

The air in and around Sugar Cube Corner was like sugar. A pony could not visit the establishment without melting into the atmosphere like hot fudge onto a sundae, and it was equally impossible to leave without getting a toothache. One could walk into the gingerbread house shaped building as sour as a lemon and leave with a smile dripping with fresh lemonade.

This was not due to the lovingly crafted delicacies waiting inside, though they didn’t hurt. Instead it had to do with the family of ponies living in the faux-gingerbread walls. Like their confections, the bakers and their children who called the establishment home were sweet. Kindness and love radiated as much as heat from the ovens as they burned the logs for the perfect batch of cupcakes. The owners, known throughout the town by ponies hankering for a treat as Mr. and Mrs. Cake, were kindly middle-aged ponies that spent so much time caring for each other they were masters of making ponies happy. The children were, when not tormenting customers with shining eyes and flittering laughs, often upstairs and simply doing things children would do. Playing with toys, marveling at the world around them, things of that nature.

Today, however, if a pony were to walk through the doors to buy some brownies, they’d find the air was stale of day-old cheer. The bubbly atmosphere would be found burst with a mess left behind. That wasn’t to say it was a disaster in Sugar Cube Corner this sun-shining day. There wasn’t any screaming or yelling, no rushes to get prized cakes to competitions or deadlines to meet. But just being around the bakery made ponies become somber as though there was a disturbance in the fabric of reality as they knew it.

Days like these, Mrs. Cake was thankful their business was a family owned store in the middle of a humble hamlet where everypony knew everypony and knew almost everything about everypony. Even if they didn’t know what exactly, the peckish ponies could tell there was a problem reflecting off of the lady Cake’s eyes. The customers showed more patience than they normally would have with understanding shrugs and declarations of ‘Hey, it’s worth waiting for!’ Some part of her regretted having to show any of her worry to their patrons, but working the front counter had to be done and the ponies weren’t going to form an angry mob just because she was lacking in the chipper department.

Another wonderful thing about a family run shop within a small community meant that, once in a blue moon (which were more frequent since a Summer Sun Festival a few sets of seasons ago, Mrs. Cake noticed) they were able to close up early and enjoy the rest of the time together as family. With the ponies in the building dwindling in number and the sun preparing its dip into the horizon, putting the crayon drawn ‘Sorry, We’re Closed’ sign on the door was starting to look like a good idea. How could she stand to be away from one of her foals when they were distressed and in need of a mother’s love?

*Creak~*

Alas, closing time would have to wait a few more minutes. On another day, seeing Applejack walk through the saloon-like door would only cause a nervous tick in which her taste buds tried to push themselves away from the farmer as far as the back of her throat would allow. Today was not another day, and today Applejack was one of four ponies that brought her already strained cheery disposition into a low. Not a new low, or the lowest of the lows or even the midway of the lows, but if it wasn’t so terribly rude Mrs.Cake would have happily asked her to leave.

“Evenin’ Mrs. Cake,” Applejack greeted as the doors swung shut behind her. Much like Mrs. Cake’s, her smile was bordering on strained. The uncomfortable atmosphere clearly rattled Applejack.

*If only they’d stop caring for a moment*, Mrs. Cake thought, though she knew that was merely her weariness talking. The bittersweet words Applejack was going to say were already at the forefront of the elder mare’s mind, accent and all. “Good evening, Miss Applejack.” Pleasantries exchanged, Mrs. Cake made a verbal beeline to cut the conversation before it could get anywhere. “Listen, I know why you’re here—”

Applejack interjected, “That’s good, saves us a lot of time.” Taking off her hat and placing it to her chest, the smile wavered. “I don’t want to be a bother none, but is there any chance Pinkie Pie could come out to talk?”

The question was like a the clattering of pots and pans to a souffle, complete with Mrs. Cake deflating. “Miss Applejack...”

Raising her hat back up s if it were a shield, Applejack said, “Now I know you’ve sent my friends away every time, but hear me out, alright? We’re jus’ tryin’ to look out for our friend. Seein’ Pinkie Pie not being, well, Pinkie Pie gets our tails in a twist.”

