Pinkie stared at the page, its surface just as blank as that of her mind. The quill in her hoof hovered above the worn, hard-bound journal, but no words came to her. With a melancholy sigh, she returned the quill to the holder and flipped absently back through the previously-filled-in pages.

She had been keeping a journal ever since she was a filly. The entries in her first volumes were blasé things, mainly a record of everyday occurrences and an unintended tribute to the tedium that her life had been back then—but ever since she got her cutie mark and purpose, the entries had been quite different. Entries of mere words had given way to tales of joy, and paging backwards, she could see the good days of more recent memory play out across the pages. More important than those entries, though, were the ones from days where the desire to smile just didn’t come to her. On those days, she took to listing off reasons to smile: everything from the shining of Celestia’s sun to the feel of grass on her hooves. Invariably, by the time she was done writing, there would be at least a small smile tugging at the corners of her muzzle.

It wasn’t a small thing to her; it was her life’s purpose. If she couldn’t smile, then she couldn’t make other ponies smile, and that would just be a day wasted. Her gaze drifted back to the inert quill pen. Why was today so difficult?

Just yesterday had been a major party! It was easily one of her biggest bashes of the year, to celebrate the occasion of Pound and Pumpkin Cake leaving home in pursuit of higher education. Pound had left for Cloudsdale to pursue a degree in medicine and aeronautics. His dream was to make the first usable wing prosthetics for injured pegasi. Pumpkin had left for Canterlot to attend the Royal University, where she hoped to become a teacher. It had done Pinkie no end of good to see the two foals she had helped raise grown up and dreaming of helping others, not to mention how proud it had made their parents—but today, the day after, Pinkie felt a malaise over her spirits that she couldn’t shake.

Pinkie had tried to list reasons to smile, but nothing seemed to hold any value. All of her stock answers just felt trite and empty. She glanced over to see herself in her full-length mirror. While her mane and tail were by no means straightened, they lacked the bounce they normally held. She pursed her lips thoughtfully.

Why was today so hard? Surely she could go out and entertain any number of ponies, so why didn’t she want to? Was she slowing down as she got older? Almost certainly, she suspected, but that couldn’t be the only reason. Mid-thirties wasn’t an *old* age by any means.

Pinkie’s ruminations cut off as the door swung lightly open. She twisted around to see Mr. Cake standing in the doorway. He looked tired, and his smile, while genuine, was tinged with sadness. “Morning, Pinkie,” he said. “Think you’ll be ready to open the shop soon?”

“Oh! Of course, I almost forgot what time it was.” The pink pony stood up and trotted slowly to the door, stopping in front of the spindly older stallion.

Mr. Cake eyed her carefully. “You okay, Pinkie? You seem a bit… subdued.”

Pinkie thought about denying the remark, but stopped. It never hurt to be honest, after all. “I’m not sure,” she admitted. “I just don’t feel like smiling today, and that’s pretty unusual.”

He sighed. “I know how you feel, Pinkie.”

“Oh, do you? That’s good, because I don’t.”

He chuckled at her. “The missus is still in bed after yesterday. I don’t know if she’ll be up and about today, honestly. The foals leaving home is… hard. Even though we knew it was coming, it’s not easy.”

Pinkie scrunched up her nose as she tried to think the idea through. “But aren’t they off doing super-cool things in college? Why does that make you sad?”

Mr. Cake’s gave her a knowing smile. “I bet it makes you sad, too. Just listen, Pinkie.”

Pinkie stopped and paid attention to the silence around her. She could feel her spirits sag even further without really knowing why. “W-what’s wrong?”

“As Pound and Pumpkin’s parents, we’re very proud of them. We want them to go off and do great things, but it still means that a lot of things around here have changed. For eighteen years now, we’ve poured our entire lives into those two, and now they’re out on their own.”

The two ponies’ gazes met. “You’ve put a lot of yourself into them, too, Pinkie,” Mr. Cake said.

“Well, yeah,” Pinkie said quietly. “I love Pound and Pumpkin. Of course I’m gonna miss them, but it just doesn’t feel quite like that.”

“Does it feel like you’re not sure what to do?”

The pink head cocked slightly to the side. “Yeah…”

“They were such a big part of your life.”

Pinkie frowned, lost in thought. “So… now that they’re not here, I don’t have anything to do anymore?”

He smiled. “It may feel like that for a bit. It’s normal, and change isn’t always easy. But I know what we need to do right now.”

“What’s that?”

“We need to open the shop.”

The earth ponies trotted down to the shop floor and got to work, and soon the store was as busy as ever. Ponies came and went, orders and bits changed hooves across the countertop, and every pony who came through gave warm wishes for Pound and Pumpkin. Pinkie worked on autopilot, her years of experience guiding her hooves as her mind wandered. Without having Pound and Pumpkin around, did she really not have any reason to smile?

Every day had been a new opportunity to make them laugh, or to cheer them up, or to comfort them when everything went wrong. It was her life’s purpose, after all. So with them grown and gone, had she lost her purpose? She spared a quick glance back at her flank, confirming that her cutie mark was still there, as it had always been, but what did it all mean? Had she fulfilled her purpose so soon? What was she supposed to do now?

