

Silence is Bittersweet, Part 4

As Pastel fussed over Cantaloupe's mane, Acoustiana gave her own a once-over to ensure it was still satisfactory. Seeing that it was the same as when she had it done earlier, she continued to watch her two friends. They did battle against, as Pastel cursedly called it, "the dastardly maniacal tangle-monster" that had grown in Cantaloupe's hair. She silently giggled at the scene of Pastel's using Cantaloupe's back as leverage as she tried to coordinate magical and brute-force methods of styling her friends mane.

Letting out a pleasant sigh, Acoustiana thought warmly on her close friends. Ever since those first few days, they had grown so close. Pastel, as well as Ray, had grown especially close to Acoustiana. That afternoon sharing of their secret solidified any questions of how and why the two seemed to be so close, yet fight so adamantly. Acoustiana remembered how she, for a time, worried that the two were more than just friends. When Hearts and Hooves day had arrived, she was ashamed to admit she was pleased to hear Pastel didn't have any plans. She claimed she certainly had none with Ray. Acoustiana never heard from Ray that day, though, which saddened her slightly, but she did not let it deter her.

Tonight was going to be the night she achieved her goal. This was going to be the time and place she finally got her special somepony. She knew it in her heart, and even her dreams had confirmed as much. By Celestia, she knew Ray would be hers by the end of this night. This evening belonged to her.

"Well now, don't you...ouch...look so happy you're...ack!...practically glowing?" Cantaloupe said, struggling at maintaining her stance as multiple brushes and hair implements tugged at her mane.

Pastel paused from her fight against the "tangle-monster" and gave Acoustiana a look-over. She attempted to talk, but found that the hairbrush in her mouth to made said action a tad difficult, and removed the offending implement.

"My word, you are quite right Canty: she is practically glowing. What are you thinking about in that mind of yours? I have noticed you have been exceptionally excited about this congratulatory party since you started planning it. You're up to something aren't you?"

Acoustiana blushed deeply and tried to wave a hoof for them to pass over the thought. She also tried to hide her face behind her mane, once she glimpsed it from her reflection, the deep red now showing in her cheeks.

"Fine then, don't tell us. But for the love of Celestia, if its a prank, please, *oh* please, don't do something that will mess with our manes! Erm...at least not after all this work we are putting in."

“What? You're gonna give up like that, Pastel? That blush means something, and I wanna know! Tell m...ouch!” Cantaloupe found herself cut off by an extra strong tug of her mane by Pastel, who glared at her for her pressing the issue.

“If she wanted us to know, she would have told us. You should know by now if Tiana wanted to say something, she wouldn't hesitate a moment. Its most likely a surprise and as much as I really, *really*, want to know what she has planned, I shan't ruin her planning. And neither will you!”

“Thank you for understanding,” Acoustiana signed to her friend.

“Think nothing of it, dear. Now back to the matter at hoof. This... thing shall be defeated one way or another.” Pastel gripped the hairbrush in her mouth with renewed vigor and went back to work on Cantaloupe's mane.

Acoustiana watched her friends struggle for a moment longer before drifting off into memory once more. The whole reason for the party they were preparing was to celebrate her success with her violin composition. She was proud of how she had turned the song from her nightmare into a heartfelt composition. When she delivered it to the conductor, she even demonstrated a few measures for him. What little he had heard of the haunting elegy had brought tears to his eyes. He immediately went on a campaign to find her a patron so as to pay for a performance that would allow her masterpiece to be heard by as many ponies as possible.

The thought of when she told Hearth Song soon drifted into her mind. As she recalled it, it was quite the humorous moment. That silly mare did have a lot of energy when she needed it, or so it seemed.

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As Acoustiana packed up her instruments from the last performance of her strange theater gig, Hearth Song trotted over to her, bearing a bright smile. In tow, she carried her instrument enveloped in her magic and lightly set it down once she was close enough to speak.

“Oh my gosh! Is it true? Are you going to be performing a solo next month? Is it that beautiful piece your horn made you play during our first rehearsal? C'mon, spill it! I gotta know!” Hearth Song bounced as she asked each question.

Amused at her fellow musician's enthusiasm, Acoustiana tried to calm her down before answering. She just wanted to sign out her answers, but Hearth was never able to find the time to stop by for lessons, even after they were offered. Acoustiana didn't mind, though, as she knew Hearth was busy with her own music, and knew it took a lot of work to get as good as she was. Acoustiana took out her notepad to answer the excited unicorn's questions.

*“Yes, I will be performing a solo. The conductor kindly found me a patron to pay for a solo performance time slot. But the conductor said that once ponies hear it, I should expect a flood of requests. The song is, in fact, the one you heard at the rehearsal. Before you try and ask—no I will not perform it earlier. You will have to wait until my solo performance. I got you a ticket, though.”* Acoustiana then pulled out a pair of tickets from her case and floated them over to Hearth Song.

Hearth Song’s smile grew as she read the message. At the end she let out a squeal and started jumping around in celebration. Not paying attention, she soon tripped over an errant music stand and ended up a tangled mass on the floor. She poked her head up through her mane, still smiling broadly.

“That is so *awesome!* I knew you could do it! And when you get all famous, we can rub it in to all those snub-nosed huffy-puffy ponies that kept mocking you for not havin’ a voice. *ha!* That’ll show ‘em.” Hearth’s expression took on a menacing appearance, which in her current position just made her look completely ridiculous.

Acoustiana helped the silly pony onto her hooves and used her magic to fix her mane back up. Hearth then took the two tickets still floating in the air and put them in her saddlebag. Turning to Acoustiana, Hearth—



A loud thud followed by a high-pitched Cantaloupe screech broke Acoustiana out of her reverie. She looked back to see Pastel on her back with all four hooves flailing helplessly in the air.