Mrs. Cake looked at the farm pony with half-lidded eyes and wondered if she were feeling anything like Pinkie had been feeling the past few days. “That’s all well and good, Miss Applejack, but as I told Rarity, Twilight, and Rainbow Dash before you, Pinkie doesn’t wish to be disturbed. It’s nothing you need to worry about.”

“But we *are* worrying,’ Applejack pressed on, taking a step closer. “She’s missed her third annual not-a-holiday party and that jus’ ain’t Pinkie being Pinkie. Why’s she actin’ so... not Pinkie?”

There was a time not so long ago that Pinkie not throwing a party would have caused Mrs. Cake the same distress Applejack and most of her friends, for the same reason, in fact. To those outside of the family, Pinkie wasn’t being Pinkie. Pinkie being Pinkie was the excuse given for her odd quirks, from the way she looked at the world around her to the way she interacted with it. It was an oversimplification of the long string of thought that led Pinkie from talking about frogs to coming up with a way to dig a tunnel system that led to secret caches of party supplies.

Understanding such a mind was a nightmare. But understanding the mind was there wasn’t hard at all. Why couldn’t they see Pinkie wasn’t just being random? What did it take to show that being a little down wasn’t the end of the world?

“Applejack,” Mrs. Cake began, finally dropping her false grin, “how often are you bucking apples?”

“I... huh? Weren’t we just talkin’ about Pinkie Pie?”

Mrs. Cake reached under the counter and pulled out the closed sign. “We were, and if you’d follow my logic, you’ll see I still am. How often are you bucking apples?”

“Umm... almost every day.” Applejack rubbed the back of her head. “But I don’t-”

“Almost, but not always. Some days you just can’t. Maybe you don’t want to. The apples just aren’t ripe enough, or you’re tired.” There was an uncomfortable amount of space between the two ponies as Mrs. Cake leaned forward. A few patrons detected a rise in hostility and decided their peanut brittle would be better eaten at home.

Applejack gulped. “Ma’am, you’re a little close there.”

“Imagine if one of your friends found you resting, not bucking apples, and were immediately worried and went to work on silly plans, schemes, and presents to fix it?” The distance closed, the two mares practically nose-to-nose with the sugary air muffled by their coats. “When all you wanted to do was rest?”

“N-Now hold on there, that’s kinda simplifying things, isn’t it?” Applejack said.

“Isn’t that what you’re doing to Pinkie?”

Applejack took a step back and tried to avert her eyes from the gaze Mrs. Cake was giving her. Memories of her mother when she had teased Big Macintosh about his manestyle tickled the edges of her thoughts. “Well, uh... do you mean the part about the ruckus or simplifying Pinkie?”

It had been meant as a joke, but Mrs. Cake’s reply of, “Both,” proved it lacked comedic timing the older mare could appreciate.

Clearing her throat, the farmpony said, “Well.” She turned slightly towards the exit. “Well,” Applejack repeated. “If, uh, Pinkie doesn’t want to come out to play, I won’t bother her no more. I’ll just tell the others Pinkie’s fine an’ we’ll be back to partyin’ when she feels like it.”

The warm smile returned to Mrs. Cake, tired irritation replaced with relief so fast that Applejack missed the transition between blinks. “I always knew you were the sensible one, Miss Applejack. So reasonable and understanding.”

“Guess we have been a touch invasive, huh?” Even though the sudden shift in mood was disconcerting, Applejack felt relieved that she no longer felt like a mother bear was getting ready for a snack. “So, uh, yeah. Just worried, send my well wishes an’ all that. Have a good night.”

“You too, Miss Applejack. For your trouble.”

Applejack turned to ask what that meant and received a couple cookies for the unspoken question. “Mmm... derifusth aff ahwayth.”

Mrs. Cake chortled as she said, “Don’t talk with your mouth full, dear. Now get back to your farm and brush your teeth before bed.”

“*Gulp*, right, sorry. Be seeing you.” And away Applejack went, leaving Mrs. Cake alone in the store proper.

