**Seeing the Pattern**

Pinkie Pie was finally managing to settle down for the day. Sugar Cube Corner had been closed, scrubbed down, and set to rest for the night. The ovens had been lovingly turned off and left to air out. The counters had been cleaned, and all the perishables tucked away. Mr. and Mrs. Cake had gone upstairs to their apartment portion of the store. It was not unusual for ponies to live at their place of work, such as a library or a dress boutique. The Cakes were no different. Pinkie Pie, on the other hand, lived in the basement.

 She bounded down the stairs, two by two, until she reached the bottom and closed the door behind her. “Whew, what a day!” she said, flicking her light on and rushing over to flop onto her bed. She went about her usual evening ritual of writing in her diary, brushing her mane, cleaning the barrel of her party cannon, and several other little tasks. She didn’t want to wake the Cakes, so she didn’t play any loud music or anything. It was late, after all, and with the new babies in the family quiet time was certainly appreciated. Pinkie wasn’t family by blood, but Mr. and Mrs. Cake loved her like another daughter, and she knew it.

 When Pinkie’s mane was certifiably poofy enough, her cannon clean enough and everything else where it needed to be at the end of the day, she finally pulled herself into bed. It got dark early during that time of year but it just meant more time to rest after a busy, busy day of making confections. Heaving a great, content sigh, she flopped her head back onto her pillow. Tucking herself in with a wide smile, she pulled the little chain on her lamp. Click. Darkness. It was 8:45pm.

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 The clock read 10:17am when Pinkamina awoke. Her long mane hung like unpleasant, gummy seaweed. Rising up from Pinkie Pie’s bed where her alter ego had fallen asleep, she frowned at herself in the mirror across the way. The scant hours of sleep would have to do for now, Luna knew Pinkie Pie consumed enough sugar to keep them both energized. Cocking her head to one side until a few bones in her neck popped, she tossed the comforter and rose. Running a comb only briefly through her straightened mane, she set it down with a harsh click. Reaching over, behind the vanity mirror’s drawers, she pressed a hidden button. Bzzt.

 Pinkie Pie’s corkboard flipped over to reveal a map of the surrounding area, tacks connected by red thread in wild patterns. Her vanity mirror darkened, as though to absorb less light. The posters on her wall seemed to peel down, showing candid pictures of every pony in town, known to Pinkie Pie and otherwise. Some of them had red scribbling around their faces, notes to be remembered. Bars rose up out of the floor to cover both the door and the small basement window near the ceiling. A small but messy desk popped out of a compartment hidden in the wall, positively buried with notes, papers, scribblings and other knick-knacks that told of complex and articulate work. The bed collapsed into itself and a long table emerged in its place, green like a pool table and just as covered with messy writings. Star charts and other astrological scrolls unfurled from their hidden spots in the ceiling, replacing Pinkie’s hanging mobiles and party poppers. It was any P.I.’s wet dream, and more.

 Pinkamina snatched up Pinkie Pie’s diary, flipping through that day’s entry. It told of the usual things. Eyeballing the nice stallion on the corner, friendship is magic, such’n’such new pastry recipe, blah-blah-blah… ah, there it was. Pinkie Pie had the very good habit of documenting whenever her Pinkie Sense went off, and what had happened because of it. Pinkamina got a scroll of parchment, scribbling down the list of actions. Placing the diary back on the end table where she’d found it, she went to her work station at the desk.

 Sweeping her long mane out of her eyes, she looked at herself in the mirror. While Pinkie ‘slept’, Pinkamina was in charge, and there was much to be done tonight. Seven Pinkie Sense events had occurred in the past few days alone and would need deciphering. Using tacks, she pin-pointed each location where a twitchy-twitch or an itchy nose or a tingly hoof had happened. Finding her spool and thread, she used slow and careful motions to connect them with thin crimson lines. Stepping back a moment, she eyed the new pattern. “See the pattern…” Pinkamina whispered to herself, trying to coax sense out of what she saw. “See the pattern…” she mumbled in a sort of chant. Closing her eyes a moment, she heaved a deep sigh. This month there had been a sixty percent increase in the Pinkie Sense. Some sort of event horizon was approaching. Something was about to happen. Something big.

 The map of Ponyville stared at her plainly, perfectly to scale though it had been drawn by hoof to represent a radius big enough to find a pattern. Sure, the Pinkie Sense would deliver little messages like ‘watch for falling objects’ or ‘beware of doors slamming open’, but other times they would elicit more mysterious agendas. Pinkie Pie called them doozies. Pinkamina called them disasters yet to come.

 The angrily frowning mare stuffed a stale cracker in her mouth. It was nice to eat something that wouldn’t give her diabetes for once. Salt awakened her tongue and made her senses more acute. Crunching noisily, she engrained the threads and their criss-crossing nature in her mind as she went over to the long table. Unfurling a map of downtown Ponyville, she traced the past couple of doozies with a silent hoof.

