

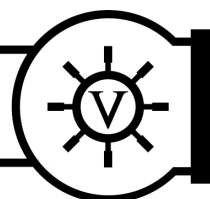
Solace

Amit

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PONY FICTION VAULT



Pinkie was sitting by Dash's bed, as she had been for several days. She had been suffering for a while now. The room was very quiet, and the lights were rather dim. Normally Pinkie would be telling stories and singing songs, but Twilight said it would be better if she were left to rest.

So she sat in silence.

"How're you feeling, Dashie?"

"Slow." A long pause. "You?"

Pinkie Pie's skip had lost some of its jump, but she didn't tell her that.

"Me? I feel guh—reat!"

"Oh, Pinkie Pie. You are so—*random*."

She didn't make the contradiction. Dash's ears had been failing for a while now; she probably heard something different.

They sat quietly for a while.

"Pinkie?"

"Yes, Dashie?"

"Can I see the sky?"

The request made her eyes widen. Rainbow Dash hadn't wanted to see the sky for a long time.

"Of course!" She stuck her hoof out, gently pushing one of her forelegs under Dash's shoulder. She began to tug gently.

"Quicker."

"You'll get hurt."

"*Quicker*."

She tugged quicker, and heard little gasps.

“I’m sorry! I’m so sorry—”

“No. Quicker.”

The pegasus began to move by herself, pushing herself off of the bed while Pinkie Pie helped her down. It took, by Pinkie’s guess, just around five minutes.

Rainbow Dash laughed, a deep, rasping sound. “Ow. Must be a new record.”

“Sure is!”

They laughed together quietly for a while. Pinkie Pie had tears in her eyes, but hid them.

She helped Dash to her hooves, stabilising her. As they reached the stairs, she reached to carry her; she lifted her by the barrel with all of her strength and tugged, pulling her up as she began to walk down.

As she went, she promptly stepped on a protruding nail; in her shock, she tripped and hit the floor very hard.

Pinkie Pie hugged herself tight to Dash for a moment before pulling away, ignoring her own bruises in favour of finding Dash’s as her heart palpitated. “Dashie? Dashie!”

To her infinite relief, she heard a wry chuckle. “Best flight ever.”

That wasn’t the best flight ever, Pinkie Pie did not say. I almost got you killed.

“You okay, Dashie? Did you break your wings? I’m so sorry, I’m so so so sorry.”

She only laughed in response, trying to push herself up; Pinkie reached out a hoof, and she took it.

“Are you okay? I’m so super-duper *sorry*. I can’t believe I *dropped* you, I stepped on a nail—”

“I’m *fine*, Pinkie. It’ll take more than that to hurt *me*. You’re sounding like your mother.” Dash pulled herself up, grinning. She looked just the same as she always had. “Oh, boo-hoo. Won’t I ever have a grandchild, Pinkamena? Think of your poor old mother.”

Pinkie Pie only managed a tiny smile.

“C’mon. Don’t tell me I’ve gotta be the Element of Laughter *too*.”

Pinkie Pie laughed, and laughed, until she had tears in her eyes and her throat hurt.

“That’s better.” She reached out her hoof to wipe her face, and her cyan fur turned a bit darker where it had touched her tears. She looked at it for a bit and licked it, grinning; Pinkie Pie made a face of mock distaste.

They went outside together, and saw the clear blue sky.

They looked at it for a while, until Dash spoke.

“It’s nice.”

“Sure is, Dashie!”

They looked at it for a while more, until Dash spoke again.

“I wanna fly again. I really wanna fly.”

Pinkie knew. “I can put some balloons on you and we can go up together!”

She looked imploringly at her. “I want to do a Sonic Rainboom again.”

Her voice became a little low. “You know that’s impossible, Dashie.”

“What happened to you, Pinkie? When’d you become like this?”

“Like what?” Pinkie knew what, but she didn’t say.

“Like *this*. You might as well be gray.”

She looked at herself carefully. Not a hint of grey.

The pegasus chuckled. “Not literally. You silly filly. What, want *chocolate rain* too?”

Pinkie chuckled weakly back, and they were silent for a while.

“Do you want to go back in?”

“No.” She shook her head. “No. I don’t want to go back in. I want to fly.”

“I told you, Dashie. You can’t. If you fell out of the clouds, you’d—”

“I’d *what?* I’d *what*, huh? *Die?* How the hay is that any different from what I am no—” Her sentence was interrupted by a fit of coughing, red spraying out onto her coat and the grass.