With the last pony gone, the weary owner placed the sign she’d been hoping to hang all day on the door and and sighed in relief, glad the major stress was finally removed. Walking back into the kitchen, Mrs. Cake went about the usual after-work chores that needed to be done, cleaning the many different types of pans for their variety of confections until her husband came downstairs and placed his hooves over her eyes.

“Guess who, sugarplum?” the stallion sang into her ear.

“Hmm, only Pinkie Pie plays silly games like this, but you’re not adorable enough to be her. That can only mean you’re my honeycake trying and failing to be cute.”

Mr. Cake scoffed and pulled back, flicking her tail with his own. “You’ve wounded my pride, my Cup Cake. Are you saying I’m unable to elicit any *d’awws* from you?”

“Try getting a bib, then we’ll talk.” Shoving Mr. Cake and bringing a laugh out, Mrs. Cake couldn’t help but laugh as she imagined her partner in love and baking in a different outfit than his usual apron. “It wouldn’t be any different from how you usually keep food off.”

“Yuk it up, darling, you look like you could use a bath yourself,” Mr. Cake said before they chuckled together. “So, how’s Fort Sugar Cube been holding out while I’ve tended to our little soldiers?”

Eyes rolled as dishes were dried. “I’ve felt ready to snap at any moment. Pinkie being in frowny-town for official business means a lot of ponies want to pull her out before she’s done.”

Mr. Cake’s lifted his hooves and rubbed his wife’s shoulders, getting at all the spots a pony in a spa would relax. “I didn’t realize the town was so small. I could have sworn more ponies came to eat here than five.”

“Four, technically.” Mrs. Cake rubbed her temple with her washcloth covered hoof. “Fluttershy didn’t come in today. Just the one time a few days ago and that’s it. The others aren’t so good at taking a hint.”

“Hints don’t work so well when you don’t know the question, dumpling,” Mr. Cake said with all the sageliness of a carrot.

“Fluttershy doesn’t know anything the rest of them don’t.” With a huff, Mrs. Cake tossed the last few dishes into the sink to soak and tossed her cleaning cloth in with them. “All she knows is that Pinkie sometimes needs a foalsitter. They *all* should know she needs a break.”

“Like you need one right now?” Guiding his wife along, Mr. Cake trotted away from the sink and cupped her chin. “Here you are dealing with worrywart customers while I’m having a good time with the foals.”

Mrs. Cake bit her lip before saying, “Speaking of, how’s the situation upstairs? Any progress?”

“We’ve jumped around a few times, and I don’t mean we were playing jumping-bean-jacks. We’ve gone from code blue to code red to green to magenta, back to blue, and have settled in code purple.” Sitting down at the kitchen table, Mr. Cake wiped his brow and let out a breath in a gust. “Once she finished talking about her friends and knocking her building blocks down a few times, she settled down and could play nice with the twins.”

There were very few times the code system for their foals came into play for Pinkie Pie. Normally a bouncey ball of endless joy, she always stayed comfortably in code pink, save for days like these. “How’s she right now?” Mrs. Cake asked.

“In desperate need of her Mommy right now.” Mr. Cake leaned back in his seat and pulled his hat over his eyes, for all it could cover. “Dad’s all tuckered out after fifty rounds of leap-tadpole. I even got Pound and Pumpkin to bed, so you get the easy job.”

Mrs. Cake stole a kiss from her husband’s lips and sauntered past and brushing her tail against his side. “You’re a saint, Carrot. Remind me to make you a cherry pie tomorrow.”

“Hush, you know making a happy Pinkie Pie is much better,” he replied, waving her off and relishing in the chance to keep his joints still.

Up the stairs and through the hall Mrs. Cake carried herself, stopping first at the twin’s room to give them both a hug and a kiss each and muse on the face they were nearly ready to be out of diapers and her oldest wouldn’t be ready for a while. The nursery proper quiet, Mrs. Cake resumed the journey to the nursery still being worked on, best known as Pinkie’s room. Sticking her head in and looking around, Mrs. Cake was moderately surprised to find the room devoid of life save for one alligator making a valiant effort at munching on a stuffed monkey.

“Hello there, Gummy.” Mrs. Cake walked into the room, past the mess of blocks on the floor and the pile of stuffed animals on the bed. “I’m looking for my silliest foal. Have you seen her?”