“Ow ow ow...isn’t there some magical spell or something you can cast to make this easier? I can tell you this, though, after tonight I promise to maintain my mane... I don’t wana have to go through this ever again.” Cantaloupe was rubbing her head from the fierce battle that was being waged.

“You had better!” Pastel bleated out as she folded her legs and just lay on her back catching her breath.

*“Are you sure you don’t want help?”* Acoustiana signed to the exhausted Pastel.

“No! This is your party and I will not tolerate your having to do any manual labor. I said I will fix up both of your manes, and by Celestia I will do just that!” Pastel then jumped off the ground, filled with a short burst of energy, and went back to her battle against the tangle-monster.

Acoustiana looked to Cantaloupe and they both just shrugged, right before Cantaloupe winced in pain as more of her mane got yanked. Acoustiana shook her head at Pastel's silliness, but knew any attempt to interfere would be futile at best. She looked back to the mirror, past her own reflection, and to the framed likeness of a unicorn playing a violin. The day Pastel painted that for her was an interesting one.

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Pastel had come to Acoustiana's practice for her solo as she had no pressing artwork due and she wanted to show her support to her friend. She figured that she might even be able to lend a helping hoof on the acoustics, should such a thing be needed. She quickly found out that it was not.

Acoustiana was permitted the use of the recital hall for her practices so that she could get the feel of the music in the larger room, over the sound she would get from her personal home space. The conductor sometimes made appearances along with a rather well-off pony. Acoustiana could only assume that the other pony was the one paying for her solo, and did her best, looking her finest when she practiced in case they would be observing.

On this day, the only ponies in the theater were Pastel and some janitorial staff. Acoustiana was glad to see her friend's bright blue eyes staring in admiration, and her crystalline chime of a voice cheering after she paused between movements. She was also very glad that Pastel had been very adept at learning hooflanguage. It seemed she truly did know a lot of it, but she had just gotten out of practice. As such, Acoustiana was able to communicate quickly with her friend on how her performances were going.

"Do you think that was too slow? It's the part where I transition from the longing movement to the hopeful movement, but it's sounding too melancholy to bring about the proper emotion." Acoustiana had to tap out the complex thoughts slowly, to convey the proper emotions of her intent.

Pastel took a moment to interpret the words her friend on stage attempted to communicate. Her eyes twitching as she watched the subtle movements, and her ears swivled forward to catch the minute taps. She was thankful Acoustiana went slow with the statement, for she worried she would have otherwise missed something important.

"I don't think so, darling. Again, not my specialty, but from over here, the change is evident, and does bring a slight lift to the mood. If you want it to be a more dramatic change, you could step up the pace, but I think the subtle flow is far better."

"Lets try it with a more dramatic change, then, and I want to know if it works better or not. And in any case, it's fun to experiment." Acoustiana then let out a silent giggle.

“Experiment away, but just remember that your music is beautiful and moves emotions easily. So don’t you go playing with a mare’s emotions without due cause!” Pastel gave Acoustiana a wink and broke out into a fit of giggles herself.

Acoustiana enjoyed the playfulness of the practice session, but in the end, she knew she would have to play it all in the serious and respectable manner expected of musicians. So when it started getting into the afternoon, she let Pastel know she would be performing her last complete play through and then they would be done.

Searching her feelings so as to empower her music, Acoustiana began to play. Her violin was performing masterfully for her. The emotion in her heart flowed through her legs, out her hooves, and into the air as music. She tried to maintain her composure, but a pair of tears still managed to escape her closed eyes.

Pastel watched and listened as Acoustiana poured her soul into the music she played. All their joking aside, Pastel knew that something in this performance held far greater importance than either of them could fathom. With the amount of power exuding from the music during this final play through, the thoughts of this just being a musical piece were deftly squashed.

As she watched her friend, Pastel noticed a tear roll down her friend's cheek. She also noted that in its wake, it left no trail. She then thought she saw the tear make a shape as it fell through the air . It was in that instant than the vision of a masterpiece struck her like a lightning bolt. She spent the rest of the performance doing her best to contain her need to run home, and tried to listen to the remainder of the piece.

When Acoustiana finished, she felt the drain of putting so much emotion into her work. She took a deep breath in and slowly let it out. She opened her eyes just in time to see Pastel charge up the stage and barely miss plowing through her.

“You, me, your stuff, my studio, *now!*” Pastel yelled at her as she levitated all of Acoustiana’s things, as well as Acoustiana herself.

Acoustiana was unable to protest, as she quickly found herself being carried through the city streets. The sensation was not all too unpleasant, inasmuch as the snugness and warmth of the magic actually felt comforting. However, the fact that her back was facing the ground and her legs were flailing helplessly in the air made her quite embarrassed as she was whisked through the streets.

She was relieved to find that they arrived rather quickly at Pastel’s home. Acoustiana found herself gently placed onto some exceedingly comfortable cushions and then found her hooves filled with her violin and bow. Her first thought was that Pastel was about to demand a personal performance. If such was the case, she would have to berate her friend on her method

of such a request. She drew up her hooves to begin signing her disapproval when she froze at Pastel's shouted admonition.

"Don't move! I just need you to stand there for a few moments... No no no, that is wrong... the ear is off... *bah!* Do over!" Pastel had a number of large pads of paper floating about her, and a rather odd-looking pencil was moving at incredible speeds on one of the pads before she shredded the sheet and moved to another pad. As she sketched, she would suddenly growl or grunt and scribble all over the page. Other times she would almost yell at the sketch grabbing the page within her teeth and furiously shredding it, allowing the pieces to rain upon the floor.

Acoustiana didn't know what was happening, and her eyes kept darting around the room to try and make sense of what was happening. This behavior also seemed to bring a displeased complaint from the artist.

