**Seeing the Pattern 7 – Pinkie Pie**

 Lickity Split arrived back in Ponyville at dusk with a set of six guards. When ponies on the street saw his return they scowled angrily and approached. Rainbow Dash saw the procession and swooped down from a cloud, eager to see what was happening. “It’s that slime ball, Lickity Split!” she said in shock. “What’s he doing back here?! Why isn’t he in the darkest dungeon in Equestria?!” she demanded to the stoic face of a guard that wouldn’t answer her. “Spill it!” she roared, but his stony face didn’t move.

 The handful of guards walked Lickity Split home after he’d gotten out of the flying chariot, to his ice cream parlor. He hung his head a little, unable to take all the glares and poisonous muttering that went through the crowd of ponies that followed. He slipped inside, and one of the guards turned about, working his muzzle. This perked a few ears, for the solar stallions hardly EVER spoke while on duty, much less before crowds. “Citizens of Ponyville, hear me!” he flapped his wings and rose into the air. It was impressive to see a pony in so much armor hovering in the air under his own wing power. More than a few mares noticed his handsome, muscled build. There was hush over the gathering, and the other five guards stood in a loose semi-circle before the ice cream parlor. He unfurled a scroll written on golden leaflet paper. A royal decree! Dead silence reigned, for now nopony would even cough during such a reading of royal words. “Princesses Celestia and Luna have interrogated the stallion called Lickity Split, and found him innocent of all charges, by way of excruciating mind-reading technique, volunteered by the stallion himself!” his deep bass voice carried over the crowd, and despite the shocking news nopony murmured to their neighbor. The scroll was still open, there was more. “While he rests in his home it is forbidden for anypony to approach him for the next few days. Meanwhile, the pony called Pinkie Pie is hereby declared the most wanted pony in Equestria! Bearing false witness for such a horrible crime is punishable by death!” there were loud gasps at this news. “If she is not found by midnight tonight, Princess Luna herself will come to extract her from this town, or anyplace else she might hide!”

 “False witness?! They found him in bed with her!” Rainbow Dash was suddenly in the guard’s face, as he rolled up the golden scroll. “Gimmie that!” she snatched it from him and unrolled it herself. Her eyes raced across it. “It’s true…” she said with a shocked expression. There was murmuring and confusion in the crowd. After everything that had happened, how could the princesses find him innocent? Everyone was boggled. The guard angrily snatched his scroll back, and Rainbow Dash backed off. “Pinkie Pie is… the most wanted pony in Equestria?” her eyes wandered towards Sugar Cube Corner, where the mare had not emerged since earlier that day when she’d passed out.

 The guard followed her gaze. The name ‘Pinkie Pie’ said much, and he put two and two together. “Over there! That bakery!” He gestured, and the handful of guards rushed to storm the place. Rainbow Dash went pale, and then launched herself skyward to fetch the rest of the mane six. Twilight First, she could teleport.

 Six massive stallions in full regalia practically knocked the door of Sugar Cube Corner down, filing inside and scaring Mr. and Mrs. Cake to death. They were herded into a corner where Mrs. Cake shivered. Her husband stood between her and the solar stallions, though his back legs shivered. “I-I’ve got ‘em honey, don’t you worry!” he said uncertainly. “Innocent ponies have nothing to f-fear from the Royal Guard!” he held the sentence up like a shield, but it didn’t keep him from seeing their menacing looks as they searched the kitchen, the upstairs, then noticed the door to the downstairs.

 “There’s a basement, c’mon!” One of them shouted. “She’s more than likely down there, if she’s here at all!” They left one guard with the Cakes, and the others thundered down the stairs like a stampede. A rather thick door was in the way, but it didn’t take more than one hard, muscled kick to bring it down. They fanned into the large bedroom, looking around rather open-mouthed.

 There were enormous maps all over the walls, pictures of everypony in town. Massive tables and desks with scribbling all over them. There were altitude maps with X’s on certain spots. Locations and general information about each one were pinned up on small corkboards everywhere. There was no bed that they could see, only lots of table space. Plenty of quills and ink were spilled around the place. What had they just wandered into? It was like a conspiracy theorist’s wet dream! There in the middle of the madness, was a pink mare.

 Pinkamina rounded on the guards as soon as they bucked the door down, a cracker halfway to her muzzle and a shocked expression on her face. Her mane bannered out briefly, then gravity seized at again and it hung like a frilly curtain. She lowered the cracker slowly, trying to think of something clever to say. She came up with, “Ever think of knocking, boys?” and tossed her cracker box to one side. “I only let one stallion in my bedroom at a time, usually.” She gave them a smile that made the guard in the back shudder. That dangerous, never-say-die smile that usually only appeared on the muzzles of criminal masterminds and other shades of evil.

