

*Author's Notes:* Compared to my last Pony fic, *Constellations*, this one is...considerably different. Not surprising, considering the differences between these stories' main characters. Comedy is really not my usual style of writing, but I did have a lot of fun imagining and writing this story, and I hope that I've accurately portrayed the hyper madness that is Pinkie Pie here. A big thanks goes to fellow author Bookish Delight, who not only critically read this for me and helped me with the ending parts, but also came up with the title for me, as well. Titles are my weak point as a writer; I can't think of a good one to save my life, so, again, big props to Bookish Delight, whose own MLPFiM stories are exceptional--look'em up and try'em out some time. Anyway, enough babbling...on with the show.

## **Sweet Apple Capers**

*By The RPGenius*

When Pinkie Pie awoke this morning, she was hit by an overpowering idea, an all-consuming thought that would direct her actions that day with the same intense urgency that a mission from Princess Celestia's own mouth would be followed with unerring thoroughness by her disciplined honor guard. There could be no distraction, no hesitation, no compromise on this matter--only pure, exact efficiency.

*Apple strudel.*

Pinkie's tastes usually ran along the lines of purely sweet treats, candies, cupcakes, soda pop, that sort of thing. The more sugar that could be crammed into a confection, the more Pinkie loved it. But as she drowsily came awake that morning, pleasantly brought out of her dreams by the sun's gentle light and the familiar, insistent gnawing of Gummy on her right hind leg, her only thought was of apple strudel. Wonderful, tasty apple strudel, the golden, flaky, pastry shell, lightly dusted with powdered sugar and perhaps just a hint of cinnamon, containing within it a warm, gooey center of chopped apples and the sweet, juicy filling they marinated in, coating their flavor over the crunchy, yet pliant, walnuts, tiny chips of almond so thin you wouldn't know they were there if not for the rich, nutty flavor they added to the mix...and perhaps there could even be some dried cranberries joining in that baked good's nucleus, shriveled yet plump and juicy from stewing in the thick apple brew, giving the inner mixture a quick, tart tang that could send a shiver of delight through you.

Pinkie Pie was not the kind of pony to ever question her whims, and as these delicious thoughts danced through her head as energetically as she danced through the loft above The Sugarcube Corner this morning, she saw no reason to change her policy today. And speaking of whims, here came another! Why keep the joy to herself? The most fun came from having a good time with others. She'd make enough for everypony! Herself and her best friends and Mr. and Mrs. Cake and Spike and the mayor and maybe even everypony in town if there was time enough!

Her day's plan set, Pinkie sped downstairs with an instantaneous acceleration that would have done Rainbow Dash proud.

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"What!? What do you mean, no apples?"

Pinkie Pie was aghast. How could The Sugarcube Corner have no apples? Had they already sold out? She had taken one small side-trip to the dress shop to check on Rarity before getting started on her strudel--Pinkie Pie was expecting to see some results soon of a prank/experiment she'd conducted recently. But when she'd confirmed that Rarity still wasn't a werewolf, she'd come straight back to Mr. and Mrs. Cake's shop, so she could get started right away on making some mouth-watering apple strudel...and now there weren't any apples?

Mrs. Cake shook her head in a distracted manner as she peered upwards through the window at the outside of her shop. "No, dear, I'm afraid that we haven't had a chance to restock them. Applejack hasn't been by the last few days to sell them, so--oh dear, she's going to put it on upside-down if she keeps going like that. Excuse me!"

Mrs. Cake quickly went outside, and could be seen through the window giving instructions to somepony above her.

Seeing the confused look on Pinkie's face, Mr. Cake explained from behind the counter, "The pegasus ponies doing the restoration after last week just brought over our new sign," (the old one had been eaten), "but the pony they left in charge of actually putting it up...well..."

Mrs. Cake's reaction had not been the source of Pinkie's confusion, however. She could see a hovering pair of grayish hooves outside the window easily enough, and it didn't take a genius to figure out which citizen of Ponyville they belonged to. Pinkie shook her head. "But what about the apples? Why hasn't Applejack been selling them? I gotta have some for the strudel! I've got a serious need for boodles of strudel!"

"Um, I don't know," Mr. Cake responded, wondering if this was going to be a major problem for him today. "I haven't seen her since we ran out."

"Well, I'm gonna find out!" Pinkie Pie declared, standing tall on her hind legs and lifting her right front one resolutely. "An apple a day keeps the doctor away, and even though I actually really like him because he's funny and that blue box thing of his is really fun to play in, we still can't have that! I'll march right over to Applejack's ranch this moment! Pinkie Pie AWAY!"

Mr. Cake, who sometimes had trouble sleeping at night due to concerns about his bakery's profits constantly being devoured by a certain pink earth pony, did not object to her exit.

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When Pinkie Pie got to Sweet Apple Acres, the place was swarming with activity. Builders seemed to be everywhere, and sounds of hammers, saws, drills, bellowed orders, and general clatter all fought a pitched battle against each other atop a field of countless conversations. This wasn't surprising, of course, given that constructing a barn from scratch was a busy and loud task.

Pinkie was largely oblivious to the commotion, however, as she hopped her way through the construction. Her concentration was taken up with looking about to find Applejack, and with humming a song she was composing about apple strudel. The lyrics were proving difficult (not a lot of words rhymed with "strudel," it seemed), but she'd figure something out if she kept at it. Finally, she found her fellow earth pony toward the edges of the hubbub, amidst several ponies not currently working on the building-to-be and a veritable armada of carts laden with apples.

"Hey, Applejack!" Pinkie called out with her usual excitement at seeing one of her close friends.

Applejack did not seem to hear her, already engaged in a conversation with her ever faithful and eager dog, Winona. "Now, Winona, I'm depending on ya," Applejack continued, looking down at her little canine. "I want ya watchin' the fields 'til we get back. All these ponies seem right nice and hard-working, but they're already getting paid well to build our house up again (gotta remember to apologize to Grannie for doubting her when she said we needed parasprite options on the insurance), so I don't want none of them sneaking one of our apples into their lunch. Just make sure nopony takes what's not theirs, alright? 'Specially since we don't know how many more than this bunch we may need."

Winona barked and wagged her tail. She jumped up, licked Applejack's face a couple times, and then ran off toward the prize orchards of the Apple family. Applejack turned to her brother and sister standing nearby.

"Everypony finally all set, Big Macintosh? We're already hours behind schedule!"

"Eeyup, we got it all together now."

"Applejack! Hey!" Pinkie said again, now having reached her friend.

"Good. I'll just go over the route with everypony again in a second, and we can hit the road. Now, Apple Bloom, I want ya staying at home with Granny Smith till I get back, y'hear? If she needs your help with anything, I want ya to be there to give it. If you wanna have fun with yer friends, you need to have them come over to play. With me an' Big Macintosh gone, you're gonna need to be the lady of the house. Uh, such as it is at the moment."

Applejack's little sister nodded eagerly, ready to do her part (not to mention perhaps find caring for the elderly to be her special talent). "You got it!"