 An old shop in Ponyville had collapsed on its owner, killing him instantly. The poor bastard’s funeral was held on Hearts and Hooves day, how cruel… Pinkamina squinted to the next doozie. The mysterious Doctor Whooves had lost his wings in a deadly flying accident, blown to the ground by a bolt of lightning. He was an earth pony now, by all definitions. Brushing her mane out of her eyes, she kept searching. An Ursa Minor had been coaxed straight into the middle of town, thankfully quelled by Twilight Sparkle. Some disasters could be averted, it was clear. Pinkamina wanted to spot the next disaster, and then prevent it entirely. Her nightly labors were meant to divine just such information. She reviewed all of the more recent Pinkie Sense events:

Twitchy-twitch in front of Rose’s flowershop, while she was pondering the mysterious herbs.

 Itchy nose in front of the pharmacy, while she was staring at new food colorings.

 Tingly Hooves at a local bonfire party, as soon as they’d lit the flames.

 Melty inner thighs at Rarity’s Boutique, after a rack of cloaks had fallen on her by accident.

 Explosive belching while poised over soup, before eating any, at lunch.

 Pinkamina knew each of the corresponding mini-events with each one of those, but all of them were meaningless. The herbs twitchy-twitch meant somepony was pregnant. The pharmacy itch meant that Spike was peeking at something in the romance section of the library. The bonfire party tingly hooves predicted passionate love was about to blossom for somepony. The melty thighs cloak rack had predicted rain. The belching that somepony’s cooking was about to go horribly wrong. None of those events had any correlation or connection. At least, not that Pinkamina could surmise. Growling softly, she traced a shape between each of the locations, trying to divine meaning. The lines, even when drawn in all different patterns, did not do much other than criss-cross over the Everfree Forest.

 Pinkamina paced, still reviewing facts and dates and tidbits. Then it struck her! Going back, she rushed one of the first doozies. Big Macintosh, of the Apple family, had nearly been crushed to death by one of his own apple trees. Though his ribcage and massive frame of muscle had saved him from death, he had been in wraps for weeks and weeks. Pinkamina looked at all the Pinkie Sense events before that. Five days… then four… then three… two, one! As a disaster drew closer, its warning signs grew closer together. Allowing herself a rather wretched smile, she rushed to compare time slots. Sure enough.

 There would be one sign. Then five days. Then another sign. Then four days. It was a countdown to some form of accident or terrible event, usually with some hint as to the nature of the happening in the signs. Pinkie Pie had serious twitchy-twitch whenever she passed Sweet Apple acres for a bit, then burned any apple pies she tried to make for a bit, then farted explosively when Big Mac had gone by on the street one day… signs were pointing to what was happening.

 Rushing back to the most recent set of events, Pinkamina studied them with renewed intensity. What was involved? A flowershop’s herbs. A pharmacy with food coloring, a bonfire, a rack of cloaks, and a soup lunch. The gears in her head strained desperately. That was five signs. Wait, that was all five signs! Something bad was going to happen TONIGHT! Gasping, she looked at the clock. 11:00pm, on the dot. It was like fate was laughing at her right then. Bizarre Pinkie Sense or no, she knew it was true.

 “What does it all mean?” she whispered to herself, frowning angrily at the hints laid out before her. “Herbs, coloring, fire, cloaks, and soup.” Pinkamina scrubbed at her mane desperately, then rushed over to the posters where all the pictures of Ponyville’s residents were. “Who is it pointing to? Which one of you?” she stared at each face in turn, trying to make the puzzle pieces fit. Gritting her teeth, she looked over at the clock. 11:10pm. At midnight the time-frame of the disaster would be over, and it would have already occurred. The only reason she knew it had not occurred yet was because Ponyville had not been buzzing about anyone’s death or injury, and in a small town like that it was hard to miss. “See the pattern, Pinkamina Pie!” she roared, glaring at all the pictures, the crimson threads, and the information splayed everywhere around her. A long and angry silence followed. “It’s right there! SEE IT!” she FLUNG the papers to one side, letting them flap hard through the air. Rubbing her temples in a desperate attempt to fight off a headache, she swore to write a note to herself to get some migraine medicine from Zec--!

 Pinkamina looked up.

 Herbs. Potions. Fire. Soup. Soup on a Fire. Brewing soup on a fire. The pieces suddenly clicked into paces, and in the back of her head there was an annoying tune:

 She’s an evil enchantress and she does evil dances,

 And when you look in her eyes she will put you in trances,

 And what will she do, she’ll mix up an evil brew,

 And then gobble you up in a big tasty stew, so… watch out.