“Dashie—”

“No. No, Pinkie, you’ve gotta understand. What if you couldn’t eat any more sweets? What if Twilight got her horn sawn off? How’d you feel, huh? How do you think she’d feel, huh? *Huh?*”

Pinkie hadn’t ever really thought of it that way.

“It wouldn’t be nice.”

She didn’t seem to have heard her; perhaps she misheard her. “And you can just bounce around all you like, and you’re just staying here. With *me*.” Pinkie could see tears brimming. “With *me*, useless *me* with half my legs in the grave, and you can’t—you can’t even—”

She couldn’t continue; there wasn’t a response.

“Why?” Hoarse, wretched. “Why here? Why me?”

“Because.”

Dash looked at her for a second before her head pushed itself under her chin, cold forelegs wrapped around her. From something so frigid, the tears were like fire. They hugged for a bit before Pinkie spoke.

“What do you want me to do, Dashie?”

She looked up at her, eyes now dry. “Just... be yourself, Pinkie. Please.”

“Sure, Dashie.”

“No. Okie-dokie?”

Pinkie smiled—sincerely, this time, not the half-smiles and half-laughes since the sickness set in—and nodded. “Lokie.”

“Pinkie promise?”

She went through the familiar motions.

“Cross my heart, hope to fly, stick a cupcake in my eye.”

Rainbow grinned. “That’s the Pinkie I remember.”

And for a moment, Pinkie thought she could see the Dash she could remember too.

Rainbow Dash was smiling and hurting. She had been for a while.

“Dashie? You okay?”

Dash laughed. “Of course I’m okay.” Her voice was very hoarse.

Pinkie’s head went into Dash’s field of vision.

“D’you need any water?”

“Nah. I’m good.”

They sat there for a while more. It had been many days, and Pinkie was still there. The rest of Dash’s friends visited once in a while. Not for very long.

She could not stay forever, either.

“I’m gonna go to work for today, okay?”

She grinned. “Pssh. It’ll take *hours* for me to die when I do, remember? Go to work.”

Pinkie had gotten used to this kind of humour. She already knew, and didn’t bother mentioning her feelings in the matter.

Rainbow Dash laid in bed for a bit, until she heard the door closing from below.

She let loose whatever tears needed to flow, and then wiped it all up and dried herself as best as she could.

Then she laid there and listened.

There weren’t many noises around the house nowadays. She could hear the noises, sometimes, when Pinkie Pie went out. She didn’t know why they were only there then, but she listened.

She could hear a sort of gasping sound, and looked around for it. Her head moved very slowly, but she wanted to see.

The sound was there. She strained her failing ears to hear it.

It was a gasping sound, like from a rat. She thought it was, but she know that Pinkie Pie might throw a party for it. So she didn't tell Pinkie Pie about it, and just listened. It was a very welcome distraction from the slowness, because the gasp was very fast and very high-pitched, and it let her think she was quick.

The gasping went away after a few minutes, and then it came back for a while, and then went.

After it went away for the last time, she could hear the door downstairs opening.

"I'm home!"

Pinkie Pie had a weird voice whenever she came home from work, like she needed to swallow something. Probably the cupcakes she ate every day. Dash laughed a little to herself in her thoughts. She would have laughed from her throat, but it had been especially painful that day.

Pinkie came into the room. Her grin was as wide as always.

"Hey, Pinkie. Back so soon?"

"Oh, I just couldn't wait to see you again, so I asked Mr. and Mrs. Cake to let me loose early!" She was smiling, and quickly trotted over to take a seat again.

Dash pointed out a bit of darker pink on the fur on her face. "What's that?"

Pinkie looked into the nearby mirror and looked very sad for a second before perking up. "Ooh! Just a tiny bit of frosting!" She licked at it, and the dark pink spot expanded somewhat. She made a show of smacking her lips before turning back to Dash. "All gone now!"

Dash smiled, and nodded. "Mind saving some for me next time?"

"Sure! Next time."

Dash could hear the strange sound coming from the walls every time Pinkie left for work. She had been coming home sooner and more often.

"Hey, how'd you get away with cutting work that much?"

Pinkie looked like she wasn't paying attention. "Oh! Uh, the Cakes are really understanding. But, uh, I just remembered! I forgot to turn one of the ovens off. I'm so, so, so sorry!"

"It's alright, Pinkie."

Dash saw tears of gratitude loom. She nodded happily, and quickly bounded out of the room. The door made its usual racket.

The sounds came back after a while.