"Dear, you *really* need to stay still. And do us a favor and close your eyes, as it is ever so hard to capture the moment with you looking around like that. And while you're at it, tilt your head ever so slightly to the right and upwards. Now there is a good model," Pastel added with a coo. All around her, piles of shredded paper were starting to form as she kept ripping them off of her pads.

Acoustiana was now almost certain that some form of inspiration must have struck Pastel during her performance and was making her act this way. She did remember Ray's mentioning something about her creation technique at some point, but was unable to recall exactly what he said. Regardless, Acoustiana knew it best just to play along and she did her best to pose for whatever Pastel had planned.

Before long, the floor had a relatively large layer of shredded paper, and the walls started getting paneled with numerous sketches of Acoustiana. Each of the sketches had slight variations of her mane and tail, along with different depictions of her tear falling in a number of oddly shaped forms.

"Well, I think that shall just have to do. I can't expect you to stand like that much longer at least. You can stop posing now. I have what I needed... mostly. Thank you, by the way, and sorry for the abruptness of this."

Acoustiana snuck a peek to look about the room and was amazed at how many renditions of herself now lined the walls. Each was amazing, and made her look far more gorgeous than she ever imagined she could look. When she tried to ask Pastel a question, she noticed that the artist was diligently examining all the sketches and had a painter's pallet floating near her. Unlike her cutie mark that only held the primary and secondary colors, Pastel's pallet had an unbelievable amount of colors on it. She was busy muttering to herself and smudging the colors with a small tool onto a clean white piece of paper and holding them up to various sketches.

Acoustiana felt it was best to let her friend alone while she fussed about. Instead, she put all her things away properly, then strapped her violin onto her back and placed the manuscript of her composition into her saddle bag.

“Now, if only... wait, no... ugh... ooh, maybe if I... yes, that could work.” Pastel started galloping around, knocking things off of her own shelves, and scattering the shredded paper all over the floor. Her pallet, however, always seemed to stay safe from the debris and no matter how often she dabbed at and swirled the colors, none of them ran from their spots.

“What do you think of this green for your mane? I know it’s darker than your natural shade, but if I make all the colors darker, I am thinking it will better set the mood. But then again, if I go with this lighter color scheme, the whole thing gets brighter and becomes far more uplifting. Choices... decisions... such a hard part of the process...” Pastel went from sketch to sketch, dabbing her brush into colors on her pallet, and then leaving small streaks on the papers. All the while, she never looked back to gauge a response from Acoustiana.

Acoustiana sat back and watched as Pastel fluttered about, adding paint to her pallet, adding a few highlights onto a sketch, then heading back to her paints. As Pastel went back and forth, she would occasionally glare at the shredded remains of sketches upon the floor. Acoustiana found that slightly odd as she watched. Then she collected all of Pastel’s actions and figured out why. Pastel was walking the same path, a slender figure eight. Pastel added paint to colors that she hadn’t even used, and upon looking closer, saw that she was adding colors in a pattern. She had started with the outermost bottom color and was snaking her way through all the colors on her pallet. It became very interesting when she got to the blended colors, as she seemed to be able to mix the colors exactly without even pausing to double-check the results.

“There we go, and now I can continue,” Pastel proclaimed as she suddenly stopped pacing and levitated a can of brushes over and started painting one of the sketches.

Pastel froze up and looked around as if she had lost something. She then looked at Acoustiana and got a scared look for a moment, but quickly relaxed and set down all of her implements. Trotting over she gave Acoustiana a hug.

“Sorry about all of that. I am sure no pony told you...well, Ray anyways, that I have my little process I go through when I create my art. But just you wait and see! I’m gonna make at least three of these sketches into masterpieces. And do you know what? You get to keep one! As a present for your solo performance!”



“VICTORY! No knot is too tight, no tangle too massive that can defeat me! Pastel: The

Mane Wrangler! Bwahahaha!" Pastel bellowed out in triumph as she stood upon a displeased-looking Cantaloupe.

"That's good and all, but could you get off me now? I am not keen on being used as a pedestal."

"What? Oh my..." Pastel quickly realized her situation and softly slinked off of her friend's back. "I do apologize for that, Canty. I was just so excited, finally to have defeated your tangle. But look—now we can style your mane... Speaking of which, how do you want it styled? You have such short hair that I can't braid it much, nor can we put it into a honey bun." Pastel started hoofing Cantaloupe's mane, moving tufts of it around.

"How about we put in a few ribbons around her ears and just brush her mane back?"

"That sounds... really nice! Hey, Pastel, did you get that?" Cantaloupe looked to the artist still shuffling around in her mane.

"Get what? Did you say something, Tiana?" Pastel looked up to her silent friend.

"Ribbons, behind ear, brushed-back mane," Acoustiana repeated as she failed to hold back her giggles brought on by the utterly perplexed look on Pastel's face.

"That would be perfect. Oh, and we can attach a large bow of the same color to your tail! You would look so gorgeous! And maybe a nice satin flank cover? Yes, a flank cover indeed," Pastel murmured as she started prodding Cantaloupe's flank, tracing the imaginary cloth.

"You sure know how to make a girl feel violated without trying, Pastel. Lucky for you, I have to agree. Now stop poking my flank." Cantaloupe leveled a stern look at Pastel.

"What? Oh, sorry!" Pastel looked between Cantaloupe and her offending hoof.

"Quite alright. So Acoustiana, you've been... erm... lost... in... thought? Yeah, that sounds about right... lost in thought over there, what's on your mind, if I might ask without getting assaulted?"

"Just thinking about the months leading to this is all. Like my lovely painting and all my practices. And of course my time with my friends." Acoustiana gave a warm smile to the two of them.