She looked back at the large mixing bowl held in her hooves, filled with all manner of nearly inedible ingredients that somehow combined to delight the senses. Was *this* her purpose? Baked goods *did* tend to make ponies smile, that much was sure, but it just felt too distant to her. The confections were merely a *way* for her to help other ponies feel good, but the reason to keep doing it seemed to be eluding her today.

The clear chime of the bell on the counter snapped Pinkie back into reality.

“Pinkie, can you help whoever that is? I’m a bit busy,” Mr. Cake called from the storeroom.

“Of course!” she called back and trotted up to the front counter, dusting flour off her hooves. “Hey, Rose,” she chirped, trying to inject her normal enthusiasm into her voice. “What can I do for you today?”

Roseluck gave her a small smile across the counter. “Hello, Pinkie. Daisy dropped a crate on her hoof yesterday. I was going to go visit her in the hospital, and I thought that one of your cupcakes would make her feel a lot better.”

“Aw, that’s sweet. What kind does she like?” Pinkie responded, drifting towards the appropriate shelf in preparation for the order.

“I think chocolate is her favorite.”

“And what’s yours? Mine’s red velvet,” Pinkie asked.

“Um, I guess I like those yellow ones you make,” the tan mare said, obviously not expecting the question.

Pinkie popped back up above the counter with two cupcakes in a box, one dark brown and the other yellow.

“Oh, no, Pinkie, I didn’t need one myself, I—”

“Aww, Rose,” Pinkie chuckled, cutting her off, “it’s on the house. You’re doing something really nice for a friend. You deserve one, too.”

Roseluck smiled and slid a few bits across the counter. “Thank you, Pinkie. I’m sure she—I’m sure *we’ll* really appreciate it.”

As the customer turned to leave, Pinkie found herself calling out. “Hey, Rose?”

She turned back. “Yes?”

Almost like she was in a dream, Pinkie felt the words slip from her mouth. “Do you think I could come with you?”

Roseluck brightened. “Oh, of course! I didn’t know you were close to Daisy. She hasn’t had any other visitors.”

“Oh, I’m close to everypony,” Pinkie dismissed casually. She dashed back into the storeroom to tell Mr. Cake she was stepping out for a bit, and then rejoined Roseluck. Her mind kept wandering, too occupied for casual conversation as the two walked across town.

Why had she asked to come along? Why did it feel so necessary to her?

Before she had a chance to sort through any of her thoughts, the pair were already at their destination and walking into the lobby of Ponyville Medical. The nurse on duty gave them directions to Daisy’s room, and they headed down the hallway.

As they walked down the hall, Pinkie kept glancing into open doorways, seeing ponies in all states. Some awake, some asleep, some sitting quietly, some in obvious pain—but almost every one alone.

Rose knocked lightly on the open door to Daisy’s room, and the flower-peddling pony looked up and smiled to see the two visitors. “Rose, what a surprise! And Pinkie, too.”

“Hey, Daisy, how are you feeling?” Roseluck asked.

The mare in the bed grimaced and held up her heavily casted leg. “I guess I’m not as young as I used to be,” she said with a shrug. “I probably shouldn’t have been trying to move that box by myself anyway.”

“Hey, I brought you a treat,” Rose said quickly before retrieving the box from her back and opening it on the bedside table. Daisy gasped in delight at the sight of her gift.

Pinkie stood back, silently. She had seen Daisy’s expression change from passive boredom to friendly joy when her friend had arrived, but now the injured mare’s face was blissfully happy as she took a bite of the cupcake. As the conversation with Roseluck continued, Daisy’s face was happier and her eyes seemed brighter. Pinkie looked back over her shoulder to the hallway. Out there were dozens of ponies, and almost all of them were alone.

Something inside Pinkie clicked.

“Hey, girls?” she said slowly. “I just remembered that I need to be somewhere. Sorry to run—hope you feel better, Daisy!” As the other two ponies just shrugged to each other, Pinkie galloped back out of the building and across town.

Yes, Pound and Pumpkin had left her. Yes, the foals she had known had grown up and moved on with their lives. Yes, she felt like she had less good to be accomplished these days and fewer ponies to entertain.

But there were still ponies who needed her.

Mr. Cake looked up in surprise as Pinkie burst into the shop, panting heavily. “Pinkie, what—”

“Sorry, sorry,” she blurted out. “Look, real quick, what would you charge me for cupcakes? Like, a lot of them?”

Her sometime-father-figure’s mouth worked up and down as he tried to do mental calculations under pressure. “I, uh—we—I suppose I could call it three for a bit.”

Pinkie’s face scrunched up as she did her own math. “Okay, three for a bit, call it forty cupcakes, that’s, um…”

“Um, Pinkie, what’s this all about? Got something big planned?”

“You *might* say that…” she said, running off in search of a quill and paper. It might make a small dent in her weekly salary, and she might have to work with the doctors at Ponyville Medical to make sure everything was allowed, but the results would surely be worth it.

Deep down, Pinkie was a party pony. That might take many different shapes, but her one mission was to make sure that ponies were enjoying life. As she thought on how much joy the simple gesture of a cupcake could give to a pony who was in a miserable situation, Pinkie realized that her morning’s aimless melancholy had lifted. She felt like she had a new mission—a new purpose. She had something she could give, something she could do for ponies who needed it.

She had to go make some ponies smile, smile, smile.