

Confessions and Considerations

A light blue blur with colorful streaks flowing out from behind it fell from the sky. The speed of the fall appeared to be too fast for what was safe, and the form was speeding towards the ground at an alarming rate. Staring at the blurred, falling form, a certain earth pony couldn't help but feel a twinge of pure terror. Even as she watched the rainbow-colored comet streak towards the ground a ways in front of her she could see what was to happen. She knew full well in her heart what was bound to happen, she would be too late, she could never reach that spot in time. She couldn't help but feel the jerk in her stomach as she watched her friend plummet towards the ground in front of her. Time had seemed to slow down, her hooves hit the surface beneath her, propelling her towards the spot where the blur seemed to be about to hit. The blur fell ever closer and closer towards that spot, and her heart was in her throat when she saw contact was made. She had fully expected the sound the hit was going to make, but it still caught her off guard, still startled her, and still made her wince all the same.

In a matter of but split seconds, she covered the last few feet between her and the blue form, lying still on the ground, unmoving, and even though she knew she was expecting this, the contents of Applejack's stomach still passed dangerously close to her throat. The light orange mare stood, unmoving, over the still form of Rainbow Dash, her best friend, lying at her feet. The rainbow-maned Pegasus was splayed out in the most pitiful form possible. Applejack felt a long, slow drip of salty tear fall down her face. Then another, and another. She sniffed to keep back her tears, she had to be strong now, especially now. 'Why am ah cryin'?' she asked herself. She sniffed to hold back the steady flow of tears as she took an appropriate time to glance over the fallen body of her best friend. She began to sputter, and senseless sounds began to form a single word that drifted quietly, sorrowfully from her lips. "Why?"

She turned her head up, and gazed with complete sadness in her eyes at the splendor of Luna's full moon. The moon stared back at her, its cool, white light illuminating the scene in a such a somber way. Applejack drank in the soft light of Luna's moon, and let the realization and emotion wash over her. Staring at the moon, she filled her voice with all the terror, fear, sadness, and regret she could ever possibly hope to muster, and yelled up into the night sky. "WHY? WHY?!" The overwhelming flood of emotion released, Applejack allowed her eyes to open up, a torrent of tears escaping over her face and falling down to the ground beside the body of Rainbow Dash. Applejack allowed the natural sobs to rake through her body as she stared back down at the face of the mare. She stared with profound intensity and real sadness at the closed eyes of her best friend. All the sounds of the night faded out. She could hear nothing. All other sights faded from her vision as well as she gazed at those blue eyelids. She could see nothing else.

Her tunnel vision lasted for what seemed like an eternity, but in reality was probably only a few seconds. Then, slowly, carefully, one eyelid began to lift, and the magenta iris of Rainbow Dash looked back up at her. A sparkle of mirth and life was alive and well within that eye, and in a flash, almost as if Applejack hadn't seen it at all, the blue eyelid flipped closed over the eye and open again before being carefully lowered back into place again. She couldn't help but smile a

little from the wink.

The first sound to vibrate the thin membrane of Applejack's eardrum since her own shrill cry was a deafening roar. Filling the field adjacent to where Applejack and Rainbow Dash were there were dozens, maybe even hundreds of ponies, and all were stomping their front hooves to the ground vigorously. Applejack let the sound wash over her for a moment before the fall of a heavy curtain muffled the noise. Almost immediately, the rainbow Pegasus before her leapt back up into the air, back up into her element, and let out a whoop.

"That was AWESOME! Applejack!" Rainbow Dash exclaimed with delight "Did you see me? I was amazing! I couldn't have pulled off that controlled fall better than I did, and that crash at the end was spectacular. I bet that, plus Twilight's awesome magic sound effects, made everypony out there think I actually hit the stage!"

"Heh, yeah," Applejack started to reply, "It sure was, uh, somethin' mighty special, Rainbow."

"You were great too!" Rainbow continued on, excitedly, "I mean, you should have seen your face when I lying there, and your voice too. If I didn't know that this whole thing was scripted, I would say that you were actually terrified for me. You sounded that sincere an realistic! You're pretty great at acting!"