"We count ourselves lucky to have been blessed by the princesses to have known you all this time. Oh, and did you know, the other two paintings I made sold for six thousand bits each! Can you *believe* it? I know I'm good, but to have my pieces sell for *that* much is just...I dunno... it's just so cool. If you ever don't make it as a musician, I can always use you as a

model.” Pastel gave a playful wink to Acoustiana who blushed in response.

“And now you make her feel all uncomfortable. Are you sure your talent is art and not making other ponies feel awkward? ‘Cause you sure seem very good at it.” Cantaloupe said with an annoyed look on her face as Pastel was yet again leaning on her, forcing the earth pony to support her weight yet again.

“I am just playing, and besides, I can tell you like it.” Pastel poked Cantaloupe’s nose, causing her to recoil her head as she wiggled the offended part.

“Yeah, yeah. Come on, though, let’s finish up the fancification of my hair so I can strut my stuff for some lucky colt.”

Acoustiana thought of what she had planned to gain the interest of her desired colt. Feeling the heat in her face made her look away and she tried to hide behind her mane once more.

“Whoa! Now either you’re suffering a bad fever, or you’re thinking of something very naughty. I am gonna have to side with Cantaloupe in demanding some answers, little lady. Spill it!”

Acoustiana looked for a means to escape, but other than jumping out the window, or trying to run past her friends, she didn’t have many options. Then a brilliant idea struck her. She started mouthing out her words in what she hoped was accurate for speech.

“You minx. Now you’re just not playing fair.” Pastel sat back with a huff and pouted.

“Seriously, tell us what’s going on in that head of yours. We can keep a secret.” Cantaloupe looked on with the biggest puppy eyes she could muster, a trick that usually worked with her family.

Acoustiana simply shook her head in response and sat back down in defiance. Her friends let out a collective sigh.

“You’re cheating. You do know that, right?” Cantaloupe gave Acoustiana a sidelong glance as she looked back to her mirror to finally inspect the work Pastel had put into her mane.

“Well, whatever it is she is thinking, it’ll come out during the party. Though I think I am getting the idea. I bet it has to do with that one bouquet at her solo performance.” Pastel said with a smug look as she levitated some satin ribbons over and started brushing Cantaloupe’s mane back.

“What bouquet? *Oh!* I remember now... hey, you’re right, and I bet that does have

something to do with it. That sure was some trick, and very romantic to boot.” Cantaloupe winked at Acoustiana.

Acoustiana rolled her eyes. She knew exactly what her friends were talking about.

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Acoustiana was on stage, she was dressed in her finest gown, and her mane was well brushed and adorned with a flowered hair clip the same gentle lavender as her gown. Her performance was flawless. The smile that was born from her music faded as she swiveled her ears upon the crowd to hear their response.

The theater was filled, and the entire crowd was on their hooves stomping out a thunderous applause. The standing ovation seemed to last forever. All the while, flowers rained from the crowd and landed at her feet. For her part, she was crying rivers of happiness.

Then a large bouquet flew out from towards the middle of the crowd. Some unicorn was levitating it to the stage instead of throwing it. Then, another magical glow over took the flowers as it got close to the stage. The bouquet stopped moving and the soft red glow of the second magical aura intensified.

Suddenly, the flowers exploded into what appeared to be hundreds of little pieces. As she watched them, they all seemed to spin like little helicopters as the pieces rained down gently over her. She then saw that each of the rose petals on the little green stems with their little green helicopter blades where in the shape of little hearts. Acoustiana closed her eyes, tears still streaming, tilted her head up, and felt the gentle rain of petals brush across her face.

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As much as Acoustiana enjoyed the sentiment of the two unicorns that provided the gesture, her mind was definitely set on a different target. Looking at the clock, she noticed that their preparation time was starting to wear thin.

“Okay, enough messing around, we have to get to work, and as a certain pony,” Acoustiana said as she paused and narrowed her eyes at Pastel, *“won’t abide my help in doing much with the preparations, you two need to speed this up and get moving.”*

“Ah, stupid march of time always cutting in on my fun. Alright, Canty: hold still; this won’t be but a moment.” Pastel concentrated her magic and flew over a number of brushes and quickly worked on Cantaloupe’s mane. She swiftly tied the ribbons into her mane next to her ears and then tied the bow at the base of her tail.

“Whoa there! Careful where you’re putting things, missy!”

Pastel just rolled her eyes and levitated a few flank covers over and quickly chose one that closely matched the colors of the ribbons and bow. She smoothed out the cover and adjusted the bow to ride lower on her tail.

“There, happy now? Anyways, let’s get downstairs and start putting things together. Acoustiana, you get to answer the door and greet your guests as they arrive. That is, ‘til either myself or Cantaloupe is finished with our tasks so you can simply enjoy the evening and soak in the splendor of being loved and adored by your loyal fans.” Pastel did her best impersonation of a drama queen faint.

Pastel picked up her large basket of supplies and Cantaloupe did the same as they led Acoustiana down her stairs and set about putting all the decorations up. Acoustiana went to her front room, where a day earlier she had set up the seats, expecting many guests. She took one near the door and waited anxiously for her desired colt.

As she waited, she watched her friends quickly dart about her, putting up decorations. Pastel barked a few orders from time to time when Cantaloupe got her color coordination wrong. Then there was a knock at the door, quickly followed by the chime of her doorbell. Acoustiana got up and opened the door to find some of her ensemble had arrived early with some extra supplies.

“Hey there, Acoustiana! We thought we might drop by a tad early to help set up some extra stuff, if you didn’t already have enough. Oh, and we got some awesome party music too! Classical is great and all, but we play it all the time. It’s good to shake things up a bit with some different genres, wouldn’t you agree?” The cheery green earth pony flailed about a vinyl record in his hoof.

Acoustiana smiled and nodded. She stepped aside to let the ponies in and pointed to her record player in the other room.

