

I was going to be working nights, so it only made sense to take a nap before Dinky finished school. But try as I might, I just couldn't sleep. Not with my heart so full of doubt. Everything I'd experienced with Vinyl told me that she wouldn't mind me asking about her romantic history. It told me that she wouldn't take my distrust hard. After all, it was just a little doubt, right?

But my heart wouldn't stop thumping tumultuous beats that echoed in my ears. I'd never been this close to somepony since Midnight. And try as I might, I couldn't help but to replay the scene over and over in my head—him dumping me after less than a month of being together. If it weren't for Dinky, I'd probably never have seen him again.

There wouldn't be a foal with Vinyl.

Whimpering, I kicked at my sheets and pulled a pillow close to my chest, pretending it had the warmth of another pony. Instead of remembering the many nights Dinky insisted on sleeping in my bed with me, my mind drew itself to me drifting off in Vinyl's embrace on her couch. I could scarcely remember a time I'd felt that way, so safe and warm. Did I ever feel like that with Midnight? I couldn't remember.

I didn't want to lose Vinyl. But my heart kept clouding my mind with fear. What if I offended her by being honest and telling her of my doubt? Would she get mad if I asked about her love life? I'd managed to mess up nearly every other relationship in my life. How could I make sure things didn't fall apart? How could I quiet this painful tattoo in my heart?

With an unladylike groan, I tossed the pillow aside and kicked the sheets off entirely. I wasn't going to get a nap today, that much was clear. I rolled out of bed and stretched my legs and wings as I tried to figure out what to do next. I couldn't go and talk to Vinyl. Not only was that event more than a little scary, she'd be fast asleep by now.

So, I could either try to muddle through my day, or go talk to somepony. But who could I talk to? I only had a couple of friends I could really trust, and barring that, only a couple of ponies that seemed to know Vinyl well. Surely Rainbow Dash would've left by now to do her Wonderbolts stuff. Amethyst might be done with work by now, but should I really bother her with all this? She didn't seem too keen on Vinyl the last time we spoke. But then who did that leave? Berry Punch? Rarity?

Okay, Amethyst it was. Definitely Amethyst.

With my mind set, I got out of bed and went straight out the door. Two doors down and I walked up to Amethyst's house. I knocked on her door, half-hoping she was home, and half-hoping her to still be at work. Even I couldn't quite place why my heart faltered so.

After a few agonizing moments, the door creaked open and Amethyst met me with a smile. It quickly faded away. "Oh, Derpy, you uh, you don't look so good."

I reached up with a hoof, running it over my mane. A part of me just hoped that she meant my “just rolled out of bed” look and not my expression. Though, I just knew that my smile couldn’t be convincing. “Can we talk?”

Amethyst ushered me inside, and insisted that I let her make us tea after seating me on her couch. Her absence gave me a few moments to consider how foolish I was coming over here and bothering her. She didn’t even know Vinyl Scratch... I think. Not to mention the fact that she really seemed skeptical of our burgeoning relationship in the first place.

By the time she’d come back with the tray of drinks, I’d already teased the idea of some fake worries I could tell her instead. But I decided that would be even more foolish. Maybe I could pretend my plight is that of a friend’s? No. That never works.

I still hadn’t come up with a decision by the time I accepted my cup with a muttered “thanks.” The steaming cup warmed my hooves as I blew on the liquid within, all the while my mind stumbled on what to say.

Amethyst broke the ice with all the elegance of a bellyflop. “So, you got dumped again?”

“What? No,” I replied, shaking my head. “It’s just, I don’t know...”

She frowned. “So, she cheated on you, then. You should dump her,” she replied, pointing her teacup at me.

“Vinyl wouldn’t do that,” I replied, my tone firm. “It’s just... well this relationship is going so fast, and I don’t know what to do.”