"Ya think so?" Applejack asked back, not generally accustomed to this kind of praise from the usually rather headstrong and self-absorbed pegasus mare. 'But I wasn't really acting, was I?' She asked herself. 'Sure I was following Pinkie's script, but there was real emotion there, I could never be that convincing if I was faking it.' She continued to think, not really listening to Rainbow continue to exclaim how awesome the performance had been. "Well, ah'm just glad I was able to help Pinkie Pie's little project." She finally said, noticing Dash had paused for a moment.

"Come on, everypony, let's go out and take a bow!" The voice of that certain overexcited pink mare reverberated through the backstage area. Behind her stood Twilight Sparkle, Rarity, and Fluttershy, all with a grin on their faces. The six friends gathered up and stepped out of the curtain to stand on the front of the makeshift stage set up behind Cupcake Corner. The continued applause of many, many, other ponies assaulted their ears and they all basked in the glow of the cheering crowd. Fluttershy seemed to fade back a bit at this confrontation, but Rarity and Rainbow Dash drank up the adoration, smiling their happy, cocky smiles at the crowd. Applejack just stood and smiled her honest smile, waiting for Pinkie to lead them backstage again.

"Thank you guys oh so much for making my play a super success!" Pinkie jabbered as she bounced around back behind the curtain. "I was so worried because I had never written one before and I thought it wouldn't go well but I wanted something extra-special for this party that I threw tonight so when I was thinking of a special thing I could do that I had never done at a party before I thought 'Hey!' I should write a play and have an extra special performance to go with the party so everypony in town could have fun watching my play and eating cake and playing party

games all in the same night!" She paused for a breath before rushing on again. "But then I thought, well, I never did write a play or anything major like that before, so I got Mr. and Mrs. Cake to help me and they were just so nice and Mrs. Cake seemed to have so many good ideas and I finished writing a whole big story but then I wondered who would play all these parts if I had to perform them because even though I would have loved to play all the parts in my play I just couldn't possibly do that and Gummy can't really play them because he can't talk anyway so I asked you guys and you guys were so good!"

Pinkie Pie's constant, high-speed, run-on rambling almost always made Applejack's brain hurt trying to follow along. So she was glad when she heard Twilight pipe up and say: "That's great, Pinkie Pie, why don't we head home now though, I mean, your parties done, and I know I'm tired. I'm sure we could all go to sleep, it is pretty late."

"OK, Twi!! Thank all you guys ever so much for helping make this whole night extra super special!" Pinkie bounced off the stage and into the crowd, which was only just beginning to disperse. Applejack and the others came down off the stage too, and began pushing their way through a crowd of friendly ponies as they tried to make their way to the road. Fluttershy, not really comfortable with being surrounded by so many other ponies, took off and shyly floated above the crowd towards her cottage house. Applejack looked over to Rainbow Dash, expecting her to do the same, but saw that the headstrong mare was still drinking in the praise everypony seemed so willing to give.

"You were all so great!"

"Who knew we had such acting talent right here in Ponyville!"

"That final scene was especially good; I was really scared for a moment there!"

"Yes, especially your part, Darling." This was Rarity, Applejack realized, addressing her. "You certainly did act like a mare that had so tragically lost her love, your compassion and emotion was beautiful to watch!"

"Yeah, I agree," came a voice from the crowd, "you two played the romantic leads very well, especially for two fillies." Applejack turned to see who was talking, and saw a brown stallion she didn't quite recognize walking beside Rainbow Dash and looking between her and Dash. Dash herself was suddenly blushing and didn't seem as outgoing as she had before, she tried to hang her head to hide the blush, but it didn't seem to be working. Looking up, Dash locked eyes with Applejack, and Applejack felt her own cheeks going hot with the redness of a rush of blood she knew was making her blush as well. She quickly looked down to avoid further embarrassment, and finally found herself out on the road to Sweet Apple Acres.

"Hiya, Applejack." Applejack looked up to see Rainbow Dash, now floating lazily in the sky next to her. The rest of the crowd had gone their respective ways, leaving Applejack alone with Rainbow. Applejack felt a twinge of nervousness looking at the blue pegasus next to her, but she didn't know why. "I just wanted to tell you that... um..." Rainbow Dash stopped, seeming to be

searching for words.

Applejack shook herself to get out of her reverie. "Well for Celestia's sake, Sugarcube, just spit it out!" She said, a little more harsh than she had intended, upon saying this, she detected the slightest droop in the demeanor of Rainbow Dash, a little frown, barely perceptible before the Pegasus' face lit up again, albeit a bit forced this time.