“Righty-oh! Come on team, lets get this place decked out and rockin’! Woo hoo!” The green pony bounded off to put on the music while their compatriots chuckled. They stayed back a little, individually congratulating Acoustiana and asked who was in charge of helping with the decorations.

“That would be myself, and I think we have enough decorations. However, I do see you have some games; those will come in quite handy. Marvelously good show. Follow me and we can get this place done in no time!” Pastel then led the group off and set them about finishing up decorating.

Acoustiana noted that Pastel was very efficient with her ability to lead the helpers. It took only a few minutes before every decoration that she and Cantaloupe had got set up. They even

found use for some of the extra ones that the musicians brought. She had the games neatly spaced out so that ponies could congregate comfortably to each without the threat of being over crowded.

Then the music started to play. It was heavy with bass, and kept up a lively tempo. The music was not to Acoustiana's taste, as her hearing was slightly more acute than that of most ponies. The volume wasn't too bad. She figured once the partiers all arrived, it would be very pleasant.

"Well, that's that. Acoustiana, time for you to enjoy yourself. Leave everything to me and Canty. So off with you! Stop guarding the door and chat with your friends."

Acoustiana stuck her tongue out at Pastel but complied with her demands.

"Oh how ladylike of you."

"It was that or mess up my tail." Acoustiana gave a cheeky grin to Pastel.

"Hehe, well keep with that good mood and go banter with your guests. I have made sure a notepad and pencil are in every room, so don't worry about carrying one around. If you need help with anything, push the bell hanging on the ceiling. There is one in each room and is out of the way of anypony, so only you should have reason to mess with it. Canty and I expect a few false alarms. This is a party after all." Pastel then trotted over to Acoustiana and gave her a hug. "You're gonna be so famous, so just remember the small ponies in your life." Pastel giggled and poked Acostiana on the nose before turning to the door and taking up post to invite ponies in.

Acoustiana mingled with her early arrivals. She was able to banter with them despite the slight pauses for her to write down her responses. Slowly, more guests started showing up as it got closer to the official party time.

"Acoustiana! There you are. Wow, this turnout is amazing! I knew you were making a lot of friends, but, wow." Hearth Song came bounding over to Acoustiana as she sat on her couch, listening to some of her visitors talk about past experiences.

Upon seeing Hearth, Acoustiana looked to the speaker and nodded to him before getting up to greet her friend. The colt waved and continued with his tale, smiling after the hostess as she left.

"So, is he here yet? Is that him talking?" Hearth was almost vibrating with excitement.

Acoustiana smiled at the antics of her friend, but shook her head in response to the questions.

“Bah, well anywho, I want you to meet my sister. She was with me at your performance and she *really* enjoyed it. And she never said it, but I know she has been wanting to meet you. Scarlet! Where did she get off to... *Scarlet!*”

From out of a small crowd, a pale orange unicorn emerged. Her mane was a light red with a bold scarlet streak. When she looked to where her sister was, she saw Acoustiana and froze. Her rose-red eyes grew wide and she tried to take a step backwards, but bumped into a partygoer.

“Ugh, stop acting all star-struck, Scarlet. She doesn’t bite; now get over here and say ‘hello.’ I know you’ve been wanting to meet her.” Hearth stomped her hoof sternly and Scarlet trotted over with her head and eyes down.

“Uh, h-hello.” Her voice was delicate.

“Okay, you are worrying me. Excuse us, Acoustiana, my sister is acting way too weird. Something must be up. We will be right back.” Hearth Song led her sister off to the side with a very concerned look on her face.

Acoustiana had attracted a sparse number of fans and those few were often too timid to approach her, so she was only slightly concerned. The notion that ponies would be at a loss for words around her had still not yet sunk in. She was used to ponies not wanting to say anything to her, never being unable to do so.

“Well, that is just weird. She won’t say what’s wrong, but said she just needed a moment. So she is gonna have a cup of punch and be back to try again. She is usually so...commanding? demanding? Nah, forceful really applies the most,” Hearth said while nodding to herself.

“Really? I didn’t think I could ever have such an effect on a pony.”

“Well, your music was just that powerful. I almost never see my sister get *that* emotional, but there they were, streams of tears. Not to say my eyes were dry, but that first part was just... perfect.” Hearth looked off into her memory of the performance.

Acoustiana was about to write something in response when the door chime went off. She looked through the crowd to see the arrival of the one she had been anticipating. Ray had finally shown up.

“What’s the...” Hearth looked in the direction of Acoustiana’s stare. “Oh, my, that is a dashing young colt. I am so jeal...oh no...” Hearth Song saw something that made her own heart drop. Ray was greeting a guest when he stepped aside and a beautiful young mare stood beside him. The two nuzzled with amorous looks in their eyes.

“Hearth! What's wrong! Did somepony hurt you? Did somepony hurt *her*? Who?” Scarlet had run over, spilling the cup of punch along the way. Her expression had gone from concerned to angry.

“Not intentionally. Calm down, Scarlet.” Hearth Song let out a sigh as she looked to her friend, still in abject shock and horror. “She was going to ask a colt friend of hers to be her special somepony tonight. But he just showed up with what can only be his mare friend. No mistaking *that* look. I am so, so very sorry, Acoustiana.” Hearth tried to console Acoustiana. The touch caused her to snap out of her shock, only to have her eyes start welling up with tears.

“That's... horrible... I can't imagine how you must feel, Miss Acoustiana.” Scarlet sat back on her haunches as she saw the tears glistening in Acoustiana's eyes. “Hearth, do something. I'll go get her some tissues and a cup of punch.”

Hearth Song held Acoustiana close. She could feel her shaking and trembling. Even still, the tears in her eyes did not fall. Hearth didn't know how Acoustiana was holding them back, but she was doing just that.