The gator’s eyelids lowered, first the left, then the right, then opened at the same time.

Mocking a gasp, Mrs. Cake replied, “Really? Hiding in the stuffed animals?”

“Ugh, Gummy!” Pinkie yelled as she burst from her concealment, sending lions and tigers and bears in all directions. “I was hiding for a reason, you know.”

Mrs. Cake turned to Pinkie and wiped her brow. “Thank goodness Gummy is such a good friend, or else I might never have found my grumpy pants Pie.”

Said grumpy pony grumbled, but scooted to the side while pushing some of her toys aside. “Sometimes a good friend needs to learn when to let another good friend be alone.”

“That doesn’t apply to mommies, does it?” Climbing onto the bed, Mrs. Cake settled into the hole and reached a hoof out to Pinkie.

For a little while Pinkie was silent, chewing her lip and looking ready run under the bed.

“Oh dear, this is worse than I thought.” What little mirth Mrs. Cake had collected vanished as she brushed Pinkie’s mane to the side. “Would you like me to leave you alone? You can be a foal by yourself if you need it.”

“No!” Leaping up, Pinkie sent more animals flying. One kitty cat clung to the tapes of Pinkie’s diaper before it was shaken off in a fit of pouting. “No, I don’t wanna be alone! I just don’t want... I don’t want... I want... Mmmph, I dunno what I want!” Pinkie dived back into the pile, not realizing her rump was sticking straight up.

Mrs. Cake patted her foal’s bottom and sighed. “Poor little Pie, so confused. It has to be tough, huh? You don’t want anypony to go away forever, but you don’t want them here right now.”

From under the toys came a muffled, “Uh-huh...”

“I won’t make you talk about it.” Playfully, Mrs. Cake nosed Pinkie’s tail, making sure the crinkling of the plastic could be heard through the fluffiest of bunnies. “Little foals have a hard time putting their thoughts into words, after all. We can play some games or I can read you a bedtime story. Maybe we could go downstairs and bake some gingerbread ponies, one for each of us. Mom and Pop cookies, two little foals and one big foal.”

Pinkie poked her head out like a spooked little animal observing a much bigger creature. “And we’ll use the cookie cutters I made?”

“Of course.” Reaching down, Mrs. Cake held Pinkie and pulled her up so she was cradling Pinkie on her lap. “The ones that have extra fluffy rumps for more cookie and more frosting. Aha, a blush and a smile. I knew I could pull them out of you with a little work.”

“Silly Mommy,” Pinkie cooed, wrapping her forelegs around Mrs. Cake. “You don’t have to try at all. You’re just a special pony being you.”

“Takes one to know one,” Mrs. Cake replied, leaning down to nuzzle cheeks with Pinkie. “And just so we’re clear, that means you’re a special pony.”

“Mmm...” Clutching a little tighter, Pinkie asked, “I don’t really wanna make cookies, though. But I don’t know what I do want.”

“That’s fine, my precious Pie. Mommy will sit here with you all night and all day for many days until you do know.”

Pinkie looked up, eyes wide. “You can’t stay here for that long, can you?”

“And why not?” Mrs.Cake teased her foal’s nose with a poke and her tummy with a tickle. “You didn’t seem to mind when Daddy did that.”

“Has it... been that long?” Pinkie asked when she’d finished giggling.

“You’ve been as down as a soggy diaper for the past three days, Pinkie.” The two ponies started to sway to and fro as Mrs. Cake spoke. “And we’ve changed more than a few, so we’re used to it. As long as you’re frowning, we’ll be here to make it better and then we’ll stick around like butter to a pan to make sure it *stays* better. Do you understand?”

A tiny smile worked its way onto Pinkie’s lips, unbidden from tickling hooves. “I’m feeling a lot better already.”

“See? Mommy always keeps her word. I think somefoal needs extra smiles, though.” A sound like a motor running blew from Mrs. Cake’s lips as Pinkie squealed and tried to crawl away.

“Eeeek~! No, s-stop it, Daddy already changed me!” was Pinkie’s cry, but it didn’t deter her Mommy in the slightest. In fact, Mrs. Cake pounced faster.