"Applejack! Oh, AJ! Yoo-hoo!" Pinkie insisted, starting to hop around the pony in a circle.

Applejack let out a sigh and turned around to address her older brother and the various ponies around her, which were all getting into place to pull the carts.. "Alright, I think we got everything. Now let's just all take a look at the map before we--"

"APPLEJACK!"

Applejack found her face crammed against a familiar pink one as her name was squealed into her ears. She backed up a step and shook her head to clear the slight ringing. "Gah! What do you want, Pinkie Pie? I'm already powerful late!"

"Oh! Then I won't keep you!" Pinkie said agreeably. "I just was wondering if I could have some of these delicious apples here for the scrumptious strudel I'm going to make! See when I wake up most mornings my brain is all "Let's go have some cupcakes!" but this morning I guess I must have been tired of cupcakes because my head was all "Go make some apple strudel, Pinkie!" and The Sugarcube Corner is all out of apples so of course I came here for some and I'll be happy to make you some strudel too if--"

"Sorry, sugar cube, no can do. These apples're all spoken for," Applejack interrupted her. "You're just gonna have to make do with something else. Now, I really have to get--"

"But, but AJ, I can't make apple strudel without apples! It wouldn't taste right! It would be like carrot cake without the carrot! Or cinnamon buns without the cinnamon! Jelly beans without the beans!" Pinkie Pie paused, a new thought entering the twisted superhighway of her mind at the same breakneck speed as all her other ones. "Oh wait! Jelly beans actually aren't made out of beans, are they? And come to think of it, I'm not sure you can really say they have jelly inside, either. It's more like a gooey paste really..."

"Pinkie Pie, I don't have time for...urrgh," Applejack grumbled. Forcing herself to remember the lessons of last week's catastrophe, she asked, "Pinkie, is there going to be a situation where ya NEED these apples for something incredibly important, like saving Ponyville?"

Pinkie sat and rubbed her hoof against her chin. "Well, nooo...I don't think so...I mean I can think of one scenario where the strudel'd be pretty essential to saving Ponyville, but I think we could probably scrape by with just painting Snips and Snails neon green and get the same effect..."

"Well if there ain't an emergency, then I'm sorry, but ya just can't have'em, sugar cube. We're about to bring all these here apples over to Fillydelphia...the pony folks there got hit just as hard

as us with those parasprites before Princess Celestia got rid of'em, so they're just about plumb outta food. We're doin' our part and sendin' them some emergency rations, since we still got plenty of food thanks to Twilight's spell makin' the swarm eat everything else instead. So these apples're off-limits," Applejack explained. Seeing the dejected look on her friend's face, she smiled and gave Pinkie a quick pat on the shoulder. "Now don't be lookin' like that, Pinkie. We don't know if we'll need to bring more apples from the orchards later, but I reckon we can spare enough for your strudel, long as ya don't mind pickin' them yourself."

Pinkie brightened up instantly and grabbed her friend in a hug. "That's great! Thanks, Applejack, you're the bestest friend a pony could ask for!" And with that, she happily hopped off, and Applejack went back to finalizing preparations for the trip.

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Ponyville was not tiny, but it didn't figure in the life and events of Equestria in any large way. Aside from Celestia's recently more frequent interest in the town (which was only because of Twilight Sparkle's residence there), there was not much to Ponyville that drew any of the rest of Equestria's attentions. Canterlot and Manehattan were the big cities, Appleloosa was the up-and-comer, Cloudsdale created and managed the weather and held flying competitions, and so on. There were many locations in Equestria that garnered attention and fame, but Ponyville was one of countless smaller towns largely ignored by the rest of the pony populace. But if it had been famous for anything, it would have been for Sweet Apple Acres' magnificent apple orchard.

As a rule, members of the Apple family were some of the most skilled and dedicated farmers in all of Equestria. They had an innate talent for coaxing life from the ground and pushing it to thrive, they were strong and industrious workers, and they had a love for their lot in life like few other ponies, one that rode double with a love for the animals and plants under their care, a love so nurturing and adoring that the ponies might well have called themselves mothers and fathers to their trees, cows, pigs, and whatever else they reared on their ranches and farms. As a result, apple crops all across the land were robust and reliable, one of the biggest sources of food--perhaps THE biggest--for ponies everywhere, and almost unarguably the most delicious.

And of all the Apple family orchards and crops, the one tended to by Applejack and Big Macintosh just outside Ponyville was one of the greatest. From the eyes of any pegasus that might happen by, the visually impenetrable foliage of treetops formed with their close-knit masses a vibrant sea of green, its waves the swaying of branches in the wind, its flotsam the gently bobbing apples scattered across its deciduous crests in innumerable quantity. From the eyes of an earth pony or unicorn, it was an unending mob of stout bark-clad towers rising steadily, yet never uniformly, up from the soil, with each member culminating at its top in an expanding mass of green that mingled and merged with every other, providing a natural roof over the head of anypony below it. Whether practical or aesthetic, this orchard was extraordinary from any perspective.

Pinkie Pie, of course, didn't give a hoot about all that. She just wanted apples. I just threw in that description there because I thought it sounded nice, and because *somebody* ought to appreciate the scenery, since she didn't.

Pinkie trotted cheerfully towards the first tree she saw, gripping an empty, wide bushel basket in her teeth that slightly muffled her humming. She set the container down underneath the tree's branches at what seemed as good a spot as any. She wasn't too concerned about catching the most possible apples at once when they dropped; she could always just pick up the ones that didn't fall in the basket and put them in herself.

Before she could get into position to properly applebuck, though, she became aware of another voice harmonizing with her own. This voice was not very good at it, though. It was really just a low, monotonic utterance that made no attempt to follow her tune's pitches and melody. Pleased that somepony was attempting to join in on her music but not thrilled with their contribution's quality, Pinkie turned around to see who it was and advise them on how better to follow her lead.

What she saw was Winona a few hooves away, crouching, her ears flattened back against her head. Her eyes, normally so bright with friendly enthusiasm, were focused and hooded with hostility. Pinkie suddenly was struck with the possibility that the sound coming from Winona was not a clumsy attempt to hum along with her, but actually a very unnerving growl.

"Um, h-hi, Winona," Pinkie greeted her, backing up a couple paces nervously. "I was just...getting some apples...for some strudel...w-would you like to help out? I'll be happy to share it with you...always happy to share...you gotta share and you gotta care, that's what I always--"

Winona suddenly barked. It was loud, and it was not nice. Pinkie was startled into a jump, and reflexively began to gallop away. Winona ran after her, staying on her heels as they raced away from the apple trees and barking all the way.

"Wait! Winona! I can explain!" Pinkie said as her panicked mind recalled that Applejack had given Winona instructions to keep anypony from taking apples in her absence. "Applejack said I could have some apples! For strudel! Really!"

Winona showed her skepticism of this story by giving a warning snap at Pinky's furiously fleeing flank. Pinkie ran faster.

Applejack's faith in Winona as her herding partner was well-justified; the dog was very skilled at the task. Whether it was a large herd of stampeding bovines or just a single panicked pink pony, she was an expert at directing her target exactly along the path she desired, darting left and right constantly to keep the target going straight, seeming to catch up to one side when she

needed her subject to turn.