"I just wanted to say nice job acting today. I thought it would be weird playing a romantic lead with you, but it turned out awesome!" Rainbow said a little too quickly. Then, without warning, she did a double-flip in the air and rocketed off towards her cloud home in the sky.

"YEAH, GREAT JOB..." Applejack began to shout, but then quieted when she realized the pegasus probably couldn't hear her, "...acting." She finished in a strangely small voice.

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On the long lonely hike back home along country roads and through the extensive orchard, Applejack had a lot of time to think for herself. "It was just actin' wasn't it?" She thought, 'But, but why did it feel so real?' When she had been performing alongside Rainbow Dash all night, she had had fun, real fun, it had been fun to play the role of two lovers with her. But nothing had been more real, nothing had felt as heart-wrenchingly close to reality as the final scene. Rainbow's big "death" scene. As she had watched that filly fall, she had felt real fear, she had felt real emotion, not just the acting everyone thought she had shown. Her tears had been real tears, she knew that was true. Her honest nature would not have let her cry real ones. She had cried to the moon with every ounce of real emotion she had felt in her body at the time. 'No, that wasn't acting.' She thought. 'Then what was it?' She couldn't answer that question. She felt too conflicted.

The soft white light of Luna's moon and stars still shimmered down at her as she trudged past row after row of ripe apple trees. "Ah'll have to do some buckin' tomorrah," she said out loud, absent-mindedly to herself. She looked back up at Luna's moon. It seemed the same as before, big, full, even, and shimmering in the soft white light that so gently lighted her path home. The sight of the moon brought back the emotion she had felt at that final scene, and she felt a tear begin to well up in her eye. She shook it away. 'Why an ah cryin'? I shouldn't be cryin', it was just a play it wasn't even real!' she thought again. But it had felt real, it had felt so real. Applejack admitted to herself that she had felt terror when she saw Dash falling, even though they had rehearsed that scene and she knew full well beforehand what to expect. She had still felt terror, fear, and sadness. 'Why? Could it be ah have... feelings... for... Rainbow Dash? Maybe I lo... lo... like her?' the questions her thoughts began to pose suddenly made a switch flip in her mind. She knew that answer. Almost as soon as she realized she knew that answer though, she shook the thought away. 'That's silly, we're both mares! How could I lo... No. She's just mah best friend. We have so much in common, and we've been friends for years, seeing her falling like that, even if it was fake, must have just triggered some friendship reflex in me or sumthin!' Even as Applejack began to tell herself that, she could feel, in the deep, unshakable bottom of her

heart, that that wasn't true at all.

It was very late when Applejack finally pushed her way through the front doorway of her country home. She noticed the sweet, homely smell of baked apples hit her nose first. She sighed, she was home late, but if home-cooking still smelled that strong in the house, she knew Granny Smith was awake as well. She walked into the kitchen, and immediately saw Granny Smith sitting on a chair by the table, a fresh-baked apple pie out on the tablecloth.

"You're home late." Granny Smith spoke in her sweet old mare's voice. Then Applejack visibly saw something register in Granny's eyes. "Sit down child, you look like you have a lot on your mind. I think you need someone to talk to."

Applejack reluctantly sat down. She knew Granny Smith could see there was something troubling her, and there was no point in bluffing to try and get around it. She was a terrible liar anyway. "Granny, I just got back from Pinkie's party, and we performed a play at the end..." Applejack's voice trailed off, unsure what to say next.

"So I heard, so sorry I couldn't be there. I find it so hard to get out of the house these days."

"Granny, you really shouldn't be up this late, why don't you go get your rest?"

"Don't try to change the subject, somethin's troublin' my granddaughter, and I intend to find out what."

Applejack sighed in reluctance. She knew she couldn't get out of this now. "Well, ah think I've fallen in... developed feelings for some other pony." She tried to keep it simple.

Granny's mouth curled into a smile of satisfaction. "Well I should congratulate you then, you know I think you've been somewhat married to this here farm for most of your life, just like your brother is, I was hopin' that you spending so much more time with all your little friends would get you more out there in the social world. Now tell me, who's the lucky stallion?"

Applejack cringed, this was what she had been hoping to avoid. She knew she couldn't tell the truth. Her mind rushed, trying to think up a suitable answer. "It's Caramel, she said quickly."