“Okay, I'm back. Here, let's dry those eyes before he comes over. I heard him asking where she was, so it won't be long before he arrives. Hold it together, just hold it together,” Scarlet looked Acoustiana in the eyes as she dabbed with the tissues to dry her tears.

“Now that's the Scarlet Topiary that I know. Okay, I see him making his way over here. Did you still want to tell him?” Hearth Song whispered as she stroked Acoustiana's mane.

Acoustiana shook her head, and accepted the cup of punch that was enveloped in a soft red glow. She gave a meek smile to the unicorn that had delivered it and took a sip. She then took a deep breath and stood tall as she saw Ray approach.

“There you are, my lady Acoustiana. Many congratulations for your most wonderful of performances. I must say that your... symphony... was quite powerful and even I was moved to shed a tear. But, oh, where are my manners? Let me introduce my mare friend. Gale Prancer, this is my close friend Acoustiana. Acoustiana, this is my mare friend since flight school, Gale Prancer.” Ray proceeded to nuzzle the mare after the introduction.

“Ray has told me so much about you. It is a pleasure to meet such a talented musician at long last.” Gale Prancer extended a dainty hoof.

“*A pleasure indeed.*” Acoustiana signed back, then paused a moment before shaking the mare's hoof.

Gale Prancer darted her glance from Ray to Acoustiana, all the while a confused look

growing on her face. Ray's face went from debonair to mortified, and settled on a nervous grin.

"She reciprocates your emotion, Gale. Sorry I did not mention that Gale here doesn't yet know hooflanguage." Ray looked into Acoustiana's eyes as he spoke apologetically. "She has a busy schedule up in Cloudsdale, and it was a small miracle that allowed her to be here tonight. We agreed that she just had to attend for such a momentous occasion, though." Gale nodded in agreement to Ray's words.

Acoustiana started to feel her ability to hold back her emotions wane while she stared into the golden eyes she had wished to long for her. So she did what she knew would help her escape: she rang the bell over head with her magic.

"Yes, yes what is the matt...Oh; I see you've met Gale. Again, it is such a pleasure to see you here, darling; you really must find more time to visit," Pastel said as she leaped through the crowd to attend to Acoustiana's summons. She then gave a good look to her friend and her expression fell.

Acoustiana knew that Pastel was able to see through her facade, and used her friends intuition to help her escape.

"Pastel, I need your help in my room. Would you mind escorting me?"

"Of course. I can tell your mane is all mussed up. You should take better care of that. But worry not, for we can have it fixed up in no time at all."

Acoustiana then grabbed Hearth Song and made a beeline for her upstairs bedroom.

"Gah...seems I am coming too. Scarlet, I'll be right back, I do believe you understand, though."

"Don't worry, sis, I can handle myself. Just make sure everything goes okay. I am sure that's why you're being taken along for the ride."

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Ray watched as the three mares cantered up the stairs and out of sight. He looked to Gale Prancer and shrugged. They both wore confused looks and turned to the only pony they thought might have an answer to what just happened.

"If I may be so bold—your name, miss?" Ray asked delicately.

"My name is Scarlet Topiary. The town's best plant and floral arranger. And before you waste your breath, the reason for the sudden departure is a filly issue. I am sure Gale here can

understand that sometimes things go wrong but shouldn't be aired publicly," Scarlet said in as a polite tone as she could, but still came off to be a bit snarky.

"I am not sure what you are implying, but your tone is unwelcome. I have not done anypony any harm." Gale said as she ruffled her feathers.

"Indeed," Scarlet almost dripped the word out. "However, this is just gonna get ugly, so if you don't mind, I shall excuse myself and let you get back to the festivities." Scarlet spun around and trotted out the front door.

"I say. Don't let it get to you too much, dear. Sometimes artists get into moods. Remember that time I talked to you concerning Pastel?"

"True, but it's still not a polite thing to have to deal with at a party. Nevertheless, if you think all is well, I shall let it go. Just for you." Gale proceeded to nip at Ray's neck.



As Acoustiana entered her room, she let go of Hearth Song and turned to release all of her tears onto her shoulder. For her part, Hearth Song was half-expecting as much.

"Okay, what happened? Did somepony say something they are about to regret deeply?" Pastel said with a low growl and face contorted with anger.

"Uh... um... Acoustiana, did you want me to tell her everything? I get the feeling she wasn't told anything." Hearth waited a moment before she felt the nod come from the weeping musician. She looked back to Pastel with a frown and downcast eyes.

"Okay, so here it is: That handsome colt downstairs... Ray? Well, Acoustiana here was going to tell him that she wanted him to be her special somepony. She has been planning this since she organized the party. And it seems you are well aware of the issue at hoof: said colt already has a marefriend."

Pastel looked to Acoustiana with great pity in her eyes. She then let out a sigh and rubbed the sobbing pony's back and neck to try and help calm her down.

"I can see why you didn't tell me." Pastel paused a moment and let out another sigh. "But you really should have, if only so that I could have prevented this... this... horrible event." Pastel waved her hoof into the air. "Gale has been with Ray since even before I knew him. She was quite displeased to find out how close Ray and I had gotten after that... incident we talked about." Pastel attempted a smile, but let it pass, as the pony for whom it was meant had no means to witness it.



“So, what now?” Hearth Song looked from Pastel to Acoustiana. “Without a harp, I’ve got nothing for helping ponies feel better. We eventually have to get back out there,” Hearth gazed at the door. “And I really need to check in on my sister; she can be a bit... feisty... when it comes to seeing ponies she likes get hurt.” Hearth bit her lower lip as she looked from the door to Acoustiana.

“Your sister? You can’t mean Scarlet Topiary...” Pastel looked at her with a bit of shock as she continued to stroke Acoustiana’s mane.

