyra said, then hopped to her hooves, grinning. "You want *me* to be your protégé?"

"I can't think of anypony else I'd rather leave in charge," Bon Bon said with a smile, getting to her hooves as well.

Lyra bounced up and down several times, then hugged her best friend yet again. "Ohmigosh! Of *course* I'll do it! You can trust me!" Lyra released the embrace and smiled sheepishly at Bon Bon. "On both counts."

"Good," Bon Bon said, also feeling a tinge of bashfulness. "That leaves one last thing."

"What's that?"

"No more secrets," she said firmly, stomping a hoof into the ground. "From each other, that is. We're open to one another now."

“Deal,” Lyra said, holding out a hoof, which Bon Bon bumped. “But that means I get to hear stories about your escapades, right?”

“Lyra, hon, my train leaves for Canterlot at nine tonight. But when I come home, I promise.”

Lyra tried not to look crestfallen at the reminder that Bon Bon was leaving. “Gotcha,” she nodded.

“Let’s go home so I can give you a rundown of how to keep the place standing for the next three weeks. If you behave, maybe I’ll let slip a story about me and a particularly pesky group of subterranean worms the size of houses.”

“Okay,” Lyra nodded, turning back towards town. After a moment, she added, “Bon Bon?”

“Yeah, Lyra?”

“In lieu of payment for running the store, can I-”

“*Don’t eat all the merchandise,*” Bon Bon interrupted.

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