“You know, I asked around about that mare. Everypony says she’s only interested in one thing,” Amethyst said. Raising a cup to her lips, she took a sip before continuing, “Don’t let her seduce you. All she wants is to get you in bed.”

“Well, that’s not true, either!” I retorted, slamming down my teacup. “Why does everypony say all these bad things about her? Have you been talking to Rarity?”

Amethyst tilted her head to the side. “The seamstress? No, but that’s not the point. I talked to several ponies. Everypony says the same thing.”

Frowning, I glared back at Amethyst. “Then everypony is wrong.”

Slowly closing her eyes, Amethyst breathed a long breath in and out. “You’re not going to budge on this, are you?” Once glance at me gave her all the answer she needed. “Fine. But don’t think

I'll let this go so easily. You're my friend, and the last thing I want to see is you getting hurt again."

"Then help me," I said, all but begging.

"You said she was pushing too hard?" Amethyst asked.

I thought on it a moment, then shook my head. "N-no. She's not..." It was then that it dawned on me, that Vinyl wasn't really pushing at all. Sure, she asked me out, and asked for a second date. But most of the rest of time it was me. I wanted to talk to her. I wanted to see her. I wanted her to get along with Dinky.

"I'm scared," I finally said. "I-I've only just met her, but already we're getting along so well." Picking up the teacup, I tried again to turn my feelings into words. "I know it sounds stupid that I'm upset things are working out."

Amethyst leaned back wearing a grimace. "It doesn't sound stupid to me. It sounds to me like you remember."

I stared back, leaning forward just a bit. "I... remember?"

"Midnight," she replied, her voice soaked with disdain. "You remember Midnight."

At the mention of his name, my eyes looked for anywhere else to rest. They seemed to find some small comfort in the rippling liquid in my cup. Were my hooves shaking? I breathed out a sigh in the vain hope that it might steel my nerves. "I... would be lying if I said that I didn't have feelings for him any more." My hooves clenched tight around the cup. "But... but I don't owe him any loyalty anymore. I know that... I know that."

A bit of a snort and Amethyst leaned forward, reaching for her cup. "That's not what I'm talking about."

My head tilted a bit to the side, trying to remember what we were talking about. The answer eluded to me. "What?"

"Midnight put you through hell, and even if you refuse to remember it that way, your heart does." After downing a gulp from her cup, she continued, "Your heart remembers how much it hurt after things went well for you, so you're afraid now that it might be happening again."

I didn't like her words, but I'd be lying to myself if I thought that there wasn't any truth to them. Maybe I was afraid that since things never worked out before, they would probably go that way again. All at once, my doubts crashed down on me. I'd never been able to get a relationship right. Why would this time be any different?

Resigning, I put my cup down as I wilted. My throat tightened as I sniffled, trying to bar the unpleasant emotions from swallowing me. Everypony around me seemed to be telling me that this wouldn't end well for me. And now I've even started to doubt myself. "I guess you're right."

"I, uh, look," Amethyst muttered, rubbing the back of her neck. "I'm not saying it's like, doomed or anything. It's just... those instincts are there for a reason, you know? Nopony wants to see you get hurt, especially yourself."

"I don't... I don't want her to leave me," I said as tears streaked down my cheeks. Reaching a hoof up, I caught the tears, smearing them across my coat.

"Oh, Derpy," Amethyst whispered as she rounded the table to sit next to me. Wrapping a foreleg over my shoulders, she pulled me close so I could rest my head on her shoulder. "You just love getting yourself into huge messes, don't you?"

"It's not like I try to," I muttered.

I felt her shoulder heave as she sighed. "It sounds like you've already gotten yourself into this one pretty deep."

"What do I do?"

Her hoof landed on my head before slowly sliding down my mane. Returning to the top of my head, it repeated the soothing ministrations. "Well, you could still back out, but it sounds to me like that's not what you really want." I shook my head only to receive another sigh in return. "Then you really only have the two options. You can keep putting things off and continue worrying about it, or you can go talk to Vinyl."

