*Love me…*

Fluttershy growled as she threw the bowl of feed out her front door and slammed it shut again. The animals—it was always the animals. Why did she set herself up where so many things depended on her? She just—she couldn’t do it. Not today. The animals themselves were long gone, hiding outside and trying to stay as quiet as possible. They had known her long enough to see these times coming, and at the first sign of a mood swing, they left. Even Angel had learned that it was better simply not to be in the house.

Her whole life she had battled these moods: moods that made her feel savage and cruel, moods where she didn’t care who she stepped on or offended, moods that could very easily cost her her friends. It was like a cloud of negativity, a blackness that hovered around the edges of her vision. It called her to give in, to let herself go in a way she hadn’t ever since the Grand Galloping Gala almost two years ago.

*You’re GOING to love me…*

Fluttershy grabbed a nearby feeding manual and took her anger out on it. She ripped out pages with her teeth and flung them across the empty house before the empty hardcover slammed into a clock, knocking it from the wall in a crash.

It was as though there were two Fluttershys constantly warring within her. One fought to live up to her calling as a kindhearted pony, and the other fought for satisfaction and revenge. She clung desperately to the former in constant fear of the latter, a side of her that Iron Will had unwittingly coaxed out. That glimpse into what she could be terrified her, made her think that maybe she *had* deserved it—no matter how much she knew that to be a lie.

She screwed her eyes shut, gritting her teeth as she screamed out into the empty house, a wordless cry of frustration. It wasn’t her fault—she kept telling herself that, but it didn’t make the memories stop. She could still see the room where she had grown up, where her younger sister would often hide under the bed. She could still feel the hooves on her body, ones she should have been able to trust. She could still hear the voice…

*Whether you want to or not, Fluttershy, you’re GOING to love me…*

The pegasus smashed her face into a pillow, curling up into a ball and screaming into the fabric until her throat went raw. Shame rolled over her like a wave, trying to pull her into the undertow of depression. She fought the urge to give in. She was the Element of Kindness, but all she wanted to do was hurt and cry and fight. Her darker half raged inside her, desperate for any semblance of control she could exert over others to mask the lack of control she felt in her own life.

It wasn’t her fault…

“It’s NOT my fault!” she screamed into the house, throwing the pillow across the room, where it knocked over some of the dishes left out from the previous night. The sound of the porcelain and glass smashing on the wood floor made her curl up tighter.

She hugged her wings around herself, sobbing. “I can’t do it, I can’t do it,” she muttered to herself, over and over again. She was a dismal excuse for an Element of Harmony, as broken as she was. She couldn’t even find Harmony in herself—how was she supposed to embody it to an entire world?

“… Shy?”

Fluttershy started, looking up through bleary eyes to see Rainbow Dash standing in the doorway. Fluttershy’s best friend from foalhood looked over the wreckage of the room, seeing the weeping pegasus on the couch. Dash galloped over to her.

“Oh, Fluttershy. Again?” Rainbow asked softly.

Fluttershy could only nod, shivering uncontrollably from the emotional release.

Rainbow Dash pulled her into a firm hug, wrapping her blue wings around the larger pegasus. “Shhh,” she murmured. “It’s okay, Flutters. It’s okay.”

“I can’t do it, Rainbow Dash,” she gasped between sobs. “I can’t be an Element anymore.”

Rainbow gave the older mare a sisterly nuzzle. “What do you mean? You’re great at it! You’re totally the kindest pony I know.”

“But I don’t *want* to be kind.” Fluttershy curled up as much as she could in Dash’s embrace. “It’s so hard. I can’t do it anymore. I just don’t—I don’t feel like it.”

Her friend kept holding her tightly. “Fluttershy, you know who you are inside—this isn’t you. You’re a wonderful pony who would do anything for somepony else.”

“But I’m not!” she exclaimed hoarsely, her rasping throat stealing the majority of her voice. “Rainbow Dash, I’m always so *angry*! I’m always angry, and I have to hide it, or fight it. Any time I let myself slip just a little, I hurt ponies. I hurt ponies who never did anything to me, just like I did when Iron Will came to town. I can’t keep hiding my anger all the time. I *hate* that stallion. I hate him so much…”

“Shy, your father was a bastard. You didn’t deserve any of the things he did to you, but your reactions to that don’t make *you* a bad pony.”

“How can I be the Element of Kindness when I’m so full of hate?”

Rainbow Dash sat quietly for a moment, lost in thought. “I think it’s *because* of it, actually,” she said quietly. “You know exactly what kindness means, and what the opposite can do. Every time you’re kind, or compassionate, or whatever, you’re showing that he didn’t win. What he did to you doesn’t have to be all there is to you. You’re helping to make Equestria a better place, so you’re not just fighting him, it’s like you’re cancelling him out—replacing his evil with good.”

Fluttershy was quiet for a long time, simply nestling in her best friend’s hooves as Dash rested her chin on top of Fluttershy’s head.

“This is normal,” Rainbow said, her voice quiet and thoughtful. “You were hurt, and it’s normal that you would be angry about that. We can find an outlet for that if you need it, but, Shy,” Dash pled, “*please* tell the other girls about this. Can you?”

Fluttershy shivered. “I don’t know…”

“You won’t have to do it alone. I promise they’ll all support you. I support you, but I’m not always around. You need as many friends to give you love as you can get.”

“… maybe sometime soon,” Fluttershy relented. “But not right now. Just—just please keep holding me for now.”

“You got it,” Rainbow replied, giving her friend a squeeze and rubbing her back gently with a wing.