The elder mare proved too strong for the younger earth pony, Pinkie held down and forced to giggle as one of the mightiest raspberries of her life was blown on her belly. Kicking and laugh-whining didn’t do anything to help Pinkie’s situation, only seemed to fuel Mrs. Cake’s onslaught. After five minutes of laughing and crinkles sounding throughout the room, they fell into a heap with Mrs. Cake somehow under Pinkie Pie.

Pinkie’s face was red, half from exhaustion and tired lungs, half from the loving pats her Mommy placed on her diaper. “N-No fair, you’re too big for me.”

“I would say sorry, my precious Pie, but I’m not in the least.” Another pat to Pinkie’s bottom made Mrs. Cake satisfied. “See, still dry, and I got to hear your pretty laugh again. That laugh is worth all the bits in equestria, by the way.”

“You’re just saying that,” Pinkie huffed, her flushed blush spreading.

Mrs. Cake gasped. “Pinkie Pie, haven’t I taught you it’s not good to fib? Mommy wouldn’t lie about this.” With chin pressing into Pinkie’s silky smooth mane and neck pressed into the back of her foal’s head, Mrs. Cake made sure every vibration of her words was felt. “When I hear you laugh, it’s like everything in the world is perfect. Nothing can ruin it because you’re happy. Do I make myself clear, young lady?”

Pinkie’s smile widened a bit more as she gripped one of her Mommy’s hooves with her own. “Like Daddy’s jello when he forgets to put in the fruit.”

Sighing, Mrs. Cake replied, “Still a little murky and green, hmm?”

“Yeah... I don’t feel right.” Pinkie turned over so she and Mrs. Cake were snout-to-snout. “It’s like there’s a box around my head and somepony filled the box with a bunch of rainclouds.”

“Talk to Momma. She’ll do her very best to make those clouds go away and bring in lots of sunshine.” Again, Mrs. Cake wiped Pinkie’s mane aside to see the innocent eyes begging for help. “Or sparkling stars so you can go to sleep with dreams of mountains made of ice cream.”

“That’s not what my dreams are filled with.” Pinkie kissed Mrs. Cake’s nose. “My Mommy and Daddy are there to play games and make sure I’m safe.”

Mrs. Cake’s eyes softened so much it was as if they were made of cotton. “So just like when you’re awake, then?”

“Yeperooni!” came Pinkie’s cheer before twitching like she pulled a muscle. The bottom-pats she had been getting shifted position so they became back-pats. “Mmm...”

“Take it easy, sweetie Pie, don’t want you getting smile cramps after you’ve been frowning so long,” Mrs. Cake half-teased. “Just remember, your Momma is here, you’ve got diapers around your tush because it’s safe for you to have them, your pacifier is a cry away, any time you want to snuggle a bear you just reach out and grab one. You can do whatever you want right now.”

“Can I ask silly questions?” Pinkie asked.

Mrs. Cake’s expression became as serious as a grown mare holding another grown mare in pink padding could be. Silly questions from Pinkie meant super-duper-extra serious questions from Pinkie, ones that had to be answered carefully and without room for misunderstanding. “Always.”

“Am I allowed to be somepony else besides me?”

A thoughtful expression passed over Mrs. Cake. This was undoubtedly the most difficult part about being Pinkie’s mommy. The words didn’t quite make sense on the first listen and needed some thought to really understand the meaning. “You really can’t be anypony else besides you. It’s not like you can go downstairs and suddenly say you’re me.”

Pinkie screwed her eyes shut and brought her hooves to her head. This was undoubtedly the hardest part about being Pinkie, trying to figure out how to word things in a way other ponies could comprehend. “I mean... mmmph... I love to make ponies smile, but sometimes I don’t wanna. S-Sometimes... sometimes I don’t wanna party or make the parties. I wanna let somepony else do it.”

The knee-jerk response Mrs. Cake had wanted to give was that parties were what Pinkie did best. They were her cutie mark, after all, what some would call her destiny. Thankfully, being around Pinkie, as a mommy or otherwise, trained the older mare that the first thought wasn’t always the most carefully thought out. “You know, Applejack was just here a little while ago.”