The most important thing was to keep the target too panicked to really think about the situation--Winona was a little dog, not capable of physically managing most of the creatures she corralled, so her bark had to be very much worse than her bite. The second most important thing was to keep the target from realizing that the situation was anything more than an earnest chase. As long as the pursued thought that Winona was just chasing them, they would only concentrate on staying away from her. If they were to realize she was directing their path, they would resist her efforts to lead them.

Thankfully, Pinkie Pie, while positively fearless in the face of things truly dangerous and frightening, was as susceptible to startled, nervous confusion as anypony else, and followed Winona's cues reliably. Better still, she spent most of the chase looking back at the dog chasing her, and not where she was going, so she barely even realized it when she ran headlong over and into a steep, muddy little ditch through which a trickling stream ran.

Winona trotted down the sharp incline of dirt with a satisfied strut, pleased at the sight of her work's result: a perky party pony planted in the middle of the moist muck, mud mottling her mane. The dog gave an amiable little bark and licked Pinkie's face a couple times in a friendly manner, to show that there were no hard feelings over the matter. Winona liked Pinkie Pie, after all. She was funny. Then the little canine climbed back out and trotted off, back to the orchard.

Pinkie pulled herself up, grumbling to herself about meanie-mean dogs who were grumpy-flanks that wouldn't listen. Well, it took more than THAT to stop Pinkie Pie. She would have her apples!

"It's on, Winona! It's ON!"

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Mrs. Cake had once told Pinkie that simple plans were the best ones. At the time, the baker had been advising Pinkie to stick to a prescribed recipe for brownies and not to improvise with additional ingredients. Although Pinkie had ultimately decided to continue her baking plan all the same, creating Equestria's first and, if Mrs. Cake had any say in the matter, final batch of Jalapeno Brownies, she had recognized the wisdom of the sound advice and carried it with her to this very day. Just keep it simple.

That was why she was trying to put a small tuxedo on a fussy alligator.

Distraction. That was the name of the game. Pinkie Pie clucked and chuckled affectionately as she laboriously slipped a tiny black tuxedo jacket (full dress tails, of course; only the best for this plan!) onto Gummy, occasionally pausing in her task to pet his head or hug him adoringly, in spite or perhaps because of his squirming and attempts to devour her left fore leg whole. She'd

managed to get the shirt, pants, cummerbund, dress socks, bow tie, cufflinks, dress gloves, and top hat (which was secured by a string around Gummy's head) onto the little alligator thus far, and once the coat was on, she could apply the finishing touch: black and white patent leather tap shoes.

The idea had come to her after her humiliating mud bath at Winona's paws. Pinkie had gone home to take a different bath, the soap and water kind, and to come up with a plan for getting past the orchard's guard dog. And it had been there in the tub, as she lowered herself in, where inspiration had struck:

*The volume of the water displaced must be equal to that of the part of her body that she had so far submerged!*

More importantly, however, her shoulder had ached, and as Gummy erupted from the water to perfectly enclose Pinkie's throat within his soft, ineffectual mandibles, the fiesta-loving pony had realized that she could use her pet as a decoy to collect and maintain Winona's attention while Pinkie snuck off with some apples. And of course, what could possibly be more wholly distracting a sight than a tap-dancing alligator? Even Pinkie's random mind was in touch with reality enough to recognize that such a spectacle would be too engaging to look away from.

"Eureka!" she had cried, grabbing Gummy and dashing off in the direction of Sweet Apple Acres.

"Perfect!" she now exclaimed, having just finished adorning Gummy's little reptilian hind paws with the clackety-clackety footwear upon which this scheme relied. She gathered Gummy up in one leg, and held her other up to shade her eyes as she scanned Sweet Apple Acres's orchard from behind a bush at its outer edges. Winona was sitting on her hind quarters a mere dozen ponies' lengths away, turning her head methodically as she watched over it all. The small dog was gradually making a circle around the orchard, stopping to sit and give a specific grove a more thorough view every now and then for ten or fifteen minutes before continuing on her rounds. Winona was due to move on again soon, so Pinkie would have to move quickly.

With an instantaneous burst of speed, Pinkie ran up to Winona just as the small canine was looking the other way, dropped Gummy, and sped back to her bush in a pink blur. She peeked her head out just a bit to observe.

Winona, having heard the tell-tale sound effect of somepony zipping from one place to another, had turned her head to see what was going on, and was now observing Gummy with all the interest that an alligator dressed like Thoroughbred Astaire deserved.

Giggling in glee at her plan going perfectly, Pinkie snuck out of the bush and made her way on twinkle-hooves around Winona's back as one pony's pet cocked her head and regarded the other. Once a little ways away from Winona, Pinkie assumed a normal trot as she made her



way to the tree where she had dropped her bushel basket before. The distraction had worked, she was at the target, and soon she would be leaving with a full basket of crisp, luscious apples. She could taste that strudel now!

But Pinkie Pie had forgotten one vital piece of information, a single, universal wisdom, an infallible truth of all time that spelled doom for her brilliant strategy:

*Alligators don't tap-dance.*

No matter how strangely attired, a small reptile doing nothing but sitting and staring does not distract for long, and Pinkie had barely set her fruit container on the ground before Winona came running at her, barking up a storm. Pinkie took off in a panic once again, with Applejack's pet in hot pursuit. As they passed him by, Gummy snapped his jaws on Pinkie's passing tail and came along for the ride, whipping about in the wind like a green, black, and white streamer. The runners and passenger took a winding path through fields, hills, and dales, until finally Winona got her fill of the fun, and directed Pinkie Pie to the same muddy little ditch as before.

Pinkie scowled as she lifted her face from the muck. Her disposition was not improved when Winona came down to her and gave her a few face-licks as thanks for the fun. Zero apples still, and a dry cleaning bill for Gummy's formal wear to boot. A new approach was called for.

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Pinkie grinned to herself as she set the large plank of wood down next to a small hoof mirror on the grass, right next to a soft pink pillow. She was surprised she hadn't thought of this to begin with. It all boiled down to simple, straightforward mathematical facts.

1. Apples grew high in the branches of trees.
2. Winona was guarding the apple trees.
3. In the entire history of the Best Young Fliers competition, not a single dog had ever won first place.

It stood to reason, therefore, that dogs were poor fliers. It made sense when Pinkie thought about it, what with their not having wings and such. Thus, Pinkie's new strategy was to go over Winona's head and pluck the fruit right from the source.

The balloon-marked equine carefully angled the board of wood that she had borrowed from the contractors nearby on the sizable rock she had found planted in the ground near the orchard, which would act as a fulcrum to her rudimentary seesaw. She gripped a pencil in her teeth and scribbled down calculations on a notepad of potential velocities, trajectories, take-off angles, wind direction, air resistance, angle adjustments for imperfections on the rock, and other science-y things. She made a few final adjustments to the plank, then hopped onto it and waited.