 “Seize her!” The leader pointed, and they rushed her. Pinkamina made no move to resist, but was none the less grabbed up and dragged all the way upstairs and outside. The Cakes were ordered not to leave the bakery, and they stayed shivering in the corner. It didn’t keep them from pressing their hooves and muzzles to the window, though.

 Suddenly, with a magical POP, five of the mane six appeared in the street before the group of guards. Twilight gasped, leaning on her front knees for a moment. She’d teleported the entire group, several times, gathering everyone up before returning to Ponyville. The enormous usage of magic made her woozy. Applejack leaned into her like an anchor, holding her upright so she didn’t fall over. “What do you think you’re doing?!” Rarity was the first to step forward, demanding an answer for the spectacle. “Unhand her this instant!”

 The guards ignored her, standing in a rather tight circle with Pinkamina in the middle. One of them reached into his saddlebag, producing what looked to Twilight like a foal’s magic wand. It was a practice wand, meant to produce sparks or—! A bright signal flare rushed into the sky, exploding brilliantly with all the force of the sun. Ponyville was lit up like the day for a split second, and many ponies were briefly blinded. “The Princesses will be here shortly.” Said the guard captain. “Remain calm and do not interfere.” He commanded. The crowd shrank back a little. BOTH princesses were coming to Ponyville?

 The sun slid gently beyond the horizon, and the moon slowly began its ascent. The stars winked into existence. There was murmuring in the crowd, and nopony dared to leave. The chill of night began to settle upon the town, and in the background Lickity Split slowly emerged from his shop. He saw the gathering of stalwart guards, and could see the tip of Pinkamina’s curtain-like mane. He stared sadly, unable to understand. Why had she done it? He didn’t understand! His eyes grew moist and his head lowered with a quiet gasp of a stallion trying not to cry. “P-Pinkamina…” he whimpered. How horrible, for his lover to suddenly stab him in the back, and now about to face royal punishment in front of a crowd of hundreds.

From across the crowd, Twilight glanced at Lickity Split. Something was wrong. Something didn’t fit. It drove her mad. Signalling the others, they went to him. “Lickity Split.” She said. He recoiled at the sight of Rainbow Dash, who glared at him fiercely but did not speak.

“Wh-what?” he said timidly, lifting a hoof like he was about to bolt back inside and out of sight. Why were all the mares in his life so angry and forceful? The lavender librarian looked him over. He was a mess of disheveled mane and tear-abused eyes. “C-can’t you just leave me alone? You already beat me up once today.” He whimpered, his rump pressing against the glass door of his ice cream parlor. Twilight sympathized with the cowardly stallion, but only briefly.

“The guards said you were innocent. How did y’all fool the princesses?” Applejack wanted to know, frowning angrily.

“I didn’t.” he said, looking back and forth between the five of them. “They read my mind, they know it’s true. I didn’t take advantage of her, she invited me in and… and somehow forgot about me overnight.” It sounded so, so lame to say it out loud, but it was the only explanation he had. How very little Pinkamina must’ve cared for him if she’d used him for her bed, then cried assault and almost gotten him royally executed. He was only thankful the princesses had given him his fair shot at proving innocence.

“Equestria’s first covenant was to prevent alicorns from reading the minds of mortal ponies.” Twilight Sparkle said doubtfully. “It’s supposed to be excruciatingly painful and—!” there was a sudden rush of wind as clouds covered the sky, blotting out the beautiful night. Leaves and debris rushed back and forth as everypony looked skyward. Exploding from the clouds on a black chariot of deepest onyx was none other than Princess Luna! (Rainbow Dash could practically hear screaming metal bands in the back of her head, the chariot looked so bad-ass to her covered with all those spikes and dark jewels.) At her side, her sister Celestia was gripping the chariot like she were about to be pitched off. “Princess Celestia! And Princess Luna!” Twilight said with big eyes, aghast. The black chariot rocketed across the sky, landed so hard the wheels almost buckled, and slid to a stop at the edge of the crowd. “Don’t go anywhere.” Twilight told Lickity Split dangerously.

Both royal sisters dismounted the chariot, Celestia doing her best not to look a little ill. The lunar stallions were very rough when it came to travelling. Though, Luna passed them a favoring smile while they settled the wing membranes and hooves to the ground at last. They tilted their heads up with a mild smirk, happy for their vocations. The crowd shifted nervously, parting as the goddess snapped their wings open. They made a wide and defined path towards the center of the commotion. Many ponies flung themselves onto their bellies to bow, the presence of the goddesses too much for their mortal minds to comprehend properly.