If Pinkie could have deflated any more, she’d have been flat by now. “Oh...”

“Mhmm. We had a good talk about how she likes to take care of her apple farm and how some days she can’t do everything that has to do with apples all the time.”

Eyes brightening, Pinkie said, “Oh?”

“Oh yes. Applejack sometimes needs to fix the barn, or watch her little sister, or pick the corn, plant hayseeds, and a whole number of things that don’t have anything to do with picking apples, or apples at all.” Mrs. Cake turned over so the two ponies were laying on their sides, Pinkie once again in a position to be cradled. “Even though I bake, it doesn’t mean I can’t have a scrap book or go out to the park. And just because you’re a party pony doesn’t mean you can’t sometimes be a baking pony or a baby pony. Then again, you’re always a baby pony, even if you aren’t wearing your diapers to show it.” Mrs. Cake winked and Pinkie Pie giggled.

The giggles went as fast as they came, though. “But why does everypony get so grumpy when I’m not making parties? Ponies only like me when I’m partying, or they think something is wrong with me... Is something wrong with me?”

“Never,” Mrs.Cake said before the thought could linger in the air for an either of a second. “But ponies are very strange creatures, Pinkie Pie. They think if something isn’t the way it always is, something is wrong.”

“That’s silly...” Pinkie replied without an ounce of amusement. “Things can’t stay a certain way forever.”

A shadow passed under Mrs. Cake’s eyes for a brief moment and was banished before Pinkie could catch a glimpse of it. “No, nothing ever does. Not even you.”

“So what gives? Why is it when I want to skip a party, everypony starts trying to make me feel better when I’m not even sad? It *makes* me sad.” Pinkie flopped her head down and sighed. “I wish I didn’t have to work so hard to make ponies like me...”

“Hey, now, where did you get an idea like that?” Mrs. Cake chastised, playfulling spanking Pinkie’s tush.

“It’s true, isn’t it? Ponies only like me when I’m partying. They don’t like not-party-Pinkie.” Pinkie frowned, her eyes starting to well with tears. “Do... do you...”

But before those tears could even leave Pinkie’s eyes, her Mommy kissed them away. “Pinkie, sometimes you get thoughts that aren’t silly at all and I wonder how you can come up with them. Ah, don’t say anything. I don’t care that you’re a party pony or not. I don’t care that you’re a foal at heart. To be completely honest, I hardly care that you go out of your way to make ponies happy. Because you’re *you*, my precious Pie. All those things and much, much more are simply part of a greater whole. I love you simply because you’re you.”

“But... but how can you say that?” Pinkie sniffled. “You’ve got to do stuff for ponies to notice you, and... and... mmph, I can’t say it in words...”

Mrs.Cake sat up, leaving Pinkie on the bed with a few more pats and rubs. “You can’t put it into words because there aren’t any. Nopony can dislike you for not being you because you’re *always* you. They don’t just like you because you throw the best parties Equestria has ever seen, even though you happen to.”

“B-But how can you know that?” Pinkie moved to sit up, but was gently pushed back down.

“Shhh, calm down, Pinkie Pie. I know it’s a little hard to understand. A thing like unconditional love doesn’t seem real, does it? That’s what it is, right? You think that there’s always a condition.” When Pinkie nodded, Mrs. Cake continued, “I can see why you think that. Maybe it looks like I only love my babies because they’re my babies. But that just isn’t true. I love everypony, even the ones I’ve never met, just like how you love the friends you still need to meet.”

Pinkie blinked. “Well...”

Mrs. Cake’s eyes wandered around the room, glancing through the mess until she saw what she was looking for; a pile of uninflated balloons and a helium tank. “And I know just how to prove it. You sit right there, don’t move an inch.”

“Can I move a quarter of an inch? I wanna see!” Pinkie pouted.

“Oh, very well, but not a centimeter more.” There were plenty of balloons, more than any party would probably need, which was fine by Mrs. Cake. Copying the tricks Pinkie had taught her over the years, Mrs. Cake became a one mare assembly line, blowing up a balloon, tying it up on a string and letting it float to the ceiling before repeating the process.