By this time of the day, Rainbow Dash was in full form. Celestia's sun was high in the sky, and its warmth, along with a customary late morning-to-early-afternoon nap, provided the pegasus pony with an excess of energy that her customary weather maintenance duties wouldn't sufficiently burn off (not that she'd give them a chance to until the last possible minute anyway). So it was this time of the day that Rainbow Dash could be seen hurtling through all the skies of Ponyville and its surrounding area, practicing all kinds of amazing aerial feats and tricks for the amusement of any pony who cared to look up at the right place and time. She generally would make her way through the sky all over Ponyville and its surrounding areas, for quality of the troposphere and stratosphere changed subtly from one location to another, and Rainbow Dash wanted to be a master flier no matter where she was. And so she sped along, twisting, turning, twirling and turbo-ing through the skies.

Pinkie Pie grinned as she spotted her multi-colored friend high in the distance making her way toward the orchard. The pink pony watched with her usual thrill and awe as Rainbow Dash practiced various amazing feats of speed and grace, marveling to herself, as she often did, at just how awesome and cool Rainbow Dash was. Then, as Dash got closer, Pinkie lowered her head down and gripped the small, round mirror in her teeth, then lifted it back up. She waited until Dash had reached the right distance, and then bent her head to tilt the mirror juuuuuust right.

Rainbow Dash suddenly found herself completely blinded by a persistent flash of light, unable to see anything through the unexpected flare. It was like looking straight at the sun! She turned her head, tried to change her direction, but the light followed her. She couldn't escape it, couldn't see where she was going, and was completely knocked off her game. Too panicked and confused to concentrate, and unable to see up from down, Dash began to plummet downwards.

No stranger to unplanned and violent landings (this was a rare occasion, having outside assistance for one of her spectacular crashes), Rainbow Dash yelled out, "Look out belooooow!"

Seeing that Dash was unhappily committed to her dive now, Pinkie tossed aside her mirror, picked up the soft, fluffy pink pillow from the ground beside her, and placed it on the other end of the wooden board.

Rainbow Dash slammed down onto the pillowed plank, sending it instantly to the ground. As her disoriented eyes rolled about in her skull, she thought she heard through her swimming consciousness somepony yelling "Thanks, Rainbow Daaaaassshhhh!"

"Uhhhhbbbgghrruuuhh," she responded to the voice (whose owner wasn't there any longer to hear it, anyhow), which meant something along the lines of, "You're welcome. If you need me for anything, I will be right here, because I have just had quite a crash, such that I am not even

quite sure at the moment where or who I am, and I don't think I'll feel like getting up again for several minutes. At least this pillow is comfortable."

Pinkie Pie hurtled through the air toward the orchard at a speed that Rainbow Dash might have envied had she not been watching stars spin round her head. Winona couldn't stop her this time!

During her flight, Pinkie had two profound thoughts. The first was, "Give me a fulcrum, and a place to stand, and a Rainbow Dash dropping at a breakneck pace along too steep a descending angle to pull up in time, and I shall strudel the world!"

The second profound thought, which came only slightly after the first, was, "Trees are very hard."

Gravity ponderously peeled the pancaked pink pony from the small impression she had made in the tree's bark several feet under the foliage she had been aiming for, allowing her to fall to the ground in a dazed heap. Winona, who had followed Pinkie's flight on foot, gently placed herself under the pony and helped her to her feet. As Pinkie's eyes spun wildly and her scrambled mind tried to piece itself back together, Winona gently led the stumbling filly to the muddy little ditch and laid Pinkie down in the sludgy earth to recover.

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From the desk of Pinkie Pie:

### **PEER REVIEW**

Pinkie, as you requested, I've looked over your equations. I applaud your thoroughness in accounting for every possible variable; however, instead of assigning numbers to any of them, you've written down different sound effects. "Zip + Whoosh x (Whee - Zoom)" does NOT equal anything usefully related to a flight path. In addition, this trajectory of yours is just a doodle of yourself with an apple for a head. I'm sorry, but no amount of revision on my part is going to produce viable results from these.

Sincerely,  
Twilight Sparkle

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Going the high road had been the right idea. The method had been the only problem. Pinkie had been too reliant on a simple tool for staying above Winona's reach, and that had been the flaw. Fundamental sciences weren't enough for this task. Pinkie Pie would have to employ high

technology. She would need to be make the tool one with herself. She would use technology to amplify her abilities, make herself more than just a pony. Flesh and steel would join and work as one. Metal would amplify her strength, make her capable of feats no body born of nature could accomplish as it wrapped around equine muscles in unyielding support. Pinkie Pie would become part pony...and *part machine*.

“Oooh, bouncy!” Pinkie exclaimed as she looked down at her four hooves, all of which had bed springs coiled around them.

She gave a tentative hop, and when she came back down on the ground, the metal spirals around and below her hooves absorbed the force and propelled it back, sending her high into the air.

“Wheee!” she exclaimed. Already a pro at constant hopping, what with it being her preferred mode of travel, Pinkie very quickly got the hang of how to control her jumps’ height and direction. She began bouncing her way toward Sweet Apple Acres.

As soon as she got there, Pinkie knew she’d won. Winona looked at her approaching, hopping figure for a moment, then ran off in the direction of the barn being constructed. Doubtless Winona knew she was no match for this equine cyborg and was fleeing in despair.

Each leaping bound, Pinkie could see the luscious, enthralling fruit grow closer to her grasp. First they were mere dots of red almost hidden within the overbearing green foliage. Two leaps, and they had form to her eyes, their call enhanced by clearer perception. Four hops later, and they were closer, close enough that Pinkie’s mouth began to moisten as her mind’s eye began to peel and cook them right where they hung on the trees. Just five more of these mechanical leaps and she’d have them. Four more. Three. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six.

Realizing that the apples were now receding steadily from her constantly rising and falling vision, Pinkie Pie looked about in confusion, trying to find the reason why she was now bouncing backward. She was facing the right direction, she was leaning and directing herself properly, Rainbow Dash hadn’t whipped up any hurricane-force winds as payback for earlier...there was only one possibility.

*The machines had rebelled against her and were out of control.*

Reeling at the betrayal of her mechanical enhancements and panicking at the thought that her body would now be a tool of the machine uprising, Pinkie completely missed, in her struggles against the traitorous bed springs whose whims she now imagined herself helplessly subjugated to, the sight of a small brown dog behind her holding a red, U-shaped magnet in her teeth, who was backing up at exactly the same pace that Pinkie was hopping in reverse. As Pinkie called out heroic words of defiance against her supposed new machine masters and attempted to extricate herself from the coils (a difficult task while erratically bouncing through the air), Winona

calmly made her way along what was getting to be a familiar path, finally stopping her trip at the same muddy ditch as before. As Pinkie continued thrashing, Winona jerked her head and let go of the magnet, tossing it into the mud below. The springs were compelled to follow it, and Pinkie them.

Finally out of the air, Pinkie managed to extricate herself from her coily captors, and commenced with their comeuppance by crushing them into the crud as completely as she could. Breathing heavily both from exertion and from the frightening thought of how close Equestria might have just come to a mechanical rebellion, Pinkie Pie climbed up out of the muck. Back to the drawing board.

