

## **SHY AND THE BLUFF**

*by GeodesicDragon*

"Snacks, check. Pillows, check. Blankets, check..."

Twilight continued ticking various items off the checklist she held in her magical aura, while four other mares nearby laid out their sleeping bags on the floor. They chatted amiably to one another as they got comfortable, the topics of conversation ranging from their day at work to the upcoming weeks weather.

"... and that is why it has to rain on and off for the next two weeks." Rainbow Dash finished her sentence by tapping a forehoof into the floor. "Sweet Apple Acres – as well as other places which grow food – didn't get enough of the stuff the last time, leading to a poor harvest, so we need to make sure that everypony gets the right amount this time around. We don't want to risk a drought."

"Fair enough, darling," Rarity replied. "I will put up with the increase in rainfall if it means we don't starve this winter." Her face lit up. "And I suppose now would be a good time to unveil my newest range of winter warmers."

Applejack chuckled. "Trust you ta see profit in everything, sugarcube," she said. "It's a surprise ya don't have bits fer eyes."

"Hey now," Spike interjected. "Rarity's eyes would look lovely no matter what they were made up of."

Rarity looked confused for a moment, but she eventually replied. "Thank you, Spike," she said. "And, Applejack, I don't see 'profit' in everything, far from it. What I see is the *potential* in everything."

"You wanna know what I see?" Pinkie Pie asked. "I see cakes! Ooh, and doughnuts, and biscuits, and lemonade, and—"

"We get it, Pinkie," Rainbow Dash interrupted. "You see food." She looked around and sighed. "It's kinda lame that Fluttershy wasn't able to make it. I hope she gets over that illness of hers soon."

"Wait, Fluttershy told you she was ill?" Twilight looked up from her checklist. "She told *me* that it was *Angel* who was ill."

"She told me that she was going to visit her mother in Cloudsdale," Rarity said. "The poor dear said that it has been at least a *year* since they last saw each other face-to-face."

"Now wait just an apple pickin' minute." Applejack frowned. "She told me that she had ta wait in because she was expectin' a delivery of critter food tomorrow and didn't want ta risk missin' it."

"Fluttershy told me that she was going to Canterlot to try and get a new pet," Pinkie Pie added. "She said I could throw a 'Welcome to Ponyville' party for it when she got home."

Twilight tapped her chin with a forehoof. "Why on Equestria would Fluttershy lie to us?" she asked. "And, more to the point, why couldn't she give each of us the same excuse?"

"Maybe she just didn't feel like coming along tonight," Rainbow Dash suggested. "And, knowing her, she would think that we would think that not coming to the slumber party meant that she didn't want to be our friend any more, so she made excuses." She paused, scratching her head. "Did that even make any sense?"

"A little," Rarity said. "But the poor dear need not worry — I for one wouldn't think any less of her for missing one slumber party."

"I don't know, y'all," Applejack said. "I can't quite shake the feeling that there's more goin' on than we know."

"Ooh, ooh!" Pinkie squealed, raising a hoof into the air. "It's my turn to make a suggestion! Pick me, pick me!"

Twilight giggled. "Okay, Pinkie," she replied. "What do you think?"

Pinkie put her hoof down and looked around the room conspirationally, then lowered her voice to a whisper.

"Maybe..." she said. "Maybe it's not actually Fluttershy at all."

"That's preposterous!" Rarity said.

"Is it, Rarity? Is it really?" Pinkie asked. "Fluttershy starts acting weird, doing and saying things that are totally unlike her, and you don't want to think it isn't really her? The last time something like this happened was when we all went to—"

"My brother's wedding..." Twilight looked aghast. "Cadence was acting strange, doing and saying things which went completely against the mare who used to foalsit me — and then I found out that she was... she was..."

"A changeling." all five spoke in unison.

Rainbow Dash bashed her forehooves together. "If some dirty Changeling thinks it's gonna mess with my friend, it's got another thing coming!" she growled. "I'm going to her house!"

"Now hold on a second, Rainbow." Applejack looked Dash straight in the eyes, adjusted her Stetson and narrowed her own. "I'm comin' right along with ya, sugarcube."

"So am I." Twilight nodded.

"And me," Rarity added.

"Me..." Pinkie counted for a moment. "Me five!"

Rainbow Dash rolled her eyes and sighed. "Come on, girls, we can't afford waste any more time! Let's go and kick some flank!"

With that, all five of them shot out of the room.