Pinkie watched with rapt attention at the air above Mrs. Cake filled with a rainbow of colors. “What’cha doing, Mommy?”

“Isn’t it obvious?” Mrs. Cake stuck her tongue out as she tied off another balloon.

“Umm... preparing for a party?”

“I’m afraid I could never host a party as grand as yours. No, I’m getting myself a balloon.”

“Mommy, I can count, you know,” Pinkie said, smiling once again. “That’s a lot more than *a* balloon.”

Mrs. Cake didn’t respond immediately, instead blowing up several more. When there was enough to satisfy her needs, Mrs. Cake grabbed them all and carried them to Pinkie Pie. “Really? I think we might need to send you back to kindergarten, then, or maybe Mommy is getting old. Because...” Some giggles escaped Pinkie as Mrs. Cake flipped her over like a pancake. “I only...” More giggles still as Mrs. Cake tied the many strings around Pinkie’s waist. “Count one balloon.”

“Waah-haa-haa!” Pinkie shouted as the sudden lift took her into the air. Not very far, but enough that the pink pony couldn’t reach her bed anymore, let alone the ground. “H-Hey! I’m not a balloon!”

“Really? You’re floating like one.” Mrs. Cake gave Pinkie’s bottom a shove, earning a squeal from Pinkie Pie as she hovered around. “And you certainly squeak like a balloon. And hey!” Bouncing up to her foal, Mrs. Cake applied another push on Pinkie’s diaper. “You’re puffy like a balloon! Therefore, you *must* be a balloon.”

Pinkie broke into a fit of snorts and giggles as her legs flailed. “G-Guess I can’t argue with Mommy logic.”

“Nope, because Mommy is always right, except when she’s wrong.” Mrs. Cake grabbed a string hanging loose under Pinkie’s stomach, tugging her through the air at a drift’s pace.

“Wh-Where are we going?” Pinkie asked as her balloons gently bobbed against the roof.

Mrs. Cake pulled Pinkie down the stairs as she hummed. “Oh, what’s that? I thought I heard my balloon say something. But that’s silly, balloons don’t talk.”

“Ha, ha, Mommy.” Rolling her eyes, Pinkie accepted her current fate as a lofty piece of rubber while Mrs. Cake carried her into the kitchen.

“Hello, my Carrot Cake. Feeling a little crumbly?” Mrs. Cake asked as she walked past her husband who hadn’t seemed to move since she last saw him.

“Nope, just enjoying the peace and quiet. Is our Pie finished steaming or is this a job for two parents?”

Mrs. Cake and Pinkie giggled as the former released the string, letting Pinkie float along by invisible minute air currents. “I seem to have lost Pinkie somewhere,” Mrs Cake said.

“Oh?” Mr. Cake cracked an eyes opened and broke into as large a grin as the corners of his mouth would allow. “And, mhmm, what exactly do we have here?”

“What, this?” Mrs. Cake trotted next to Pinkie and gave her another push. “You really are starting to crumble. Haven’t you ever seen a balloon before?”

“A ball-oof!”

Pinkie winced as she went rear first into Mr. Cake’s face. “Sorry, Daddy!”

Blowing the strands on tail from his face, Mr. Cake pulled Pinkie away and sent her careening around the kitchen without any direction in mind. “A balloon! I should have known. Nothing as light and carefree as a balloon, after all.”

“I’m not a balloon!” Pinkie whined, though her smile didn’t suggest any frustration with the situation.

“Balloons are such odd things, don’t you think?” Mrs. Cake said, grabbing Pinkie’s string and marching around as if pulling a parade float. “They don’t really do anything except float.”

“Nope, balloons just hold on by the edge of their string.” Joining the march right behind his wife, Mr. Cake nosed Pinkie’s side, making their ‘balloon’ squirm. “They just drift along. Not much to say about a balloon. Funny how they make fillies and colts happy just by being there, hmm?”

Pinkie blinked.

Nodding in agreement, Mrs. Cake said, “Balloons don’t have to do a thing to make ponies love them. Just exist and be their bouncy balloony selves.” The little parade went into the living room, through main hall, back into the kitchen, and around a few times, and Mr. and Mrs. Cake talked about how great balloons were just for being balloon.