Rainbow Dash listened, and after a while she swore she could hear her name in them.

Rainbow Dash pushed herself to the side.

It took a few minutes before she could repeat the movement without screaming. She didn't want to wake Pinkie, who was sleeping on the chair besides her.

It took her about half an hour to get off the bed; she made sure to make her blankets catch at a particular loose nail in the wall as she fell off the bed. It hurt, but everything hurt.

She wiggled her body so she could move over. The blankets kept her on the right path. It took a few hours before she was at the nearest window, which was about two metres away from the bed. She brought her head up so she could see the rising sun.

She caught her breath for a while, and looked as the sun rose. She didn't know how much time she spent there. She slid the hoof that she had put up on the wall up onto the windowsill and tried to push herself up.

“Da—*Dashie*?”

“Pinkie.” The voice was especially tired. “Morning.”

“What're you *doing*?” She ran over, and Dash felt Pinkie's warm hooves under her wings. They had not flapped in a while.

“I want to fly again.”

She did not tug at her as she held her. “You know you can't.”

“Would the old Pinkie Pie ever say something like that?”

They were both quiet for a bit.

“No.”

“You Pinkie promised, remember?”

She was quiet.

“I'm gonna fly, Pinkie. With or without your help. No matter what.”

A moment passed.

“With.”

Rainbow laughed. “That sure was quick.”

Pinkie Pie gently pulled her back to the bed and pulled her blankets back over her. “I’ll be right back.”

By Dash’s estimate, it was around two hours before Pinkie had come back, carrying a peculiar contraption in her hooves.

“What’s that thing?”

“I got Twilight to make you some wings!”

“Twilight? That egghead wouldn’t know the first thing about flying. Those don’t even look like they’ll *flap*.”

Pinkie giggled. “They’re magic, silly.”

“Sounds like a bunch of—” Rainbow paused to cough for a little bit. “Sounds like a bunch of mumbo-jumbo to me.”

“Come on, try ‘em.” Pinkie Pie walked up to her, gently putting her on her front as she strapped the second pair of wings onto Rainbow’s back.

And then everything seemed to change. She felt that feeling that she felt when she first flapped her wings and took flight; and she lifted herself off the bed, the sheets coming off of her. She looked down at Pinkie Pie, and she grinned almost from ear to ear.

“They *work*! It *worked*!”

Pinkie smiled, her eyes acting up a little. “I told you they were magic.”

Dash did a turn, and gently pushed herself out the window; she soared high as she could, and she didn’t feel the cold. She went to a nearby cloud and sat on it and laughed as she felt its softness against her rump.

She felt as if she could go on forever.

Pinkie Pie watched her shift about happily under her blankets.

Twilight's magic worked.

She smiled, her eyes acting up a little.

Pinkie watched Rainbow shifting about for only about an hour before she went to sleep; she had observed Dash to the point of exhaustion.

She was awoken by loud, deep sobs.

Pinkie first thought the spell had expired. She reached a hoof over, and touched Dash on the shoulder. “I’m sorry, Dashie. I couldn’t tell you the truth. You were just so happy like that.”

There wasn’t a response other than tears. Her eyes were still closed.

She poked at her lightly, smiling weakly. “You okay, Dashie?”

No response.

Then she realised that she had never woken.

Immediately, she pulled the sheets down. The wings were still attached, and they still glowed. Dash was still crying.

Pinkie undid the straps as quickly as she could and pulled the thing off gently. Dash’s cries abruptly stopped, and Pinkie hid the thing under the bed. “Dash! Are you alright?”

“Pinkie!” Rainbow tried to move her head. It looked like it hurt, but she didn’t stop.

Pinkie reached over to push Dash onto her back. “Are you alright, Dash?”

“Pinkie, Pinkie!” Her voice was even more croaky than usual. She leaned over and tried to raise her forehooves to hug her. “You’re still there. I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry.”

Pinkie reached over and brought her hooves over her own shoulders before hugging Dash tight. “What’re you saying sorry for, you silly filly?”

“I left you. I dreamed that you got me some wings, and I—I *left* you. I just went. And then I flew around for a bit, and—” She collapsed into coughing, and Pinkie could feel some blood splatter down her back. She gently patted her on the back.

“—and then, I tried to go back to you but you *weren’t there* and I kept looking for you and I called for you and I just looked for *hours* but I never woke up I’m so sorry I’m so sorry I’m so sorry.”

“It’s alright. Just a dream. It’s just a dream.” She pushed Dash so she could see her face. “I’ll be there for you, alright? I won’t ever go away.”