"But what if she dumps me?"

"Then she wasn't the one for you," Amethyst replied. "You deserve a relationship with somepony who wants to be with you every bit as much as you want to be with them. Don't settle for anything less."

I whimpered. "I'm still scared."

Amethyst drew a deep breath as she withdrew her foreleg and pushed me back. "Well now, there's only one way to fix that, now isn't there?"

Leaning again on my own weight, I let out a weary sigh. "You mean I need to talk to Vinyl about all this, huh?"

She gave me a smile. "Bingo."

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If all my worries with Vinyl weren't enough, the letter I found when I returned home only made me more upset. It was the reply from Midnight, and he couldn't see Dinky this weekend. Sure, he had a good reason. A really good reason.

He was getting married.

Sure, it wasn't this weekend, but apparently, there was quite a bit of planning to be done. He asked that I let her go next weekend so he could invite her personally. Of course he wanted her to be a part of the wedding. Just... not me.

For the longest time, whenever I imagined my own wedding, I always saw myself walking down the aisle with Midnight waiting for me there at the altar. But now, he waited by the altar for another mare. He would never wait for somepony like me.

The sound of the door jerked me out of my reverie. I swiped at my wet cheeks with one hoof while my other worked to crumple up the letter. Just as I tossed the offending scrap of paper away, the sound of tiny hooves reached my ears.

"Momma? Are you okay?"

I turned to find Dinky standing there, ears back as she stared up at me with those big eyes. Forcing a smile, I tried in vain to will my pain away. "I-I'm okay," I stammered out.

Dinky's ears swiveled forward. Tilting her head just a bit Dinky asked, "Then why are you crying? Did you and Vinyl break up?"

My heart skipped a beat as my mind reeled. I never told Dinky about Vinyl and me. And she was okay with it? Was she okay with it? How the hay did she find out? My lips flapped uselessly for a moment before I could find words, "Vinyl... that's not..." Closing my eyes, I breathed a sigh in and out as I tried to focus on just which fire I should put out first. It wasn't an easy task, considering I stood at the heart of a veritable inferno. "This has nothing to do with Vinyl Scratch," I finally said, mustering a calm and even tone.

She sat down, a small but firm frown forming on her lips. "Then what?"

Plodding over, I sat with her. "I got a letter from your dad," I said as I stroked her mane. "He said he couldn't see you this weekend."

Dinky's whole body drooped. "O-oh," she muttered.

I leaned in, planting a kiss on top of her head. I forced an upbeat tone into my voice. "But hey, he says that he wants you to come visit him next weekend in Canterlot."

She perked right up. "Really?" she asked, looking up at me.

Nodding in return, I hummed in affirmative. "I'm going to have Rainbow Dash take you, so you won't have to ride the train."

In an instant, that frown returned. "You mean so you won't have to see Daddy."

Try as I might, I couldn't keep myself from wincing. Celestia, I miss when she was too naive to really understand what was going on. I folded a wing over her, bringing her flush to my side. "Sweetheart, I know you want us to be a family again. For the longest time I wanted us to be a family, but... sometimes what we want isn't what the Fates want."

Still wearing that frown, Dinky stared straight down at the floor. "Miss Cheerilee says that we shouldn't let the Fates decide; that we need to make our own decisions and control our own lives."

"Yes," I said after chewing on the hand-me-down advice a moment. "But we can only make our own choices. You can't make other ponies do what you would like, and you can't make them feel how you want them to." I let out a long sigh as I held Dinky tight to my side. "Accepting that is something that everypony is forced to learn, even if... even though it hurts."

Dinky looked up, turning those big, amber eyes on me. "But don't you and Daddy love each other?"

Her words tore at my heart like an angry mantichore. Withering away from her expectant stare, I choked on the truth. With far more effort than it should have, I spat out the bitter word I feared might shatter Dinky's world.

"No."