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Going above just wasn't going to work.

Pinkie Pie was familiar with the expression, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try, try again." This was why she was giving up on her overhead approach. First, she had tried the seesaw. Then she had tried again, with the springs. Neither had worked.

Her next attempt had been to try something that was more familiar to herself--tying a bunch of balloons around her waist until they lifted her above the ground to about the same height as the treetops. This really had seemed like it was going to work, but it turned out that Winona was *surprisingly* handy with a blowpipe, for a dog.

The final "try," as it were, had been to get into her homemade flying machine and pedal her way through the sky to the orchard. Winona had been helpless to stop Pinkie Pie's crazy contraption, but Pinkie had discovered that she was equally unable to accomplish her own goal in that situation--all four of her legs were necessarily preoccupied with pedalling, meaning that, though closer to her target than before, Pinkie was completely unable to actually reach out and knock the fruit down, or collect it from midair. She hadn't even been able to grasp one in her teeth, for getting close enough to crane her neck to an apple would have meant getting her machine's propeller caught in the branches. And she wasn't going to have that; fixing the thing after the violent landing Gilda forced on it a little ways back had been quite a lot of trouble. After a few minutes of this (literally) fruitless endeavor, Pinkie had turned and flown away in defeat. Then, after carefully landing back in Ponyville, she had sought out the muddy ditch and dutifully rolled in it. It just didn't feel like a proper failure without that part.

Yes, the route above was a no-go. But that realization had only led to Pinkie Pie's next brilliant plan.

"Um, Pinkie, I still don't really understand this," Fluttershy quietly protested to the pony at her door.

"It's simple! I told you, the problem that I grapple is that I really need an apple, but doing that is hard when that dog's always on guard, and she will be all day because AJ is away! So I gotta be sly if I'm gonna get by, because that stubborn poodle is keeping me from strudel!" Pinkie explained. "Do you need me to do the dance again?"

"I understood that part," Fluttershy replied. She wondered if she should clarify the nature of Winona's breed for Pinkie, but decided against it, as it would mean having to talk more than necessary. And Pinkie probably wouldn't be interested. It might even bore her. Fluttershy would hate to do that. Not to mention that Pinkie Pie might have better things to do at Fluttershy's door than to talk with her about such things. Fluttershy would hate to impose. In fact, just continuing to talk at all might be inconveniencing her friend, which would be a terrible thing to do after Pinkie had come all the way to stand outside Fluttershy's home. She should probably just stop talking completely.

Pinkie Pie waited a minute for Fluttershy to continue, but the pegasus just stood there silently, looking vaguely uncomfortable. Finally, the earth pony said, "Sooo...what was it you don't get?"

"Oh! Well, I understand that you need the apples, and Winona won't let you have them, but how can I help you with it?"

"Easy! Just lend me Angel Bunny for little bit!"

Hearing his name mentioned, Angel bounded over to the doorway and leaped up onto Fluttershy's back, as she nervously replied, "Oh...I don't know about that...I'm not sure that would be such a good idea for him..."

"Awww, come on, please? Pretty please? With sugar on top? And a cherry? And whipped cream and sprinkles and nuts and icing and chocolate and honey-coated gumballs filled with marshmallow-dipped strawberry candy that fizzes on your tongue?"

"It's just...he has such a delicate constitution. It might be a little much for him..." Fluttershy insisted.

Angel Bunny fancied himself something of a free-thinking rebel, yearning for independence from a dictator who perpetually held him prisoner in an iron hug. Seeing an opportunity for a reprieve from Fluttershy's tyranny of affection, he raised a foot and began to rapidly thump it down against her back.

"Oh," Fluttershy exclaimed, looking back and seeing Angel's glare, "I guess Angel wants to go along. But still..."

"I won't break him, I promise! I'll take good care of him! And it'll only be for maybe an hour, anyway. It'll be fun!" Pinkie assured her cheerfully whilst hopping in place.

“Well...”

Angel decided the matter for himself by hopping down from his adoring overlord and out to stand by Pinkie Pie. Seeing this, Fluttershy said, “I guess it’s okay, then,” even as she looked less sure than ever about the situation.

“Yay! C’mon, Angel, let’s go loot some fruit!” Pinkie exclaimed.

“Just make sure Angel doesn’t exert himself too much. But do make sure he does get some exercise! And try to have him home in time for dinner. Don’t let him nibble on any unusual flora. Do you need a first aid kit? I can get one for you if you don’t have one with you. Remember to look both ways before you cross any roads, Angel. And don’t talk to strangers. Don’t spoil your dinner! Oh, but do make sure you stay well-nourished. Do you need to bring along a snack just in case? I’ve got a nice stalk of celery here. Maybe I should come so I can bring it along--”

Thoroughly fed up, Angel jumped up, grabbed the door handle, and slammed it closed. There was a moment of silence, then Fluttershy’s muffled voice could be heard from within saying, with some resignation, “Have a good time.”

Having secured her secret weapon, Pinkie Pie excitedly cried out, “To the orchards, chum!” and began hopping to Sweet Apple Acres, with Angel following her.

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“So here’s the plan,” Pinkie announced with authority. They were hiding in some shrubbery near the outskirts of the Apple family’s orchards. Pinkie was wearing a hard hat and staring with narrowed eyes intently at the apple trees so close, yet so far away. Angel was looking up at Pinkie with a thoughtful expression, considering how hard he would have to thump to cause any distress through her helmet.

“I’ve tried going over, and it’s a complete No-Go, Joe. So now, we’re gonna go under! I need you to dig a tunnel from here to the center of the orchard. We’ll go right under Winona’s nose! And also the rest of her. Once we’re in, you can just dig right up to a tree. I’ll jump out, apple-buck it real quick, and jump back down. All the apples will fall right into our tunnel’s hole! And even if Winona passes by, we’ll be out of sight! It’ll be one sweet, juicy haul! Are ya up for it, partner?”

Angel contemplated this for a moment, then stuck out one paw, palm up. He crooked it toward himself a couple times.

“What? Your cut? You wanna get paid for this?” Pinkie exclaimed.

Angel nodded.

“Um...I’ll throw you a party some time?”

As though she wouldn’t, anyway! Angel shook his head.

“Well...I could owe you a favor! Like a free Pinkie Pie Prank on anyone you want!”

This merited some consideration, but in the end, Angel rejected this offer, as well. He was quite capable of causing others distress on his own.

“No? Hmm. Ooh, I know! How about I give you some of the apple strudel I’m going to make with the apples you help me get?”

Angel’s eyes lit up. While he usually was more interested in raw vegetation, filling up on sugary baked treats would spoil his dinner without fail and bother Fluttershy the fussbudget. That would show her! What, exactly, it would show her would be anypony’s guess, but Angel Bunny was too caught up with the idea of asserting his independence to mind the details. He nodded his assent.

“Alright, it’s a deal, partner!” Pinkie proclaimed, giving Angel a hearty hoof/pawshake. She didn’t let him know that she planned to make enough to share with her best friends and their families, so he would have gotten some, anyway.