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Approaching Fluttershy's cottage, two voices could be heard being carried on the evening air. One was Fluttershy's, although confusion reigned regarding to whom the other belonged. The five mares crept up to the door and listened to the conversation.

"Keep going," Fluttershy's voice urged.

"I... don't think... I can go... much longer!" a stallion grunted in reply. "I really... think... we should... finish!"

"Okay, if that's what you want," Fluttershy said sweetly. "Go ahead and finish, I honestly don't mind."

"Well, I guess that proves it," Rainbow Dash said. "Fluttershy has been replaced with a Changeling, who is now gathering love from the stallions in town." She stuck her tongue out and grimaced. "Of course, just our luck we'd have to show up 'mid-harvest."

"Aren't you going to stop?" Fluttershy asked.

"No!" the stallion shouted. "I need to... feel the burn... for longer!"

Rarity shuddered in disgust. "Enough of this," she snarled. "That filthy bug is harbouring our dear sweet friend, so I think it's high-time we introduced ourselves."

"We'll go in quietly." Twilight's horn lit up briefly. "I've unlocked the door, so we can take the Changeling by surprise."

"On three, y'all," Applejack said. "One... two... three!"

She grabbed the handle and turned it, gently pushing it open. Almost immediately after, she, Rarity, Twilight, Dash and Pinkie piled into the house, ready to fight — only to stop dead in their tracks at the strange sight which confronted them.



(Art by [Timplosion](#))

"Um..." Rainbow Dash raised an eyebrow. "Fluttershy?"

Fluttershy squeaked at the mention of her name, which in turn caused Bulk Biceps to drop the dumbbell he was holding. He quickly shot to his hooves and looked at the new arrivals.

"Oh..." he coughed awkwardly. "Hello, everypony."

"Uh, yeah. Hi, Bulk." Rainbow Dash looked at Fluttershy. "What the heck, Shy? You blew us off to spend time with *him*?!"

"I'm so sorry!" Fluttershy whimpered. "It's just... I... well..."

"Let me explain, Fluttershy," Bulk offered. She nodded meekly, at which Bulk cleared his throat. "Fluttershy is my spotter for the upcoming weightlifting championships in Manehattan." He explained. "We spent a lot of time together during the Equestria Games try-outs, and became good friends. I didn't trust anypony else to help me out, because they'd always overestimate my abilities to lift — but Fluttershy can sense when I'm reaching my limit." He chuckled. "That, and she makes a damn good doctor."

Pinkie Pie suddenly burst out laughing. "And to think..." she gasped out between giggles. "We thought you were a Changeling!"

"Well, she's not," Bulk replied. "I'm sorry about the deceit, but I'm sure Fluttershy has her reasons for lying."

"I do." Fluttershy nodded. "I was worried that, if I didn't help him tonight, Bulk would have tried doing this alone and risked hurting himself with no pony there to help him." She sighed. "But I forgot that the slumber party was taking place tonight, so I panicked and started making up excuses. I didn't mean to lie, I was just... worried about Bulk's safety, that's all."

"Oh, Fluttershy." Twilight nuzzled her. "You know what your problem is?" Fluttershy shook her head. "Your problem is that you care too much. You could have simply told us that you were going to be helping another friend tonight. Honestly, it's not like we'd think you didn't care about spending time with us."

Fluttershy smiled. "Thank you, Twilight," she said. "I promise I'll come to the next slumber party we have, okay?"

"Sounds great." Twilight turned and began to leave. "Well, I guess we'll leave you to it. Good luck with the competition, Bulk."

Bulk grinned and nodded, then lay on his back and grabbed the dumbbell he had been lifting.

"Bye, Fluttershy!" chorused the group, as they closed the door behind them and started walking home.

"So..." Rainbow Dash began. "Fluttershy and Bulk Biceps? Now *there* are two ponies whom I'd never expect to hang out together."

"Me neither." Twilight giggled. "But it just goes to show that the magic of friendship can never fail to surprise us."

"Yer not wrong there, Twi," Applejack agreed.

"And thank Celestia Pinkie's Changeling theory was wrong," Rarity said. "Still, it's nice to know that Fluttershy is her usual lovely self."

Pinkie stopped walking and turned around. "You're all forgetting the most important thing of all!" she gasped.

Rainbow Dash raised an eyebrow at her. "And that is...?"

Pinkie grinned. "We *totally* need to ship those two."

She giggled uproariously and resumed walking, leaving her friends to shake their heads and sigh in the day's waning light.