"Now Applejack, you know I can tell when you're lyin' to me. Why don't you just go ahead and tell the truth, mah little honest one."

Applejack bit her lip. There was no point hiding it anymore. "Well, she said slowly, trying to pick her words. They ain't exactly a... stallion." She finished, and hung her head, ready for whatever may come from Granny's mouth at this little revelation.

Granny Smith's eyes sparked with a sudden understanding, but the smile never flinched on her face. "Now tell me, little one, why couldn't you just say that in the first place?"

Applejack looked up again, into the deep caring eyes of her grandmother. She decided then and there to just lay everything out for her. "Well, Grandad always said that it wasn't natural. That only a mare and a stallion could be natural too. He always seemed so against the whole concept, that I just figured you might be too. Ah've been scared for years to even admit to mahself that mah barn door might swing that way, because I thought this family frowned on that stuff!"

Granny Smith's eyes retained their same calm, caring, loving, and understanding shine they had had. "Now Applejack, your granddad was a great man, but he did have his flaws. That's one of his biggest right there. He didn't understand the power, or all the forms, of true love. Don't get me wrong, he loved me, and he loved your mother, and he loved you, Macintosh, and even Applebloom with all of his heart, even though it was Applebloom that caused him to lose our daughter, he still loved her all the same." Applejack saddened at that memory, learning that their mother had died of childbirth, it had been so sad for her, she had been so young. "But the one thing he didn't understand about love," Granny Smith continued on, a hint of sadness in her voice, "was its many forms. He always thought that two mares together or two stallions together was unnatural and wrong, he must not have seen the marks of the same true love that he had for me evident in those ponies, but ah did. I loved your granddad even though he felt like this, and when he died, it was still sad for me, but I want you to listen to me good now. I want you to forget everything he ever said on the subject. Applejack, the only thing that matters is love, and what lies in your heart. I want you to listen to your own heart, and no other voices."

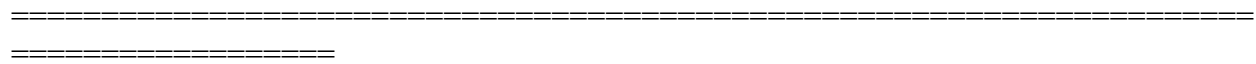
Applejack found herself crying. She knew this was what she needed to hear. She needed to hear that it was OK, that her feelings were natural. Granny couldn't have pulled through any better than she did.

"Remember child, you need to follow your heart. Follow your heart to the ends of the earth, and you will always find happiness."

"Th... thanks... G-g... Granny." Applejack managed, sniffing away tears as her heart finally won out, she knew what she felt on the inside now.

"Good, now before bed, let's eat the rest of this pie, wouldn't want mah fine craftsmaanship to go to waste, would we?" Granny chuckled, and began to dig in. Applejack followed suit.

They ate their pie in silence.



Rays of Princess Celestia's sunlight streaming in through her bedroom window woke Applejack from her deep slumber the next morning, followed closely by the shrill cocka-doodle-doo of their rooster. Applejack made her way to the window and looked out to a glorious sunrise. A wide,

expansive field of fruit-laden trees looked back at her. "Buckin' time," She said to herself, "YEEEE-HAAW!" She cried as she burst from her bedroom door and galloped down the stairs. She wolfed down a quick breakfast before snatching up her favorite hat and charging outside to her trees.

A good time later, Applejack was still hard at work, it was nearing midday, and she had worked up a nice sweat. She neared her next tree, poised her front legs, and picked up her hind legs, ready to deliver a swift kick to the trunk so as to let the apples fall neatly into the buckets poised below. She delivered a powerful kick, and smiled, satisfied, as she heard the rustle start to shake the branches. But then she heard a noise that made her blood run cold.

A cry, a crying out, was emanating from inside the tree, Applejack wondered what It could be, but then her fears were confirmed as she saw somepony fall to the ground. A blue and rainbow blur hit the grassy floor in front of her, making Applejack jump back. Rainbow Dash picked herself up off the ground, looking dazed and somewhat confused, but froze when her eyes fell on Applejack.

Applejack was so severely startled that she couldn't control the outburst that came next. "WHAT THE HAY ARE YOU DOIN' HERE!" She shouted, before stopping herself, realizing she had just screamed at her best friend and the mare she probably loved.