After issuing a quick frown disapproving of the vigor of Pinkie’s shake, Angel leaped up, did a flip at the apex of his hop so that he faced the ground, and dove into the soil, his paws becoming a blur of frenzied motion as he dug, displacing dirt at a rate any Diamond Dog would desire to duplicate. Pinkie giggled and hopped into the hole after the rabbit problem child.

Once involved in tunneling, progress was made at a steady pace, quickly enough that Pinkie had to stay in motion to keep up with her diminutive digger, but slowly enough that she could do so with a relaxed trot. She did not have much to do, save shine her helmet’s light about and take in all the sights that dirt, rocks, soil, roots, earth, minerals, and loam could provide. While her professional knowledge of stones allowed her to hold an interest in the scenery much longer than one might have expected, she eventually became bored, and decided to engage her companion in one of her favorite activities: talking.

“Wow, look at that root there! Talk about twisty! It just starts there and goes loopy-dooopy over there. Loopy-dooopy-whoopy-whoop! Mmm, I can’t wait to get those apples. So sweet and juicy...maybe I’ll have a few before I start the strudel, just to get a taste! Applejack sure is lucky. She gets to eat as many apples as she wants every day! Of course, she has to work hard for them, but that’s what we’re doing now! Well, that’s what you’re doing now, at least. I was working pretty hard earlier for them, though, let me tell you! Oh! In fact, let me tell you! There I



was, all set to get some apples, when I heard this growl, only I didn't think it was a growl at first..."

As Pinkie Pie's prattle persisted pointlessly, Angel Bunny's expression descended deeper and deeper into great irritation.

"...and so that's why going over didn't work. But now we're going under! Winona won't be expecting this, I bet! How close are we, anyway? Are we almost there? Are these roots over here some of the apple trees? They must be!"

Pinkie's bearings were actually fairly accurate. Up on the surface, Winona was watching, with mild interest, a line of overturned and disrupted ground pass her by on its way to the heart of the orchard.

Back underground, Angel Bunny was gritting his teeth in aggravation as his pink partner continued to assault his ears. "Did you know Applejack's family names all their trees? I could never think of names for them all! I mean, what do you name a tree? I guess I could think of a few, though. Like Barkus Aurelius! Or Stick Van Dyke! I should really write these down in case I ever start a garden some day."

Angel's eye was twitching in agony. The glare he shot at Pinkie Pie could have curdled milk. Unfortunately for him, Pinkie Pie was no dairy product, and continued unabated. She had now decided to assist him with the digging. Her "help" consisted entirely of advice and backseat bulldozing.

"Hm, that side over there's looking a little uneven. You might want to touch it up a bit. Careful not to get tangled in that root there! You'll be sure to wash your paws before you eat the strudel, right? Remember to pace yourself! Slow and steady wins the race! Or at least places fifth, which is still pretty good."

It went on this way for several more minutes, with Angel Bunny's face contorting into various visages of extreme vexation as Pinkie continued to advise him with statements like, "Watch out for tomatoes with goggles, those guys'll getcha good!" and "If you see a sign for Chevalbuquerque, make sure to take a left!"

Angel motored his paws as fast as he possibly could, desperate to reach his target and be free of this irritating quadruped as soon as possible. Finally, just as Angel was starting to seriously contemplate gnawing his own ears off, he reached the destination he wanted, and dug his way up to the surface. He hopped out, followed by an ecstatic Pinkie Pie.

Pinkie's feeling of triumph ebbed a bit as her eyes adjusted to the light. Something seemed slightly strange about this setting.

“That’s strange. I thought the orchard had more trees than this! All that’s here is that muddy little ditch I keep falling into,” she remarked in confusion.

Angel hauled his hind leg back, and let’er have it. Propelled by the righteous kick, Pinkie went sailing into the mud. Angel then brushed his hands off, satisfied he had made his point, and hopped off.

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From the desk of Pinkie Pie:

**IN CASE OF GARDEN**

Barkus Aurelius	Stick Van Dyke	Dwight K. Root
Branche DuBois	Forest Stump	Lee Van Leaf
Adrian Trunk	Sap Brannigan	Fluttershy

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Pinkie Pie had finally figured out what she’d been doing wrong. This whole time, she’d been using the wrong tactics. Her plans thus far had been based on conventional wisdom and strategies, ideas that any normal pony could perceive as logical for avoiding conflict--distraction, staying out of reach, going in from below. Anypony would agree that these were good methods.

But Pinkie Pie was not anypony. Pinkie Pie’s strengths were the unexpected, kooky, and fun. She couldn’t expect success by using just anypony’s old tactics. It was time get those apples, Pinkie Pie Style!

Pinkie peered out from behind a large rock at the orchard just a little ways off. Every time she saw it, those apples got more beautiful, more luscious, more delectably desirable. She was starting to see the appeal of Spike’s preferred diet, because by this point, those apples sparkled like gemstones in her eyes. And this time...this time they would be hers. Even that troublesome dog, who was right now sitting in Pinkie’s line of sight with Granny Smith (who was enjoying her daily constitutional), would not stop her this time.

Pinkie Pie chuckled deviously to herself as she observed the small bottle in front of her. Ah, the ever-faithful invisible ink. One of her preferred tools for pulling pranks, Pinkie had often used the contents of this bottle to annoy her friend Twilight Sparkle, cause major mayhem and bureaucratic mental meltdowns at Mayor Mare’s office, and even once to help Spike and Twilight fool Princess Celestia herself (who, thankfully, had a mischievous side, and appreciated the trick for the good fun it was). Now it was time to put her pranks to use for more practical purposes: purloining those plump, prized apples!

Pinkie took the top off the bottle, lifted it above her head, and dumped the container’s contents

all over herself. Winona couldn't stop what she couldn't see! Pinkie began to rub the ink all over herself, so that no part of her would be left uncovered when the ink turned her invisible.

This actually worked, for some unfathomable reason.

Pinkie admired herself in the small mirror she had brought with her. Or rather, she admired the fact that she couldn't admire herself in it. Head to hoof, front to flank, Pinkie Pie was completely invisible.

Grinning, Pinkie gripped her bushel basket in her teeth, and trotted with carefree stealth toward the apple trees, taking a route that would lead her directly past Winona, just because she could.

As Pinkie approached, Winona's ears went up, and her nose twitched. She took her attention away from watching Granny shuffle along, and turned to locate the coming intruder. She saw nothing, however, save a floating bushel basket. Yet her ears and nose told her that Pinkie Pie was somewhere in front of her, had to be--no pony else had the same bouncy gait, or the same scent of a dozen different forms of sugar mixed together. Winona gave a confused growl in the direction where some of her senses thought Pinkie Pie was, unsure of what was going on but not liking it one bit. But this utterance was too perplexed, too lacking confidence to stop Pinkie this time.

Hearing Winona's growl, Granny Smith turned to see what all the fuss was about. She took in the sight of the floating basket, and Winona's reaction. Her eyes widened, and she shrieked, "Lands' sakes alive of mercy! The dogs always know! Somepony help! It's a COLTERGEIST!"