“One and the same.” Hearth jerked her head back slightly at the surprise recognition. “I invited her with me as I knew she really enjoyed Acoustiana’s music. I have only seen music move her *that much* a few times in her life.” Relaxing a bit, Hearth nuzzled Acoustiana as she looked to Pastel.

“Are you s...oh, never mind; this is neither the time nor the place.” Pastel had a skeptical look before waving a hoof in the air to disperse the thought that had crossed her mind. “Acoustiana, dear, you need to calm down now. I am one for letting it out, but there is a point when it becomes more than a pony can take.” Pastel placed a gentle hoof upon the back of her friend. “I know you can put on a brave face. Now let’s clean you up and get back out there to face the crowd. As for the wonderful clichè, there are always more fish in the sea, and you’ll find your special somepony. You may even have already met that pony tonight and you just don’t know it yet.” Pastel put on a genuinely warm smile.

“That’s the spirit!” Hearth chirped up with forced enthusiasm. “Come on, you wonderful unicorn, you. I have seen you put up with plenty of mucky muck. You can manage this.” Hearth placed a hoof under Acoustiana’s chin and slowly raised her head to look her in the eye.

Acoustiana did feel slightly better from the affections of her friends, though the pains of her shattered heart were still quite strong. Her tears still slowly drizzled down her face, and were slowly fading away. She then looked from Hearth Song to Pastel, nodding in agreement to both and sniffing back some tears.

“That’s my girl,” Pastel cooed. “Let’s clean that face of yours. As for your shoulder... uh...” Pastel looked to Hearth. “Now that I think of it, we have not been introduced. My name is...”

“Pastel, yes, I know of you well.” Hearth looked knowingly at Pastel. “I own a few of your works, and my sister also speaks of your collaborations often. My name is Hearth Song, and as you can tell I am a member of Acoustiana’s ensemble, and the only other unicorn in the group. Kinda how we got to know each other.” She said as she looked to her distraught friend.

“It’s a pleasure finally to meet you, Hearth Song.” Pastel gave a slight bow as she took a nervous glance to the tear stained face of her friend. “Acoustiana has mentioned you a number of times. I have to say, your name in hooflanguage has been an interesting one to learn. Took

me a good part of a day to get it right.” Pastel giggled nervously as she again glanced to her heartbroken friend.

Arriving at her sink, Acoustiana looked up at her reflection. Her face was streaked with tear stains, and her eyes were so bloodshot that they almost drowned out her orange irises. She dunked her face in the bowl of water and proceeded to dry it off. She could hear Pastel and Hearth as they got water for Hearth’s shoulder. Thinking on the mess made her regret soaking her friend’s coat with her silent wails. She set down her towel and turned to her friends to apologize properly.

*“Pastel, I am sorry for not telling you ahead of time, but I didn’t want to make you get stuck with a secret or such nonsense. I also will admit I wanted—no, I hoped—to make it a surprise to both you and Cantaloupe that I would be getting together with Ray. Could you let Hearth Song know that I am sorry for crying too much into her coat so as to force her to clean up too?”*

“Silly filly.” Pastel shook her head as her own eyes misted up. “You have nothing to be sorry about.” Pastel looked to the other unicorn in the room. “Hearth, dear, she wishes to apologize for crying onto your shoulder. Wouldn’t you agree that she has nothing to be sorry about?”

“Wait, all that was to say sorry?” Hearth wiggled her hoof in the direction of Acoustiana. “Wow, hooflanguage takes forever to talk with.”

“Actually, only the last part was for you.” Pastel stifled a laugh. “The rest was for me. She feels bad in general for everything.” Pastel turned to Acoustiana with a warm smile, “you shouldn’t, you know. Just trust us to be more understanding in the future. You would be surprised at how open and accepting we are.”

“I must agree with Pastel.” Hearth also gave Acoustiana a warm smile. “In hindsight, if you would have let them into your plan, assuming he was available, think of all the extra scheming we could have done to make this even better. Maybe even set up a game just for you two to get close, or some such.” Hearth looked to Pastel and gingerly nodded.

“Enough of that.” Pastel gave Hearth a stern look. “We have had enough talk on this to last us the whole night. We should get back out there and drink some punch and play some games. Tiana will feel better once she starts enjoying the company of her guests.” Pastel ended with a stiff nod to add emphasis.

There was a sudden flash of soft red light from outside the window, followed by another. Hearth let out a groan when she saw it and headed for the bedroom window. The other two followed her with towels in tow.

Hearth nudged open the window with her nose and quickly looked around. She then leveled her sights on a shadowy figure as it moved around a shrub across the road from Acoustiana's house.

"Scarlet Topiary, will you knock that off! If you want to vent, do us a favor: go to my place and get my harp. I have an idea to help Acoustiana cheer up, but I need my harp. Can you do that for us?"

Scarlet stepped into the light, wearing a small devilish grin.

"Fine, but you owe me. And I will call to collect before too long." She then proceeded to gallop down the road.

"I am going to regret this later. For now it will be worth it, though." Hearth Song had a worried look on her face for a few moments, but then smiled and turned to Acoustiana. She grabbed the towel floating nearby and used it to help dry a few spots still showing some moisture on Acoustiana's face.

"Well, to hold the ruse, we should do something with your mane... perchance an ornament? What do you think, Hearth? A flower? Or maybe a bow?" Pastel had floated over her box of hair implements and was fishing through it.

"I know exactly what to put in her hair." Hearth Song fished out a crescent-moon hairpin and placed it into Acoustiana's mane. "Now, we just need to dress her in that lovely purple ensemble she wore during her performance, or one similar at least."

"Like this one?" Pastel trotted over with a rich purple cape adorned with a bright sapphire clasp.

"Perfect! Now get that on her and our own little mistress of the night can enjoy the rest of her evening." Hearth's eyes flashed in the light and she wore a mischievous grin.