By about the fifth lap through the kitchen, Pinkie was no longer deflated like she had been mere minutes ago, instead bobbing her head in time with the senseless march her Mommy and Daddy had entered.

The rest of the night was spent with Pinkie as a balloon, doing all the things a balloon did. That wasn’t very much at all, but that didn’t stop her parents from playing catch with her, letting her go adrift around the home, or simply bouncing her on a string. The only thing of note that happened was Pound and Pumpkin crying, and that was remedied by Pinkie simply floating in. A whole lot of nothing happened, and it was some of the best nothing Pinkie had in her entire life.

Being a balloon turned out to be rather tiring. When the moon flew high in the sky and Pinkie’s mood matched its height, her eyes nearly weighed her down enough to bring her back to the ground.

“Guess even baby balloons need their sleep,” Mrs. Cake sang as she pulled Pinkie over her crib. “Ready for bedtime, my precious Pie?”

“”Mmm, think so,” Pinkie said before she yawned. “Is it time to get down? Too bad, I kinda like being a balloon. Oh!” A pillow appeared under Pinkie’s chin, held up by a few more balloons. She turned to see Mr. Cake shutting the valve of the tank off.

“Got you covered,” he said with a wink.

Pinkie’s cheeks flushed as a tingle ran down her body, from the tip of her tail to the tippy top of her mane.

“See? What did I tell you?” Mrs. Cake said, pulling Pinkie down enough to place a kiss on her cheek and let Mr. Cake do the same.

“Umm... you told me a lot of things,” Pinkie said as she swung her dangling legs. “Like you always being there, that ponies like me for me, that you love me...”

Mrs. Cake rubbed the top of Pinkie’s head as Mr. Cake blew out all the candles in the room and situated Gummy in his now-hovering basket. “And every single one was true. Sleep tight, my precious Pie.”

“Love you more than cupcakes~” Mr. Cake sang, earning a look from his wife. “Oh hush, you know what I mean.”

“Night Daddy, night Mommy!” Pinkie said before closing her eyes and snuggling her pillow close.

The house quiet and the tension long-since released, the home’s owners trotted out of the second nursery and shut the door behind them, heading off to slumberland themselves.

When Mrs. Cake was again aware of the land of the waking, her senses warned her that her room was warmer than usual and that something delicious was nearby. When she sat up and wiped the sleep from her eyes, the frilly end of a party blower tickled her nose.

“Surprise~” Pinkie sang, grinning from ear to ear.

A groggy smile graced Mrs. Cake as she shook her husband. “Dear, looks like it’s party time.”

“Way ahead of you,” Mr. Cake said as Pound Cake offered him a glass of orange juice.

Pinkie bounded next to her caretakers’ bed, the balloons around her waist lacking in the lift of being freshly blown, but still with enough ‘up’ in them to allow moon jumping. “You both made me soooooo happy last night and I thought I should do something special, but then I remembered Mommy said I shouldn’t be happy to fast or I’ll pull a smile muscle, so I decided I’ll give you a breakfast in bed party for being the bestest Mommy and Daddy ever! Pound and Pumpkin helped too, well, they helped pour the juice, I know they’re still too little to work the stove, but they made you smiley faces!”

A tray each was placed on Mr. and Mrs. Cake’s laps, complete with french toast with powdered sugar smiles, eggs, potato chunks, and slices of cake with a candle on each piece.

“Aren’t candles for birthdays?” Mr. Cake said as he smiled, already grabbing a fork and pulling Pound into his forelegs while Pumpkin crawled into her mother’s.

Pinkie’s smile grew impossibly wider, the corners of her mouth tinting red. “And ponies aren’t balloons. You two deserve a million wishes every day for being so super-awesome-amazing. Maybe my birthday candles will make yours come true... they made mine.”

Scooting over, Mrs. Cake patted the space next to her, which Pinkie Pie readily leapt onto with the grace of a falling feather. Blowing out the candle on her slice, Mrs. Cake pulled her family in close. “Would you look at that? Wish granted.”