Dash shook her head. “But *I* will. I’m gonna just go and *die* and leave you here by yourself and just have fun in whatever happens next and I can’t. I can’t.”

She broke down into sobs. Pinkie patted her on the back.

“I can’t. I’m sorry. I’m sorry.”

“It isn’t your fault.”

“Don’t you understand? I *chose* to go. I could’ve stayed with you and I *chose* to go. I’m disgusting. I’m a bad pony. I’m the Element of Loyalty, and I just *went*. I’m gonna just go and leave you here, and I’m so *selfish* that I’d *wanna* go.”

“You wanted to come back.”

Rainbow focused deep into Pinkie’s eyes.

“And the next time?”

And Dash leaned into her barrel, and sobbed.

They held each other for a long time.

Pinkie held the plant she had been given in her hoof—not her teeth, she had been warned—as she came into Rainbow’s room, and held it up. “Hey! Guess what Fluttershy gave me!”

Dash didn’t put her head up. “Hey. What *did* she give you?”

“She said it was some kinda rooty snake. ”

She groaned, turning over a bit. “What happened to the cupcakes?”

“You know Twilight said you couldn’t have ‘em, you silly filly. Come on. Have a bite.”

She came closer, and saw Dash rolling her eyes. “Fine. Can’t taste worse than rainbows.”

Pinkie Pie giggled and put the plant on the bed next to her. “That’s the spirit.”

Dash moved her hoof about ten centimetres towards before she twitched a bit. “Ow.”

“It’s okay, Dashie. I’ll just—”

She glared up at her, and she stopped talking. “I’m not gonna be *fed*, Pinkie.”

It took a while for her to move her hoof over to the root, and a while more to bring it up.

She moved her jaws for a bit.

“I’m not feeling anything.”

Pinkie looked closer. “You didn’t chew, silly.”

“What are you *talking* about? Look.” She did the motion again with her mouth open, biting down on the roots and rupturing none.

“Dash—you’re not chewing hard enough.” Pinkie put her hoof near Dash’s mouth and took some of the root. “Do you want some help?”

She didn’t respond.

Pinkie put a hoof against the bottom of Rainbow’s jaw, and one on top of her muzzle. She didn’t protest.

The hooves began to push up and down a little.

They kept it up until some of the roots were being crushed between her teeth.

“Stop.”

The weak sound came out muffled by her full mouth. “What?”

“Stop.”

She stopped helping, and Dash spat the roots out. She was only strong enough for them to go a short distance. “It’ll hurt less.”

Rainbow laughed. The sound was very hoarse. “Hurt less? *Hurt less?* I can’t even *chew ‘em*. How much do you think it *hurts* when you put your hooves on my muzzle and chew for me, huh? How do you think it *hurts* when I can’t stand up myself? How do you think it *hurts* when Equestria’s fastest flier can’t even wash herself, when I can’t even go to the—when I can’t even—”

She fell silent. Pinkie quietly gathered the snakeroot from the bed.

“Do you want anything, Dashie?”

“Cupcakes. I want to eat some cupcakes, Pinkie.”

“Twilight said you couldn’t, Dashie.”

Rainbow looked at her with tired eyes.

“I’ll be right back with some.”

Rainbow Dash inhaled sharply. It hurt.

“Dash? Are you okay?”

“It’s starting.”

They were both quiet for a while.

“Should I tell the others?”

Rainbow shook her head very softly. “No. They wouldn’t wanna see me here. Not like this.”

“Loyal to the very end, huh?”

“Heh. To the very end.”

They were quiet for a while.

“You know, I never did get to join the Wonderbolts.”

“You’d have to go to Canterlot. It would’ve really hurt all of us if you left us like that.”

“Hurt.” Rainbow laughed a bit. “Look how far we’ve come. I wonder if it’ll hurt. When it happens.”

“I hope it doesn’t.”

“Me too.”

They shared a look.

“Will you forgive me?”

“Dashie, what in Equestria could *I* forgive *you* for?”

“For turning into this. Getting your hopes up every few days. Just leaving you like this.”

“Wasn’t your fault, Dashie. You didn’t choose any of this. You never wanted to go.”

“I did. For a long time.”

There was a pause.

“Do you still want to?”

“No. But I still want to say sorry, because I know you haven’t forgiven me yet.”

They looked at each other for a bit, and Rainbow could see deep into her blue eyes.

“I forgive you, Dashie.”