“You have her, then?” Luna said loudly, leaning forward into the face of the closest solar stallion guard. He nodded, snapping a salute and disengaging the circle of guards around Pinkamina. They loosened out into a roughly ring-shaped formation, in case they needed to keep the crowd back.

Pinkamina turned towards the princesses, frowning dangerously and whipping her mane behind her ear with a harsh motion of her neck. The stringy pink mane fell back exactly where it was, though, covering half of her face. She bowed low as was expected, shutting her eyes, and then rising up again. Bold. “Princess Celestia. Princess Luna.” She said in a neutral voice.

“Pinkie Pie.” Celestia said with a slight inclination of her head. Out of the corner of her eye she could already see the rage boiling up in her sister’s expression. “We have found that your accusation against Lickity Split was false. Do you want to explain yourself?”

“What accusation?” Pinkamina said, frowning and narrowing her eyes.

“Thou said he assaulted you in thy bed!” Luna’s archaic vocabulary snuck in, in her anger.

“Well if that’s what you wanna call it.” Pinkamina admitted with a snarky smile.

Both Princesses stared at her, as did the other mane six and Lickity Split. There was confusion in the crowd as well. The guards looked around nervously, like they were expecting a bodily rush at any moment. The royal sisters looked at each other briefly. “Then… why did you report him for such assault?” Pinkamina stared at them, trying to work out what she’d missed. She’d gone to bed with Lickity Split the night before, gotten more than her desserts there, then fallen asleep with—ohhh. Pinkie Pie. Pinkie Pie had awoken with a stallion in her bed. She sighed inwardly.

“I… guess I had second thoughts.” Pinkamina said with the same snark.

“THY LIES HAVE BROUGHT THE WRATH OF THE GODS UPON YOU!” Luna roared, rearing up as lightning split the sky in a glorious display. The crowd flinched, and the few ponies that were on their feet fell to their bellies in awe. Only the guards, the royal sisters, and the others of the mane six remained on their hooves.

Eyes flicked to Celestia. She made no move to stop her wrathful sister, for she knew she was correct. Nopony should get away with such a travesty. And while execution was not her first personal choice, many things stayed her hoof. The crime had happened at night, the carnal event was Luna’s realm, and many of the other factors as well. All in all, it was practically out of her hooves. Celestia would indeed have a political mess to clean up, but a hundred years since the last execution wasn’t a bad record to have. Perhaps they could make it another hundred years before the next one? The solar princess saw many, many eyes upon her. They looked to her for comfort. She gave a gentle nod of her head, confirming her sister’s words. Expressions changed to horror, and then all eyes went back to Luna and the pink mare.

“If I recall you said you would only kill me if I prevented another death.” Pinkamina said, pushing her mane out of her eyes again. The pink mare could see no way out of this, but she would not let the icy fear of death take her over.

“There was no ‘only’ in the decree. Thou hast provided another reason! Clearly thy death wish spans several categories of mischief, Pinkie Pie!” Luna said, making the pink mare’s mane flap like a banner. Stubborn, the little pony stood her ground. Princess Luna looked out over the crowd. “CITIZENS OF PONYVILLE! LOOK, AND LEARN WELL THIS LESSON! LET NO STALLION FEAR THE HOOF BEING POINTED FALSELY AT HIM FOR A TERRIBLE CRIME HE DID NOT COMMITT!” The princess’ voice rolled like blasting thunder, and her horn ignited with terrible black magicks.

“No! Don’t do it! Pinkie Pie, run!” Five of the mane six rushed to prevent the punishment in a confusion of shouting voices, but the royal guard was there to stop them, to hold them bodily back. It took all five stallions to hold back the five mares, impressive in itself. Celestia looked over at them sadly. It had to be done. There would be a new Element of Laughter someday soon. This one had fallen from grace. Lickity Split looked on in terror, unable to take his eyes off of the spectacle. Pinkamina planted her hooves, stubborn to face death head on. She’d saved four lives, perhaps that was enough? That was a good run, right?

An arc of black magic exploded from Princess Luna’s horn, possessing Pinkamina’s body. She was lifted into the air in a twisting, writhing mess of flailing hooves. A thousand needles of ethereal pain formed in the air around her, each taking its turn to pierce her body one way or the other. They passed through her like fire, none of them leaving a mark. Her screams would give the citizen’s of Ponyville nightmares for weeks. When the thousand needles were through they formed a sphere of dark energy around her, concussed her like a cannon shot to the head. The spell sent bolts of punishment across her body, seizing her muscles as she screamed and writhed. Then, it slammed her into the ground. A ring of dust rushed away from her when she impacted and her stringy mane slowly settled over her face. She was limp. Dead.