"I was... I was just... I was only... I tried to.... I can't really... I wasn't ... I... I... I..." Rainbow Dash was startled too, and she was stammering. She had no idea what to say, and even the fastest flier in Equestria couldn't think fast enough to get herself out of this situation. She could only do what came naturally to her, a reflex, and Rainbow Dash reflexes told her she needed to get out of there, fast. Without warning, she sprung up into the air and rocketed away, away from Applejack, Away from the farm, away from the prospect of explaining herself in an awkward situation.

Applejack just stood there, dumbfounded, her stupid little outburst had just driven off the one pony she had wanted so desperately to see, to talk to, when she had fallen asleep the night before. She had wanted to tell Dash everything she had felt that night right then and there, and when presented with a near perfect chance to do it that morning, she had gone and blown it. She hung her head in shame and finished her daily work in silence.

Applejack headed into Ponyville the next day. She had cried that night, cried over lost opportunity. Now she needed to see her friends. As luck would have it, she ran across Pinkie Pie in the center of town.

"Ohmygosh Applejack I haven't seen you since the play how have you been because I've been just great and I wanted to see you!" Pinkie exclaimed in about the fastest voice she could, rushing over to hug Applejack.

"Ooof," Applejack groaned as a solid force of Pinkie Pie crashed into her. "It's great to see you too, Pinkie. I've been well." Applejack paused, there was only one pony who she really wanted to talk to. "Pinkie," Applejack said suddenly, "have you seen Rainbow Dash, I've been lookin' for her."

"Ooooooohhh, would this happen to have anything to do with your performances in my play?" Pinkie asked with abject curiosity.

"Uh, sure," Applejack said, "let's go with that."

"I knew it, I knew it, I KNEEEEEWWW IIIIT!!!!" Pinkie broke out into a singsong voice.

"Knew what?" Applejack asked, suddenly concerned.

"Applejack and Dashie are a couple, Applejack and Dashie are a couple! Applejack and Da-"

Applejack clopped her hoof over Pinkie's mouth the instant she realized what the pink mare was saying. "Pinkie, she hissed, what in Equestria's name gave you that idea!"

"Well it's obvious isn't it?" Pinkie continued at a whisper, "You and her perform as the couple in my show, and then you were acting really awkward around her after the show, and now you come into town asking me if I know where she is! This is so awesome, two of my best friends getting together, I'll have to throw a party! I mean, I knew something was happening as soon as Dashie asked me if you could play the romantic role with her in the play, but now I know something is happening, and..."

"Wait, Rainbow asked you to make us the couple in your little play?"

"Yeah, she came up to me one day and said: 'Pinkie...', wait, you didn't know?" Pinkie was suddenly incredulous.

"Ummm, no."

"OH NO! I didn't tell a secret, did I! I could never do that, never ever!"

"Relax, Pinkie, did Rainbow say it was a secret?"

"No..."

"So it wasn't a secret! Now look, I need to know where Rainbow is, have you seen her?"

"I think she was at Fluttershy's cottage earlier." Pinkie finally said.

"Thanks!" Applejack managed to say before she ran off. She had another chance, and she wasn't going to blow this one.

She saw Rainbow Dash on the road to Fluttershy's cottage. The rainbow-maned pegasus was walking instead of flying, and looked somewhat dejected, Applejack noticed with a cringe. She knew that if she wanted to get the truth out of Rainbow, she would have to keep her there and make sure her pride didn't get the best of her and force her to lie and try to save face. Applejack had seen that enough to know it was a real possibility. Luckily, the pegasus didn't notice Applejack until Applejack was right up in front of her. "Hey Rainbow!" She called, out in her most friendly voice.

Rainbow Dash jumped. She hadn't expected to meet Applejack here. She had just been walking home from crying her eyes out to Fluttershy, and now this mare, the mare she had been crying about, had come to confront her. Rainbow wanted nothing more than to not go through with this conversation. She reared up on her hind legs and prepared to take flight. She leapt up into the air and began shooting away when a sharp pain at the base of her tail told her she was doomed. Her forward momentum was cut instantly, and Rainbow Dash had no choice but to sink back down to the ground and face the orange earth pony.