Acoustiana looked skeptically at Hearth Song but only got a wink in response. She decided to allow her friends to try whatever it was they had planned. She didn't have the energy to resist in the first place. She just closed her eyes and tried to ignore the pain in her chest.

"Hey, no more of that." Pastel scolded as she dabbed a towel on Acoustiana's eye to soak up an errant tear that had formed.

Hearth Song and Pastel looked at each other, both bearing a worried crease upon their brows. They then both shrugged and gave Acoustiana a hug. Startled at first, Acoustiana slowly yet surely relaxed and accepted the affections of her friends. As she felt the warmth from their bodies, a small smile managed to make its way onto her face.

“That’s better. You will see, and things will be okay.” Hearth drew back and looked Acoustiana in the eye. “Just give it time. For now, though, let’s get back downstairs and show your guests that you haven’t just up and vanished on them without a goodbye.” Hearth waved at the door. “If you don’t want to stay down there, we can cover for you and say you are worn out from everything. Or, maybe, something more reasonable so as to send them all home and you can have your peace. Pastel, I am sure, can come up with something, and if we get desperate, I *know* my sister can clear out the party without much effort.” Hearth giggled to herself at the prospect.

“She does have a knack for crashing a gathering when the mood strikes her. Useful when we are working outside though, I do have to admit.” Pastel added with an emphatic nod.

The trio headed downstairs to the party where nopony seemed to have paid heed to their hostess’s departure. Pastel and Hearth Song stayed close to Acoustiana as she once again mingled with the guests. Though her willingness to engage in conversation was obviously reduced, some younger musicians managed to coax responses out of her by asking her for tips on becoming good enough to play professionally.

“I have to say—I didn’t think this was going to work. She has always been so timid with exposing her emotions, and I was worried she would close in on herself for the rest of the night,” Pastel whispered to Hearth Song.

“You would be surprised what type of connection musicians have with one another. I can only assume it would be similar for you artists. Imagine yourself on your worst day, but having a young filly come up to you and ask how she can make such masterpieces. Her eyes filled with admiration and hope, nopony could dwell upon their dark thoughts... well, nopony with a heart, anyways. And that mare there definitely has a big heart.” Hearth pointed a hoof at Acoustiana as she was scribbling some words of encouragement to a young unicorn.

“That she does. I just hope it isn’t broken for good.” Pastel’s ears folded back as she nibbled on her lower lip.

There was a sudden commotion near the front door and a well-kept double harp shot up over the crowd, enveloped in a soft red magical aura. The guests started parting as Scarlet charged through them, looking to head for the stairs and the room where she thought her destination lay.

“Scarlet! Over here!” Hearth jumped and waved to get her sister’s attention.

“Okay, here ya go, and I kept it safe from harm and all that.” Scarlet said after a moment to fully catch her breath. “I know how important it is to you, so don’t worry about that. I am curious as to what you’re gonna do with it, though; a party for her doesn’t leave much room for

you to try and upstage her...does it?" Scarlet gently placed the harp in her sister's hooves while looking confused.

"It was never my intention to upstage her; that would do little good." Heart looked rather offended. "Besides, she is better than I; even if I wanted to try, it would be futile." Hearth relaxed and continued. "However, the one thing I know that will make her feel better is to escape into music. With my harp, I know just how to let her, without causing any gossip-mongers to speak poorly of her." Hearth turned to the purple unicorn. "Pastel, I need you to let Acoustiana know that I will be in her music room, retrieving her double bass, and that I am requesting she play a duet with me, if she feels up to it. Otherwise I can play the song myself without issue. Just offering to let her play along if she desires."

"Okay...not exactly sure how that's supposed to help, but I do know she is happiest when playing her music, so I can go along with the plan." Pastel nodded in agreement.

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Scarlet watched as her sister headed off to a back room with her harp floating behind her. After a few moments she returned with a few sheets of paper and a large music case. She assumed it contained the double bass. Her sister then shooed a few guests out of a corner as she set up her harp and leaned the bass against the wall behind her. Acoustiana trotted over with Pastel and they, as it appeared to Scarlet, had a whispered conversation. Pastel then levitated the double bass and returned it to the back room. Shortly after, the party music stopped, and many of the guests looked around and murmured in confusion at what was happening.

"Ladies and Gentlecolts, if I could have your attention, please? By her request, Acoustiana wishes to hear a little song to be performed by Hearth Song on her harp. Odd as it is, I am sure we can all enjoy a small reprieve from the standard party musical fare. Thank you all for being quiet during this small performance," Pastel announced over the crowd in a rather authoritative voice.

After a few moments, the guests gathered around the area Hearth had set up, every seat occupied, and many started just laying on the floor. Once all of the attendees had quieted down, Hearth began plucking at her harp. The melody was somber, and her voice carried a sorrowful tone.

Acoustiana listened to her friend sing for her. She quickly realized the plan her friend had set in motion. The song may not have been about her when Hearth Song made it, but it suited the situation, and definitely her current wardrobe.

All of Acoustiana's friends watched as their friend visibly relaxed, and a smile slowly crept across her face as the music played. Cantaloupe had asked Pastel what was going on,

and was told she would be informed later, after all the guests had left. Ray also approached Pastel to ensure that there were no further filly issues that would come up in the near future. He was put at ease to hear that nothing else should occur lest someone provoke it.

*"I heard there was a harpsichord
That Luna played, and it lulled Discord
But ponies don't really care for music, do ya?"*

*It went like this
The fourth, the fifth
The lunar fall, the solar lift
The saddened queen composing Hallelujah..."*

(Author Note: In the off chance you would like to see the full song I covered, see link below)
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Vttq7yymIFFiC4dHHgApePFnrDQB6VhhITAjdmHvfxA/edit>