Celestia closed her eyes, sighing quietly.

Twilight Sparkle stood stone still, mouth agape in horror.

Applejack vomited violently, falling to her knees to wretch.

Rarity’s hoof leapt to her mouth, eyes glistening with tears.

Rainbow Dash’s whole body shook, her eyes tiny pupils of disbelief.

Fluttershy passed out entirely, splayed over the ground.

Lickity Split wept, unable to look.

The crowd shuddered visibly. The first and only royal execution in a hundred years. They would probably be telling their children and grandchildren about it someday. Quiet murmurs and innocent whimpering went through the crowd. “Luna.” Said Princess Celestia gently. “I think we should go for now.” Luna looked down at her handiwork with a distasteful frown, then at her sister. “Our punishment is given, let us away so the town may return to its peaceful norm.” She used the word ‘our’ on purpose, to remind the entire town that the sisters had made the decision together. Not just Luna. More than a few eyes begged her for answers and mercy, but nopony spoke.

“…Yes.” Luna said after a time, sober after her rage-filled high. The two alicorns returned to the chariot with dainty hoof steps. The lunar stallions snapped their wings open, warming up for the trip back to Canterlot. Not even the mane si… the mane five, dared speak to them. Even Twilight Sparkle suddenly felt a great distance from her mentor, Celestia. A mortal pony like her couldn’t imagine what was going through her princess’ head. She didn’t want to know. When the white alicorn glanced over at Twilight Sparkle, she saw the look of betrayal and uncomprehending sadness. Inwardly, the goddess sighed. Time would heal them. It had to be done. They were so innocent, all of them. The princesses left Ponyville via the chariot, flanked by a flying-V of royal guards.

The crowd dissipated slowly, everypony going home to find comfort in their warm beds and in each other. Equestria was not a place of violence, crime, or hatred. They would take solace in each other this night, lovers in each other’s arms and foals held tightly to their mother’s breasts. By morning, hopefully, they would be over the shock of witnessing such a violent demise.

 Rainbow Dash was the first to come to Pinkie Pie’s body, and winced when she saw it was smoldering. Though there were no burns visible, a white steam was rising from the corpse as though she’d been in a hot bath and then tossed into a wintery night a moment later. “Oh Pinkie Pie…” Rainbow Dash whispered, coming down onto her belly. “I j-just don’t understand. What happened?” Her voice broke and she stopped speaking for a long time. Fluttershy was fainted upon the sidewalk, but the others came to gather around. Turning her onto her back, Rainbow Dash held the dead pink mare to herself, sniffling loudly. “Pinkie Pie!” the cyan mare howled like a wounded dog, squeezing her friend’s body and bawling. Applejack, Twilight, and Rarity pressed in around her, much the same. They cried together, tears spattering the pink mare’s face and fur. They held Pinkie Pie’s body, hugged and kissed her, apologized for a dozen different reasons. How had everything come crashing down so fast?

 “W-we… we should bury her. Hold a funeral.” Twilight Sparkle said quietly while her friends sniffled around her. “Sh-she’d want a big party for her send-off, y’know?” the mares around her bitterly knew that Pinkie Pie was the party planner. How ironic to be planning such a thing for her death. They each nodded their assent.

 “W-with nice outfits.” Said Rarity.

 “And a full spread’a food.” Said Applejack.

 “A-and stuff…” Rainbow Dash said lamely, glancing up at Twilight. Her gaze flicked over the purple unicorn’s shoulder and saw Lickity Split standing there on the corner, in a stupor. “You.” The cyan Pegasus rose slowly, a terrible hatred in her eyes. One flap of her powerful wings was all it took to propel her across the street and straight into the stallion. “I’ll get you!” She launched him bodily into his own ice cream parlor as she tackled him through the thick front glass and into the store beyond. The others rose in shock, rushing to stop her. “I’ll get you I’ll get you I’ll get you!” Rainbow Dash roared. “This is all your fault!” she straddled Lickity Split as she wrestled him to the ground. “All your fault!” she beat him mercilessly, her hooves crashing into his face over and over until finally Applejack got her into a full-pony-nelson, yanking her off of him. Rainbow Dash thrashed and roared obscenities, out for the stallion’s blood. He lay there on his side, staring at her fearfully. “Pinkie Pie’s dead because of you!” the Pegasus shouted cruelly. “Because of you!” They dragged her, howling, out into the street. They bumped into somepony on accident and turned. A hoof came across Rainbow Dash’s face, a stern slap. She yipped despite herself, not expecting the pain.

“Keep your hooves off my stallion.” said Pinkamina slowly, glowering at her. Everypony went pale.