"A what?" Pinkie asked around the basket rim in her teeth, having stopped at Granny Smith's outburst.

"We're bein' haunted! Help! Help!" Granny wailed.

In the blink of an eye, three small ponies zoomed up to the distraught elder, seemingly from nowhere. All three were wearing loose-fitting beige flight suits, and had bulky, black, technological doohickey-adorned backpacks strapped to their backs.

"CUTIE MARK CRUSADERS PARANORMAL EXTERMINATORS!" all three proclaimed, drowning out Granny's cries and Winona's growls with an obnoxious quantity of volume.

"Don'tcha worry 'bout a thing, Granny! We'll take care'uh this!" Apple Bloom reassured the Apple family elder.

"Ma'am, for your own safety, we're gonna have to ask you to take your grandmother and evacuate to a safe location while we handle this infestation," Scootaloo informed Winona with an official air.

“Yeah, trained professionals only,” Sweetie Belle added.

The young fillies surrounded the levitating bushel basket, and thus Pinkie, on three sides while Winona led Granny away. They glared fearsomely at the space around the basket, occasionally saying things like “Grr!” and “We’ve got you now, ghost!” Pinkie Pie was totally at a loss for what to do at this point, and just stood there, watching each of the fillies and wondering what her best course of action would be. After a few minutes of this, the Crusaders looked at each other blankly.

“Now what?” Scootaloo asked.

“I dunno. Check the book,” Apple Bloom suggested.

Sweetie Belle set a large book titled PinTobin’s Spirit Guide on the ground and scanned some of its pages. “It says here that we need to subdue the spook with our Oaton Packs.”

“Oh, is that what this thing’s for? I was wondering,” Scootaloo remarked, gesturing to the blocky accessory on her back.

“How do we use them?” Apple Bloom asked.

Sweetie Belle shook her head. “I don’t know.”

The girls looked at each other, then at the “ghost,” then back at each other. After a moment, Apple Bloom took off her pack, held the strap in her teeth, and swung it at the transparent Pinkie Pie. It connected with Pinkie’s left leg with a “thwump.”

“Ouch!” exclaimed Pinkie, rearing back in response. The movement and opening of her mouth set the bushel basket into the air, and it came down over her head as she rubbed the spot where she’d been hit.

The three fillies grinned at each other. Sweetie Belle and Scootaloo unslung their packs.

“Ow! Oof! Ouch! No! Ack! Stop! Yow! Quit it!” Pinkie yelled as she ran away, the Cutie Mark Crusaders following her and buffeting her as they ran, the basket on Pinkie’s head giving them a clear target area for their phantom. Sweetie Belle hummed a catchy tune as she ran, which she assumed would somehow help with the process of ghost busting.

Pelted with attacks from her enterprising little friends, Pinkie ran on auto pilot, relying on her subconscious to bring her somewhere safe as she twisted and dodged as well as she could. Of course, given how often she had been to one location that day, it was no real surprise where she unconsciously led herself to. Luckily, as she stumbled over the edge of the ditch and fell

into the crud below, the basket fell from her head, and lay still on the ground several hooves away. The Crusaders swung their packs around it, but hit nothing.

“Hey! I think we got it!” Apple Bloom exclaimed.

“Take that, ghost!” Sweetie Belle admonished their imagined opponent.

The three girls tore off their flight suits and examined one another’s flanks. They simultaneously groaned, “Nothing!”

“Let’s go back to the farm. Maybe there’ll be something else we can try there,” Scootaloo suggested, and the three of them left.

Pinkie pulled her invisible head out of the muck. The mud clung to her sloppily, outlining her face as she declared, thoroughly vexed, “OOOOOkay, that does it. No more Miss Nice Pony!” It was time to break out the big guns.

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Ponyville saw very little of Pinkie Pie for the rest of that day, and the entirety of the next. Here and there, a few witnesses might have recalled seeing her moving through the town occasionally, weighted with boards of wood, tools of all kinds, sheets of metal, colorful paper, ribbons, and countless odds and ends. The builders working on the new Apple family barn saw the most of her, as a great many of the items she carried through town happened to be their own materials and implements for the construction they were currently engaged in. The contractor ponies were all local workers, however, and resigned themselves to the loss of these items, being familiar enough with Pinkie Pie not to attempt to stop her when she had that singular glint of determination in her eyes.

But though she might not have been often seen, Pinkie’s presence was nonetheless made known all day and aggravatingly late into the night as a cacophony of the sounds of creation brazenly issued forth from behind The Sugarcube Corner. Hour after hour, Ponyville’s residents could hear nails being hammered, the sawing of wood, hinges creaking, planks being sanded down, and a general orchestra of miscellaneous noises as Pinkie Pie labored tirelessly, taking breaks only for the absolute necessities: food, drink, a paltry few hours of sleep, and ventriloquism practice.

On the second morning after the one in which Pinkie had set her mind to having apple strudel, it was complete.

The earth all around the Apple family property shook, as though quivering in fear of what approached. Birds flew from branches en masse, creating dark clouds of ill portent in their attempt to flee, while the various small animals that had been going about their daily business in

the area rushed in a knee-high stampede to seek refuge over at Fluttershy's cottage. Even the mighty sun, symbol of Queen Celestia's regal and divine power, seemed to shrink away, blocked from vision by the sheer size of Pinkie Pie's creation. Ponderously the gargantuan rolled forth, its measured pace only adding to its intimidation, communicating to any who should see it (and who could *not*?) that it had no need for greater speed, for there was nothing that could halt it.

Sure, some might argue that it was a touch of overkill for a single guard dog, but when you absolutely, unequivocally have to get by, nothing quite beats a siege tower.

Adorned with colored construction paper, balloons, ribbons, glitter, and all other manners of festive decorations and armed with surface-to-air pie catapults and enough fireworks and smoke machines to make the so-called great and powerful Trixie jealous, the monstrosity rolled onwards by Pinkie Pie Power alone--which was to say, Pinkie Pie power-trotted on a treadmill located about midway up the contraption, right around the giant carved cupcake on its front, and that, in turn, moved the wheels at the bottom along. Joints creaked, great wooden wheels tread the grass, theatrical flames shot from the paper-mache dragon at the top, and sweat beaded at Pinkie's brow as she relentlessly marched. Those apple trees were getting closer. Those apples were getting closer. That *strudel* was getting closer. Closer. They'd be all hers. As many apples as she wanted for all the strudel she could eat. Just a little more and...

"Whoa, nelly! What the...?"

Pinkie's ears perked at hearing a familiar voice. She hopped off the treadmill, bringing her war machine to a halt, and looked down to verify the speaker. Standing below next to an empty cart was Applejack, gazing upwards at the siege machine with her mouth slightly agape.

"Applejack! What are you doing here?" Pinkie called down in confusion.

"Uh...I'm here to buck apples? On account'uh that's what I do every mornin' round this time?" Applejack called back up, still taking in Pinkie's colossal device with a fairly blankly inquiring expression.