Applejack watched as Rainbow Dash turned around and gulped. She had caught her expertly with her jaw, using years of practice to tie down the mare. Now was her chance, she wasn't going to let it go. "Rainbow, I want you to tell me exactly why you were there in my apple tree yesterday, and why you dashed off like that when I found you."

"Well, I was uh... Sleeping!, yeah, sleeping. And I was startled when you bucked me out of the tree so I flew away because I was startled." Rainbow was speaking fast, and also seemed to be repeating herself. It was not a very well-conceived lie.

"Nah." Applejack said, determined to break the shell of pride Rainbow was erecting, "I don't want that excuse, Rainbow Dash. I want you to tell me the honest truth, and now."

The shell broke. Rainbow hung her head, and stammered. "I... I... I was there because I was watching you. I come to watch you all the time, really, I like watching you buck those trees, it's pretty cool the way you do it, and I've always thought you looked pretty... pretty... graceful." Dash finished, as if revealing her emotions was painful in some way. Applejack sat there, in quiet contemplation, taking in what had been said. "Puh, Please?" Rainbow Dash began to babble, "I don't want this to ruin our friendship. I don't know how you feel about me, but please don't hate me because of the way I feel about you! You're the best friend I've had in a while, and even though we get into arguments, and we compete a lot, you're the only one I feel is most like me. I've always felt some sort of connection with you, like we're both athletes, or we're both pretty tomcolt-ish, or whatever, I've always felt close to you, but I never knew how you felt. You're the only one I can't seem to keep my head on straight around. I've always been able to hide my feelings, but now they feel stronger than ever! I can't hold them under a proud, boastful façade any more. Please, Applejack, don't hate me! Please let us keep being friends!"

Applejack had been unprepared for this string of revelations. Maybe Rainbow really couldn't hold in her feelings anymore, maybe this is what she had wanted to tell her when they were alone, after the play. In a flash, Applejack realized that she had to say something. "Rainbow, you don't have to keep your feelings bottled up." She began, unsure now, that she finally had the moment, what exactly to say. "I'm a very understanding person, in fact I..."

"APPLEJACK!" A shrill voice sounded behind them. Applejack didn't get a chance to finish confessing to Rainbow Dash before she felt herself being whirled around by another ponies arms. "Where. Are. They." Breathed a very distraught Rarity.

"Slow down, Sugarcube, what do yah mean by that?"

"Sweetie Bell, Apple Bloom, the girls! They told me they were going to be staying at the farm with you today! Where are they! It doesn't look like you're watching them!"

"Whoah, Nelly. Apple bloom told me they were a gonna be at your place! You mean they're missing!"

"Well, yes, obviously. And where do you think they might have gone? Hm?" The sarcasm was evident in Rarity's tone, she wasn't kidding around.

"The Everfree Forest." Applejack said. "Ah'm goin in after them, Rarity, you go check with Scootaloo's parents, then get Twilight, and even Pinkie and Fluttershy. We'll need all the help we can get. Rainbow, I need you to..."

"Air patrol, got it." Rainbow Dash jumped in, and then abruptly shot into the sky and flew off towards the Forest.

"Well good, I'll run and get the others, you get going Applejack, make sure they come home safe!" Rarity exclaimed and then ran off. Applejack began running in the opposite direction, towards the Everfree forest. Without thinking about direction, but with the slightest perceived glimpse of footprints to tell her she was on the right track, she rushed on in.

Applejack had shoved her way through the dense brush for what felt like hours, but had really only been a few minutes, when she thought she heard a voice. "APPLEJACK!" It came from above. She looked up. Rainbow Dash was floating above the trees, obscured by branches. "They're up this way," she said, "I saw them in a clearing! Follow me! She charged ahead, and Applejack followed her. towards where she thought she could hear voices coming from, and a spot of brighter sunlight shone through a hole in the trees ahead of her. She charged through, and there, plain as day, sat Applebloom, Sweetie Belle, and Scootaloo. All three looked up with a start at Applejack.

"What the hay are you fillies doin'!" She gasped.

The three looked at her, then at each other, and began to grin. "CUTIE MARK CRUSADER FOREST RACERS YAY!!!!" They shouted, and took off into the brush in the opposite direction from Applejack. "Try and catch us, Applejack!" Applebloom shouted backwards.