And she knew she meant it, and would always have meant it.

Rainbow Dash looked up at the ceiling. She couldn't do much else.

"Are you scared, Dashie?"

"I'm scared, Pinkie. I'm so scared."

"I'm really scared too."

And then, very suddenly, Rainbow started laughing, and laughed very hard. She laughed until a bit of blood came from her throat and splashed onto the bedsheets, and then continued.

"Dash—Dashie, what're you doing?"

"Remember, Pinkie? *When I was a smaller pony and the moon was ever hiii—igh.*"

Pinkie's voice was cracking a bit. "Tell me you're not."

The tune was croaky and shattered and barely recognisable, but it was perfect. "I am. *The trees started turning into monsto—rosities.*"

Pinkie took a sharp breath, and Dash could see tears at the sides of her eyes as she tried not to smile. "You'll hurt your throat even worse like that, Dashie."

"I hid among my friends, and I cowered and I cried, but a certain pink mare said that wasn't the way to deal with fears at all."

And then they began singing together.

*"She said,
Gi—irls, you've gotta stand up tall, learn to face your fears,
you'll find that they can't hurt you, just laugh and make them disappear!"*

And they let out three hard, loud 'ha's.

*"So
Giggle at the ghostly,
Guffaw at the grossly,
Crack up at the creepy,*

*Whoop it up with the weepy,
Snortle at the spooky,*

And tell that big dumb scary face to take a hike and leave you alone and if he thinks he can scare you then he's got another thing coming and the very idea of such a thing just makes you wanna— ”

They went into fits of laughter.

“*Laugh!*”

Pinkie had to speak between her giggles. “And I thought *I* was the Element of Laughter.”

“Good thing I’m retiring. Wouldn’t wanna take your job too.”

And they laughed more, until they were silent again.

It was a little while before Dash spoke.

“It’s getting kinda cold.”

Pinkie pulled the blankets over her.

“I’ll miss you, Dashie.”

“Where do you think I’m gonna go after, Pinkie?”

A moment or so passed.

“I dunno, Dashie. But I’m sure it’s somewhere super-nice.”

“That’s good to hear.”

Dash fidgeted very slightly. She couldn’t do much else.

“It’s getting really cold.”

Wordlessly, Pinkie leaned over and embraced Dash as hard as she could.

“Ow.”

She quickly eased her grip, and grinned sheepishly. “Didn’t know my own strength. Sorry.”

“No biggie.”

Pinkie pushed a forehoof down and took hold of one of Dash’s. “Is there anything you want?”

Rainbow considered.

She looked up at Pinkie Pie, smiling faintly.

“No. Got everything I need.”

“Okie-dokie-lokie.”

They stayed like that for a while.

She inhaled sharply.

It didn’t hurt.

Pinkie stood in the graveyard. It was very cold that night, and the rough ground was beginning to hurt her hooves.

She put some cupcakes down on the mound, and sat there until she began to feel slightly numb. She stayed a while longer, until nothing hurt.

After a few minutes, she got up and turned to leave.

“Where d’you think you’re going, Pinkie?”

Pinkie looked behind her.

“You’re dead, Dashie.”

She wasn’t very surprised.

She laughed; the cupcake disappeared from her hoof, and Pinkie noticed that the few cupcakes she had left hadn’t been touched. “Of course I am, candy-head. Take a look at this.” Her hoof went through her gravestone; she wiggled it a bit and grinned. “Cool, right?”

“You’re not real, Dashie. I’m seeing things. I really miss you, but you’re not coming back.”

She turned back and continued walking.

“I’m sorry for going so quick, Pinkie.”

She stopped walking.

“It wasn’t your fault.”

“Maybe not. But I’m the Element of Loyalty, remember?”

“Celestia took it from you. At the funeral.” She winced as she finished the sentence.

She snorted. “That shiny little thing? I’d never leave a friend in a rut, and *you* are in the ruttiest rut I’ve ever *seen* a pony be in.”

“What’s it like, up there?”

She took a second to reply.

“Everything.”

“And you’d leave that for me?”

“Of course I would.”

“And what if you’re not real? If I really *am* just seeing things?”

“Does that really matter?”

No, Pinkie supposed. It didn’t.

Dash reached out, and took her hoof.

“C’mon. Let’s get out of this place and have some fun.”

“Whatever you say, Dashie!” Her voice was cheerful for the first time in days.

She began to walk towards the cemetery gates, Dash following besides her; for no particular reason, Pinkie started to hop.

The night felt a lot warmer.