"But I thought you were in Fillydelphia, delivering apples!" Pinkie exclaimed.

"Yeah, I was. Darn good thing, too; some of the pony folks there were gettin' powerful hungry. We got back last night," Applejack explained, examining the battering ram part as she did.

"Ohhh, okay. Welcome back!" Pinkie said excitedly as she waved.

"Er, thanks, Pinkie. Good to be back home." Applejack eyed some of the anti-personnel streamer launchers for a few silent moments, before finally saying, "Uh, Pinkie Pie?"

"Yes, Applejack?"

*“What in tarnation is goin’ on here?”*

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Things had turned out well, all in all. Sorry that there had been a misunderstanding, Applejack had been more than happy to let Pinkie Pie collect as many apples as her heart desired, and had even let Pinkie go the rest of the way to the orchard in her siege tower, since Pinkie would have hated not to get some use out of it for all the work she put into it. Applejack even helped Pinkie to bake the strudel, though she attempted to temper her kindness with an admonishment to Pinkie about the virtues of patience. The conversation didn’t quite go as the orange equine would have expected, however.

“Ya know, if you’d just waited for a couple days, instead of tuckerin’ yerself out tryin’ again and again over something ya just couldn’t get, you could’ve saved yourself a heap’uh trouble and just let me tell Winona to move aside when I got back home, Pinkie,” Applejack told her while rolling out some dough. “I think y’all need to learn some patience.”

Pinkie looked up in surprise from the recipe book she had been perusing. “But, AJ! I WAS patient! Super-duper patient!”

Applejack frowned. “How do ya figure that? It sounds to me like there weren’t twenty minutes of the last two days that you weren’t makin’ for mah apples and gettin’ chased around by Winona,” she replied.

“Exactly!” Pinkie Pie exclaimed. “I stuck with it all that time! I could have just given up and found something else to do, but I didn’t! I kept trying and trying as hard as I could, no matter how many setbacks or how much mud tried to stop me. If I wasn’t patient, I wouldn’t have kept trying. I would have just given up and gone home. I’m sure I don’t need to tell YOU how patient you have to be to do hard work, to keep trying for something in spite of failing the first few times!”

“Uh...w-well, yeah, I guess so...I’d never get anything done around the farm if I wasn’t patient and didn’t stick to it,” Applejack admitted, thinking about the many tasks of her everyday life that were long, difficult, and required the kind of dedication to complete that many other ponies didn’t have the patience for. The ability to wait and abide in both action and inaction were essential to growing crops, raising livestock, and tending to the needs of a functional farm.

Pinkie Pie wasn’t done yet, though. As she measured out some sugar, she continued to lecture. “I wanted apple strudel a lot! It was all I could think about this whole time! I couldn’t stop imagining how great it would be to sink my teeth into it, and share its delicious yummy-ness with everypony I know! And when you want something that much, isn’t it worth it to try as hard as you can to get it? If I just up and quit the first time I got a little mud on my face, and the rest of

me, then it just wouldn't be the same when I finally got my strudel. Sure, I could have just waited for you to give me the apples, and the strudel would have turned out fine. But this strudel we're making now I know I earned, because I kept at it and never gave up! Even if I failed in the end, I just know this strudel is going to be better than it ever could have been before, because I gave everything I could to get it!"

Applejack rubbed her head with her hoof, rolling her eyes back in thought as she answered, "Yeah, I guess I can understand that...that satisfaction ya get from seein' the fruits of your labors is a mighty fine feeling."

Pinkie nodded as she divided and cored the apples. She concluded, in a very satisfied way, "Yup! So always remember, Applejack, as long as you're patient, sooner or later good things will come your way. It's a good lesson for you to take from all this!"

Applejack looked at Pinkie for a few moments with mildly indignant annoyance, then sighed and went back to rolling the dough.

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With the aid of the most skilled pony in all of Ponyville at baking (and most other things), the confection turned out better than even Pinkie's idolizing imagination had hoped. More than enough was made for all of Pinkie's friends and acquaintances (which was to say, all of Ponyville), and she shared it happily with everypony--including Winona, for Pinkie Pie held no grudges. Finally, Pinkie's particular palate's preferences were satiated.

The builders, bolstered by Pinkie's baked treats, quickly finished the Apple family's barn. It was almost as though the parasprites had never devoured it to begin with. In fact, much to Applejack's dismay, it was *too* identical to its previous incarnation--thanks to many supplies having been pilfered for use in construction of Pinkie's siege tower, the roof was almost exactly as saggy and rundown in the new barn as it had been in the old one. It looked like she would just have to rely on her sales at the upcoming Grand Galloping Gala to fix it, as she had been planning before.

Cup Cake and her husband experienced a nice bit of bonus business for their bakeshop. Although Pinkie insisted on giving the strudel away for free to everypony who came by the shop for it, the increased traffic still resulted in several extra customers who bought other treats to enjoy alongside their strudel. The extra revenue helped Mr. Cake to sleep peacefully that night...since he would only realize the next morning that Pinkie had used The Sugarcube Corner's own inventory in creating her confections, and the cost for the ingredients slightly outweighed the extra business's profits.

Apple Bloom and her friends did not receive their Cutie Marks that day from their amateur ghost removal services. In fact, they did not discover their special talents at all that day, despite their



many attempts to do so, and the fact that they actually met with some success in the field of rabbit retrieval.

Angel Bunny received karmic justice for his betrayal when, after a mere hour of frolicking freedom, he was apprehended by three youths who knew he was out past his curfew, and, though he fought fiercely all the way, brought back to Fluttershy's cottage. Seeing Angel return completely covered in dirt without his intended pink chaperon, Fluttershy had grossly misinterpreted his grimace to be caused by the hardships he had no doubt been through, and not seething frustration at being once again in her care. She had pledged to never again let him wander without her safe supervision.

Yes, all was well again with Ponyville. Appetites were sated, misunderstandings cleared up, conflicts ended amiably, and the daily status quo returned. There was really only one thing left to do to conclude this adventure...

"Dear Princess Celestia,

Hi! It's me again! And boy, did I ever learn a biiiiiig lesson on friendship today! Today I found out that sometimes, you can really, really, really want something, so much that it seems like the most important thing in the world! But just when you think you have it, a dog that you thought was your friend can get in your way and keep you from it, no matter how hard you try to get around her. But the important thing is to keep trying, until you build a big siege tower that the dog can't stop, or the dog's owner comes by and makes her leave you alone. Then you can have all the apples you want!

Yours truly,  
Pinkie Pie"

Pinkie set down her pencil, then rolled up her scroll. She turned to the small alligator behind her. "Okay, Gummy, it's done. Send it to Princess Celestia!"

She tossed it to him, and Gummy caught it within his ineffective mandibles, as always. And, also as always, he set to the methodical work of chewing it up into soggy shreds, which Pinkie somehow had gotten into her head would convey it to Celestia in the same fashion that Spike's magical fire breath would. Satisfied that Celestia would soon be marveling at the new wisdom Pinkie had come to know from this adventure, the pony went downstairs for another serving of strudel.