"Oh, Horseapples." Applejack said to herself, then charged in after them. In any normal conditions, she could outrun the three fillies like nothing, but here in the forest was another matter. Her speed was virtually useless in the dense underbrush, and she found herself slipping back as she fought through it, knowing that with their small size the three ahead of her were having an easier time and were probably slipping away. Looking up, Applejack could see Rainbow trying to keep pace and follow along without losing eye contact through the dense canopy.

With a sudden spark of realization, Applejack recognized her location. She instantly doubled pace to try and catch up with the fillies ahead of her. She could see what was coming up ahead, she had been here before. All thoughts of the tendrils of plants ripping at her pelt were now gone as she pushed herself through the foliage. She could see the trees thinning out ahead, they were reaching a break in the forest, and she knew exactly what was at that break. "Applebloom, Scootaloo, Sweetie Belle! Stop!" She yelled, trying to get them to stop before it was too late. Up ahead, she could see them through a gap in the trees. They had reached the other side of the trees, and were now trying with all their might to halt their forward momentum as they slid closer and closer to the edge of a cliff.

Somewhere in the distance was a rickety rope and board bridge, which led across the gaping chasm. Applejack had been here before, on the trip to stop Nightmare Moon, and she knew that if any of those fillies went over the edge, they would essentially be goners. She burst from the trees just in time to watch Scootaloo flap her wings as an air brake. This slowed the pegasus filly, and she instinctively grabbed the tail of Sweetie Belle, sliding just in front of her, with her jaw. Sweetie Belle then reached out towards Applebloom, who was closest to the edge. Applejack hoped against hope that Sweetie Belle would be able to grab her little sister, but she pounded forward anyway, propelling herself towards the edge as well. Sweetie Belle missed. Applebloom's hind legs slipped over the edge, her momentum pulling the rest of her with them, just as Applejack launched herself through the air. Scootaloo and Sweetie Belle stopped short, Scoot's wings giving the little bit of air resistance needed to keep them from plummeting, and just as Applebloom's forelegs grasped for purchase at the edge of the cliff, Applejack grabbed them. She immediately planted her hind legs in the ground and used every ounce of her considerable strength to dig in. She now had to halt her own forward motion lest she lose both herself and her sister over the edge. As her midsection passed over the side, she focused all of her concentration into her hindquarters. She had to stop her own slide! Then, she felt two small pairs of hooves grasp her hind legs and hold firm. She stopped with her front half dangling over the side, Applebloom hanging on by her two front hooves which were grasped by Applejack.

Until that moment, she hadn't heard anything. The next thing she knew, a myriad of sounds

assaulted her. She heard Applebloom's scream. A terrifying, blood-curdling scream, as she saw her sister hanging there by her hooves. She heard the strained grunts of Sweetie Belle and Scootaloo, both struggling to hold her and Applebloom up, struggling to keep them from falling. But the one thing she heard that brought joy to her heart was a voice. Her most beautiful voice she had ever heard in her life.

"Applejack!" Rainbow Dash cried, "Applejack, down here, look down here!" Applejack looked directly down and saw, to her great delight, Rainbow Dash, she was hovering just below Applebloom's dangling hind legs. Her magenta eyes were fixed with steadfast determination, and she stared up into the green eyes of Applejack. "I'll catch her." She said simply. Trust me!"

Applejack had never felt more trust for another pony on her life than she did right now. "Applebloom," she said as sweetly as she could manage given the situation. "I'm going to let go now. Rainbow Dash is right below me, she's going to catch you. I need you to be a big pony and let Rainbow catch you." Applebloom had stopped screaming, but she was shaking now. She shook her head. "Rainbow Dash is the most loyal, trustworthy pony I know," Applejack found herself saying, "She will catch you. I promise. This is the only way to save yourself. Scootaloo and Sweetie Belle can't pull us both back up."

"Hey!" Scootaloo interjected, but Applejack had won. Applebloom slowly shook her head, the fear and terror prevalent in her eyes. Applejack counted down.

"5... 4... 3... 2... 1..." And she let go. The scream only lasted for a split second before Applebloom landed squarely on Rainbow's shoulders. Rainbow immediately lifted the frightened filly up to the top of the cliff and a muffled thump told Applejack that they were safe.