 Pinkie Pie’s song. And… and the first time they’d met Zecora she’d been under a hood and cloak. Gasping in hard realization, she RUSHED back to the map. Even in her crazy scrawling, she’d already confirmed it. All the lines from all the previous locations criss-crossed in the Everfree forest. “Zecora the zebra!” Pinkamina grinned with a sadistic sort of glee. She’d figured it out, at last. Turning quickly to look at the clock, she gave a start. 11:20pm. Time was almost up, and for all she knew the disaster had already happened. GRABBING a saddlebag and throwing it on herself, Pinkamina sprinted, her pink seaweed mane flapping in the wind.

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Zecora was gasping quietly. She didn’t know what had happened. She’d been mixing a lovely brew there in her little hut, and then she’d… what? Perhaps added the wrong thing to her brew? It was unlike her to stay up so late, but her latest mix had needed full moonlight to stew properly, and her open window had helped usher in the beams. One wrong ingredient was all it took. The explosion had knocked her senseless and it was all she could do to lay there and breathe. She was sprawled her side, surrounded by steadily growing heat. Part of her mane had been singed right off, and she felt a warmth on the side of her face that told of a nasty burn. She was too stunned to move, and the hut was filling with smoke and fire faster than she could have imagined. That was the problem with living in a tree surrounded by wooden masks and potions with volatile ingredients. Very, very flammable.

She tried to sidle towards the exit, but her legs would not obey. It was like a horrible nightmare, where one’s legs became lame while a monster chased you around dark hallways. But this was real, and the flames were growing closer. Zecora whimpered, mumbling nonsense and prayers in her native tongue as she waited for the extremely painful death to claim her. Tears slid from her eyes as black smoke began to find her down on the floor and she coughed, trying to curl up and stay the inevitable.

Suddenly her door was bucked off its hinges, flinging itself across the room and onto Zecora’s burning bed. A straight-maned figure coughed heavily, pushing herself into the burning hut and over to the nearly unconscious zebra. Hacking and swearing, Pinkamina lowered herself to inspect the damage. Ah, she was still alive. Pushing her head rudely under Zecora’s side, she hefted her onto her back. The zebra moaned, incoherent from the smoke and pain.

Pinkamina quickly exited the burning hut, depositing Zecora in the safety of a group of large ferns. Leaning over her, the pink mare angrily worked the zebra’s chest with pressure patterns. One-two-one-two-one-ah, there she was coughing more heartily. Her lungs would clear themselves. She would live. Pinkamina turned towards the burning hut with an angry, determined glare. “Saw you coming, I’m afraid.” Turning quickly, she pulled Pinkie-Pie’s party cannon from her saddlebags. It was a loud, annoying thing, but it would do the trick. She never left home without it, after all. Leaning, Pinkamina fired!

Splat! A pie shot into a window and onto a burning table, the messy innards extinguishing a few flames. She fired again, and a concentrated cloud of confetti melted like cheap plastic over another gathering of flames. She fired again, and the force of a hundred kazoos was enough to shudder the hut to collapse on itself, flames and black smoke curling towards the sky. She fired again, and again, and again. Ridiculous party elements that would do her bidding and soon put the flames out somehow or another. Pinkamina didn’t question the party cannon, or how it was loaded, or how it always seemed to know what it needed to shoot. She only knew it worked, and that her alter ego Pinkie Pie maintained it.

Panting and sweating in exhaustion, the pink mare leaned on the party cannon and studied the scene. Disaster averted. Sighing in genuine relief she returned to the disaster’s victim, Zecora. She was a hard-edged and angry pony, but she allowed herself a small smile at a job well done. Her alter ego Pinkie Pie would be pleased on the morn, no doubt.

Zecora lay there, breathing quietly, stained with soot and with a mild burn on her muzzle. Her eyes fluttered a little, and she squinted up at her savior. “Who is this, with the long straight mane, who saved me from the hungry flame?” even as beaten as she was, she still spoke in couplets. Pinkamina scoffed mentally, but could not bring herself to be angry. Before Zecora’s eyes could truly focus, the pink mare put a heavy and insistent hoof over her eyes. “Whuh?!” Zecora protested, but was too weak to actually shove the hoof away.

 Pinkamina didn’t want to be seen. The last thing she needed was somepony, or somezebra, knowing she was more than one mare in one body. When Zecora went slack with exhaustion, Pinkamina snatched up the party cannon and was away. Returning to Ponyville, she skulked through the darker alleys as she made her way back to Sugar Cube Corner. There were other disasters to avert. Other ponies to keep alive. Other patterns to see.

 Replacing the party cannon in its normal resting place, Pinkamina collapsed into bed after she’d restored Pinkie Pie’s room to its normal state with the push of a button. When the morning came she would be Pinkie Pie again. Her more innocent persona was not aware of her night time wanderings. But Pinkamina would always be there, trying to read the patterns. The clock read 3:00am.

 Pinkie Pie would wake the next morning, wondering why the party cannon was pointing in the opposite way she’d left it, and why she had traces of soot in her coat. Oh well. Time to make cupcakes!

**The End**