"Help me Rainbow Dash, I can't hold on any longer!" Sweetie Belle suddenly cried out. Before Rainbow Dash could do anything, her grip slipped, and Applejack's right hind leg fell over the edge. Scootaloo couldn't hold on for more than a second longer without Sweetie Belle, and she too had to let go.

Applejack had never felt the sensation before. She was falling, utterly falling, and she knew there was a raging river somewhere below her. She didn't cry out, she didn't scream, she just felt the wind rushing past her ears and felt as she picked up speed, plummeting downward, farther and farther, faster and faster. Time ticked by in slow motion as she slowly fell head-over hooves. It wasn't until she tumbled so she was face-up again and looking up at the cliff's edge above her did she realize the situation. Up above her, staring downward were three little fillies. An orange pegasus, a white unicorn, and a light yellow earth pony with a red mane and a cute pink bow. Tears were falling from this one's eyes. Applejack realized that her little sister, the one who for all intents and purposes called her "mom" was about to watch her role model, her older sister, and the only mother figure she had, plummet to her death. It was this realization, staring up into the eyes of her younger sister, that this little filly, who had never known her real mother, was about to lose the only maternal figure she had, was about to witness that death, that made Applejack cry. Applejack cried not for herself, but for Applebloom, for Big Macintosh, For Granny Smith. She knew not how they would cope with any loss of this sort. In a rush, she knew

she had to say something. Her kin was up there, and she had to get a message to them. "AH LOVE YOU!" She screamed at the top of her lungs, hoping that her words would reach the little crying filly at the top of the cliff.

Then, she closed her eyes. She closed her eyes and listened. She heard the sobs of a crying filly growing weaker and weaker, she heard the rushing, thundering roar of a river growing closer and closer. She didn't look, but she listened as she prepared herself for death, knowing that she had saved at least one life to balance out the loss of her own. The roar of the river grew closer still, and Applejack resigned herself for the high-speed hit that would surely be fatal. Then, she heard a new noise. It barely registered over the sound of rushing water, but it was there, and it was right next to her. A whoosh, as if there was something else cutting through the air near her. Then, there was a sharp pain in Applejack's chest. She felt the wind nearly get knocked out of her as she sensed a strong force dig into her midsection and cut her downward momentum. Then, there was a precarious dance of sound as the roaring water loomed closer, but with less speed, she was slowing down. The noise of the water got louder, but it wasn't raising in volume as fast anymore, and a new sound was there to take its place. THUMP THUMP THUMP. It sounded like...

The beating of wings. Applejack's eyes shot open and she found herself staring straight down at a rushing river, mere yards from her. She craned her head up and witnessed the most beautiful display of raw power she had seen in her entire life, even surrounded by strong farm ponies. A blue pegasus with a rainbow mane beat her wings furiously, front hooves locked around the chest of the orange mare. Slowly, slowly but surely, the kinetic energy of the downward descent was overridden and the sheer power of Rainbow Dash, the greatest flyer in Equestria, lifted Applejack up and out of the ravine. For the first time she had ever seen, looking up into the face of her savior, Applejack saw tears streaming from the eyes of the headstrong pegasus. She locked gazes with Rainbow Dash, and Rainbow Dash started back, tears flowing freely. "I... I love you too." She managed to choke out, the force of the moving air ripping tear after tear from her eyes.

The two landed at the top of the cliff. Rainbow set Applejack down and then set down herself in front of her. Applejack was silent for a moment. She was thinking again. 'Ah meant those last words for Applebloom.' She thought. 'She was going to be so said... But Rainbow must have thought ah meant her! What should I do?' In a flash, she realized that this was exactly what she had wanted. Rainbow Dash was hers, all she had to do was say yes. But... but... there was still some nagging doubt... "Remember child, you need to follow your heart. Follow your heart to the ends of the earth, and you will always find happiness." Granny Smith's voice came into her head, and Applejack understood. She understood everything.

"Listen," Rainbow Dash began to speak, the silence becoming a little too much for her, "Applejack, I... uh..."

"No, Sugarcube." Applejack cut in, "you don't have ta say anythin'." And then she rushed forward. It was now or never. Applejack planted her lips on Rainbow Dash's mouth. Rainbow was only startled for a second before she returned the kiss in full. The forest, the three fillies, everything around them began to melt away from their minds.

And for an eternal moment, two mares stood alone on the edge of a cliff, locked in loving embrace.